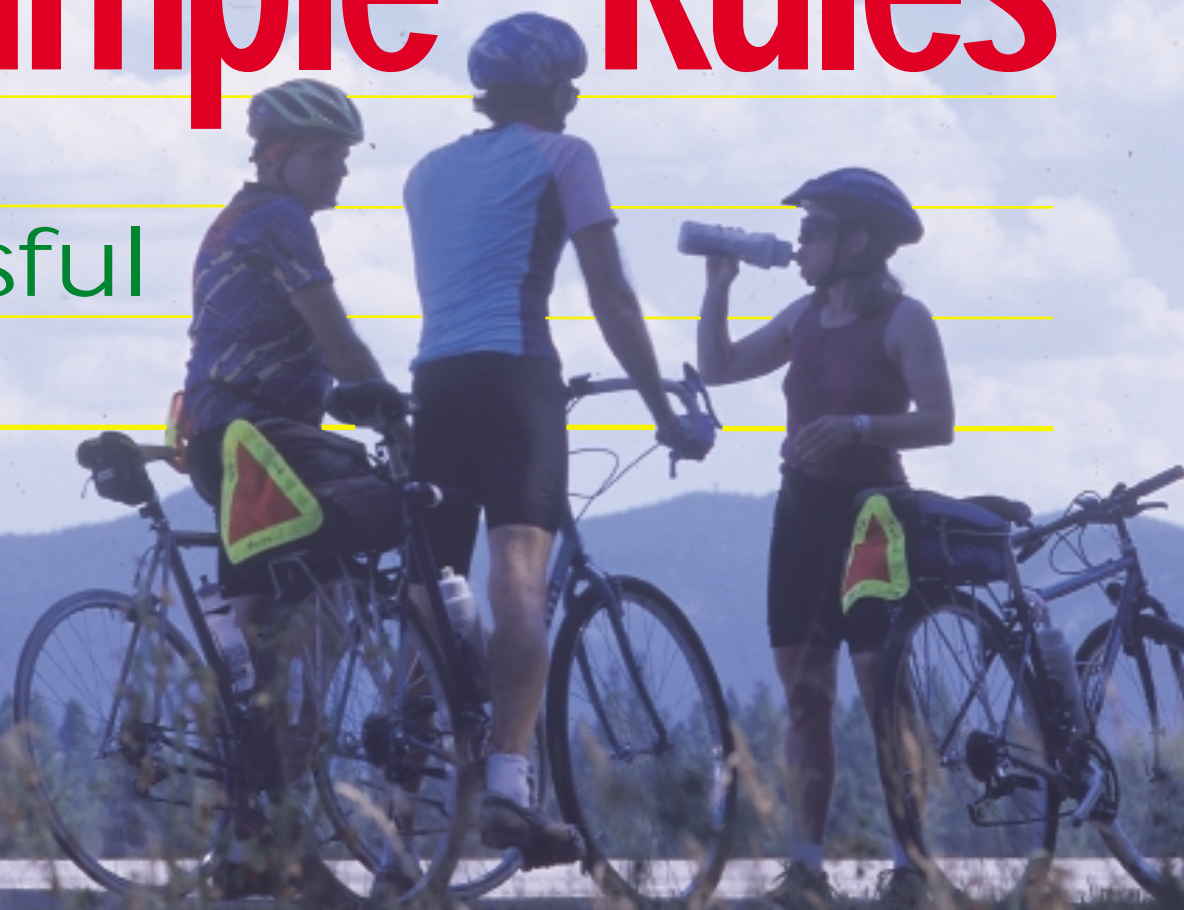


# 10 Simple Rules

## For A Successful Tour



Above: A group of well-prepared riders catches a patch of shade at the side of the road in northwest Montana.

Right: As you grow older, stretching before riding will become a necessity rather than an option.

Each time I'm touring, I meet a few cyclists who aren't having much fun. Often it's because they haven't prepared well — they didn't train enough, they didn't bring spare parts or rain clothes, or they didn't equip their bikes properly. Each time I meet one of these unprepared cyclists, I can't help but think how much more they would enjoy themselves if they had just done a few simple things in advance.

To help you avoid similar unpleasant experiences, I've prepared a "top ten" list of simple things to do before you leave on a tour.

**1. Train.** You would think this would be obvious, but I am continually astounded by the number of people I meet who are "training on tour," meaning they're using the tour to get in shape for the tour! That's fine if you plan to take it easy the first week or so, but on a one-week tour with 60 miles and 5,000 feet of climbing on the first day, you can kiss your knees goodbye if you follow this method.

Avoid the pain, and train in advance. Over a period of a few weeks, build up to the average daily mileage you'll be doing on tour. Remember to take at least one rest day a

week, and take it easy the entire week before your tour. That way, you'll begin the tour rested, in shape, and rarin' to go. If you don't have the time to train properly, reduce your daily mileage for the first few days, or consider a different kind of cycling vacation.

**2. Stretch.** I rode across North America when I was 17, and I don't think I stretched once. Amazingly, I didn't tear any muscles or deform my body in the process. However, now that I've hit the ripe old age of 38, I can't get away



PHOTOS BY GREG SIPLIE

By Richard Drdul

**Rule #4:**  
Carry spare  
parts. Need  
we explain  
any further?

without stretching on a daily basis.

My stretching routine includes six simple stretches, and takes me less than ten minutes to complete. The key is to stretch only when your muscles are warmed up, and to hold each stretch for up to a minute. Get your hands on a copy of Bob Anderson's book, "Stretching," which describes stretches appropriate to cycling, and proper stretching form.

**3. Tune your bike.** It's much easier to repair your bike at home, where you've got your toolbox, a supply of spare parts and cold beer. It isn't anywhere near as much fun on the side of the road, in the cold, pouring rain, with no beer. You might not think anything on your bike is likely to break on a short, four-day tour, for example, but believe me, it can. I've seen serious mechanical breakdowns occur within 15 minutes of the start of a tour!

Save yourself a lot of grief, and check your bike over before you leave for your tour. If you don't feel qualified, take it to a bike shop you trust. And even then, check it carefully afterwards — one of the best mechanics at one of the best bike shops in town left a headset loose on a friend's bike after a tune-up.

**4. Carry spare parts.** Ever tried to buy a 700c presta tube at Wal-Mart? Be glad you haven't had to. I have seen cyclists attempt all sorts of variations on this theme, and it ain't pretty. Even on supported tours, you can't be certain that the support vehicle will be carrying the part you need, or that they won't have installed the last one on someone else's bike a half-hour earlier.

As Lord Baden-Powell said, "be prepared." Bring a reasonable supply of consumables such as tubes, chain lube and brake pads, plus commonly needed parts like spokes and spare chain links. If you've got any weird parts on your bike, bring spares of these if they're likely to break or wear out. I ride a recumbent, and I always carry a spare 20" front tire, as well as several 20" presta tubes. And as a further precaution, I've drilled my rims out to fit Schraeder valves (a small insert reduces the valves to presta size), so that I can use Wal-Mart tubes if necessary.

Carry a light, too, and mount a flashing LED taillight to your bike. Even if you don't plan to ride at night, unexpected events can result in an unplanned after-dark ride. Better to be prepared than be lost or injured. A small but powerful light such as the Cateye Micro Halogen provides enough illumination to see and be seen at night, and doubles as a flashlight for finding your way to the porta-potty.



**5. Get some low gears.** On one tour, we had a five-mile uphill with a 10% grade. I dropped down to my 20-inch low gear, and climbed it in an hour. Many of the other 600 cyclists walked or stopped several times, and most took much longer to get to the top. Why? They were riding road bikes with double chainrings. One guy I talked to was groaning up the hill with a "low" gear of 49 inches!

Even if you're planning a tour to Kansas, low gears are



**Train now, so  
you don't  
pay later.  
These guys  
know the  
score.**

essential (believe it or not, there are hills in Kansas). Low gears allow you sit and spin at a comfortable cadence, so you arrive at the top of the hill with energy in reserve, and



If you're not drinking lots of water by now, we don't know what to say.

with your knees intact. There's no reason not to have low gears — the extra weight of a triple crank is negligible, particularly if you're riding a bike with a full touring load.

## 6. Bring cold/wet weather clothes.

I always bring too many clothes on a tour, but I've never

regretted it. On one supported tour, my wife and I left our rain gear in our duffel bag, and we almost froze to death in an unexpected August storm, complete with rain, hail and mid-40's temperatures. It took four cups of scalding hot coffee at a roadside Starbucks before I stopped shaking. After that, I vowed to never again be caught without proper clothing.

At a minimum, pack a high-quality rain jacket, a long-sleeve thermal jersey, a pair of tights, water-resistant gloves and booties. That should get you through most of what Mother Nature might throw at you. If you're travelling in spring or fall, pack extra layers of warm clothes.

**7. Switch to fat tires.** That is, if you can. A lot of road bike frames only accommodate tires up to about 25mm wide. That can make for a flat-prone, bumpy tour. If you hit a pothole with narrow tires, you stand a good chance of a pinch flat. The only way to avoid this is to pump your tires to a high pressure — usually over 100 psi. Now you're safe from pinch flats, but you'll feel the bumps a lot more.

I've given up on skinny tires, and switched to 1.5 inch (38mm) tires. With fatter tires, 65 or 70 psi is sufficient to avoid pinch flats and provide decent bump-absorbing capability. My tires last a long time, and provide great traction on rough or wet roads. And I was pleasantly surprised to learn that the rolling resistance of higher-quality fat tires is as low as skinny tires. So if you can fit 'em, put fatter tires on for your tour.

**8. Install fenders.** I don't understand the anti-fender bias among cyclists, particularly among cyclists touring for a week or more. You just know it's gonna rain sooner or later, and without fenders you'll get a face full of road grime, and a backside full of the same. Personally, I like to stay as clean as possible, so I use fenders.

My favorite fenders are made by SKS (formerly Esge). They're lightweight, rigid and can be installed or removed in just a couple of minutes. Be sure to use the "Secu-Clip" attachment for the front fenders — it will release the fender stays if a stick or other object gets caught between the tire and fender, preventing the front wheel from locking up.

**9. Eat and drink lots.** Remember the old rule — drink before you're thirsty and eat before you're hungry. Sure, it's possible to ride 60 miles in 90-degree heat with one waterbottle and a packet of GU, but why? You'd be crawling the last 20 miles, weaving all over the road dodging the stars in front of your eyes.

I avoid dehydration by carrying a Camelbak filled with water, and at least one waterbottle filled with a sports drink (my favorites

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are Cytomax and Twinlabs' Ultrafuel). On long days, I carry a small Tupperware container filled with extra sports drink mix, which I mix up in my waterbottle. Sure, I have to stop

a lot for the "pause that refreshes," but I'm riding in top form and I feel great.

I always carry at least two energy bars and a packet of energy gel. Even on supported rides, there's no guarantee that any of the food at the next rest stop will be edible. I'm a vegetarian, and on a recent tour all there was for me to eat at rest stops

was peanut butter — smooth or crunchy. After two days of that, I just rode past the rest stops, and relied instead on my stash of energy bars (unfortunately, half of which were peanut butter flavor!). For fuel during the ride, stick with energy bars and gels that are high in carbohydrates — protein isn't really needed until after the ride, to assist recovery.

Consider taking a multi-vitamin as well. I take a multi-vitamin every day, even when touring. Maybe it's all in my head, but I find that since I started taking a multi-vitamin, I get far fewer colds. No one wants to get sick on a tour.

**10. Wear a heart rate monitor.** This is optional, but if, like me, you have a tendency to ride hard, then a heart rate monitor is a great touring accessory. Before I started using one, I used to blast off in the morning, and burn out before lunch. I would make it to the end under my own power, but I didn't enjoy a good part of the ride.

Wearing a heart rate monitor taught me to slow down. I ride at a pace which puts me in the middle of my aerobic zone, and now I'm like the Energizer bunny — I can go and go and go. Surprisingly, even though I don't feel that I'm working anywhere near as hard, my average speeds have dropped only slightly. ●

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*Richard Drdul has been an Adventure Cycling member for four years. He lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.*

Follow our  
ten simple  
rules, and  
you'll have a  
smile on your  
face at tour's  
end too.

