

On occasion some of our clients have complained that they can't go on the local club ride and keep their heart rates in the endurance zone. Recently, I had the opportunity to watch six of our clients on a group ride as all but one accumulated an hour or more each above zone (you know who you are!). The strange thing is that since all but one got a lot of time above zone, they were going too hard as a group. Despite this all they continued to take strong pulls. Had they all backed off, all could have finished the ride in zone, comfortable and strong. In the days after this group ride, several of the riders called to discuss fatigue. At least two got sick. What happened? How could it have been prevented?

The first and most important thing when attending a group ride for endurance training is to be sure that you choose an appropriate group. Will you be able to go hard enough to get some training without leaving the group behind? Will you be able to keep up with the group without going above your zone and thrashing yourself? Will the ride be long enough but not too long? If the length is a little off, go ahead anyway. If the length is a lot different from what your schedule requires, plan to add distance or bail out early as necessary. Often the only way to be sure that a group is appropriate for you is to attend a ride, which means that you have to be willing to separate from the group if the pace turns out to be wrong for you. In the example we are discussing, the riders were well enough matched to enjoy and benefit from riding together.

The second most important thing when attending a group ride is to be committed to doing your training, to sticking to your plan. Don't sniff the testosterone cloud and end up in a race when your training plans and needs call for an endurance ride. If you are checking out a new ride, warm up for 15 minutes before joining the group. Experienced riders will usually roll out slowly, at least slowly for them though it may or may not feel slow to you. Often a new rider will be excited about being able to be at the front during this slow portion of the ride and will push the pace. Other riders, not wanting the group to break up, will keep up and suddenly the gentle start becomes a hard start. If you are warmed up, you will be more able to deal with this. If you are an elder statesman of cycling, you may even be able to form a gap and let the hot-head ride away without ruining the warm-up for everyone else.

Once you are on the ride, should you pull? Maybe. If your heart rate is anywhere in the endurance zone or even in the upper half of the recovery zone (65-80% of maximum), you are getting a fine training experience. If your heart rate is staying in that range while you are sitting in, don't pull. If your heart rate is dropping below mid-recovery zone while you sit in, you'll need to join in the rotation and take a pull at the front.

Be a good team mate. Don't encourage people to pull if they know they shouldn't. Help everyone on the ride to get a good experience. Later in the ride when you are more tired, the guy who does not pull early may be towing you home.



How long should you pull? That depends on the pace of the group. Watch your heart monitor. If you are one of the better-trained and stronger riders you may find that no-one wants to come around you while you plow along in your endurance zone. In that case, you can pull for as long as you feel like it. However, if the heart rate is creeping up you must pull off when you still have a few beats left before hitting the top of the zone.

What if the previous leader doesn't slow down so you have to accelerate to take the lead? Don't do it. If you are doing an appropriate heart rate and not coming around the leader,



INVEST IN YOUR GOALS!

HOW TO DO AN ENDURANCE RIDE WITH A GROUP

BY SCOTT SAIFER

just settle back into the pack and let that leader keep pulling. She's either very strong or going to get tired soon. Either way, there's no reason for you to waste yourself trying to get in front of her.

What if the pace of the group is high and you have to go above zone to keep up? It's okay to go above zone by a beat or two for a minute or two once or twice on a ride. If you have to go farther above the zone, if you have to go above the zone for longer, or if you have to go above the zone many times, let that group go. You'll be doing more harm than good by trying to keep up. I have often found that a group is very excited early in a ride, especially on hills. If I let them go a few times but keep up my effort on the flats and descents, I will catch. Later in the ride when the hot-heads are pooped, I sometimes end up leading for many miles.

What if I get tired and have trouble keeping up later in the ride? Get dropped. Remember, when you are training, be committed to going the best pace for you. Sometimes people say, "Practice makes perfect". This is wrong. Corrected, the statement would be, "Practice makes habits". If you practice feeling badly and riding yourself into the ground, you'll get good at it. You'll go for more rides while tired and it will feel normal. You'll get slower or at least not get faster. You'll get sick a lot.

If you practice cruising, feeling strong when you can and resting when you need to, you'll get better at cruising faster and faster. Perfect practice makes perfect. What do you want to be good at?

**Wenzel Coaching training programs and consultation are available
for all levels of endurance athletes.**

**Please contact 503-233-4346 or info@wenzelcoaching.com
for information on working with a Wenzel coach.**