



## **Madera County Stage Race**

### **Stage racing in general.**

Stage racing is really hard on your body. Unless you are a super-stud, your body will start rebelling by the second stage (an ITT), so you will need to take care of it. You will be tired, so conserve your energy when you can. Before the weekend, think about your "nutrition strategy" and how much, when, and what you need to fuel before, during, and after each race. And make sure you have your bottles and food ready for the weekend! Bring anything that you need to make yourself comfortable. Bring your special coffee, your special pillow, and don't forget all the clothes that racing in spring in Northern California dictates (cold and wet weather clothes for unpredictable weather!). Be good to your body; keep your legs elevated when you can; stay hydrated; eat; warm up and cool down for every stage.

Additionally, your racing strategy is different from single-day races, and you and your teammates will want to consider whether you are going for a stage win, or the GC (general classification) win. Let's say that you are ambitious and are going for the GC win. So...who are your rivals? Who will win the crit, but not be a factor in the TT or the RR? What are the teams? Can the other teams work well together? If you don't know your competition, after the first race, remember the cyclists (and their race numbers) that you noted during the first race, and their strengths and weaknesses.

Before each race, meet with your teammates to develop a strategy. In your pre-race meeting (1hr minimum before start, ideally after getting your race number. Plan on arriving at race venue no later than 1.5 hrs before start time), your team might designate a leader or a protected rider. Often teams with lots of riders can designate two top riders: someone who does well in a breakaway, and someone who does well in the sprint, and so if there is no breakaway, you can lead out your sprinter for the win. If you have designated a team leader, protect your leader so that he doesn't do any unnecessary work. If you have teammates with fairly equal strengths, hmmm...you might have to be creative to get the best results for the team. Of course, some teams prefer to let the first stage of a stage race decide the leader, a strategy which is perfectly acceptable. If you decide to do this, keep in mind that you are still obligated to help your teammates, especially when helping them will not hurt you. Also, you are absolutely obligated to do nothing to hurt your teammates. For example, do not chase down a break with your top teammates in it. Do not help another team win the sprint. Working with other teams is OK, as long as you meet your ultimate goals (winning). OK, I realize that not everyone is accustomed to working as a team or for another teammate, so there might be a few conflicts, but if you can have someone resolve those conflicts before the racing starts, all the better.

The Madera County stage race is based on time this year. Timed stage races are very different from points races. Races based on time mean that you go as fast as you possibly can for each finish. In the timed race, someone can finish far back in the field during the crit, but still do well on the GC; however, breaks with lots of time or good time trialists usually decide the GC winners. Confused? Just go like hell!

### **The Criterium**

Get there early: about 90 minutes before your start. Don't forget, you have a lot to do: register, eat, dress, warm up, and attend the team race strategy meeting 30 minutes before the start.

A four-corner, flat, wide crit won't be much of a challenge, except, there's a pavement lip in first turn apex, a set of RR tracks on backside straight, and watch out for the wind! Once you've determined where it's coming from, try to ride in a protected spot unless you are pulling through or attacking. Make sure your efforts are deliberate and with purpose. Don't squander your efforts. It's a short race, so stay focused and make note of who goes off the front. Don't let your rivals slip away.

After the race, cool down for ~ 15minutes, and then head on over to the TT start. Don't lose focus, and lose track of time. Even though you should probably check for race results, they haven't been available at the crit in the past.

### **The Time Trial**



The most important things about the time trial are 1) Do NOT miss your start. 2) Get a great warm up in. 3) Do NOT start too hard.

1) Make sure you know your start time. Double-check your start time. Synchronize your watch with the official time. Triple-check your start time. Get to the start a few minutes before your start time. OK, enough about the start time! Just don't miss it, because the clock will not stop if you are late, and your late time will be added to your TT time.

2) When you warm up on your trainer (oops, don't have a trainer? Maybe you should get one now!), warm up with longer intervals, gradually working your way into your TT effort. Get into your aerobars, and make sure that they are on tight so they don't rattle loose during the bumpy race. Because you have already ridden in your aerobars a couple weeks before the race, your position shouldn't be foreign to you. And find a really comfortable saddle. There is nothing worse than the pain caused by a saddle that isn't quite right in a time trial.

3) The worst thing for your placing is to go out way too hard, blow up, never recover, and limp to the finish. Ideally, you should either gradually increase your effort throughout the time trial, or maintain the same effort throughout. It's harder to maintain the exact effort throughout the event, so I recommend starting at a hard pace (80%) that increases to a difficult pace, then a damn-this-is-killing-me pace, and finally excruciatingly hard and fast at the very finish (95-100%). If you go to the damn-this-is-killing-me pace right away, you will never see the excruciatingly hard and fast pace, and you will be incredibly uncomfortable at or below the hard pace (80%) for the rest of the TT. Stay focused! Don't let your mind wander to dinner, the scenery, the guy you just passed...think about maintaining your effort and your perfectly aero position.

This particular time trial is flat (minor hills) and windy, and has really crappy pavement. It is also located some way from the crit, so you might be tempted to ride from the crit to the ITT. Please don't! I've heard of too many cyclists getting lost and having to catch rides with farmers. Don't expect water, stores, or restaurants at the TT start, so bring what you need to eat and drink. The officials may or may not have the results from the crit posted, so you might not know who you should target. But you should know who starts directly in front of you and who starts directly behind you. That way, you can gauge how you are doing during the TT, for example, if someone whizzes by you that you know is not in your category, you won't be discouraged. On the same note, even if you do get passed or pass a lot of people, keep going as hard as you can. You could have been passed by a former World Champion who beats the field by 10 minutes, or you could pass the slowest racers in the entire race. You never know until the results are posted.

There is actually a team strategy to the TT: race the fastest race that you can. It doesn't matter where you placed in the crit or whether or not you are a team leader, because you never know what will happen. Everyone on the team could flat, and then you would be the team leader! Also, if you do place in the points, then the other teams don't get those points.

### **The Road Race**

By today, the team leader will be firmly established, and it should be fairly obvious who is the leader (or top riders) and who the domestiques are. Your goal today is a win!

This particular course has a hilly section, lots of flat/rolling sections, and one Paris-Roubaix section. The hilly section has 2-3 large rollers, and the finish in the past has been on the first hill just after the bumpy Paris-Roubaix section. The Paris-Roubaix section requires perfectly adjusted gears, a fairly new chain, pretty sturdy wheels and tires, and a firm grip on the handlebars. The hills are what I would call power hills, and they are good for getting rid of rivals who either can't deal with hills well or can't do a few minutes of very difficult effort. Remember that things change fast on the road. Be flexible and improvise. You can't dictate how things unfold, but you should be alert to what is going on, and make the best decision you can.



I hope that you've followed most of what I'm presenting here. If not, please don't be intimidated! The Madera stage race is a fun little stage race in the middle of nowhere, and sharing the pain, suffering, and glory with your teammates is a blast.

PS A final word of advice: on the return trip on the right on Hwy 152 in Los Banos, there is a wonderful Mexican restaurant called Espana's that has great fajitas, and you can sit at their red tableclothed tables in your dirty post-race clothes, and they don't mind.

*Toughie bonus question for advanced strategy:*

Q: When is it OK to chase down a break with your teammates in it?

A: You absolutely must chase down a break with your teammates in it if they are not the GC contenders, and if the others in the break could win the GC. Period. Yes, it really sucks. And, not only should the teammates in the pack chase down the break, but also the teammates in the break should not be helping the break; they should be blocking (sitting in and not pulling). Of course, if you are in the break, it's hard to remember that you really can't work because you've just dropped everyone and you are ready to go! But it's not the best tactic for the team.