

Velo29 – A beginner’s Guide to Sportive Riding

We’ve put together this short guide for people new to Sportives. A lot of riders enjoy their first Sportive with Velo29 so we want to make it as smooth and enjoyable as possible.

The guide is aimed at people who are new to the Sport however more experienced riders might also find it useful.

Which Event?

Perhaps you’re entering as a part of a group so this is already concluded however if you are in the position to choose then there are a few things to consider when selecting an event.

For us one of the beauties of Sportive riding is that you get to explore a new area with the comfort and confidence that you’ll be well looked after and don’t need to spend the rest of time researching the area, studying maps, planning the lunch stops etc!

So we suggest that you choose an event that explores somewhere new and doesn’t cross the roads you regularly ride on. Entering as a group is great if you’ve got that option as the pre and post event banter is great however equally if you’re riding alone you’ll be amongst a lot of other friendly people who are all keen to chat and look after each other. We see people who were strangers hugging it out on the finish line after dragging each other through a tough day!

All our events get good Facebook coverage so feel free to post comments and ask questions as you’ll always get a response and might start to make some friends already!

Which Distance?

We work to have 3 route distances of roughly 30, 60 and 90 miles in each Sportive. The 30 we keep sensibly flat, the 60 has some challenging hills and the 90 is generally as tough as we can make it! If you’re pushing yourself then we suggest to not massively go over the distance and climbing that you have accomplished before. Push yourself on one of the metrics, not both at the same time! You can change your distance down at any time so if the preparation doesn’t go well don’t worry however it’s much more satisfying to be realistic in your goals and to be able to achieve them.

A sensible achievable challenge is roughly not more than 25% over and above what you’ve more than once recently ridden. When we chat to riders in the broom wagon they usually confirm that significantly more than that is going to result in failure. Of course with a favourable wind, a super human effort and the longest day, you’ll achieve the unthinkable, it’s rare though!

Preparing for the Event

So, you’ve got an event booked, hopefully you’ve given yourself time to prepare for it! We suggest not less than 2 months if the event is a “challenge” ride for you.

Firstly, study the route. All the data is available on the Velo29 website. Distance, elevation, rough ride time, links to the maps and GPS data. The profiles are really useful to gauge the challenge ahead!

You’ll be emailed an event manual a week before the event but you can download it from the Velo29 website at any time. This is an essential read as it’s the only info you’ll be sent. We don’t post anything out to you as we believe it’s a waste of paper and money.

We won't aim to cover pre-event training here as that's an in depth topic but a few pointers in the day leading up to the event might help.

Be sure you've ridden a ride around 75-80% of the Sportive distance/ climbing within a few weeks of the event. How did you feel, what did you eat, how was the bike? 2 weeks is absolutely the minimum time to change anything before the big day. You're not going to be able to train yourself out of a hole in that time but an issue with the bike, tune the nutrition, adjust your riding position, address a niggling injury could be tackled in that time scale. Also if you failed to complete the ride, it's time to rethink the distance choice.

Position on the bike is a huge tipping point, you're probably new to Sportive riding so you should consider comfort over aerodynamics or ultimate efficiency. A bike fit from an experienced fitter is a great place to start but this really needs to be done months and not weeks before the event. We urge people to really take position seriously as it can give you one of the biggest gains in performance and comfort which leads to going further and faster. You should be progressive about your position, be honest with the fitter, get comfortable but revisit perhaps once a year for 3 years to move to a more dynamic position. Flexibility and core strength can be key to a good riding position.

Make sure your bike is ready. Bikes are simple but delicate. If it's lacking in maintenance address this at least 2 weeks before the event. Bike Shops are busy with services early season particularly so if you don't maintain your own bike and feel you need a service, get it booked in.

We have a mechanic on site on the day but he's to address the unforeseen. His ability to bail you out of poor maintenance is very limited!

Nutrition forms the next fundamental to success. Here we suggest sticking with what works for you. We like to address the essential nutrition with product such as High5 and handle the tasty stuff with our bakery food at the feed stations. Again, on your 80% pilot ride, gauge your nutrition needs. Don't make a big change on the day, it can be a disaster. If you've not used Gels before, don't start that day as they don't agree with everyone.

Strava is a great tool, we nearly all have a smart phone so can run the app. It will give you a crude measure of calories burnt on your training rides, workout your calories per hour, workout how many hours you'll be riding for and that will give you a rough calorie need for the day. Work out before the day how you're going to address that calorie need, this will be a huge step towards your success.

We urge you all to ride with 2 large water bottles. There is water at every feed but regardless, you need to drink a lot! Running out of water will likely mean the end of the ride! Whenever we here stories of dehydration we look at the bottles and for sure, they have 1 small bottle on the bike!

Finally do some basics such as plan your route to the event HQ, share a lift if you can. Think about your kit for the day and be sure to include a pump, tubes and tyre levers. 90% of breakdowns are punctures where the rider doesn't have a tube or the bike is badly prepared.

On the day

Pack your bike in the car carefully, it's quite common for gears to be bent and damaged on the way to an event! Check if changing is available and if not, address this before setting off if you're not fond of changing in the car.

Eat some carbs the night before but again, don't go outside of what you've done before. If you can handle carbs at breakfast then great but if like most of us a bowl of pasta turns your stomach at 6am find some carbs you are comfortable you can handle!

We always open registration an hour before the first start time which is adequate time to arrive, sign on and get your rider number and chip, ready yourself and the bike and take position at the start line. It's rarely anything other than cold at 7am in the UK so take this seriously. Keep warm until setting off.

Some riders turn up crazy early. We will never fail to get you riding as long as you sign on before 9am. If you're doing the long route then you won't thank yourself by limiting your hours so aim to start at 8am. Also as nearly everyone wants to start at 8am then this will be the biggest group so the most exciting to ride on open roads with 100's of

other riders. Our tip is arrive at about 06:45, register, get a coffee from us and then head back to the car and prepare the bike. Again, stay warm even if the car heater is needed!

You need to sign to say you are there and will start the ride and this is also to confirm you've read the rider manual and understand you will ride to the rules of the road and acceptable rider conduct. You'll be issued a rider number and ties which goes on your handle bars and must be visible and a timing chip which goes on your helmet. You must wear a helmet!

The chip sticks to the helmet, it will not stick if the helmet is wet so keep the helmet in the car and then attach the chip. If it rains once it's attached it will stay on. If you've ridden to the event speak with us and we'll help you.

The chip must go on the helmet as the RFID Timing Equipment is mounted above you. If it's in your wallet, stuck to your spoke or left in the car, it won't work and you won't get a time.

Start at a comfortable pace, so many people go off trying to hold a fast group and live to regret it. If you usually train at 15mph and find yourself doing 20mph on the event day, there is only one outcome! Get to the first feed and assess your progress. What has my average speed looked like compared to my training rides? If you are challenging yourself on distance or climbing and your average speed is higher than usual, be realistic about this, are you really going to go faster than before for longer than before?

At the feed fill the bottles, top them up with High5 powder. Replenish any used bars/ Gels in your pockets and then enjoy the bakery food. Don't over eat, especially if there is a climb in the next 30 mins of riding. If you're riding within your limits and you've planned your nutrition for the day, you should have a view of what you need to eat so despite how tasty our chocolate brownies are, stick with your plan! Enjoy the feeds but aim to get moving within 15 mins as the body will start to slow down and you'll have to drag it back into action all over again!

The Event Control Contact number is written on the back of your rider number, at any time you can call the team for support. They will need to know your position to be able to help. Rider number, route you're riding and miles into that route will be essential info. We'll always aim to get you on the move again and we'll respond as quickly as possible. We've got Motor Bikes, Mechanics in Vans and Broom Wagons. Event Control will give you a rough ETA and agree with you what to do. If it's really poor weather they might advise a short walk to the nearest Town to take shelter. If you need taking back to HQ the broom will not necessarily drop everything and run you back. The team are looking after a lot of riders and they might have other pick-ups to do so please be ready for this.

If you want to sort your own recovery this is totally fine but ALWAYS call or text the Event Control to advise them. If you aren't accounted for by 17:00 we'll alert the emergency services and if you're at home with your feet up, it's embarrassing for all involved!

At the Finish

So, the job is done, you've crossed the line and it's time to relax and congratulate yourself!

You'll ride under the finish gantry and the medal team will be waiting to congratulate you, give you your event medal and chat about your ride. We are always keen to hear how you got on, we appreciate that these events can be a huge day for people and represent years of training so please do tell us about this.

If anything went wrong we want to know straight away so we can sort it out. Don't feel you need to email when you get home, we'd rather chat with you.

The Timing Machine takes a picture of you when you ride over the line, these are available free on the RideTiming Facebook Page. You can print your rider time on the results kiosk as soon as you've finished and you'll be emailed a link at 17:00 pointing you to the free rider certificates and the photos. The professional photographer who is based out on the course will upload his images usually on a Tuesday.

Once finished we always have a hot snack available for you which is free with the exception of the Cat and Peak as they are huge events we cannot cater for ourselves so we bring in external companies with a wide range of food and a bar.

You should have a post ride routine and aim to start positive recovery as soon as the ride has finished. Protein is a huge benefit if consumed shortly after the ride so pack your favourite source of protein in the car and have it as soon as you can after finishing. We always have a massage available, 5 mins free or you can pay for me. The team specialise in cycling, massage can really help loosen up the legs, start the lactate moving or ask them to address some pain you might have picked up in the ride. 5 mins will make a huge difference.

Drink water especially if it's hot, post ride cramp can be significantly reduced by good hydration, perhaps add some supplements to the water to further address this.

We always have picnic tables after the event so please do stick around, chat with the team and other riders and enjoy a rest before leaving.

Finally if you're drive home is more than 30 mins be sure to break it up and stretch the legs as a long drive after a big day in the saddle will almost certainly hurt the legs!

It's really easy to be focused on the achievement and forgot to start a positive recovery but the following morning the difference will be huge and you'll be days ahead and ready for your next challenge!