

John's Thoughts

My thoughts - Riding with New Riders

A bike's multiple gears are there to be shifted, to allow you to pedal efficiently and not to change speed. Use them to maintain a comfortable speed, especially if riding with a group.

Most road bikes have two gears up front (the chain rings) which offer a change of effort. Selecting which chain ring to use usually depends on the expected ride speed.

Understanding the rear gear set (cassette) is most important. Tidewater has flat and/or rolling roadways and variable winds. An appropriate cassette should have gears that are closely spaced so the change to an adjacent gear is not too big. For example, I have a rear cassette with nine gears. Counting gear teeth, the smallest gear has 11 teeth, then 12, 13, 14, 15 teeth and the last four are double jumps at 17, 19, 21 and 23 teeth that help in hills or big head winds. If a cassette has too many jumps between gears, chances are a gearshift change may not obtain a pleasant effect. The easy solution is purchase a rear cassette with narrow spacing. Maybe keep your old cassette for riding on insurmountable hills.

Pedaling efficiently means maintaining a moderate cadence between 75 - 85 rpm, while keeping up with the group. If this seems too fast, cranking too slowly on a longer ride can result in sore, tired knees. At higher speeds, maintain a higher cadence to obtain knee comfort or prevent legs from pooping out. Pedaling cadence can be determined by counting how many cranks you do in 6 seconds then multiply by 10 or purchase a speedometer that has a cadence read out.

Never allow yourself to get left behind (dropped) on a group ride. This happens sometimes during a turn. You may have to work hard but you have to keep up! If dropped, the effort to catch up is like trying to bring up a low grade point average (if you remember those days).

More next month,
John McKee