

Get involved in cycling events

There is no better way to shorten the learning curve in bicycling than to get involved in organized events – be it races, club rides or charity events.

Newer riders sometimes are intimidated by the word “race”. One needs to realize there are those who ride to race but many more who race to ride. Our family wandered more than once on a mountain bike trail – until we entered races throughout the Northwest. With a few exceptions, permanent marking of trails is not allowed on National Forest or Bureau of Land Management lands. However, temporary markers are allowed for permitted races.

I did not start mountain bike racing until I was 47. Winning for me meant opening my heart and lungs to avoid costly medical bills that many Americans suffer due to lack of fitness. Instead of staying close to my starting point on the same trail time after time, racing allowed me to get comfortable on different routes. At forks in the trail, temporary markers or race volunteers pointed the way.



When I ventured into road racing at age 50, getting “lost in the woods” was not a concern but I lacked knowledge of certain aspects of endurance riding. Instead of riding solo, entering a road event puts one in contact with hundreds or thousands of riders. The first time I did LOTOJA (Logan, Utah, to Jackson, Wyo.), I rode with 850 riders. My riding buddy had done the race numerous times. I learned a lot about maintaining energy. Jay said, “Drink when you’re not thirsty; eat when you’re not hungry.”

Our family also has done the 200-mile Seattle to Portland ride (not a race). One is immersed in support ranging from the 9,000 other riders to the hundreds of volunteers assisting along the way to organized rest/feed stops about every 25 miles.

Charity rides offer another level of involvement. Riders can choose the distance to match their fitness. Many charity rides have routes of 35, 62 (metric century) and 100 miles. Many charity events provide sag wagons should a flat or other mechanical mishap occur.

Regardless of where one is, information is available about local events. USA Cycling (www.usacycling.org) lists websites for cycling organizations in more than 30 states. In the Northwest, one can follow links to numerous cycling groups through: Washington (www.wsbaracing.com), Idaho (www.idahobikeracing.org), Oregon (www.obra.org) and Utah (www.utahcycling.com).