



Walkers Cycling

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we understand cycling

An Introduction to: Cyclo-cross

Cyclo-cross

As the name suggests, this type of cycle sport is held on cross country courses. Cyclo-cross – popularly known as ‘cross’ and often spelled cyclocross without the hyphen, is held on short circuits over mixed terrain which can include grass fields, paths, woodland tracks and short stretches of metalled roads. Artificial obstacles such as hurdles or steps may be included, requiring competitors to dismount and shoulder their bikes. Seaside courses – such as those found in Belgium and Irvine – may also feature sandy stretches which can be tough on bike and rider!

Cross racing follows a simple format – competitors start together in a bunch and cover several laps of a circuit for a set duration – often one hour. The winner is the rider who covers the greatest distance in the allotted time, i.e. the frontrunner. All riders finish on the leader’s last lap regardless of any laps they may be in arrears.

Origins

Those who thought that cross country cycle racing came into being with the advent of the mountain bike may be surprised to learn that cyclo-cross can trace its roots to the early 20th century. The first French national cyclo-cross championship was held in 1902.

Several theories exist as to why cross racing was created but it’s most likely that it stemmed from road cyclists looking for an enjoyable way of keeping fit during road racing’s ‘off-season’.



Who Can Ride?

Cyclo-cross is one of the most accessible cycle-sport disciplines and caters for a very wide variety of age groups and abilities from beginners to elites. Local, club level races offer a hassle-free, relaxed atmosphere where riders can usually get ‘on the day’ entry.

Cross meetings usually include separate races for under-16s with reduced or free entry. Cyclo-cross circuits are typically less demanding than MTB courses making them suitable for beginners.

If you fancy having a go at cyclo-cross racing to see if it’s for you, British Cycling have a membership package that includes a few free ‘single event racing licences’ allowing entry to events suitable for beginners.

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How Long do Cyclo-cross Races Last?

Senior riders have to do several laps of a short circuit for around an hour's duration. For younger, older and women riders, race duration is often shorter. Circuit length is typically one to three kilometres of which about 90% will be rideable. Riding surfaces, although mixed, are usually smoother than the MTB equivalent which makes for faster racing.

When are Cyclo-cross Races Held?

In the northern hemisphere, the cross season runs through the autumn and winter from September to January. The World Championships, introduced in 1950, are held in late January. Most racing takes place at weekends although a few races are held on weekday evenings where suitable circuit lighting is available.

In the UK, cross racing is well-established in England & Wales and Scotland has a growing cross scene with the Scottish Cyclocross Association's SCX Series attracting an increasing entry year-on-year.

The Cyclo-cross Bike

Cyclo-cross bikes look similar to road racing bikes but differ in that the specialist cross bike has wider frame clearances and cantilever brakes to reduce mud blockages, possibly a higher bottom bracket, knobby tyres for grip on mud and loose surfaces and lower gear ratios to cope with the accelerations and short, sharp climbs found on the typical cross circuit.



For beginners taking the first step into cyclo-cross a standard road bike can be adapted for cross racing and mountain bikes are acceptable at some races nowadays.

Where to Buy

The best place to buy your cyclo-cross bike, accessories and clothing is at a local, independent cycle dealer who should be able to offer a range of good quality products to suit your requirements. Most dealers will be happy to order in a cyclo-cross bike if they don't already have it in stock.

At Walkers Cycling we aim to get people cycling – and keep them cycling. Our customers can benefit from the knowledge and experience our friendly staff have gained doing most types of cycling. We want you to enjoy your cycling as much as we do and can help you choose the best kit for the job.

I Would Like To Try Cyclo-cross Racing – How Fit Do I Need To Be?

As stated above, cyclo-cross is a great entry to cycle sport and can be enjoyed by anyone possessing a reasonable level of general fitness. Cross circuits are short which means that the slower riders are never really left behind and always feel 'part of it'. Cyclo-cross spectators are a friendly, enthusiastic bunch and they'll cheer on complete beginners just as loudly as the elite riders!

As with any physically demanding sport you'll get fitter the more you do it. The training required varies according to a number of factors but, in general, riders competing in higher categories will need to put more time into their training and preparation. The ambitious rider may benefit from the advice of a qualified coach.

Many clubs have one or more qualified coaches in their ranks. There are also a growing number of self-employed and commercial coaches who offer clients a one-to-one service. The national governing bodies all maintain a register of qualified coaches.

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How Do I Get Started in Cyclo-cross?

By far the best route into cyclo-cross racing is to join a club where you can tap into the facilities, help and support offered by experienced riders and coaches. You'll be able to get advice on the right type of bike, clothing, riding technique and much more.

Walkers Cycling Club is an Ayrshire based club that aims to encourage participation in all types of leisure and competitive cycling – including cyclo-cross. Visit the club web site at www.walkerscyclingclub.com

The national governing bodies – British Cycling, Scottish Cycling, Welsh Cycling Union etc. – maintain lists of affiliated, 'cyclo-cross friendly' clubs.

Contacts/Further Information

British Cycling

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Scottish Cyclocross Association

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British Schools Cycling Association

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