

# Is there a little Lance in you?

## GEARING UP



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Last Saturday, the world's top cyclists launched the annual quest for the yellow jersey.

Yet the Tour de France, sans Lance, likely won't garner nearly the attention that it did last year.

That's where you come in ... sort of.

Granted, it's unlikely that you have a shot at being the next Lance Armstrong, but that doesn't mean you can't feel the thrill of racing elbow-to-elbow toward a finish line.

Competitive cycling opportunities abound in North Texas, and you don't have to be a seven-time Tour winner to take part.

You can find attorneys, teachers, stay-at-home moms, computer programmers, and other career climbers and parents at the starting lines of the region's most popular races.

Bryan and Rebecca Perkins find time to race in their busy schedules. Mr. Perkins is a Dallas attorney; his wife is a stay-at-home mom. The McKinney couple has two children, an 11-year-old girl and 5-year-old boy.

"We hire baby sitters," Mrs. Perkins says. "Or we do tag-team riding, where he'll do a morning ride and I'll go out later in the afternoon."

Mr. Perkins starting bike racing about 18 years ago, and now manages up to 40 races a year.

"It's hard, and I like the challenge. You can't fake it, so you have to work hard, and it's rewarding," he says. "It's a competitive outlet you can compete in in so many ways."

## Balanced competition

Competitive cycling is divided among categories that allow racers to go up against cyclists of similar experience, age, and gender.



FILE 1999/Staff photo

**Want to try competitive cycling?** North Texas has plenty of outlets for two-wheel speed demons.

Races take place all over the region and state, and they include the popular Tuesday night timed races in southeast Plano sponsored by Plano Cycling & Fitness.

Lowell Seaton, referee at those races, says you don't have to be a speed demon to start racing.

"There is a good deal of personal satisfaction just finishing the race even if you are way behind the winner," he says. "You will often find other racers in the race that are about your speed, and you will end up with a 'race within a race' for 38th place."

And racing is a great way in which to increase your fitness benefit and speed, he says.

"The old saying, 'If you want to go faster, you need to ride fast,' is very true," he says. "You have a great deal of motivation to ride fast when you are just barely hanging on to the guy in front of you. You might get dropped, but hopefully you will get stronger and faster until you can keep up. ... Riding by yourself, it is very difficult to push yourself hard enough to gain fitness quickly."

Cyclists interested in racing should be at least a year into the sport, says Max Miley, team coach for Matrix Cycle Club, a Dallas-Fort Worth performance and racing club. He also suggests tackling a few bike rallies, those informal and often noncompetitive distance rides with hundreds, even

thousands of participants.

Those will help cyclists grow comfortable riding in groups, which is vital in racing because cyclists often are inches apart.

Cyclists should be able to maintain about 18 mph, Mr. Miley says. Mrs. Perkins says she averages about 18 to 19 mph; her husband maintains 23 to 28 mph, depending on conditions. Speed varies with terrain, turns, wind and hills.

## It's not cheap

People who race, even amateurs, tend to shell out some dough for their bikes. Top-of-the-line bikes can start at \$1,000 and exceed \$5,000, especially if you're buying titanium (prized because of its feather weight). You can race on any bike, as long as it'll hold up, but you'll probably have frame/fork/tire envy at the starting line.

Some cyclists also hire personal coaches. But if that's beyond your budget, you could get similar coaching and training benefits by joining a team.

During a race, teammates also can help block the wind (a technique known as drafting), and "they will encourage you to keep going when you might want to give up," Mr. Seton says. Teams also help shuttle racers to competitions hours from Dallas, he says.

About half of the North Texas teams are open to new racers, and

they include, among others, the Matrix Cycle Club and Mirage Cycling Teams sponsored by Richardson Bike Mart, and the Plano Athletic Cycling Club sponsored by Plano Cycling & Fitness.

"The other teams you see are a little more exclusive and smaller," says Mr. Seton, a member of the Mirage Cycling Team. "If you are a strong rider, they will accept you, but I would not recommend them for beginning racers."

And the last but not least bit of advice: You just need to have guts.

"You will never be 100 percent ready to race before you enter your first race," Mr. Miley says. "I have seen many people sit on the sidelines afraid to race because they didn't want to fail. Just like anything in life, if you are afraid to fail, you will never be successful."

There is a learning curve to racing, Mr. Miley says, "and that process is one of the most rewarding aspects."

When Mrs. Perkins jumped into her first race — a time trial at an Arlington school parking lot — she couldn't keep up with the pack and dropped out after 10 minutes.

It didn't discourage her, she says. It only made her realize she needed more training.

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## BIKE RACING BASICS

### ROAD BIKE RACING

**Criterion:** This is a short, high-speed race on an enclosed course with repetitive laps usually shorter than one mile. Races range from 30 minutes to two hours. In a timed criterium, as the time winds down, announcers will call out the final laps and the winners will be the first, second, third, etc., racers that cross the finish line after the final lap.

**Road race:** This is a simple cross-the-finish-line race based on set mileage. This can vary from just a few miles to more than 50. Amateur road racing is divided into categories, as follows:

■ **Category 5** — Entry level for men. Usually limited to 50 participants and shorter in length.

■ **Category 4** — Entry level for women. For men, it requires completion of 10 Category 5 races. Usually features larger groups and longer races.

■ **Categories 3-2-1** — For both men and women, reaching these levels requires accumulating points, which are given to top finishers. Races also might have age categories, such as 35-plus, 45-plus, and 55-plus. These are sometimes referred to as "Masters" levels.

### TRACK RACING

Track racing features special racing bikes on a steep sloped track. The Frisco Superdrome Velodrome is an example. It uses the same categories as road racing.

### MOUNTAIN BIKE RACING

Mountain bike racing has a more open system in which racers decide their own ranking. Levels include beginner, sport and expert. Moving to the higher competitive levels of semipro and pro requires approval by USA Cycling. For more information about competitive cycling rules and regulations, go to [www.usacycling.org](http://www.usacycling.org).

## DIGITALEXTRA

🔗 **Links:** Find out about local racing clubs, races and racing rules.

[DallasNews.com/extra](http://DallasNews.com/extra)