

Cycling Terms

Like most sports, cycling features unique terminology. Below is a list of the most commonly used words and phrases in the sport of competitive cycling.

Attack: A sudden attempt to get away from another rider

Blocking: When a rider tries to get in the way of other riders, usually done as part of a team strategy to slow down the main field when other team members are ahead in a breakaway

Bonk: Known as "hitting the wall" in marathon running, this is when a rider completely runs out of energy

Breakaway: A rider or group of riders who have separated themselves ahead of the main pack

Bridge the Gap: When a rider or group of riders is attempting to reach a group farther ahead

Chasers: Riders who are attempting to "bridge the gap" to catch the lead group

Criterium: A multi-lap event on a course usually a mile or less in length and of medium total distance, usually 25-75 miles

Derailleur: The mechanism that moves the chain from one gear to another

Director Sportif: Pronounced "Director sporteef", this is the manager of the team

Domestique: A rider who sacrifices any individual honors to the team leader who is in contention to win

Drafting: Riding closely behind another rider, which creates a slipstream, or air pocket. The lead rider expends up to 30 percent more energy than the following rider does

Drop: To leave another rider or riders behind by attacking. Losing contact with the group in which they are riding will drop fatigued riders

Echelon: A line of riders taking orderly turns at the lead and staggered so that each rider will get maximum protection from the wind. Also called a "paceline"

Feeding: At some point during a long road race it is necessary for riders to replace expended energy. Riders are given a "musette," a small cloth bag, containing food and water bottles. Riders grab the bag from the team support personnel, remove the contents and put them in the pockets of their jerseys to eat when most convenient. They generally prefer high-energy foods that break down quickly.

Field: The main group of riders, also known as the "pack," "peloton," or "bunch"

Field Sprint: The final sprint between a group of riders, not necessarily for first place

Force the Pace: When one rider goes harder than the pack to increase the tempo

Gap: The distance between individual or groups

Hammering: Very steady, strenuous pedaling.

Hanging On: Barely keeping contact at the back of the pack

Hook: When one rider, either on purpose or by accident, uses his/her rear wheel to hit the front wheel of the rider behind him/her

Jump: A sudden acceleration, often at the start of the sprint

Kick: The final burst of speed in a sprint

Lead Out: An international and often sacrificial move where one rider begins a sprint to give a head start to another rider (usually a teammate) on his rear wheel, who then comes around at an even faster speed to take the lead

Neo-Pro: Cycling's term for a rookie at the professional level

Pace Line: See "echelon"

Pack: See "field"

Peloton: See "field"

Prime: Pronounced "preem." A race-within-a-race where riders sprint for prizes on a designated lap or at a certain point in a race, i.e., the "sponsor" Teamwork Challenge

Pull: To take a turn at the front and break the wind for the other riders in the pack

Pull Off: To move to one side so that another rider can take a turn at the front

Pull Through: Move to the front of a pace line, from second spot, after the lead riders swings off to the front

Sitting In: When one rider refuses to take a pull and break the wind for the group in which he/she is riding. A derogatory term is "Wheel Sucker"

Slipstream: The pocket of air created by a moving rider, just as in automobile or motorcycle racing. See "drafting"

Soigneur: Pronounced "Swa-neur" Comparable to a trainer in other sports, this person gives massages and watches the physical health of the riders along with the team doctors

Sprint: A sudden burst of speed for the finish of a race involving more than one rider.

Stage Race: A series of individual races- time trials, road races, circuit races or criteriums - grouped into one event that lasts several days. The rider who has the lowest accumulated time for all stages determines the winner. The most famous stage race in the world is the Tour de France, which spans 2,500 miles in 22 days.

Take a Flyer: When one rider goes off the front of the pack, usually alone

Time Trial: An individual race against the clock, often called the "race of truth"

Velodrome: An oval banked track, usually 333.33 meters in length. In general, track riders and road riders compete in separate kinds of events. The difference in training and ability is similar to the difference between sprinters and long-distance runners.

Wheel Sucker: A derogatory term, referring to a rider who always sits in and never expends any energy by taking a pull at the front.