

Commonly Asked Questions About Cyclo-Cross

1. Please explain, what is cyclo-cross and how does it differ from other forms of racing?

- ↳ balance in the power to endurance pendulum is shifted more to power since the race durations are much shorter... 4 hours for a typical elite/senior category road race vs. 1 hour for the same category's cyclo-cross race
- ↳ Courses are shorter circuit: 2.5 km to 3.2 km per lap — they are typically on mixed terrain; gravel, dirt, grass, sand, mud — a well designed 'cross course has the competitor off their bikes 5 to 7 times every lap; that is 5 to 7 double transitions every 7 to 8 minutes — courses aren't level; off-camber riding and off-camber down-hill turning plays no role in road cycling and a lot less of a role in mountain biking than in cyclo-cross, that said a 'cross course terrain isn't as severe as some mountain bike courses and thus the reason suspension is not part of a cyclo-cross frame design. From spectators' perspective you can stand in one or two locations (typically where the beer garden is placed) and watch all the exciting action. You can't do that at road and mountain bike courses.
- ↳ technique and bike handling have a huge role in cyclo-cross; possibly the most of all cycling disciplines
- ↳ running and hurdling are in 'cross but not in any other cycling discipline
- ↳ 'cross is a race of positioning, gaining cumulative parts of a second advantages over your competitors. In road if you get dropped you can, with huge effort, reconnect and then rest. In 'cross when you are off the back you have to fight through a crowd to reconnect (see positioning below) and there few opportunities to rest/draft
- ↳ equipment knowledge plays a much greater role in 'cross than any other cycling discipline... Reading a course, selecting the correct tire profile to match that course and then the perfect air pressure that allows your tire to grip where you want it to and let you fly when you want to fly plays a significant role. One reason elite level 'cross riders can be seen changing tires/wheels before their race starts
- ↳ pit crew: 'cross is the only discipline where competitors change bikes as often as every half lap, which means you need to have a really good pit crew to be able to hand you your spare bike and get you back to up to speed in 5 paces, grab your bike, wash off all the caked, energy-sapping mud, change any broken part, readjust and lubricate and have it ready for you to grab 3.5 minutes later and repeat and repeat...
- ↳ positioning from the start of the race is important, since the courses are 3 to 6 metres wide all those bikes ahead of you can create a jam-up. In road your team plays a much greater role in protecting you and conserving your energy. In 'cross there is no sitting in and being protected to the finish line. That said, it isn't as much of a time trial as a mountain bike race

2. What is the appeal?

- ↳ it is more fun... It is very much like being a kid on a bike again
- ↳ it is the challenge. it is being tested to the limits of your ability every time (every course is different, even riding the same course in the reverse direction is a significant different experience)
- ↳ very familiar atmosphere... everyone cheers on, encourages, supports and celebrates everyone's efforts
- ↳ for most people training isn't as all demanding as in road (you don't have to spend 20 to 30 hours a week on your bike building the base just to be fit enough to be competitive)
- ↳ lots of tangible intangibles that make most roadies and mountain bikers who give 'cross a season start to say "I ride road (or mountain) to train for 'cross. Cyclo-cross is my favourite discipline!"

3. Could you speak to the growth of the sport, just how popular is it getting, and how fast?

- ↳ participation is roughly doubling each year. But it hasn't grown so huge that you don't know everyone
- ↳ Midweek's 'cross@centennial and other like programs across Canada are delivering the training facilities where newbies can go to learn and practice 'cross and meet other 'cross riders for informal training rides
- ↳ courses are in city parks so people get to see, experience and conveniently give it a try. (Versus road and mountain which typically are way out in the country)

4. What do I need to get into the sport?

- ↳ desire to have fun
- ↳ for Midweek's 'cross@centennial park weekly Tuesday night training clinic any road, mountain or cyclo-cross bike (10+ years of age please)
- ↳ depending on category you are racing mountain or cyclo-cross bike (elites/seniors and juniors must race on a cyclo-cross bike)
- ↳ to race in Ontario either a racing licence or a citizen's permit; there are one or two races every weekend in Ontario and in most provinces across Canada from now until mid November (and other races around North America and Europe until February... need the racing licence). First timers can typically purchase a one-day permit so they can test and try the discipline.

↳ tires with a tread (not as much as most off the rack mountain bikes but more than on a road rain tire)

↳ helmet

↳ membership to an internationally recognized cycling association like your provincial cycling association (for insurance)

5. Why would I do such a thing — what types of people is the sport attracting.

↳ In addition to the answers in "2 above...

↳ because you want to have fun, like going home feeling exhausted but with a smile from ear to ear

↳ parents are telling us that their kids are dragging them out, it is the weekly activity that the kids want to do because they have fun, enjoy being with new friends, like how they learn a new skill or succeed in accomplishing/doing something new each week and how everything is so supportive and non-judgmental... It you aren't good at it this week all it means is you need some more practice, you'll get it with time. Guess these are the reasons adults do it too.

↳ runners and multi-sporters find it is nice blending or running, hurdling and cycling

↳ it is so different than anything else out there... It has the fear factor... will I make it down the hill, around that corner half way down the hill, will my tires grip on the wet long grass? Much like riding a roller-coaster or watching a scary movie. Crashes tend to be minor (off the bike one moment and up and racing the next, just another transition) --- people do like to crash, they don't like to get hurt.

↳ it is a great anaerobic exercise

↳ size does not matter in cycling, if anything the advantage goes to the smaller person

↳ and its nice being outside in the crisp cool weather of fall and early winter

6. Five tips for beginners?

↳ give yourself time to succeed; this discipline is technique based which takes time to master

↳ don't worry about where you place, everyone who places higher in the finish order has been where you are

↳ come out to a Midweek's 'cross@centennial and other like programs, learn and practice

↳ ask someone to critic your technique... Someone watching from the side can see what you are doing right and what needs work and can give you suggestions on what might work better for you

↳ closely watch the technique of more experienced riders, look and see with your brain: what line they take a corner, how they pass within a maze, how their hurdling is so like a ballet... All the little things they do to gain parts of a seconds on their competitors.

7. Good races to get your feet wet?

↳ All the races on your provincial 'cross racing calendar... Since 'cross is ability based the level of competition is directly proportional to your experience level so any race is a perfect first race (except maybe the Oct 17th UCI race at Centennial Park... It's hill and course, which has been compared/equated to the Koppenberg in Belgium is really not a "first-time in the sport" course, but Sunday the 18th's is.)

8. What should I be looking at for a bike and how much should I spend starting out?

↳ if I was considering purchasing my first 'cross bike I'd come out to a race, 'cross@centennial or like session and look to see what others are riding before I walk into a bike store. I'd ask riders why they are riding what they are riding and where did they buy it. Not all bike stores are as 'cross familiar as they should be. For that reason I'd also read the rule book (UCI.ch) and take note that disc brakes are not allowed on cyclo-cross bikes. Then for my first year I'd spend as little as I can... buy entry level, buy used. Since for your first or two seasons it is more your technique, strength, skill, comfort and confidence then what you are riding I suggest you not being overly "equipment" concerned. After you know what you want, that's when to spend. Don't forget your first bike isn't wasted... it becomes your spare bike in the pit.

↳ recall that 'cross started as a winter training activity for road cyclists, thus virtually all your road equipment works for 'cross, even your road bike will in a pinch (except on really muddy courses). The other exception is your road cycling shoes and peddles... but your mountain bike ones will work instead!

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Photo by Martin Franchi

Toronto International cyclo-cross



UCI-c.1 Sat Oct 17⁰⁹ • UCI-c.2 Sun Oct 18⁰⁹
Over \$24,500 in cash – 2 very distinct courses
 Centennial Park, Toronto, Ontario • www.midweekclub.ca

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Fri Oct 16⁰⁹ 'Cross Party at the Brunswick House, 481 Bloor Street West, cycling themed, contests & prizes

Sat Oct 17⁰⁹ • 12 noon to 6 pm • FREE admission to spectators • Beer Garden • Expo

- 12:00 Master 3 m, Under 17 m & f, Elite 3 & 4 m: 40 minutes
- 1:00 Master 2 m, Under 19 m, Master f: 50 minutes
- 2:30 Youth ages 8 & 9 m & f: 3 laps, Youth ages 10, 11 & 12 m & f: 5 laps, Youth ages 13 & 14 m & f: 7 laps
- 3:00 UCI-c.1 Elite f, U 19 f: 40 minutes
- 4:00 UCI-c.1 Elite m: 60 minutes *(the biggest race of the weekend, prize money wise!!!)*
- 5:00 Master 1 m: 55 minutes

Sun Oct 18⁰⁹ • 10:30 am to 4:30 pm • FREE admission to spectators • Beer Garden • Expo

- 10:30 Master 3 m, Under 17 m & f, Elite 3 & 4 m: 40 minutes
- 11:30 Master 2 m, Under 19 m, Master f: 50 minutes
- 12:45 UCI-c.2 Elite f, U 19 f: 40 minutes
- 2:00 UCI-c.2 Elite m: 60 minutes
- 3:15 Youth ages 8 & 9 m & f: 3 laps, Youth ages 10, 11 & 12 m & f: 5 laps, Youth ages 13 & 14 m & f: 7 laps
- 3:30 Master 1 m: 55 minutes



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Warning: Filthy Fun

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