

# girls just wanna race bikes

Reconnect with your inner speed demon this summer.

By Jayme Otto

More women are racing road bikes than ever before. But they're doing it a little differently than the guys. Consider the scene in the race parking lot at the Jefferson Cup Road Race in Charlottesville, VA: Hillary Styer and Zina Labudde slather on the sunscreen, while Nicole Shue digs around in her car to find the leis. Styer and Labudde tie pink and purple grass skirts over their black spandex shorts. Once she locates the hot pink leis, Shue relaxes and joins in the carnival atmosphere of her teammates. "We race with flair," she says.

The girls represent Velo Bella, the nation's largest all-women's cycling team. At the start line, they'll join 50 other women, racing 20 miles. The Bellas take their racing very seriously, just not themselves. "Bike races can be very intimidating, and roadies in general can be intimidating. Our point is to make



CHAO, BELLA! Nicole Shue warms up for a race.

it a relaxing atmosphere using things like feathered boas. It's all about breaking down those barriers and just being girls at heart and having fun," explains Shue, head Bella of the Mid-Atlantic region.

There's no better time to step up to the start line of your first bike race. Be ready to roll with these insider tips.

## Which race is right for me?

	DISTANCE	TERRAIN	SPEED	GOOD FOR
<b>ROAD RACE (RR)</b>	40-80 MILES	VARIED	Depends on the pack. Typically starts gradual, gets faster as the race progresses.	Gals who are strong and steady and comfortable riding in a pack.
<b>CRITERIUM (CR)</b>	<1 MILE LOOP raced for 30-60 minutes depending on Category.	FLAT	Fast and furious.	Girls with the need for speed who are skilled bike-handlers and comfortable in close proximity to other riders.
<b>TIME TRIAL (TT)</b>	VARIABLES, but typically 20 miles or less.	FLAT w/ some gradual up or downhill	As hard as you can go. It's just you, no pack.	Triathletes or ladies looking to race against the clock, not other riders.
<b>HILL CLIMB (HC)</b>	VARIABLES, but typically 20 miles or less.	STEEP UPHILL	Slow and steady.	Climbers, masochists, and women who aren't interested in riding in a pack.
<b>CIRCUIT RACE</b>	5-25 MILE repeating loop. Number of loops depends on Category.	VARIED	Depends on the pack.	Steady riders with average bike handling skills, not quite ready to commit to the length of the road race or the ferocity of the criterium.
<b>STAGE RACE</b>	This is a MULTI-DAY event with different types of races.	VARIED	Depends on type of race.	The woman who wants to try it all at once.

**How fast do I need to be?** There's no rule, but 16 to 18 mph is a good place to start, and will put you in the middle of the pack

**Do I need to be on a team to enter a bike race?** Nope. Just sign up as "Unattached." Single girls are welcome!

**Should I join a team or club if I want to race?** It's not required, but a team provides an instant group of mentors, as well as a snazzy uniform. It never hurts to look the part.

**What do I wear to a bike race?** The same thing you wear on a ride, plus some flair if you're a Bella. Helmets are required. If you are part of a club or team, you should wear the team uniform, or "kit."

**What kind of equipment do I need for a bike race?** You need a road bike; mountain bikes and hybrids are too heavy. You also need clipless pedals, which are the kind you clip into, despite the counterintuitive name. They take some getting used to, but trust us when we tell you that you don't want to stick out as the only person with bootleg pedals.

**Will I need to eat and drink during a race?** Yes. We recommend one water bottle per every hour you race. Long races (60+ miles) will have "feed zones" where volunteers hand out fresh bottles of water. Use water bottle cages attached to your bike to hold your water. The Camelbacks popular in mountain biking are faux pas. If the race runs more than an hour, plan to stash some energy gels in your jersey pocket.

**Will I have to race against professional racers?** Nope, not even if you wanted to. Racers are divided into different categories according to ability. As a new racer, you'll automatically enter the lowest possible category—Cat 4. The hierarchy goes 4-3-2-1-PRO.

**What happens if I have to go to the bathroom?** Women have a civilized habit of stopping to call a "pee break" in races over 60 miles. It's quite a spectacle as everyone drops trou on the side of the road. The more experienced girls will lead the charge. Just make sure you follow their lead. It's a no-no to keep riding when a break has been called.

**Where do I go to find a race in my area?** USAcycling.org is a good place to start. Click on "Road" and then "Find a Race."