

Frequently Asked Questions by New Riders

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What is Fredericksburg Cyclists?

Fredericksburg Cyclists, Inc., or simply FCC (Fredericksburg Cyclists Club) is a bike club founded in 1984 to foster riding, social activities and social events among cyclists in the Fredericksburg area. The Club was incorporated in 1989.

We are a small to medium sized club of approximately 300 members, and hold at least three (3) rides every week. Some of our rides are held on weekdays and some on weekends. We also sponsor our signature event, the "Cannonball" century, occurring annually during the fall and a Spring Membership Ride featuring lunch. The Spring Ride is free to all members.

How do I become a member?

It's easy. You can [join online](http://www.bikefred.com) at our website: www.bikefred.com. Individual memberships are only \$20 and there is special pricing for families and students. You may also join in person at a scheduled ride if you complete all necessary paperwork and bring cash or check (payable to Fredericksburg Cyclists) to pay for your membership. Please see the Ride Leader to join.

What are the member benefits when I join?

We like to think that the main benefit is riding in a group and enjoying the fellowship of other riders during a ride and other social activities. Other benefits include discount pricing at several bicycle shops and our club insurance policy that, in the event of an accident, will generally pay for medical bills not covered by your regular health insurance. *You are only covered by the Club's insurance while you are participating in a scheduled Club sponsored group ride.*

Who "runs" the club?

The FCC is governed by an Executive Board consisting of a President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary, and operates under Bylaws. We also have volunteer or appointed members, know as the Administrative Board, who perform crucial functions, such a scheduling rides and other events, that are essential to the operation of the Club.

What does my membership pay for?

Our membership fees cover expenses incurred by the club that include, but not limited to:

- Website hosting
- Social Activities & certain rides
- Participation in community and outreach events
- Hosting classes and meetings
- Insurance
- Printing & Postage
- Donations to local churches for use of facilities
- Professional Fees
- Miscellaneous expenses

We support cycling in the Fredericksburg area. We contribute to worthwhile cycling causes such as the Dahlgren Rail trail, the Spotsylvania Greenways Initiative and we'll donate cycling safety items such as bike helmets for children to encourage safe cycling.

Do I have to join the Club in order to participate in a group ride?

No. Non-members are always welcome. Our insurance policy will cover you on your first time ride as a non-member. Future rides are not covered unless you join. You're welcome to participate in our rides to see what they are like, but we hope that you enjoy the riding so much that you will want to join after a ride or two. You need to sign a waiver each time you ride.

I'm new to cycling or I'm seriously out of shape. Should I join?

Yes. We have riders of all different abilities. If you are new to cycling or out of shape, look for a "No Drop" ride that is usually held on Saturday mornings. This ride, which is shorter than other rides (usually around 17-20 miles), essentially goes no faster than the slowest rider in the group, and you won't get left behind. As a participant in a "No-Drop" ride, however, you are expected to be able to ride approximately 17 miles with only minor difficulty and possess the necessary cycling skills that will permit you to ride on the road without posing a danger to yourself or others.

Necessary cycling skills include, but are not limited to, coordination and balance to ride without falling over, the ability to ride in a straight line without weaving across a road, and the ability to keep a reasonably consistent pace (speed). If you have not achieved this level of fitness or expertise, we have classes for the newest riders from the L2R (Learn to Ride [for adults who have never been on a bike]), CCC (Confident City Cycling) which teaches basic and emergency skills to newer riders, Bicycle Maintenance and Care and Bicycle Rodeo for children. For these and other classes, visit the classes listing on our web site. Beyond this, we recommend you ride on bike paths or other relatively safe areas until such time you feel you are ready to participate in our group rides.

Riding with other cyclists of similar ability is lots of fun and helps everyone to improve. As you gain experience and fitness, you will graduate to longer and faster rides if you so choose.

I want to try a group ride. How do I find out when they happen?

Look at our ride schedule located at www.bikefred.com and find the ride(s) that seems best for you.

I see the ride and distance options, but I don't see speed or terrain categories, like some other clubs have. How do I know if I'm on the right ride for my ability level? Should I be worried about getting left behind?

Our normally scheduled Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday rides always follow the same routes, although individual groups of riders may modify the route for any number of reasons. Therefore, the terrain remains the same. If a Sunday ride is scheduled, it may be in a different location than the Tues/Thurs/Sat ride and the type terrain is usually noted.

There are other days that sometimes have rides scheduled; check with the Ride Leader if you have questions.

Our groups of riders will generally average anywhere from about 15 mph to 19+mph (for other than "No Drop" rides) in our light to moderate hilly terrain. Weekday rides are generally slower than weekend rides, but it depends on the particular mix of riders on a given day.

While everybody starts at the same time, rides may break up into several different groups of riders according to ability and the mileage that group wants to do on a given day. Just as in professional cycling, our rides often "break apart" at the first significant climb. The best and most fit riders may climb a hill several times as fast as other riders. Other riders may struggle and fall completely behind. This is known as getting "dropped". It happens to virtually everybody at some time or another. Once dropped, weaker riders will find it extremely difficult to impossible to catch those riders and will fall back into a slower group.

So while 30 members may start a ride together, you may ultimately find yourself riding in a group of only about two or three other riders (or less), with riders ahead and behind you.

To avoid getting dropped, identify yourself to the ride leader before the ride and be honest about your capabilities. Don't overestimate your speed or mileage ability. The ride leader will try to find you an appropriate group of people for you in which to ride. Overestimating your ability and fitness can lead to a very lonely ride as you see riders vanishing in the distance.

But don't worry if you get dropped; as a new rider, someone will usually wait for you at an intersection or turn if they know you are new and not familiar with the route. You may wish to purchase a Garmin GPS type bike computer for your bike; they are popular units with club members.

If you are still hesitant, call the ride leader a few days before the ride to discuss any concerns you may have.

Are the Club's rides social or competitive?

All of our rides are social rides; we don't race. But Saturdays sometimes bring out the "Hammerheads" who will have a competitive type ride and ride very fast. Each individual decides how much they want to challenge themselves. For many of us, our primary goals are to improve our conditioning & fitness, increase average speed or cadence, increase distance, or improve climbing ability.

What kind of bike should I use on Club rides?

The vast majority of our riders have road bikes, which are best for the type riding we do. After all, we do all of our riding on the road. But a few people ride hybrids, recumbents, and even tandems. A few of our triathletes use tri-bikes. If you need advice on buying a bike, just ask a few club members for their opinions. And look at what people are riding. Ask lots of questions! Club members will gladly share their knowledge and expertise with you, or refer you to someone who can better answer your questions.

Do I need a bicycle helmet?

Yes! No exceptions!

Are headphones permitted on a ride?

No. Although VA bans the use of headphones in both ears*, Fredericksburg Cyclists does not permit the use of **any** headphones during a group ride. The use of headphones will not allow you to hear approaching traffic, barking dogs who may try to chase you, or other riders who are trying to communicate with you about their intentions or road hazards. Using headphones is dangerous for you **and** the riders around you.

* § 46.2-1078 It shall be unlawful for any person to operate a motor vehicle, **bicycle**, electric personal assistive mobility device, electric power-assisted bicycle, or moped on the highways in the Commonwealth while using earphones on or in both ears.

Is there a registration fee or any other charge for participating in a ride?

No. All of our rides are free except for certain special events that may incur a nominal fee to cover such things as food & drink.

Do I need to register for a ride or just show up?

There is no registration for a ride. Just show up!

How do I know if a ride is cancelled?

Take a look at the Club's Facebook page and Ride Calendar; ride leaders will post a notice of a ride being cancelled. Last minute cancellations will usually be posted on Facebook. Cancellations usually only occur due to inclement weather and are more likely in the winter months. If you regularly participate in a particular ride, the ride leader may put you on a personal e-mail list so that you will get notification.

What happens when I get to the ride?

Show up at the start location at least 15 minutes prior to the ride starting time and locate the ride leader. Introduce yourself and let them know if you are a new member or guest and let them know what kind of rider you are. You will need to fill out the sign-in/waiver sheet that all participants of the ride complete. If the route is not marked on the road, the ride leader will give you a cue sheet with the ride directions. We try to start every ride on time. A pet peeve of many members is the rider who shows up a few minutes before the start of a ride while everyone else is ready to start. Yes, sometimes it can't be helped, **but do not expect other riders to wait for you.**

What is a cue sheet?

A cue sheet will list every turn of the ride with mileage at each turn or major intersection. You may need to refer to the cue sheet while you're riding so that you make the proper turns and don't get lost. It's important that you use a bike computer with an odometer that displays mileage, so that you can confirm each turn in advance by referring to the mileage listed on the cue sheet. You can find available cue sheets on our webpage at www.bikefred.com.

In actual practice, you probably won't need a cue sheet because most routes are marked with arrows on the road making it difficult to get lost. It's still possible to get lost if you have missed a turn so look for marks on the road indicating the route. And if you have identified yourself as a new rider to the Ride Leader, someone will typically be looking out for you. Riders will often turn around or wait for a rider who has been dropped.

What facilities are at the ride start locations?

Our normal starting points vary. Most (but not all) Tues., Thurs., and Sat. rides start at the Spotsylvania YMCA which has restroom and shower facilities. The YMCA has graciously permitted member of Fredericksburg Cyclists to use their restroom and shower facilities. Other starting points may have facilities; check the Ride Description in the Ride Calendar, or call the Ride Leader if necessary.

How many people show up for each ride?

The number varies considerably depending on the day and weather. Tues/Thurs rides usually have 5 – 10 riders: Sat. rides have 15- 25 riders, sometimes more. But again, the numbers vary.

What is the typical age of Club members?

Overall, we're a fairly mature group, with lots of riders in their 50s and 60s, but you will see riders of many different ages on our rides. We have the occasional teen, a number of twenty-somethings and a few in their late seventies and eighties.

Does the Club have women cyclists?

Yes, we have lots of women in the club. Most rides have a majority of men, but on occasion we are outnumbered by, as a few women have called themselves, "Team Estrogen."

Does bad weather cancel a ride?

Generally yes. Moderate to heavy rain will cause most rides to be cancelled, but a ride may go on under a light drizzle. Most rides go on if conditions are "iffy" and riders will often determine at the starting point if they will ride or not. In the winter, most rides will go on in conditions above 40 degrees unless it is windy.

Cancellation is done on a ride-by-ride basis and is up to the discretion of each ride leader. If the weather looks doubtful either call your ride leader the morning of the ride, or visit our Facebook page for an announcement about the ride.

Who is the Ride Captain?

The Ride Captain has overall responsibility for Club rides; they schedule rides, get Ride Leaders, and put rides on our website with pertinent info. about the ride to notify members of upcoming rides. The Ride Captain (and Ride Leader's roles, described below) are critically important as without them, there are no rides.

Who are Ride Leaders and what are their roles?

Ride Leaders are Club members who volunteer to lead a ride and perform certain functions. It does not literally mean that they "lead" the ride with other members behind them. They coordinate rides with the Ride Captain, often establishing a given ride and prepare cue sheets. They often mark routes on the roads. Ride Leaders get everyone signed in at the start and may address the group prior to departure with information that riders may need to know.

Are Ride Leaders required to wait for everyone, even the slowest riders?

No. Ride Leaders are not required to wait for the slowest riders. They will ride in the group of their choosing, and ride their own pace just like any other rider. That's why it's important for you to ride with a group that's within your ability.

What do I need to bring on a ride?

Besides the obvious answer of your **bike** and **helmet**, here's a list of items that will help to make your ride more safe and enjoyable. You may also wish to apply **sunscreen** before a ride as many miles may be ridden in full sun.

1. **Water bottles** – A general rule of thumb is one large water bottle is needed for each hour of riding, but fluid consumption varies by individual, temperature and terrain. We recommend 2 large water bottles filled with water or the sports drink of your choice be carried in warm - hot weather. Most rides over approx. 40 miles have 2-3 places where you can purchase more water or sports drink if necessary. Let someone in your group know that you need to refill because some rides may not directly pass by a location and you might have to deviate slightly from the route to get there.
2. **Food** - energy bars or gels, bananas, whatever you like to eat.
3. **Cash** for drinks and snacks you may need to purchase.
4. **Spare tube, tire levers, patch kit, mini or frame pump, or CO2 inflator** with at least 1 canister of CO2– if you don't know how to fix a flat, you still need to bring these items so other cyclists helping you don't have to use their tube or CO2 they may need later.
5. **ID** such as a driver's license. Many of our members use a "Road ID" bracelet that they wear containing necessary medical and emergency contact information
6. **Cell phone**; good to have in case of emergency. Smart phones with weather apps. can be invaluable to let you know of changing weather conditions.
7. **Bike computer** – not absolutely essential, but pretty close. Models can display speed, temperature, mileage, heart rate, navigation and many other kinds of data that can be extremely helpful.
8. **Cue sheet holder** – makes using a cue sheet easier, but not usually necessary because most rides are marked.

Do I need to prep my bike before riding?

Yes. Make sure it is in good shape with no mechanical issues that might lead to a breakdown. If it's an old or little used bike, take it to a bike shop to get it inspected and serviced. Replace parts like tires, chains, brake pads, or anything that needs to be replaced to help ensure your safety and the reliability of your bike. Also, know that tires leak air over time, so ensure that you pump up your tires just before leaving from home or at the ride. Know the maximum inflation pressure that is printed on your tire's sidewall and don't exceed it. You will notice most club members pumping up their tires just before starting a ride to get tire pressure "just right" for them.

Also, make sure you carry the right size tube for your wheel. Also ensure you have the right stem length; a brand new 36mm stem size tube is useless on a wheel that requires a 42mm or longer stem. Make sure that your pump or CO2 device matches the valve type used on your bike, which will either be a schrader valve or a presta valve. (Presta valve tubes are most commonly used on high pressure tires and have a screw in valve cap; a schrader valve is an automotive type valve.) Lastly, if you are going to use CO2 to inflate a tire after a flat, ensure that you have enough CO2 to inflate the tire; a 12 gram cartridge is not going to be enough for a "fat" tire. If you're not sure, ask a member or go to a bike shop to make sure you are carrying all the right equipment to fix a flat on your bike.

What should I wear?

Highly recommended are cycling specific clothing and shoes & clipless pedals. Yes, you can ride in gym shorts and tennis shoes, but cycling specific clothing and shoes make cycling much more comfortable and efficient. Bike shorts have a built in chamois that makes a bicycle seat more comfortable. They offer a degree of compression that helps delay the onset of muscle fatigue. And moisture wicking fabrics in shorts and jerseys help you feel cooler than wearing cotton. Cycling gloves also make riding more comfortable and helps prevent injury in a fall. Cycling shoes and clipless pedals improve your efficiency and power, allowing you to ride further and faster. Yes, there is a learning curve with clipless pedals so it's wise to practice, practice, practice clipping in and out before coming on a ride.

A full discussion on this topic could take pages so it's recommended that you do some research and pay a visit to a local bike store to get their advice. And ask other members for their recommendations too.

I've never ridden on roads before, am I going to be safe?

The club typically rides on country roads with relatively light traffic compared to say, roads in Northern Virginia (which is why we often see bike clubs from up there riding on roads down here). But some routes take riders on roads that are more heavily traveled. Riding on these roads is usually limited to only a few miles.

While vehicles are certainly uppermost in most riders mind with respect to safety, most crashes occur because of obstacles in the road (e.g., tree limbs & branches, potholes, railroad tracks, sand or gravel, etc) or rider inattention (e.g., going too fast, improper braking, hitting the rider in front of you in a paceline, etc).

Riders will point out and/or call out obstacles (e.g., "HOLE!") to let riders in back know of upcoming obstacles, but be vigilant, sometimes an obstacle can be missed. Be especially cautious on higher speed descents.

It's impossible to be completely safe while sharing the roads with cars and potentially inattentive or distracted drivers, but there are things you can do to be safer:

1. Ride in a group – it's easier for drivers to see a group of cyclists before a single cyclist and they will also tend to slow down more for riders in a group.
2. Wear a brightly colored jersey – yellow is usually the most visible.
3. Use a flashing tail light – these are available at bike stores and the internet. Some are better and brighter than others so ask questions. Especially good for overcast days.
4. Use a mirror – Not everyone uses one but there are models that clip on your helmet or to your handlebar end.
5. Stay to the right and ride single file unless it is safe to do otherwise.
6. Obey the "Rules of the Road" (see next question).

There are multiple articles on the internet about safe riding practices and the Club sometimes offers safe riding classes. Check our website for further info.

What are the "Rules of the Road" and how do I interact with other riders?

Obey traffic laws. If a light is red, you need to wait until it turns green. Stop at Stop signs and call out "SLOWING" as you slow down and "STOPPING" as you come to a stop. This is to let the rider(s) in back know of your intentions and prevent an accident.

You should always ride single file on busier roads to allow traffic to pass. Signal your intention to turn left or right by extending your left or right arm completely out to your side. This is important because the rider behind you (as well as cars) need to know that you're turning. If you don't signal, the person behind you could very easily run into you because you suddenly turned right in front them without warning, while they've continued to go straight. So always remember to communicate with the rider(s) in back of you by using hand signals and/or voice.

Should I be concerned about getting hit by a car?

National statistics show that only about 17 percent of bicycle collisions involve motor vehicles and half of those are incidents where the cyclist is at fault. A large number of cyclist at fault accidents involve children riding from between cars and from driveways. The bottom line is, if a cyclist obeys the rules anticipates possible dangers (like open car doors and intersections) your chances of having an accident involving a motor vehicle are very small.

Many bicycle/car accidents occur at intersections, so you have to be especially careful at such places. Riders at intersections will yell “CAR LEFT!” or “CAR RIGHT!” to alert riders in back of them of approaching traffic.

Riders will also yell out “CAR BACK!” to let riders in front of them know a car is coming. Riders in front will yell out “CAR UP!” to let riders in back know of approaching traffic so they can get in line if they happen to be riding two abreast. “CAR UP” is much more often called out on roads without a centerline, which tend to be a bit narrower. It’s used less infrequently on roads with a centerline because you never should be riding in the other lane.

Fortunately, most cars in the area where we ride give us plenty of room. In fact, the majority of drivers are quite friendly and often wave to us. We try to do the same to generate good-will with motorists and property owners.

We do our best to operate in a safe and considerate manner to insure that our rides are safe and fun.

What do I do if I have an accident and get injured?

Obviously, calling 911 is imperative if you are seriously injured. If any accident requires medical attention, you must contact the ride leader so that an “Incident Report Form” can be completed and processed. (see: <http://www.bikefred.com/Resources/Documents/Accident%20Report.pdf>)

Do we ride the entire distance non-stop or are there rest stops along the way?

Rides of around 40 or so mile will generally have one rest stop, usually at a certain church that has picnic tables. Rides over about 50 miles will generally have two, but there is no firm rule. If it is really hot, there may be short rest stops at intersections and other stops to get water at a convenience store/gas station or a country store/market. Rest stops are generally short, about 10-15 minutes.

How can I ever possibly ride 40 miles or more?

Many people express amazement when a club member mentions they have ridden 40 or 50 miles (or much more!) in a conversation with non-riders. But it’s really not that hard if you are in reasonably good shape and have the proper bike and equipment.

Yes, you have to put time in the saddle and accumulate what we call “base miles”. The more often you ride equals more miles ridden, which results in better cycling fitness. It is not especially unusual for someone in their 50s or 60s (and sometimes even 70s) to be able to outride someone 10, 20, or even 30 years younger, who hasn’t put in many base miles and is not in good cycling shape.

What is “Paceline Riding?”

Paceline riding is an advanced technique where riders ride (generally) single file closely together. The rider in front is taking a “Pull”, pulling the other riders in back. Estimates vary, but riders in back have an energy savings of around 20-25% compared to the rider in front, due to the “draft” created by the front rider. The more riders in a paceline means a longer time for each rider to “rest” and enjoy the energy savings.

Riding in a pace line, where riders are sharing a turn at the front, virtually always results in a higher average speed and the ability to ride more miles. As you can imagine, the rider doing the pulling is working hard and will move to the left and drift to the back of the paceline once tired. They’ve earned the rest! How long an individual “pulls” depends on multiple factors such as speed, terrain, temperature, and how they feel that day. Riders who get tired can sit in the back indefinitely and let other riders pull.

Many riders, especially newer riders, are uncomfortable riding in a paceline, riding just a foot or two in back of the rider in front. **You must concentrate and pay attention as you can cause a crash involving multiple riders!** Newer riders should stay further back from the rider in front. But as you gain experience, it should become more comfortable.

There are pages and pages of information available on the internet about paceline riding; we highly recommend searching for terms such as “paceline riding” and reading what has been written to gain a better understanding of the techniques involved.

What happens if I “bonk” or have a problem with my bike that I can’t fix?

Bonking happens when your body simply runs out of energy and you can go no further. It can best be avoided by eating properly and hydrating properly, and not trying to ride further than you are actually able. Almost every cyclist has experienced this at one time or another. If it happens, eat some food and drink some water; if you are out, someone in your group may be able to give you some or try get to a place that has these items. This might allow you to continue the ride at a slow pace, or turn around to get back to the starting point. Ask someone to accompany you.

If you’re still not able to continue, use your cell phone to call for someone who might be able to pick you up. Depending on the point in the ride, another club member may be able to ride back to their car and pick you up.

Many mechanical issues can be fixed by another cyclist who may have the proper tools, but don’t count on this as many riders carry no tools. Usually, a repair can be made that will allow you to limp home...it’s better than walking! That’s why it’s imperative that your bike be in good mechanical shape before riding. Breaking down on a ride is not a fun experience but the effects can be minimized if you carry some basic repair items and learn to do some minor repairs on your own. We offer regular classes and you can learn a lot from other cyclists.

Am I going to have fun riding with Fredericksburg Cyclists?

ABSOLUTELY!!