

TRY-A-TRI TIPS part 2 – all about the bike!

This is the second of our articles designed to help first-timers prepare for a triathlon. As the bike is the single most important item of kit needed for the race, I've decided to deal with it first. So, these pages will tell you all you need to know about the rules & requirements of triathlon when it comes to bikes (and bike equipment).

WHAT KIND OF BIKE DO I NEED & DO I NEED TO BUY A NEW ONE?

You can use most types of bike for a triathlon. If you are planning to take part in triathlons long term, there is no reason why you shouldn't get yourself a proper Tri Bike and use it in your first race. You won't look out of place or come across as "too serious". On the other hand, if you want to have a go on an old mountain bike, that's perfectly fine too at an event like the Try-a-Tri. Here are some images from one of our previous GO TRI events at Tockington, so you can see the variety of bikes that get used in these beginner events – Tri Bikes, Road Bikes, Hybrids, Tourers and Mountain Bikes are all fine.



There are a few rules to be aware of, so here are the key things you need to know. Although a Try-a-Tri is aimed at first timers, ALL the rules of triathlon do apply. For the full text of the rules, see the British Triathlon Rule Book: <https://www.britishtriathlon.org/competitionrules> - you'll notice that the section on bikes is very technical so to summarise it – you need a standard bike that is not Fixed Gear (in other words it *must* allow you to freewheel, rather than stop when you stop pedalling) and it must have front & rear brakes. If your bike is an unusual shape or design then do check the rules but otherwise for GO TRI / Try-a-Tri events we're looking simply for a normal bike that is safe and roadworthy – simples!

IS MY BIKE FIT FOR PURPOSE?

A basic visual check will be made on race day, but the responsibility of ensuring your bike is safe and fit for use is down to you. If unsure, visit your local, friendly bike shop or mechanic for a safety check. Gary Harris Cycles have supported many of our events over the years and you can google them and arrange a service if you don't already have a local bike mechanic lined up. Please note that when you take a bike to a Triathlon you have to make sure the ends of the handlebars are plugged, not just open metal tubes, as those could do someone some damage (probably you) in the unlikely case of a crash. For the same reason, you need to remove light-mounts and brackets and fixings that project from the frame if you have any.



IF I TAKE PART ON A MOUNTAIN BIKE OR HYBRID WILL I BE LOADS SLOWER THAN EVERYONE ELSE?

On a long triathlon with flat, straight roads, the tri-bike does give a big advantage, but the 10k Tockington course is relatively short & slightly undulating. Those of you on mountain bikes should not be left too far behind. If you want to improve the speed of a mountain bike, the key things you can do are to replace the knobby tyres with smooth ones and/or pump the tyres up to their full safe pressure (see sidewall of tyre for max pressure recommended by the manufacturer). This reduces rolling resistance on the roads.

At the end of the day, Try-a-Tri events are more about the challenge of completing a triathlon rather than going flat-out to beat the other competitors. No one outside of the sport is likely to ask if you won, or if you finished in less than an hour, but if they hear you have completed a proper triathlon, they will be impressed! Our club's philosophy has always been that the real competition is with yourself – being the best you can be with the equipment you have. That's a worthwhile goal for the race.

COULD MY BIKE GET NICKED?

We keep things pretty informal at our Tockington races but there is ALWAYS a marshal crew on the field gate so things are relatively secure. At our Try-a-Tri we will issue you with a bike sticker that matches your race number and you won't be able to collect your bike and leave with it unless you can show the numbers match. During the swim leg, when you will be out of sight of your bike, there will be marshals at both ends of transition to keep things secure.

DO I NEED TO WEAR A HELMET DURING THE RACE?

"Approved cycling safety helmets of ANSI Z90.4, SNELL B90, EN 1078 or an equivalent national standard must be worn by competitors."

Take a look inside your helmet for a sticker or some other evidence that your helmet meets one of the above standards. If you aren't sure, contact the manufacturer or the shop where you got it from and ask them if it does. If not, you have plenty of time to pick up an appropriate helmet. It is absolutely COMPULSORY to wear a helmet in the bike section of any triathlon – whether it's a Try-a-Tri or professional standard event, the rule remains in place.

DO I NEED THOSE CYCLING SHOES THAT CLIP INTO THE PEDALS?

Apart from a helmet, the other main piece of bike-related kit you need to think about is shoes. You can, of course, wear special bike shoes that clip into your pedals - most experienced triathletes do this. You can also get by with traditional, flat pedals and a pair of trainers. I'll deal with this in more detail in the article on shoes and clothing / transition. Having specialist bike shoes will make you faster on the bike as you get propulsion from pulling the pedals up as well as when pushing them down, but on the other hand the transitions are a little more complex when you have to change from bike shoes to run shoes. The choice is yours....



WHAT IF I GET A PUNCTURE, OR MY CHAIN SNAPS?

In triathlon you cannot accept Outside Assistance to fix any “mechanical” that you have on the bike, so your only resources for getting back on the road if this happens are yourself, the tools/spares you carry with you and (last resort) any neutral assistance provided by the race organiser. In our Try-a-Tri there will be a sweep vehicle following the riders and if they pass you and you need assistance, they will have a pump and a few spares/tools. The only thing that is statistically likely to happen in a race is a puncture so if you carry a small pump, tyre levers and a couple of spare inner tubes you should be OK. Of course, you need to get yourself competent/confident in replacing inner tubes beforehand in order to be able to do it during the race. I've had punctures during long distance cycling events but in all my miles of Triathlon I have never actually heard that dispiriting hiss of a punctured tyre during a race – I guess I have been lucky! It's up to you if you want to enter the race without the knowledge and equipment to deal with a flat tyre, as it is pretty unlikely, but if you want to be certain of finishing the race no matter what, you will need to be prepared. Spares and tools are usually carried in a small “seatpost bag” that attaches to your bike under the back of the saddle, while small pumps can be clipped on to your frame. Check anything you fix on to your bike before the race and make 100% sure it is securely attached.

WILL THERE BE FOOD/DRINK PROVIDED ON THE BIKE COURSE?

On short events like a GO TRI / Try-a-Tri there won't be drink stations or feed stations out on the course. GO TRI is very much a no-frills format and the distances involved mean that aid stations are not a requirement. So, you should carry what you need with you. All you really need is a bottle in a "bottle cage" mounted on your bike frame, filled with water or energy/electrolyte drink. On a short event you shouldn't need food as well but if you want to carry energy gels / jelly babies etc. these are best stored in some kind of top-tube bag or box that you can unzip and grab your snacks from easily while riding. I wouldn't personally bother with this on a GO TRI race, but you can if you want to. Just remember that dropping any litter at all on a Triathlon course means disqualification, so only carry snacks you can manage while riding without dropping any wrappers/packets.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I NEED TO KNOW?

Probably – this article doesn't cover everything! But if you do have any questions at all about the bike, bike equipment or anything else Try-a-Tri related you can email me and I will aim to get back to asap either with the answers you need or some ideas of who else to contact if I don't know.

Enjoy your cycling 😊

Garga Chamberlain

Sri Chinmoy Triathlon Club

garga.sctc@zoho.com / <https://clubs.britishtriathlon.org/SriChinmoyTriathlonClub>