

# RAGBRAI Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some frequently asked questions about RAGBRAI. Read these and hopefully many of your questions will be answered. If you still have questions, then email them to Coach David Ertl at [Coach@CyclesportCoaching.com](mailto:Coach@CyclesportCoaching.com)

**Q: I hear RAGBRAI is going to be hilly this year. I don't have many hills where I live. How can I train for hills?**

**A:** Hills require you to work harder than riding on level roads. If you don't have hills to train on, then you can simulate them in a couple different ways. You may not like riding on windy days but use the wind to your advantage. If there is a strong wind, ride into it pretending you are riding up a hill. Concentrate on pushing forcefully on the pedals the same way you would riding up a hill. If the wind isn't strong enough, you can shift to a harder gear to increase the resistance. It should feel like you are riding up a hill. Another way to train for hills is to hop on a spin bike or put your bike on an indoor trainer and crank up the resistance and/or use a hard gear. Grind away at about 60-70 rpm with your feet to simulate hill climbing. Or, you can throw your bike in your car and drive somewhere where there are hills. Do this occasionally and you will have the opportunity to train on hills and also ride on some new and different roads.

**Q: I've never ridden my bike this far. How many miles should I plan on riding before doing RAGBRAI?**

**A:** This is one of the most commonly asked questions. Because RAGBRAI this year is 442 miles, you don't want to double your annual mileage when you ride RAGBRAI. I would recommend that you try to get in at least 1000 miles of training this spring and summer before starting RAGBRAI. In addition, you hopefully can work your way up to a 70 mile ride in one day prior to RAGBRAI. Because RAGBRAI is a multi-day event, you will not only need to be able to ride a long way in one day, but you'll need to be able to do these multiple days in a row. So try to get out on weekends and do two long back to back rides prior to RAGBRAI. Keep in mind you will have all day to ride the 60-80 miles each day on RAGBRAI. If you take it easy and make sure you eat and drink throughout the day, and you've done what I've explained above, you should be just fine and have a great ride.

**Q: The thought of riding with lots of other cyclists scares me. What can I do to be more comfortable around other riders?**

**A:** Riding with other cyclists can be intimidating to some cyclists. In addition, RAGBRAI isn't the same as getting out and riding with a few friends. There will be other cyclists around you all day long and some will be riding slower than you and some will be riding faster. My first suggestion is to make sure you ride with some other people while training. This will teach you to get familiar with riding near other riders. Hopefully you can ride with someone with more experience who can teach you some tips on drafting (riding behind the rider in front of you). If you are riding more slowly than most others, stay to the right and leave them room to pass on your left side. Many people get nervous on downhills. Make sure you leave plenty of space between you and the riders

in front of you going downhill. Control your speed and you will be fine.

Another key tip is to ride smoothly to make your riding more predictable to the riders behind you. Avoid jamming on your brakes abruptly (unless you absolutely need to), try riding in a straight line and avoid weaving, and use hand signals and call out when pulling off to the side of the road. By being a more predictable rider, those around you will be more comfortable riding around you.

**Q: What can I do to increase my speed so I can ride faster?**

**A:** Interval training is a proven method for increasing your speed. If you want to ride faster, you have to train faster. However, if you've been riding at 17 mph you can't just go out and start riding at 18 mph, at least not for very long. So the way to train faster is to ride 'intervals'. Increase your speed for a minute or two and then back down to your normal speed. Do several intervals during the course of your ride where you ride at a faster pace than what you are used to. Gradually you will find your average speed can increase and the speed at which you ride your intervals can increase.

**Q: What kind of bike is best for riding on RAGBRAI?**

**A:** There are two simple answers to this: 1) A bike that fits you comfortably and 2) A bike that is in good working order. Don't worry as much about how much it weighs or the style as long as you've addressed these two items.

First, a bike that fits. You are going to be spending a long time on your bike preparing for and then riding on RAGBRAI. If you are not comfortable on it, you aren't going to have the best possible experience. It could even be downright painful! It doesn't really matter if you have a road bike, a hybrid type bike or even a mountain bike. Any of these will work and you will see them all on RAGBRAI. (Note – if you ride a mountain bike, invest in a pair of slick tires and take off the knobby tires – your rolling resistance will be a lot less with slick tires). First, it's important to have a bike which is the correct frame size for you. You should be able to stand over the bike and have room between the top tube and your crotch. There are two key adjustments to make to your bike. First is the seat height. When pedaling you want to have a slight bend in your knee when your foot is in the lowest pedaling position. One way to test correct seat height is to put your heel on the pedal and then, holding onto something, spin the pedals backward. If your hips have to rock to keep your heels on the pedals, then your seat is too high. Having a seat that is too high not only causes you to rock on the saddle but it can lead to knee pain (in the back of the knee), something you definitely want to avoid. On the other hand, if your saddle is too low, this too can cause knee pain (in the front of the knees). So check it out or have someone help you ensure your seat height is correct. The other important adjustment is the handlebar height. The higher you raise your handlebars, the more upright you sit which may feel more comfortable, but will increase the wind resistance which increases the work you have to do. If in doubt about either your frame size or your seat and handlebar positions, seek about someone knowledgeable to help you. Bike shop employees are very knowledgeable about this and can help you out.

The second important factor regarding your bike is to make sure it is in good running condition. If

**your bike isn't well adjusted or lubricated, it won't run smoothly and you'll waste energy. Also, poorly adjusted bikes tend to wear out faster and you may find yourself with a breakdown on RAGBRAI. That's not a good way to have fun! If you aren't handy with bike mechanics yourself, take it into a shop and have a tune-up done on it before you start doing a lot of miles.**

**To read more question and answers, check out the online training chat on the RAGBRAI website:  
<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20090209/NEWS04/90206018>**

**If you would like to read more about cycling training, check out my website  
[www.CyclesportCoaching.com](http://www.CyclesportCoaching.com) where you will find numerous articles on cycling training.**

**Coach David Ertl**

**David Ertl is a USA Cycling Level 1 (Elite) Coach. He coaches individual cyclists, the Des Moines Cycle Club Race Team and the JDRF Greater Iowa Chapter for the Ride to Cure Diabetes. He is also an NSCA certified Personal Trainer. He can be contacted at [Coach@CyclesportCoaching.com](mailto:Coach@CyclesportCoaching.com) .**