

# rideSMART™



## An Introduction to the **2015 A-SIG**

**NYCC**



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## Welcome to the 2015 edition of the A-SIG!

The A-SIG is a progressive training series that teaches group cycling skills and removes the mystique from becoming an A-rider. The ultimate goal is to produce “*Great Wheels*”; cyclists that everyone enjoys riding with because their presence in a group enhances safety, predictability, smoothness, and fun. To that end the A-SIG teaches a very particular *style* of group cycling. The curriculum is designed to emphasize cooperative techniques that allow a group of cyclists to function as a team, capable of riding longer distances and cruising at faster speeds than the individual members may otherwise be able to. This specific style of cooperative group riding may be different from the way you ride now; ideally, by the end of the 12 weeks you’ll understand the advantages and benefits of this style of riding and choose to do *all* your group rides “SIG style”, but at the very least we ask that you embrace these techniques for the duration of the SIG program, as well as during any midweek training rides with other SIG participants.

Remember, the SIG is a progressive series. We start out quite a bit slower than a typical Club A-ride. In order to teach group riding skills safely and effectively, we need to be able to have everyone riding comfortably, well below their maximum effort. It’s not possible to learn how to handle the complexities of riding in a group if all you are doing is holding on for all you’re worth. You’ll also be learning some new techniques that are easier to see at lower speeds.

The main focus of the SIG will always be on these two very simple, but very important topics:

- **Safety** - there are no corners to be cut here, the safety of every person in the group is paramount.
- **Smoothness** - it seems to be a “law” of cycling physics that the smoother the group is, the safer they are *and* the faster they go.

With everyone’s attention on Safety and Smoothness, the rides will be very informative, a great deal of fun, and, as we get towards the end of the series, pretty fast too.

In addition to 12 weeks of (hopefully) awesome cycling, there will be opportunities to get together off the bike too. There will be several social events scheduled, great opportunities to get to know your “classmates” and chat with the leaders. These socials are combined with the participants and leaders from the A-Classic SIG, giving you an opportunity to compare notes with them.

## What do I need?

You will need the following:

- A helmet
- A well-maintained road bike (no aero bars)
- Two frame-attached cages with full bottles of water or energy drink
- Pocket food (small snacks that fit in your jersey pockets)
- Two spare tubes (that fit your tires)
- A means to inflate (or re-inflate) your tires
- A patch kit
- Tools/Tire levers (a multi-tool is handy)
- ID/Health insurance card
- Money/credit card (for food, travel, etc.)
- Metro North/LIRR bike permit
- A means to attach a paper cue sheet to your bike



Just as important as the items listed above, you'll need to bring a well-rested and well-fed body to each ride. Get a good night's sleep on Friday, and do not substitute a cup of coffee and a muffin for a real breakfast. You will not perform well starting on an empty fuel tank. Not only will you (and your leaders) be disappointed, the rest of your fellow SIGgies will not be able to rely on your performance.

Other items on your "must-have" list include a positive attitude and a willingness to accept (and use) constructive criticism. Everyone in the SIG knows how to ride a bicycle, and there are many ways to ride in a group; some of you may already be acquainted with one or more of these ways. Outside of the leaders, however, very few people in the SIG know how to ride in a group the *A-SIG way*, and that's what we'll be teaching you, the New York Cycle Club A-SIG style of group riding. **Your continuing participation in the SIG requires that you ride the way we ask you to ride when you ride with us.**

## Policies and procedures

We expect you to attend every ride in the series. Yes, we understand that it's very difficult to commit to 12 weeks in a row, but the program is a progressive, cumulative series; missing a ride can cause you to miss learning, or honing, a critical skill. It's our policy to review any and all absences to make certain that you have the

ability and skill to continue. If you are not meeting expectations due to absences, you *will* be asked to leave the SIG (typically two missed rides is the tipping point).

Everyone runs late now and then. A great fix for this is to leave fifteen minutes earlier than you need to arrive at the start of a SIG ride. Be on time! We have a great deal to cover, and early in the season it's cold! We won't wait for you because you're unable to arrive on time.

Each and every participant in the SIG will need to be able to accept coaching and criticism from the leaders. It's our goal to improve your group riding skills. You'll need to listen and put our suggestions into practice.

### Mentor Program

On the third ride in the series, an A-SIG leader will be assigned as your mentor. They will be your go-to person, your confidant, and your coach. Your mentor will do her/his best to get you through to the end of the program. Each week, you'll receive a short critique of the past Saturday's ride from your mentor. This critique will include what the leaders saw from you, good *and* bad. You'll get some tips on how to maintain the good, and pointers on how to change the bad. Training suggestions, nutrition ideas, and other items will also come from your mentor.

However, your mentor isn't your only leader resource. You can, and should, pick the brain of every single leader you ride with. You'll get another point of view, and have a more well-rounded SIG experience.

### What is the price for all this?

In financial terms, very little. To participate in the SIG, you *must* be a New York Cycle Club member—that's it. From a time standpoint, the SIG requires your commitment to attend all 12 rides in the series. The SIG requires you to train during the week, to practice skills learned, and to maintain your fitness level. The SIG requires you to become a better cyclist in order to graduate.

And finally, the biggest "price" for participating in the 2015 A-SIG: **You must lead at least one club ride in order to graduate.** There are dozens of leaders involved in the SIG programs at all levels, and we each have many reasons for volunteering to lead the SIG. One that we all share is that we do this so that there will be more listed club rides led by "great wheels" that *we want to ride with*. That's where you come in. We'll give you the skills to become a "great wheel"; you need to share those skills, to Pay It Forward, by leading a ride. Or two. Or twenty. There will be more on this all through the series. We know you won't let us down.

# Safety

## Observing the rules of the road

The rules of the road are pretty simple: Cyclists should behave the same as drivers of other vehicles. We obey traffic signals. We ride to the right. We ride predictably and smoothly. We signal our intentions early. We pay attention to the constant changes that cycling on the open road brings our way. We expect the unexpected. And we look ahead to anticipate any challenges on the road ahead.

We are each responsible for our own safety, but we also have a duty to do all that we can to maintain the safety of the group.

## Avoiding hazards

We all know that road conditions, especially in the spring, can leave a lot to be desired. There will be pot-holes from our region's winter freeze and thaw cycle. Glass, sand, gravel and other debris will cause issues on our rides. The cyclist at the front of the line is the eyes of the group and our primary line of defense against these hazards. Moving our group away from these hazards, gently, and well in advance is the lead rider's duty. Pointing to, or calling out these hazards is helpful to those in line behind us, but moving us out of the way is even more important.

As for calling out "HOLE!!" at the top of your lungs, well... let's just say that's not very helpful. We've all done it, mind you, but think about it: We each dutifully scream out "HOLE!" down the line, without referencing *where* this hole is! Just as important as calling out the obstacle is calling out its location: "Hole Right!" or "Hole Left!" lets everyone know where the thing we want to avoid is.

But let's look at the way an experienced group rider might deal with this: From the front of the line, s/he can see a series of pot-holes ahead. S/he gently and smoothly moves to the left (or right) and puts two or three feet between the group and the hazard. No need to shout anything at all.

Or, perhaps there is no reasonable way of avoiding the rough patch of road in our path. S/he slows the group to a speed that will allow us to proceed through safely, while indicating (quietly or, better yet, with a hand signal) where the worst road conditions are.

We'll start with the basics (identifying obstacles and their locations with hand signals and voice commands) and ideally work our way towards the sublime (riding smoothly and quietly while rarely coming in close proximity to obstacles).

Your leaders will be discussing many different scenarios, and many ways to handle them. But here are some basics that apply in most situations: Communicating down

the line from the front that we are running into a hazard is primary; gently and smoothly moving the group out of harm's way is what group riding is about; if the hazard is unavoidable, slowing the group to a speed that will allow us to safely traverse the hazard, **or STOPPING the group (again, gently and smoothly) BEFORE the hazard is reached.**



## Welcome to rideSMART™

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“The thing that makes someone an ‘A Rider’ isn’t how fast they can ride or how far they can ride; the thing that makes someone an ‘A Rider’ is being able to ride fast and far, *gracefully*.”

– Michael Allison,  
long-time NYCC member

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### An introduction

We’ve all ridden with folks who begin rides by pushing the pace; those cyclists who push up rollers at threshold (or beyond), and then sit up and coast on the downside, breaking everyone’s rhythm; these same folks blow up by the middle of the ride, and have little if any reserves to finish the ride strong (and safe!). Ever ridden for 20 miles behind a guy/gal who pedals inconsistently (pedal, pedal, coast...pedal, coast...)? Of course you have. What about being behind the person who pulls out from a stop light and gets up to 25mph within three seconds? Yeah, that’s a lot of fun, no? (Answer: no.) What about the cyclist who seems to be incapable of riding in a straight line? Been there, done that. Perhaps you’re guilty of some of the above. During the course of the SIG we’ll explain why these behaviors have a negative impact on the group.

**rideSMART™** is simple. **rideSMART™** is all about consistent effort, *not* consistent speed. **rideSMART™** is smooth, gradual changes, nothing sudden or jerky. **rideSMART™** is pulling the group up State Line wheel-to-wheel-to-wheel in a tight single group, not shattering the line as soon as the road tilts upward. **rideSMART™** is being safe, predictable, steady, and aware of the group dynamic.

**rideSMART™** is about riding in a group, and riding *cooperatively* in that group. It’s understanding that (to quote Mr. Spock) “the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one” and riding selflessly towards a common goal. It’s trusting your team, sharing the work, the responsibilities, and the rewards. **rideSMART™** is everything that you do on the bike *besides* the simple physical action of pedaling a bike...and yet it includes that too. It’s your relationship to the road, and to the riders around you; it’s an awareness of your actions and their consequences.

In short, **rideSMART™** is about...riding smart!



## Riding in a group

Unlike riding alone, group riding has responsibilities that keep us all safer. You will need to ride predictably, always pedaling, maintaining a straight line, no sudden changes in speed or direction.

Communication is key; by keeping the entire group in sync, you will be able to ride farther, and faster than you would if riding alone. Most of our communication takes place using hand signals. But voice signals are just as important when used right, and we'll be talking about using voice signals correctly.

Group riding has tremendous benefits as well. Generally, a group is more visible, and therefore safer, to motorists. Riding in a group also allows an individual to conserve energy; you'll be able to ride farther, with less output, easily going faster than riding alone.

When riding in a SIG group, the emphasis will always be on the group working together. The goal is for the entire group to stay together for the entire ride, each rider doing her/his part, and reaping the benefits.

Each week, the leaders will cover material relating to how each skill you're learning relates to group riding. By the end of the series, each of you will be more than proficient in all the skills that foster smooth group riding.

In twelve weeks you'll be riding smoother than you did in the past; you may also be riding faster than you did in the past. In any event, you'll be riding smarter than you did when the SIG began.

This is what the SIG, and **rideSMART™**, is all about!

## Pedaling

If your bike is moving, you should be turning the pedals. It's pretty simple, the only time you should really stop pedaling is when you have at least one foot on the ground.

Think of it this way: if the cyclist in front of you stops pedaling and begins to coast, even for a brief time, that cyclist will begin to slow down immediately (unless we're on a downhill). So you will also stop pedaling. You may even brake a bit. So will the person behind you, and the person behind them... all the way down the line. This sort of behavior will cause the line to stretch and gap, requiring everyone to speed up then brake, then speed up then brake, again and again. This scenario is exhausting. It will put the group into what Phil Liggett would call "difficulties."

Also note that whenever someone in a paceline stops pedaling, that sends a subliminal cue to the rider behind them that **Something Is Changing**, and it disturbs the rhythm and smoothness of the group. We don't want to send subliminal

cues to our fellow riders (least of all when they're unintentional). We convey our intentions deliberately, and otherwise we want to *maintain*. We want to convey that **Nothing Is Changing** ...until it really has to.

It's easy to avoid putting your group into this situation. Just pedal constantly. As long as you keep pedaling, everyone in the line behind you will know what to expect.

Your leaders will be talking about spinning for much of the time on the first several rides. You will probably hear them urging riders to "Keep pedaling!" Listen to them.

## Gearing

Gearing and pedaling are joined at the hip, as it were. In order to do one efficiently and effectively, you need to do the other well also. For most people, spinning at a cadence ~85rpm or higher is the most efficient use of energy. In order to spin like this, you'll need to shift as often as the terrain demands.

Knowing when to shift is deceptively easy, and eventually it becomes something you won't even think about. In general, **shift early and shift often**. By shifting gears to maintain a constant perceived effort (meaning, you are constantly changing the gear you're in so that your effort feels the same despite varying terrain or wind conditions), you'll be conserving energy, which will allow you to finish the longest and hardest rides safely and strongly.

You'll hear your leaders making gear shifting suggestions from time to time. By taking those suggestions, you'll find that you'll be more able to stay with the group, without exhausting yourself. You'll be fresh, and strong through to the end of the rides. Staying strong and fresh means that the group will be able to rely on you to carry your share of the work.



## Climbing

Look at the photo above. See the smiles? The group pictured here just climbed to the top of Bear Mountain. It's a climb that you'll be doing this spring with the SIG.

It's been said that the best rides are the rides that challenge you as a cyclist. For most of us, the biggest challenge is a road that goes uphill. You'll be going uphill on every ride this spring. So, why the smiles? That's an easy one: the smiles come with successfully completed challenges.

Going uphill requires fitness, it requires experience, it requires you to use your head as much as your legs. Spinning, gearing, and the right frame of mind all play a part in cresting a hill.

Over the course of the SIG, you'll be putting in more than enough miles to get the fitness. Over that time, the SIG will give you the experience needed. During the SIG, you'll be taught how to use your head to put you over the top of any climb we'll see this year.

It's also important that your bike is equipped with a gearing ratio that suits your climbing strength. Some hills will be long and/or have substantial grades, and your equipment must allow you to pedal at a high cadence so that you don't exhaust

yourself or others in your group. For most A-SIG participants, this is achieved with a compact 50/34 crank, or a standard 53/39 crank with a large rear-wheel cog (29 sprockets would be our suggestion). Gearing equipment can be confusing; feel free to approach the SIG captains before you begin the SIG with any questions.

Your leaders will be talking about different styles of climbing, and what might work best for you in different situations. You'll get to the top of every hill we ride this spring, and you'll be smiling!

Yes, we know; you're not a climber. Most of *us* aren't either.

## Pacelines

This is the cornerstone of A-level riding. And it's a heck of a lot of fun.

We'll be spending a great deal of time developing and honing the skills required to ride safely in smooth, rotating pacelines.

Some of the basics:

- Ride in a straight line following the wheel in front of you. Do not offset to the left or right.
- Pedal constantly, especially on a descent
- Maintain a steady pace; no sudden changes in speed or direction
- Gently modulate your speed by changing gears, or by feathering your brakes
- Keep your head "in the game" - PAY ATTENTION TO EVERYTHING GOING ON AROUND YOU!
- Don't just watch the rider directly in front of you; your primary focus needs to be farther up the line, so you can anticipate what's happening. You'll learn to "see through the line" to the road up ahead while observing the closest cyclists with your peripheral vision.
- Don't break from the line and overlap wheels to the side of the rider in front of you (aka "half-wheeling")



- When you get to the front of the line, maintain the same speed you were going; NO SURGING! Any and all changes in speed are to be made very smoothly
- At the front, you are the pacesetter, and the eyes of the group—maintain a uniform consistent effort but watch for hazards
- Work as a team—"pulls" (your time at the front) should be short (under a minute); the real advantages of pacelining are that the entire group shares the workload

## Training

For most participants riding on Saturday alone won't be enough to successfully complete the SIG. It's strongly recommended that you train during the week. Recovery rides, laps in the park, hill repeats, intervals, all will help your fitness level, and improve your skills.

Several of the leaders will organize midweek morning training rides in Central and Prospect Parks. Others will offer recovery rides on Sundays. You may even hook up with some SIG mates for a ride or two.

If possible, you should try to train with others. We are after all, working on *group riding skills*, and riding in a group is the best way to improve those skills. However, if you can't hook up with a group, you still need to get in some training miles.

The leaders will be talking quite a bit about mid-week workouts, don't hesitate to ask questions.

One very important (and often overlooked) part of your training is *rest*. We will be riding over 850 miles over the course of twelve Saturdays. Add in another 20-50 miles of training rides each week, and it's likely that even those who are at the low end for mileage will have accumulated well over 1,200 miles during the SIG. That's a considerable amount. Rest days take on an important role if you want to continually ride well on Saturday. We recommend that you take a short recovery ride the day after the SIG ride if possible. On a recovery ride, you should be turning the pedals without any real effort. *If it feels as if you're not getting any workout at all, then you're doing it right.*

An additional part of your training agenda must include eating properly, and staying well-hydrated. We will be talking about this throughout the series as well.

## rideSMART™ cheat sheet

- Consistent perceived effort. The upside of rollers should feel as easy (or hard) as the flats. The downside should also have the same effort. *This means that the “ups” will be slow, and the “downs” will be fast!*
- Gradual accelerations (and decelerations); at traffic lights and stop signs; into and out of turns; after slowing down for *any reason*; picking up speed on the downside of a roller; decreasing speed on the upside of a roller.
- Warm up at the beginning of a ride. *Do not rush right into the cruising speed for the day.* Take your time.
- Conserve energy during the first half of a ride. Don't go as hard as you can or even as hard as you want. Hold something in reserve; it will pay off later. Save the harder effort for the last hour of a ride. Blowing up the group early does no one any good.
- Gauge the ability of the group and adjust the effort to keep everyone together.
- Always remember that a group ride is not *your* ride, it's a *group* ride. If you need to work on *your* fitness, do it on your own time
- Take Fridays as a rest day. *No workouts on Friday.*
- There are no stupid questions. If you are unsure of something, talk to a leader.

This guide was written for your use by members of the 2015 A-SIG Leader Team.

Remember that this is just a guide, and while the information contained within is as accurate as possible, it is by no means, the "final word" on all things cycling. It is meant to give you a feel for the philosophy of the SIG.

Once again, welcome to the 2015 A-SIG.

*The A-SIG Leader Team*

