

A-SIG FAQs

Updated January 2022

What is the A-SIG?

The A-SIG is a 10-week training series that teaches group cycling skills for those interested in being 'A' riders. Our goal is to produce "Great Wheels," cyclists with whom everyone enjoys riding since their presence in a paceline enhances safety, smoothness, predictability and fun, making it a better ride for the group. The A-SIG teaches a particular style of group cycling that emphasizes cooperation, allowing cyclists to ride together as a team, cruising over longer distances and at faster speeds than they may ride alone. If this is different than the way you ride now, we hope that after 10 weeks you'll appreciate the benefits of this "A-SIG style" of riding. We ask you to embrace coaching for the duration of the program.

What kind of cycling experience do I need?

You should be confident operating a road bike over significant distances and challenging terrain outside of the city. You do not need to know how to ride in a rotating paceline before joining the A-SIG, since that is one of the core skills that we will teach you. After Week 3, all rides will be in a rotating paceline.

How fast will we ride?

We often say "Smooth is Fast." Our focus is on teaching skills for predictable, smooth riding, on consistent effort and not on consistent speed. With the development of group cycling skills, speed will naturally increase over time. Leaders will monitor the appropriate pace for their groups each week, focusing on skills development instead of a particular target pace. You may be frustrated by how slowly we ride early in the program when learning to rotate in a paceline, but by the end of the A-SIG you will be riding 20+ mph on flat terrain.

Is the A-SIG for both men and women?

Yes! The A-SIG is a fully co-ed program both in participants and leaders.

What kind of bicycle do I need?

You must have a road bike with drop handlebars (no aerobars or hybrids), and shifters on the brake hoods (no down-tube or bar-end shifters). No 'bar-mitts' are permitted. You should have 'clipless' pedals and be comfortable using them. Your bicycle must have two bottle cages with water bottles, and gearing that is appropriate to your strength, so that you can pedal at a high cadence while climbing without exhausting yourself or others. For most participants we suggest a compact crank (50/34) on the front and an 11/28 cassette on the rear (or equivalent gearing). While we favor paved roads, we'll ride on dirt trails/roads on many routes, so wider tires (25/28mm) are recommended. Feel free to ask questions of the leaders about equipment.

How will I know if the A-SIG is right for me?

For the A-SIG it is helpful to have graduated from a B-SIG or C-SIG, but it is not required. We rely on self-selection (no timed laps in the park), and hope that you will ask questions of leaders and graduates. You may know quickly if it is right for you, but if not the leaders will help you to decide. Many participants who do struggle early finish strongly. There is some movement among the SIGs in the first weeks so you may transition to another program.

What kind of shape do I need to be in when the A-SIG starts?

Staying in shape over the winter, and training indoors if you can't ride outdoors, is highly recommended. We encourage you to have some winter miles in your legs, but the pace is moderate in the first weeks as we build stamina and practice group riding skills, so more important may be that you work hard and train smart once the A-SIG begins.

What training will I need to do to keep up?

You will need to train during the week. We recommend joining A-SIG training laps with participants and leaders in Central Park or Prospect Park on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Riding 15-20 fast miles in a paceline will hone skills and build endurance better than a solo ride. A workout of hill repeats or intervals is good, as is a recovery ride, which some do on Sunday. Eat and drink well during the week and get plenty of rest. Follow a hard workout with an easy day, and make Friday a rest day – no workouts on or off of the bike. There is some truth to “No Pain, No Gain,” and you will be challenged, but you will likely be able to meet those challenges if you treat the A-SIG as a commitment.

How long and how hilly are the routes?

Rides get longer and more difficult each week, progressing from 50 miles to 100 miles. We will ride some of the most challenging terrain in the region with >5,000' vertical gain on longer rides. Groups will try to stay together on climbs, but will always regroup at the top of the most difficult climbs. While we favor paved roads, we also do some off-road riding on trails and dirt roads suitable for modern road bikes. All rides include a lunch break and other pit stops.

Will I get dropped on a ride?

We hope not, but it is possible. We try to keep the group together and help those who may be struggling, especially in the first six weeks. No one will be left alone for mechanical issues, illness or injury. We stop as a group to help each other get back on the road or get help as needed. But if a cyclist struggles to keep up with the group week after week, we will not hold the others back and may recommend or require that the participant resign or move to another SIG.

What's with the nametags on helmets?

We want everyone to learn everyone else's name, so all leaders and participants will have nametags on the front and back of their helmets. It helps with feedback and instruction.

How will we be evaluated by the leaders?

Each week the leaders share feedback about each of the participants on their rides with the other leaders, to assess the progress of each cyclist, in addition to the verbal coaching and feedback that are given during rides or at the small group debriefing at the end of each ride.

What is the mentor program?

By the 3rd or 4th week of the A-SIG, each participant is assigned a mentor from among the leader group to be your advocate, coach, confidant, and liaison, to help you to progress through the program. Each leader is a volunteer, not a professional, but our experience and expertise can help with most questions and concerns. Feel free to ask any leader for help, but your mentor is the one with whom you should be sure to communicate regularly.

How are weekly groups assigned?

Randomly except in weeks when mentors and mentees ride together. Otherwise each week you will ride in a different group of five to eight cyclists, so everyone gets a chance to meet and ride with almost everyone else, all of whom are following the same curriculum and learning the same skills. Different leaders may give different feedback, but riding with a variety of cyclists parallels the 'real world' of club rides, and you will learn to gauge others' strengths and weaknesses, working together each week to make your group smooth and efficient.

How many rides can I miss?

The A-SIG is a progressive series, and since each week builds on the skills and experience of the preceding week, participants are expected to attend and complete all 10 rides. But we know that this is not always possible due to illness or family commitments. Absences will be reviewed by your mentor and the A-SIG captains, and participants who fall behind in skill development will be asked to withdraw. Those who miss either of the first two rides or more than two rides (or miss two in row) will be dismissed. Those who miss the A-SIG graduation ride will not graduate.

Isn't the GFNY the day after the A-SIG graduation ride?

Yes. For many years the A-SIG graduation ride has been the Saturday before Memorial Day weekend, and in recent years the Gran Fondo New York has been scheduled for the next day. Several A-SIG graduates and leaders have done both rides, a badge of honor for some. We ask that if you sign up for the A-SIG you commit to the A-SIG graduation ride, and not treat the A-SIG as your training for GFNY, which organizes its own training rides.

Do you do any activities off the bike?

We want to get to know you and for you to get to know each other, so we'll meet for drinks and food at the end of some rides and typically have a graduation dinner. While not required, you'll get more out of the program (and likely find some post-SIG ride partners) if you take advantage of social opportunities.

What is the policy on cell phone/headphone usage?

You should have a cell phone with you in case of emergency, but phones are not to be used while riding (including for photography or video). They must be kept out of sight and not mounted on your bike. Headphones are strictly forbidden on A-SIG (and all NYCC) rides. Once you are clipped in, you are unavailable by cell phone until your group comes to a rest stop, when you can then check messages and make any calls.

How does the A-SIG differ from the A-Classic SIG?

The A-SIG and the A-Classic SIG teach similar skills with similar curricula, but the A-Classic will push you harder and faster than the A-SIG, as well as being two weeks longer. Many A-SIG leaders are graduates or past leaders of the A-Classic, and many A-SIG graduates continue with the A-Classic as a sort of 'second year' of the program, refining and perfecting group cycling skills. Both programs require great athletic conditioning, but the A-Classic generally requires more frequent and intense mid-week training and its routes are often longer and more difficult.

Anything else?

If you have any questions about the A-SIG, feel free to email the captains at asig@nycc.org