

2014 A-CLASSIC SIG FAQ

How fast do you go?

One mantra you will hear from us is “Smooth is Fast and Fast is Smooth.” We focus on teaching skills that produce predictable, smooth riders. With the development of those skills the speed comes. From week to week we don’t set a pre-determined speed on the flats. Rather, the leaders monitor their groups and determine the pace, weighing safety and skills development ahead of a pre-determined target pace. True, we are the fastest SIG. Our slightly faster average pace is one thing that separates us from the A-SIG (formerly the A-19s) and we seem to get there by continually focusing on skills development. Be prepared to ride 10mph with us when learning to paceline – the time you spend riding that slow will help foster the skills you will need to ride 21. . .22. . .23+ by the end of the SIG.

What training will I need to maintain in order to keep up?

You will need to do some work. Practice, practice, practice. Everyone has different needs, strengths, and weaknesses. We can give you some basic guidelines:

- You need to put in several days on the bike
- Quality is more important than quantity. That translates to getting out during the week for laps in the park with fellow A-SIG Classic participants and leaders. There will be several options (morning and evening) to choose from. These are your key workout. Riding 3 or 4 intense laps of the park in a paceline will foster the skills and build the endurance better and faster than any longer solo ride you might do. As a bonus, if you can fit it in, add another quality workout such as hill repeats each or every other week. Adding a longer, easier recovery ride once a week (most do this on Sundays) is also good practice. If you are short on time, opt for the shorter more intense workouts over the longer, slower rides.
- An important part of training is rest and fueling. Eat and drink well throughout the week (there are many resources for this and we will offer some suggestions throughout the program).
- Follow a hard workout with an easy recovery day. You should make Fridays a very easy day, perhaps even complete rest.
- This is a commitment – train smart and you will do fine.

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

Having a training routine over the winter and especially as the SIG season approaches is highly recommended. The truth is, many leaders and participants in the past have started the SIG with very few (if any) winter miles under their belts. The good news is that for the first few weeks the pace is moderate as we focus on skills. Using these early weeks to build stamina and practice the skills you learn each week during the SIG will be essential to your successful completion of the program. So don’t let a lack of winter riding stop you from joining – but be prepared to work hard and train smart for 12 weeks once the SIG begins.

How is the A-SIG Classic different from the A-SIG?

The A-SIG Classic features longer distances and a somewhat faster pace than the A-SIG. To succeed and get the most out of both the A-SIG and the A-SIG Classic programs, we recommend you make a commitment to midweek training (see “What training will I need to maintain in order to keep up?”). All things being equal (including your conditioning and athleticism), the A-SIG Classic will require more midweek training than the A-SIG to prepare you for the greater demands.

What is the Mentor Program and how does it work?

By the 3rd or 4th week of the SIG, we randomly assign each participant a mentor. This mentor will have several participant mentees. Your mentor will be your advocate, your coach, your confidant, your liaison to the leadership group, perhaps even your personal trainer. Keep in mind we are not professionals. We are volunteers who have either graduated from the A-SIG Classic or have proven skills and leadership abilities to have been chosen to help lead. We have a variety of experience, expertise and skill levels. While your mentor is there to help you in any way to complete the SIG, the other leaders are there as resources for you to call on as well. We want you to succeed. We will certainly do our part – you will need to do yours. If you have questions, issues, concerns, suggestions or are having trouble with a particular skill – speak up. I’ve heard you keep track of each rider, actually take notes after each ride.

What’s that all about?

That’s correct. Each week, your leaders compile their notes about the ride and about each rider. We share those notes weekly with all leaders. We believe this is an invaluable process to help track and assess the progress of our participants. The mentors can keep up to date immediately after each ride when they do not ride with their mentees, and leaders can prepare accordingly for participants assigned to their groups for the next ride.

How are weekly groups assigned?

Randomly. The exception to that is usually during the 3rd or 4th week when each participant is assigned a mentor. For two weeks, mentors and mentees ride together. Riding together fosters a mentee/mentor bond. Outside of those two weeks, the random assignment of groups assures you ride with a different mix of people each week. We believe this most closely resembles the “real world” of NYCC Club rides. This is part of the learning. Riding with different people each week affords you the opportunity to learn how to gauge the group, individuals’ strengths and weaknesses, and work together each week to make your group smooth and efficient. This includes riding with different leaders who might offer different perspectives and feedback about your individual development. How many rides am I permitted to miss?

The success of the A-SIG Classic program stems from the commitment made by each of the participants. Commitment fosters consistency, which builds strength, skill and confidence, ultimately leading to groups of confident, skilled riders who navigate the challenges of the road predictably and safely. Everyone needs to remain on the same page in training and skills in order to ensure the progress and safety of the group. Participants are expected to attend and complete all sessions. Participants with more than two absences may be asked to leave the program.

Will I get dropped?

Maybe – hopefully not. No one gets left behind for mechanical issues – we stop as a group and help each other get back on the road. Some of us are more skilled climbers than others, some are better on the flats. At times people fall back on hills (up and/or down) and on rollers. We foster a team environment and try to help those struggling hang on. Within reason, we try to pull together to keep the group together. However, we cannot hold the entire group back if a rider struggles to keep up week after week. This will be very evident and in the best interest of the group and the individual, we will recommend to (or ask) that person to move to another more appropriate SIG.

I've heard rumors that the Classic leaders are a bunch of hammerheads and just like to go fast.

Any truth to that?

Not really sure where or how that rumor started – maybe way back when. . .maybe it used to be that way. . .maybe just one year it was true and the label was formed and stuck. . .How about this:

- Read the A-SIG Classic description on the SIG page
- Read through these FAQs
- Ask around. . .talk to people who know us. If you come away with anything closely resembling that picture then stay away. We're pretty sure you will not and we will see you at orientation – and hopefully graduation!

I am a female and fear I will be in way over my head with much stronger/faster/fitter guys.

Should I even attempt the Classic?

Sure! Some of our most competent participants have been female riders. In fact, many of them over the years have become leaders of the Classic (and other SIGs) and this year we are proud to have two of them as our all female A-SIG Classic co-captains! Some of the recent female A-SIG grads are currently racing and doing amazingly well – their experience with the Classic was priceless in building a foundation for safe riding and safe racing. If you are game, we will do everything we can to help you succeed. You'll never know unless you try. . .so come on out and join us!

What will happen if I start and struggle. . .how will I know if this SIG is right for me?

We rely to some extent on a “self-selection” process. No time trial laps in the park to determine if you should start in the A-Classic – we let you make that initial call. Once the SIG starts, you will probably know if it is right for you, but in case you have some doubts the leaders will help you decide. Many people have struggled early on and come through with flying colors in the end. Likewise, the A-SIG Classic is not for everyone and if this is not a good fit, you have other great options with the A-SIG, or the B-SIGs. There is movement among the programs in the first couple of weeks, so if you've chosen one and belong in another, the transition is simple and easy to make.

I've heard the A Classic really pushes you. How hard does it push and how painful is it?

Every year, as we approach and go beyond graduation, we hear participants say the same thing: “the A-SIG got me in the best shape of my life and pushed me harder and farther than I ever imagined I could go with my cycling skills and fitness... truly an enriching, life-changing

experience.” We will help you and you will learn to push yourself beyond your current pain threshold. Come join us... you will be glad you did.

What is your policy on cell phone usage during the SIG rides?

It is important to have a means of communication with you in case you get separated from the group, therefore, we highly recommend you bring your cell phone with you. However, the cell phone must not in any way interfere with your ability to focus on the road and on the challenges of the rides. Therefore, cell phones must be kept out of sight (they are NOT to be mounted to any part of your bike) and are not to be used while riding. At rest stops, you can check your messages and make any calls you need to make. This policy applies to any devices such as radios, TVs, iPods, etc. Let's let common sense prevail here.

Every spring, I see hundreds of NYCC cyclists on the road with their name on the front and back of their helmet. Is that really necessary?

Yes, it is. Everyone, including the leaders, needs to wear their names prominently displayed on the front and back of their helmets every week for the duration of the SIG. We need to get to know each other by name and it is especially important while riding for leaders to be able to identify participants when giving feedback and instruction. Plus, it's much nicer being called by name. We know you will agree once you start riding with us.