



Welwyn Wheelers Guide to Cyclocross

What is cyclocross?

Cyclocross is like a mixture of mountain biking and cross country running, with races taking place across the country most weekends from September to February.

Who can race?

Cyclocross is one of the most accessible branches of bike racing. As the races and training are all off road, there's no traffic to worry about, and as all racers finish on the same lap, there's no need to worry about being too slow.

There are races for all ages, with different categories and race durations dependent on your year of birth. For the 2016/2017 season, these are as follows:



Category (Letter name)	Year of birth
Under 8 (E)	2009 or later
Under 10 (D)	2007 or 2008
Under 12 (C)	2005 or 2006
Under 14 (B)	2003 or 2004
Under 16 (A)	2001 or 2002
Junior	1999 or 2000
Senior	1998 or earlier
Veteran	1976 or earlier

What do I need?

For a beginner, the bike just needs to fit and have reasonably grippy tyres. It can be a mountain bike or even a hybrid.

If you do want to buy a specific bike, there are many options available. The cyclocross bike has had a massive upsurge in popularity over the past few years, in recognition of their versatility.

As well as racing, they can also be used for all other bike related



purposes- many use a cyclocross bike for commuting.

Most 'cross bikes have dropped handlebars, cantilever or disc brakes, and knobby tires for riding on mud.

They also generally have lower gearing and a more relaxed position

than a road bike.

You'll also need shoes you can run in and clothes in which you can ride (and don't mind getting muddy!). Many riders use off road clipless pedals, but these take a bit of getting used to so initially, trainers and flat pedals are best.

How should I prepare?

If you want to start riding cyclocross, Welwyn offers a lot of help. Initially we would recommend coming down to the Gosling Sports Park on a Saturday morning to give the club beginners session a go and talk to coaches. From there, you



The hill is the site of Wednesday night and Saturday morning training sessions



can progress to other sessions.

On weeknights throughout the season, there are specific training sessions to help all abilities and ages hone their skills, and learn the key aspects of how to start, dealing with technical sections of cyclocross courses and also the general bike handling which is key to success in not only cyclocross, but all other branches of cycling.

Every cyclocross race is different, but generally U12 courses are the shortest, with a number of corners to negotiate and perhaps a technical ascent- these courses are specially designed to be rideable for the whole range of abilities and levels of confidence.

For youth onwards, the courses are generally about 3km long, and include obstacles like stairs, barriers, sandpits as well as corners and hills. Although early season races are usually dry and sometimes even sunny, later in the season riders may have to contend with bad weather and mud- this often means that the course conditions change during the race!

As well as practising skills, young riders in particular are also encouraged to work on their all round fitness, through doing as much sport as they can, in and out of school. Welwyn also offers training several nights a week, again to all ages- this includes a circuits session on Mondays, to improve



The Christmas Off Road Ride is always well attended

fitness and strength (this session is open to everyone, and is often attended by 'non cycling' family members) a turbo/spinning session



on Thursdays, and older and more experienced riders can on Saturdays join the 'ride out', in which a senior club member leads a group for a ride on the bridleways and trails around the Gosling Sports Park.

How do I enter a race?

In order to enter a British Cycling race, you will need a Racing License, which can be ordered through the club (just ask a coach for a form). These are free for U16s, and cost £37 for seniors. Alternatively, it is possible to get a day license, for just the one event- these can be bought at race registration, and usually cost around £5.

Once you have found a race which you like the sound of, there are a couple of options- either you enter On the Day, which is sometimes more expensive, or online at British Cycling. Also, this year the Central League have introduced electronic timing, so any riders wishing to race their events should affiliate with the league and rent a timing chip- more information on this is available on their website.

For new young riders, there is also the option of Go-Ride Racing, which doesn't require license- events such as Muddy Monsters, with events at the Gosling Sports Park, can offer a fantastic introduction to cyclocross racing in a more relaxed format.



What will happen on the day?

On arrival, you first need to find Event Sign on/ Registration. This is where you get your number to race. The Event HQ will also have toilets, showers and a place to get changed. Before the race you'll want to ride the course, to prevent any nasty surprises on the first lap- for this, you'll need to make sure you know when the course is free for warm ups, as riding on the course when another race is on can get you disqualified.

Race durations vary for age categories, with U10s racing for 10



minutes, U12s for about 15, Youth for 30, Veterans and women for 45, and all others for a full hour. Due to the short length and high intensity, you won't be able to eat and drink on the bike so it's important to fuel up and hydrate pre race.

Most leagues use a gridding system to ensure the safety of racers, so it's best to be near the start line 10-15 minutes before your race is due to start. This time is also be a good opportunity for a pre race catch up, as the cyclocross events also offer a great sense of camaraderie! During gridding, the fastest riders are called to the line first. Once ready and on the start line, the race official will give a rider briefing, telling you what not to do in the race. At this point, you'll also be given an opportunity to raise any questions you have.

A whistle usually starts the race. On your debut, you may start at



the back, but the technical nature of the course will generally mean riders naturally separate over the race, and courses offer plenty of room to overtake. If you are being overtaken, the other rider should give you plenty of warning, often with an 'on your left' or 'passing'- just be sure to hold your line. The races all finish on the same lap, with officials calculating the number of laps left by using the winning riders times. For this reason, sometimes the race duration will vary- a longer lap may mean some riders are out for longer, but this is all good training! When you go over the line for your final lap, a bell will be rung. When the chequered flag is held out, you finish once over the line.

After your race, it's important to get changed quickly, so be sure to bring comfortable clothes and also something to eat. The HQ will usually offer tea, coffee, cakes and snacks. It's exciting to stay and support Welwyn riders in other races, but



don't feel as though you must stay for the whole day. Also, don't forget to look after your equipment- especially after a muddy race, bike washing is key! You can either wait to do this at home or bring a bucket.

Really keen racers may have a pressure washer and a spare bike to ride during the race so that they can swap if one bike gets jammed with mud- this quick swap is good fun to watch, so it could be worth seeking out the pits to see how it's done. You may also be able to borrow a pressure washer to quickly rinse your bike down.

After the day is finished, you can find event results, reports and photographs online, through the league's website.

Finding an Event

Welwyn riders generally stick to the two most local leagues, Central and Eastern, with occasional visits to London league events. More experienced racers may also take part in the National Trophy Series, which has events across the country.

The best way of working out what events to do is talking to clubmates, who may have more experience of the courses and so be able to offer advice on which races will be most fun. At any local event on the calendar, it's not unusual to have 10 or more Welwyn riders taking part. The biggest Welwyn turnout usually comes at either the Club championships or the two events Welwyn run itself, at Stanborough Park. We encourage all members to come and ride, volunteer or just spectate at these.

Generally, Central Events are more local to Welwyn but in the past, Eastern have tended to be better organised, with a highly reliable results system and a lot of friendliness amongst riders. This year, Central have a new electronic timing system, which should improve the reliability of their results. However different riders prioritise different factors in choosing their race, and wherever you go, there should be a decent course and talented field as cyclocross continues to gain in popularity.



Links

Welwyn Wheelers-

<http://welwynwheelers.org.uk/>

British Cycling

<https://www.britishcycling.org.uk/>

<https://www.britishcycling.org.uk/cyclocross/article/20131213-Get-in-cyclo-cross-0?c=EN>

Calendars

https://www.britishcycling.org.uk/events?zuv_bc_discipline_filter_id=4 (use the filters to narrow down local events)

Eastern League (covering the counties Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire)

<http://www.easterncross.org.uk/league.htm>

Central League

<http://centralcxl.org.uk/201617-calendar-draft/>

London League

<http://www.londonxleague.co.uk/calendar-2016-2017/>

Affiliation

<http://www.easterncross.org.uk/contact.htm>

<http://centralcxl.org.uk/2015-affiliation/>

Where to find further help

The best place to get advice is at a club session, from either peers or coaches. We are based at the Gosling Sports Park in Welwyn. Come see us on Saturday mornings from 9-11, down by the athletics track- we'll do our best to answer any questions you might have.

Gosling Sports Park

Stanborough Road

Welwyn Garden City

AL8 6XE

You can email me at elspethgrace@virginmedia.com for further cyclocross advice, or many racers use Facebook so if you're after advice or event information, it's a good place to start, especially

Welwyn Facebook group-

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/WelwynWheelersMembers/>

Or Eastern Cross Group-

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/202950576468775/>

Youth Cycle Sport- this website has a lot of featured interviews, full of expertise about youth bike racing

<http://www.youthcyclesport.co.uk/>

Overleaf is a calendar of most of the events at which there will be Welwyn riders. Use it to work out what's on, but be sure to ask other riders their plans, too!

Cyclocross events 2016/17

Sun 4 Sep	Tour of the Cornfields	Hackney GT
Sat 10 Sep	London Phoenix Cross, Redbridge	London Phoenix
Sun 11 Sep	Springfield Cross, Chelmsford	Chelmsford
Sun 18 Sep	Amis Velo Hilly Fields Supacross, Colchester	Amis Velo RT -
Sun 25 Sep	Northlands Cross, Basildon	Ford CC
Sun 25 Sep	RAF Halton, Wendover.	RAF
Sat 1 Oct	Push Sports MSG 20:12 Cross, Hadleigh, Essex	Push Sport
Sat 1 Oct	MK Bowl, Milton Keynes.	CC Luton
Sun 2 Oct	Revolution Cross, Colchester	VC Revolution
Sun 9 Oct	CC Ashwell Cross, Princess Helena College, Preston, Herts	CC Ashwell
Sun 9 Oct	National Trophy Round 1 - Derby	
Sun 9 Oct	Gadebridge Park, Hemel Hempstead	
Sun 16 Oct	Welwyn Cross	Welwyn
Sun 16 Oct	Cedars Upper School, Leighton Buzzard	LBRRC
Sat 22 Oct	MK Bowl, Milton Keynes	Team MK
Sun 23 Oct	Mistley Cross, Mistley, Essex	Colchester
Sun 23 Oct	National Trophy Round 2 - Abergavenny	
Sun 30 Oct	Grafham Water Cross	St Ives CC
Sun 30 Oct	Standalone Farm, Letchworth,	Hitchin Nomads
Sat 5 Nov	West Suffolk Cross	West Suffolk
Sun 6 Nov	Shuttleworth College	Icknield RC.
Sun 13 Nov	Hempton Cross, Norfolk	East Coast
Sun 13 Nov	National Trophy Round 3 - Houghton-Le-Spring	
Sun 13 Nov	Dinton Pastures Country Park, Wokingham.	GS Henley
Sat 19 Nov	Diss CC Suffolk Supercross, Redgrave, Suffolk	Diss + District
Sat 19 Nov	Prologis Park, Glendon nr Kettering.	Kettering CC
Sat 26 Nov	Stanborough Park South,	Welwyn Welwyn
Sun 27 Nov	Swanbourne House School, Swanbourne.	A5 Rangers
Sun 27 Nov	National Trophy Round 4 - Ipswich	
Sun 4 Dec	Regional Championships - Cyclopark, Kent	
Sun 11 Dec	Stow Scramble, Ipswich	Stowmarket CC
Sun 11 Dec	National Trophy Round 5 - Shrewsbury	
Sun 11 Dec	Hillingdon Cycle Circuit, Hayes Twickenham	
Sun 18 Dec	Push Sport Cross, Southwold, Suffolk	Push Sport
Sun 18 Dec	Ashlyn's School, Berkhamstead.	Lovelo
Tues 27 Dec	West Glebe Park, Corby.	Rockingham
Mon 2 Jan	Trinity Cross, Ipswich	XRT Elmy Cycles
Sat 7 Jan	National Championships - Bradford	
Sun 8 Jan	National Championships - Bradford	
Sun 22 Jan	Iceni Velo Snetterton Cross, World Horse Welfare, Snetterton, Norfolk,	Iceni Velo
Sat 28 Jan	Misterton Hall nr Lutterworth,	Welland Valley

Red Eastern league
Blue Central league
Green Nationals