

A Guide to Lehigh Wheelmen Association Ride Ratings

It is nearly impossible to develop a fool-proof method to rate road rides. The speed that a group rides at is subject to many environment variables, including wind speed and direction, temperature, ride distance and terrain, as well as human variables such as the fitness of the riders, whether they climb hills well, how they feel that day, and the reason they're riding. Rather than rate rides by some predicted mph, we find it more useful to break rides into five ratings. In general, you'll find that competitiveness tends to increase going up in ratings, while tolerance for slower riders tends to decrease.

All of our posted rides indicate whether or not slower riders will be dropped. Nevertheless, particularly in faster paced rides you are likely to feel uncomfortable holding up the group, even if they've advertised they'll wait. Note also that due to the local terrain, few rides in the Lehigh Valley are flat, while some are extremely hilly. Once you've ridden a few times with the LWA, you'll have a good feeling for what rating best fits your riding style. The mph estimates listed below are for typical 30-60 mile trips, and they're only estimates.

D - Easy / Beginner

At less than 10 mph, most people can keep up the pace even if they're just beginning. Speed is not the point; getting out, riding and enjoying the group is what it's all about. Oh, and by the way, even at this pace you're burning up fat, building conditioning, and doing the all the right things to maximize your chances of leading a long and healthy life!

- 6-10 mph on easy terrain

C - Casual / Social

These rides tend to emphasize the pleasure of riding over speed, and are great for enjoying the terrific scenery as well as the conversations you're likely to be engaged in. Generally, these rides will tend to be less hilly than A & B rides, though the occasional challenging climb is hard to avoid in the Lehigh Valley. There may be beginners or riders getting back in shape, and drafting and close riding is less common.

- 12-15 mph on flat terrain
- 10-13 mph on rolling/hilly terrain
- 9-11 mph on very hilly terrain

B - Intermediate

These rides are designed for solid, experienced cyclists interested in getting a good workout and enjoying themselves. Some members of the group are likely to compete for the top of the hills, and maybe a good sprint finish, but the point of the ride is still to enjoy the exercise. Therefore, these rides tend to re-group after hills, as long as the slower riders can maintain the group's pace on the flats. Drafting is common, though the group rarely maintains an truly organized pace line. Usually these rides move along at 13-17 mph. You should not underestimate the stamina required to maintain this kind of pace for 30-60 miles.

- 15-18 mph on flat terrain
- 13-16 mph on rolling/hilly terrain
- 12-14 mph on very hilly terrain

A - Advanced

Definitely a step up in competitiveness from intermediate, these rides are fast, and training and conditioning objectives are about on a par with pleasure. You should have a high level of bike handling skill for these rides, as drafting will probably be required to stay with the pace lines that often form. In the Lehigh Valley, you can probably anticipate a speed of 16-20 mph, so these rides are really for very strong, well-conditioned cyclists.

- 18-20 mph on flat terrain
- 16-18 mph on rolling/hilly terrain
- 15-16 mph on very hilly terrain

T - Training / Expert

These rides are highly competitive, and the riders will ride extremely closer together, perhaps sometimes brushing shoulders. The main purpose is to maintain or improve the fitness of already well-conditioned athletes, and to prepare them for the rigors of bicycle racing. Many of the riders are licensed bike racers, or former bike racers. Rest stops are unlikely, and there's usually little sympathy for dropped riders; indeed, the objective of many of the riders may be to drop you.

- 18-20 mph or greater on any type of terrain