



THE NATIONAL CHAMP TELLS ALL

HOW TO WIN ENDUROS, PART III

Jeff Russell's points of preparation

By Jeff Russell

Pre-race preparation often is more work than the race itself. I think almost anyone would agree that riding bikes is more fun than working on them. However, from checking that last bolt to topping off your tank, the chores that you do in the 30 minutes that lead up to your starting time can often make or break your chances of trophying.

While every rider seems to know the importance of bike maintenance, sometimes we forget about body maintenance and our needs in proper food, the right clothing and the right frame of mind. In my years of local and National-caliber racing, I have found that the simplest

things, like drinking too much or not enough water, can have a big impact on how I perform later. You can save yourself a lot of time on the trail and frustration afterwards if you just spend your pre-race time wisely.

In order to keep from overlooking items that might come back to haunt me 40 miles into a race, I keep a checklist taped to my van door that has all of the things I need to do just before the start. Obviously, there are lots of mechanical concerns on this list, but there are at least ten items that concern my personal comfort and preference. Read through these ten points of preparation and ask yourself

how many times you wished that you had thought about these *before* you started.

1. Breakfast. Oftentimes AMA National Championship Enduros start before 8 a.m. That doesn't leave a lot of time for a hearty breakfast, and I try to avoid fast food as much as possible. When I don't have the time to sit down for a meal, I usually feast on a PowerBar and a good-sized serving of apple juice. Also try to remember your vitamins. Coffee is fine but don't overdo it because you might get *too* stimulated before the race even starts—not to mention the fact that you might need a quick pit stop ten minutes into the race.



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Programming time: Make sure you have time not only to program an enduro computer, but also to fill out your cheat sheet.

◀ *Being smart counts: Jeff Russell won his National Championship more by being consistent than by going fast.*

Jeff Russell in California: The same tips that work in the east work in the west. ▶

2. Goggles. A lot of times I get my goggles set up the night before a race, but the conditions may change overnight and require a whole new setup. For Nationals, I usually have four pairs of Scott 89 goggles ready, one for the start and a set for each trip back to the pits. For muddy conditions, I use the Scott EFS system with a clear lens. When it's dusty, I spray a little Endust on the lens to keep dust from sticking. I also put a little baby oil on the foam to keep dust from working its way through the frame. On cold mornings I use a thermal lens, which is double-paned to prevent fogging.

3. Taping. If you need special taping for an injury, get it done at least 30 minutes ahead of time in case it doesn't hold and needs to be retaped. As for taping my hands to prevent blisters, I use plain medical tape. Whatever your preference, make sure you use a product like Tough Skin to make the tape stick throughout the race. I understand that some guys like to tape their feet for support. I've never tried that.

4. Jersey. Usually, I prefer a 100-percent cotton jersey, but conditions might say otherwise. I use a "gel" jersey on cool days when a riding jacket is too much and cotton is not enough. When it's hot and humid, I like to use a vented shirt like the Fox Cool-Max. Choosing the right jersey might sound trivial, but racing when you are overheated or suffering with a chill can ruin your day. The choice of pants or boots is pretty standard.

5. Gloves. Just like your jerseys, gloves can cause lots of problems late in

the race. I don't like a lot of padding in my gloves because after a while I tend to get blisters. I also prefer a tight fit so that I keep a good grip when they become wet with sweat or from an unforeseen water crossing. If I know the conditions are going to be wet, I use wet-weather gloves like Fox H2Os, which I believe are actually for jet-skiers.

6. Cheat sheet. I put a cheat sheet together that highlights the route for the day's run. I usually work on it the night before, but I like to go over it again right before the start to get familiar with what's ahead. I then tape the sheet to my tank in front of my seat in case I need the information during the race.

7. Drinking system. I never believed in drinking systems that are attached to the body until I dehydrated in a Texas race and needed two days to recover. Now I use a system every time the sun comes out for a race. If it's a non-stop cross-country or hare scrambles, I fill a Camelbak system with cold water and ice before the start. Gatorade or energy drinks don't taste too good when they warm up, but in enduros you can refill your container during gas stops, so I use a Link Drink and sometimes fill it with Exceed.

8. Spares. No matter what I wear in the morning before a National, chances are I'm going to need to change something two hours later. I put all my spares together after I'm dressed and make sure that they are in a place where I can get to them at a gas stop. Extra gloves, goggles,

water, whatever—you never know what you are going to need once the race begins. (The coldest I have ever been in a race was in California, of all places. What looked like a rainy day at 1000 feet turned out to be a snowstorm when the trail climbed a few thousand more feet up into the mountains.)

9. Stretching. Getting your body heated up on a cold morning is as important as warming up a plug-fouling CR500. To get my circulation going just before the start, I do never-ending windmills with my arms, stretch my fingers and forearms with pressing exercises and do a little jogging. I also try to do some thigh stretches because I tend to have trouble with my hamstrings from training on the Stairmaster.

10. Ride and wait. The race starts as soon as your minute comes around, which means that you need to be loose, your bike needs to be warmed up and your clocks need to be in sync from the word go. So ride around the pit area for a few moments, warming up the bike and brakes. Do a few NASCAR-like zigzags and find your rhythm, then try to be at the start line with about five minutes to spare. This will allow you to check your clocks against the organizers' and make one last check of your bike and body.

If all systems are go, you will find yourself concentrating more on racing than on what you might have forgotten. Otherwise, you might be in for a long, uncomfortable day at the races. When you feel good, you ride good, and when you ride good, you feel great! □

