



Palmer Park Velo

A guide for new members





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Welcome to Palmer Park Velo

You may already be an experienced cyclist, your parents may know lots about bikes and bike racing, or you may be a complete novice with parents who have never been anywhere near a bike race. Whatever age you are, and whatever your current level of experience and knowledge, we hope there is something in this guide that you will find useful in your first few weeks with PPV.

Who we are

PPV is run entirely by volunteers. The key people to get to know are the Admin and Sign-On team, the Coaches, the Welfare Officers and the Committee.

Admin and sign-on

Before riding in any PPV session, whether at the track or elsewhere, you will need to sign-on.

Sign-on at the track is usually in the stands. You will need to sign against your name on the membership list and also pay your session fee. The rider (even the youngest) are expected to sign-on themselves – not get their parents to do it for them!

The current sign-on team is:

- Sarah Dawson
- Julie Pitt
- Inge Taylor

Sarah is also the Admin Officer and will usually be your first point of contact at the club.

Meet the coaches

We have a fantastic team of volunteer coaches:

- John Wann – lead coach for track and performance. Also coaches road and time trial.
- Chris Boulton – lead coach for road and time trial. Also coaches track and cyclocross.
- Matt Carey – lead coach for mountain biking. Also coaches cyclocross and track.
- Chris Macleod – lead coach for cyclocross. Also coaches mountain biking.
- Andrew Pitt – coaches across all disciplines.
- Fiona Hawkins – track coach
- Matt Pritchard – track and cyclocross coach
- Ian Keary – track and freewheel session coach
- Leigh Mason – freewheel coach
- Tim Macfarlane – freewheel coach
- Philip Taylor – freewheel coach
- Filippo Negroni – freewheel coach

Look for them at sessions wearing green grey PPV polo shirts, green PPV jackets or big red British Cycling coats.

All PPV coaches are qualified to level 3, 2 or 1 and the lead coaches (and many others) also have discipline specific coaching qualifications. In addition they are all DBS (formerly CRB) checked, have a First Aid qualification and have attended a Level 1 Child Protection course.



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Welfare officers

PPV follows the British Cycling 'Safeguarding and Protecting Children' policies and procedures when working with club members. The welfare and safety of all our riders is paramount and we have dedicated Club Welfare Officers to ensure that these guidelines are applied at all times. The Club Welfare Officers have Enhanced Level 2 Safeguarding qualifications.

- Alison Ashcroft
- Sarah Clarke
- Sarah Dawson
- Inge Taylor

The committee

The PPV committee comprises the Chair, Vice Chair, General Secretary, Treasurer and General Committee Members. The list of the current committee, and their contact details can be found on the PPV website (palmerparkvelo.net).

What do we do? And when do we do it?

PPV offers coaching and racing opportunities in all the main cycling activities except BMX and cycle speedway.

With our home base being at Palmer Park stadium with its outdoor velodrome a key focus of the club is, unsurprisingly, track cycling. Our main club coaching sessions are on Saturday mornings and we run a variety of different sessions at the track – on both freewheel and fixed wheel bikes. In addition we run mid-week cyclocross training sessions in autumn and winter, road and time trial and mountain bike sessions in spring and summer and a winter training session on Monday nights for our older riders.

We organize coaching sessions at the indoor velodromes at Newport and Calshot and occasional family mtb riders – usually in Swinley Forest.

We also organize Saturday morning race days – which for many represent a first foray into bike racing – an annual Club Championship (of which more later), and track racing on a Monday night through the summer.

Off the bike our main annual event is the AGM and prize presentation – where we come together (usually just before Christmas) to celebrate the fun and successes that our members have enjoyed over the preceding year.

Session dates and times are listed on the calendar (available on the website) and are advertised via email to members and by social media (Twitter @palmerparkvelo and Facebook)

Bikes, clothing and equipment

Do I need a bike? What sort of bike?

We have freewheel (road) bikes in a variety of sizes for members to borrow on Saturday mornings. Our volunteer 'bike shed' team will help you find the right one and make sure that it fits you before you join the coaching session.

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If you are buying a road bike of your own we suggest the following guidelines:

- Don't buy a bigger bike that has 'room for growth'. It will be uncomfortable and, if you can't reach properly to control the bike and the brakes, it will potentially be dangerous. There is a guide to bike fit on the club website. Or ask one of the coaches for assistance.
- Aluminium frames are perfect for kids' bikes. You don't need to invest in something that looks like it has just come from the Tour de France!
- Current international and national road cycle race regulations ban the use of disc brakes on a road bike, and, on current safety advice, we do not allow them to be used in racing or training sessions at PPV.
- Be aware of the gear restrictions that apply to each youth and junior age category. A 'standard' adult's road bike might have gearing that is difficult to set up properly for youth racing. Further explanation of this is given later, but if in doubt, do ask one of the coaches how it works and what you should look for.
- Also be aware that riders in British Cycling age categories of U14 and below (again, more on this later) are subject to further limitations on permitted equipment – e.g. rim depth on wheels.

As you progress you will want to start riding a fixed wheel (track) bike. Again, the club has a range of bikes in a variety of sizes that can be borrowed by members for coaching sessions.

Club bikes can also be used for coaching sessions and races away from Palmer Park, providing that the shed team issue the bike to you and a bike hire form is completed.

For cyclocross coaching sessions you will need a cyclocross bike or a mountain bike. The key thing here is that you need knobbly, grippy tyres to cope with being on grass/gravel/mud. Many kids bikes (e.g. Islabikes, Worx bikes, Frog bikes) have sufficient frame clearance that they can be used for road riding or cyclocross just by changing the tyres (just be wary of cyclocross bikes with disc brakes – fine for cyclocross, but not allowed for road).

For mountain bike coaching sessions, rides and races you will need to be able to get hold of a mountain bike to ride.

Clothing

A correctly fitted cycling helmet is compulsory. No helmet = No ride.

Gloves are also essential. Short-fingered mitts for the summer and long fingered, warmer gloves for the winter.

Cycling shorts make riding more comfortable, but you can get away with tracksuit trousers or leggings for your first few sessions.

We also suggest that you should always wear a base layer under your cycling jersey or T-shirt. If you are unfortunate enough to come off on the track this can help reduce the friction damage to skin.

The general guide is:

- Helmet and gloves are compulsory
- Special cycling clothing is not essential (but makes things more comfortable), but clothing should be tight fitting, with no loose, flappy material or fastenings.
- Dress for the weather. Several thin layers are better than a huge, thick coat.

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- If you do not have your own pedals (see below) you must ride in training shoes or similar (with laces tucked in). Cycling shoes with cleats are not permitted unless paired with the appropriate pedals.

Club kit is available to buy at various times throughout the year. Further details are given later. Second hand kit is often available from fellow members, and the club also has a small supply of old kit that can be worn for coaching sessions and general riding.

Equipment

- Water bottle – needed for every session
- Pedals – if you borrow a club bike it will be fitted with flat pedals or flat pedals with straps. These are ideal for novice riders. As you progress you may want to move to 'clipless' pedals, and special cycling shoes with 'cleats' on the soles. There are a variety of different styles, some more suited to particular cycling disciplines than others. If you are unsure please ask a coach or a member of the Shed Team. If you want to change the flat pedals on a club bike so you can use your own pedals this is fine, but please ask a member of the Shed Team first – and remember that they need to be changed back again at the end of the session when you return the bike.
- Rollers or a turbo trainer – used for warm-up in advance of the medium and higher level fixed wheel coaching sessions and also before races etc. Riding on rollers is an acquired skill, but one that will be important to you as you progress. The club has a couple of sets of rollers that can be borrowed at Palmer Park – and the coaches will be happy to help you get going on them.

Club kit

PPV club kit is highly distinctive and highly visible – enabling you to be easily seen whether in the middle of a bunch in a road or track races, across a field in a cyclocross or mountain bike race, or if you are out riding on the road.

We think it is great. The best club kit around!

The kit is made by Champion Systems and, when a club order window is open, it can be directly ordered by members from the CS website. When an order window is opened by the club an email will be sent to all members giving all the necessary details.

A full range of kit is available, including jerseys and shorts, skinsuits, jackets, gilets, arm and leg warmers and gloves.

Sizing can be a little difficult to gauge though, so do always ask about sizing, and also the best specific items to purchase, before placing your first order.

Our coaching sessions

All new members, whatever their age or level of prior experience, start in our freewheel session. This allows the freewheel coaches to get to know you and assess the best path for progression.

From here, when the freewheel coaches consider that you, the rider, is ready, you will be invited to join our 'C' fixed wheel session. It is important to note that speed and strength on the bike isn't really an issue at this stage – the freewheel coaches



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will be looking for good bike handling skills, demonstration of good observation and awareness and the ability to ride safely in a line and in a bunch.

In the 'C' session you will be introduced to fixed wheel bikes and further your experience of riding on the track, with other riders around you.

In order to progress out of the 'C' session and into the 'B' session you are required to show the coaches that you can ride safely in a bunch and in a line at faster pace. Observation and awareness skills are again key, but you also need to demonstrate that you can sustain a certain speed for a certain length of time.

Younger or less strong riders might therefore stay in the 'C' session for some time, but this is not a negative, as the development objectives of both groups are closely aligned.

A rider who joins the club with prior track experience may be invited to 'guest' into the 'B' session after assessment by the 'C' session coaches, but this is always at the discretion of the coaching team.

The A session is the next step up, and in this session there is greater emphasis on physical development. Due to this there is a minimum age for entry to the A session – only riders going into 2nd year of U12 racing are eligible – and there is also a speed and endurance 'ramp' test that must be passed.

Riders who have not yet done the ramp test may be invited to 'guest' into the A session if the track coaches consider that they are capable of riding with the required speed and skill levels.

Finally there is an A* session for U16 riders and junior riders (ex-PPV and from other local clubs). This is an invitation-only session based on coaches' assessment of the rider's readiness to benefit from concentrated hard, fast-paced training and is designed to help riders prepare for U16 and junior national level racing.

Racing – a natural progression

PPV is a racing club and encourages all members to race once they feel confident and skillful enough to do so.

The first racing experience is often a club race day on a Saturday morning – where you can experience having your gears checked, signing on and racing, all in the safe and supportive atmosphere of your own club.

Another good entry route to racing is through cyclocross. There are two cyclocross leagues that have racing local to PPV members – Wessex league and Central league. Both run events on many weekends from about mid-September to mid-January and cater for age categories from U8 or U10 to, well, as old as you like. There are also local mid-week summer cyclocross leagues. Cyclocross is a very family friendly sport where riders of all speed and fitness levels can compete and find somebody to be racing against even if they aren't challenging for the lead!

Track racing (fixed wheel) is catered for at a local level by Reading Track league. The league runs on a Monday night from about April to September and includes adult and youth racing. The U12 racing is organized and run by PPV coaches. PPV organizes a regional omnium track event each year and there are this and other regional and national track events through the spring and summer, and indoor track leagues at Newport, London and Calshot in the autumn and winter months.



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Circuit racing generally starts in late winter or early spring and runs through to mid-autumn and during this season you will be able to find both mid-week and weekend races for all levels and age categories.

There are two local(ish) mountain bike series – Southern XC which runs a series of races from March to July or August across the south of England, and the Banjo Rampage series at Checkendon in the autumn.

Our lead coaches have put together guides to racing in the disciplines of track, road and time trial, cyclocross and mountain bike, and these can be found on the PPV website.

The Club Championship

All members are encouraged to take part in the Club Championship. This comprises 7 events (cyclocross, a circuit race, skills, track sprint, track pursuit and track bunch race, and a mountain bike race) and starts with the cyclocross race in January. You can do 1 event, all 7 events, or anything in between.

Riders race in their British Cycling (BC) age category and with separate categories for girls and boys. There are trophies for the winners, medals for 1st, 2nd and 3rd in each race, and the overall champion in each category receives a special medal and a Club Champion jersey – which they can wear with pride the following year.

The awards for the Club Championship individual races and the overall Champions are presented at the annual prize presentation celebration held in December.

Thanks to the generosity of our club sponsors, AW Cycles, each member who has raced in any of the Championship events also receives a small award at the Presentation event.

British Cycling

BC is the governing body of cycling in the UK, and Palmer Park Velo, as a club, is affiliated to BC. We are an accredited Go-Ride club – which means we meet certain criteria in terms of provision of coaching and other opportunities for young cyclists.

All members of PPV are also required to be members of British Cycling, and the first year of BC membership for youth riders is free. If you are going to race anywhere outside of the club races you will also need to have a race license – also free to youth riders – although you do have to tick the relevant box to apply for it when you apply for membership, and upload a photo of yourself to the BC website which is then reproduced on your license. You will need to present your race license every time that you sign on to race.

There are also membership offers you can benefit from, such as discounts at various retailers and priority access to tickets for some national and international cycling events.

The BC website is where you will look for things like race dates, online entry and results. There you will also find news about a wide variety of aspects of cycling in the UK and also detailed guides and information about a range of topics in the Insight Zone, and much more besides.

BC age categories

The age categories for youth racing in the UK are determined by your age on 1st January each year and are U16, U14, U12, U10 and U10.

- Track and circuit racing categories are, respectively, A, B, C, D and E.
- Mountain bike U16s are 'Youth', U14s are 'Juveniles' and U12 and below are 'U12'.
- Cyclocross U12 and below are 'U12', and U14 and U16 are both 'Youth'.
- The categories are different again for BMX.

So, if when 1 January comes around you are already 8 you will race as an U10 for that year. You will also be U10 the following year – as you will be 9 when 1 January comes around.

If your 8th birthday is 1 January itself then you will be U8 for that year (because at the very first second on 1st January you were not yet 8).

Gear restrictions

As mentioned earlier, each age category has a restriction that restricts the gearing that riders in that category can use for road and track races. This is measured by the distance the bike travels in a straight line while it does one full revolution of a pedal and the rule is there to reduce the risk of young riders damaging their joints by trying to push gears that are too hard for them while their bodies are still growing.

Checking if a bike has the correct gearing is called 'rolling out' and will be done either before or after every race.

If a bike is fitted with a combination of chain ring and cassette that permits a longer roll-out than is allowed for your category then the gearing must be 'locked off' to prevent it being changed into a bigger gear.

There is further guidance on this, including details of the roll-out distance for each category, on the PPV website but don't be afraid to ask before trying to do it for yourself as it is much easier to be shown how to lock off the gearing than to try to work out it from written instructions.

A club run by volunteers

As a parent, we would like to encourage you to get involved in the club – whether it be training as a coach, becoming a Welfare Officer, helping the shed team with the club bikes, baking cakes for the weekly tea bar (an essential part of Saturday morning sessions), helping at race days and the club omnium, or simply sweeping the track before the sessions start. Please do come and talk to the coaches or to members of the committee.

And finally

We hope you love being a member of PPV. We think it is a great club, and this is due to the enthusiasm, commitment and friendliness of all our riders and all our volunteers and all the parents who want to give their children the opportunity to love riding their bikes and to develop a passion for cycling that we hope will last a lifetime.

*Fiona Hawkins
November 2016*