

The Fine Art of Bladder Relief While On The Bike

by Beth Lamie and Mark Montgomery

A well-hydrated athlete will likely have to pee at least once during a 100-mile bike ride, but for athletes who are racing a century or more, there is a little secret that I'm going to share with you: elite athletes do not get off the bike to pee when they are racing. It's not that they don't pee – they just don't get off the bike to do it.

Now that the secret is out, we should probably tell you how to do it, since this is one how-to article you almost never see. So here it is—unedited, uncouth, and in full detail brought to you by Mark Montgomery, Jurgen Zack's training partner.

"I've been told that many guys have a kind of performance anxiety when it comes to urinating in public. I had never experienced that kind of anxiety until I tried my first on-the-bike pee. I went on a lot of rides with my training partner Jurgen Zack, and that guy always had to pee. He would just slide to the back of the pack, pull it out through the bottom of his shorts, and let it fly into the wind. It looked pretty easy, so I tried it. One of the tricks is that you have to stop pedaling to be able to get the flow going. So, I stopped pedaling and started getting dropped from the group.

"Now, you all know about getting-dropped anxiety. I just never figured that it would turn into peeing anxiety. So, there I was, coasting behind the peloton, holding onto little Monty with a full bladder, and not a drop. The pack was getting further and further away, so I would chase back up and try it again and again with the same results. The pressure began to get unbearable, but there was no apparent outlet. If I got off, I would be dropped and riding alone for the rest of the day. If I didn't, I would explode from the inside. Then while sitting in the saddle I just let it go, and go, and go. I took a water bottle and gave myself a quick shower with fresh water. It's not as gross as it sounds—if you are hydrated the urine produced is mostly just clear salt water. After a wash and a few miles of blow drying, I was good as new. I had discovered what most women already knew, the sit down and let it flow method. Probably best if you do this at the rear of the pack.

"I remember one race in which I was following the first-place guy and had to pee. We'd been running 20 yards apart for about five miles and it was just a few to the finish. I couldn't afford to stop for the minute it would take to properly pee, so I whipped it to the side and did it on the run. What a mess. It was like a loose garden hose under full pressure, flying about in every direction. After giving my shoes and legs a good soaking, I surged on to win the race."

Here are tips from others who have their own method for finding relief without wasting time:

Spencer Smith says, "Just stand up on the bike and go. I don't pull it out, I haven't got the time. Plus, depending on the wind, I'd end up wearing most of it anyway."

Scott Tinley echoes Spencer. Stand up, scoot it off to one side of your shorts, brace one leg against the top tube, and go. But whatever you do, make sure it doesn't roll down into your shoe. That's bad. You'll never get it out.

"But that's not the challenge," Tinley says. "The real challenge is peeing while running—fast. If you can do that, that's total Zen enlightenment. I've managed to pee while running 6:10 miles. No lie."

Are there any legal problems to consider? One USA Triathlon official said that the competitive rules don't specifically forbid "le flying pee-pee" but that there is a rule athletes should consider. It's Rule 3.3b, and it requires that competitors "conduct themselves in a manner that is not offensive in any way to fellow participants, spectators, officials or volunteers and is considered reasonable and acceptable in the community."

This official also recalled being at Vineman a few years ago when officials were asked to enforce a "no pee-pee" rule to keep neighbors of the race happy and to ensure that athletes weren't using nearby vineyards as watering holes. Athletes were told, in pre-race briefings, that they should use the porta-potties only and not nearby front yards, vineyards, trees, etc.

At the Ironman World Championship in 2013, the pro athletes were told that there would be a penalty if anyone peed in the seats in the changing tents. It seems that in order to save time while changing from swim to bike or bike to run, athletes would pee while they were sitting in a chair putting on their bike shoes and then would hop on the bike without a thought about the next person to use the chair. You think that's crazy? One athlete ignored the rules and was DQ'd.

Ironically, you might be less likely to get a penalty with a stealthy release on the bike than a more obvious evacuation by the side of the road or on the chair in the changing tent.

Should you choose the on-bike method favored by the pros above, there is one final detail I ought to remind you of, which is that you'll want a bottle of clear water handy to rinse yourself off. If all your bottles are full of sports drink, it's probably better to skip the rinse until the end of the race.

Truly, there's no right or wrong way to take the nature break—there's just the fastest way that works for you. I've described some extreme measures the pros have taken to save some time, but I'll leave it to you to choose your own dignified, or not, method of returning the salts to the earth.