

# How To Prepare For RAGBRAI

## Pork Belly Ventures Tips for First Timers

**The Riding Part-** A lot of people ask us, "What do I have to do to get in shape for this thing?" There is no other way to train for a long-distance bike ride than to ride long distances. You can't really prepare for RAGBRAI by riding a stationary bike or by walking or running, although these activities will contribute to a higher level of fitness. You need to come as close as you can to simulating the ride, which means riding hills, riding against the wind, riding long miles day after day. Not many people go on a training ride in the rain, but it would help you know how you and your bike will perform. We suggest that you try riding 20-30 miles three nights a week, and 50-60 miles on weekend days. Take some time around the 4th of July to do longer miles three or four days in a row. This will let you know whether you can recover for the next day's ride. Don't over-train, though. Come to Iowa rested.

Comfort on the bike is critical. Make sure that your bike is adjusted correctly for your body. Don't change anything about your bike or your gear just before the ride. Make sure that your shoes, gloves, saddle and all other gear is broken in. Make sure your helmet rests securely on your head. Don't make any drastic adjustment to your saddle or handlebar height just before the ride. If you are thinking of changing to clipless pedals or adding attachments to your handlebars, do it now, not just before the ride.

Everybody has his own idea of what he needs to carry on the bike. Some riders don't feel prepared unless they are carrying a few clothing items, food items, a first aid kit, etc. We suggest that you carry only what you absolutely need -- a tube and patch kit, money, i.d., sunscreen, protection for your lips, a rain jacket if the forecast calls for rain. (Today's cycling rain jackets are vented, and they have extra long sleeves to cover your arms as you're reaching for the bars, and usually a shirttail that covers your behind. Rain pants are optional and often too hot for RAGBRAI.) Although food and drink can be found virtually every couple of miles along the route, you may want to have two bottle cages on your bike for two large water bottles on hot afternoons. If you plan to get on your bike before sunrise (neither is recommended), or to be riding it after sunset, you will need a headlight. There are small handlebar mounted lights that can be clipped on when you need them; others mount on your helmet. A rear light makes you more visible to others before dawn. Carry sunscreen and lip balm with sunscreen -- we have seen a lot of perfectly fit people become miserable because of sunburned skin or blistering lips.

Watch out for the other guy. You're going to encounter people who are not in very good shape and who are not very skilled riders. They are going to swerve erratically on steep hills. They are going to try to draft you. They are going to pedal furiously one minute, and then coast along in exhaustion. They are going to cut clumsily across the road in front of you in a desperate dive for the Dove Bar stand. Our first

tip is this: 1) Don't be one of these people. Always look back over your shoulder before changing lanes or getting off the road. Don't draft anybody you don't usually ride with. Pedal smoothly, maintaining an even speed. Whether you are coasting down a long hill, or climbing a steep one, "hold your line," which means don't weave around. Ride like you drive. If you're fatigued, get off the road and rest a bit. And secondly, 2) Be considerate of these people. Use the RAGBRAI road lingo to signal your intentions to other riders. As you pass another rider, say "On your left" or "On your right." Say it pleasantly: don't shout at them as if you expect them to get out of your way. It's customary to holler "Stopping" or "Braking" when you do. Be safe. Be predictable. Be defensive. Be kind. The stronger, more capable rider should always defer to those who are struggling.

When a car is approaching in the oncoming lane or from behind you, warn other riders by shouting "Car Up" or "Car Back." If you come across an accident, shout "Rider Down." You will pick up the lingo on your first day as other riders shout "Bump!" "Gravel!" or "Rumble!" (for a rough strip announcing an upcoming stop sign). You can also help the rider behind you by simply pointing to a patch of gravel or a pothole. Remember to hold your line on a turn. Remember to cross railroad tracks at a right angle. Watch for treacherous cracks and grooves in the road. Your narrow tire can drop into a crack and send you end over end. One last thing... RIDE RIGHT! Stay right of the center line.

**The Packing Part-** Bring layers. You'll probably start out in long sleeves in the morning and remove them by 10:00 a.m. Bring a hand towel and four days worth of clothes. Pork Belly offers a midweek laundry service (small extra charge, which you can reserve at check-in in Sioux City), a great morale boost that gives you fresh towels and a chance to wear your clothes a second time. In the evening, it's shorts and t-shirts, but one pair of long pants and a sweatshirt will prepare you for cool evenings. (Watch the forecast, but things can change quickly on the prairie.) A few items you might not think of: baby powder and/or anti-chafing products like Butt Butter, a few shop rags, a pocket mirror, one of those miner's headlights (for use in the dark tent), earplugs, extra socks, a high-tech wringable towel, whatever you take for aches and pains, and antibacterial handwash. Get sample sizes of some things— toothpaste, lotion, handwash, shampoo—to save on space. You'll find a dozen uses for a fistful of ziplock bags. If the forecast is hot, you may be tempted to leave that sleeping bag behind. Don't do it. Iowa weather can change in a heartbeat, and you don't want to shiver all night. On the other hand, lots of folks pack a small, battery-operated fan for warm nights in the tent. (Ice in a ziplock helps too.) Many people do a trial-pack and then take out half. And remember, if you can lift your bag above your head, then our drivers can, too. Keep their spines in mind as you pack.

**The Camping Part-** Put your tent up and take it down so you know how it's done. If your tent is new, don't assume that it's water-tight. You may need to seal the seams yourself. Bring a ground cloth and rain fly. With the distant sound of the street dance, the whispers and giggles from tents around you, and of course a chorus of snorers... light sleepers would be wise to bring earplugs to help them doze off. Heavy

sleepers may need to set an alarm. Having snacks like fruit and power bars in your tent will keep your blood sugar on an even keel. The sinks and facilities are so crowded in the morning that some people just make do with their toothbrush, water bottle, a wet washcloth in a ziplock bag or alcohol wipes to hold them over until their afternoon shower.

**The Eating Part-** This is not the time to diet. Eat before you are hungry, drink before you are thirsty, and rest before you are tired. Many food vendors have caught on to the idea that RAGBRAIers want healthy food, but veggies and whole grain stuff may not always be readily available. Pancakes and homemade cinnamon rolls abound. Tender Toms makes a great turkey sandwich. Iowa sweet corn is a real treat. You can always get fresh fruit and fresh-squeezed lemonade. Espresso drinks are sometimes available on the route. Pasta is everywhere, usually with meat. Church dinners offer huge portions and homemade desserts. Along the route, RAGBRAI is giving special attention to the availability of water and food—but get it when you see it. The Pork Belly Mobile App will let you know each day what foods are waiting for you in Pork Camp. Don't worry about calories or pounds this week. Have a Dove Bar. Have an Iowa Chop. Eat for pleasure and for fuel.

**The Money Part-** Figure out what you may spend for food, and then add money for things like massages (\$40 for 30 minutes), souvenir shirts, bike parts and accessories. Showers (if you're buying showers) are usually \$8, and towel rental (when available) is about a buck. The towns charge a little something for their shuttle buses. Everything's a bargain.

**The KEY-** What's the key to RAGBRAI? Not training. Not gear. Not money. The key to a successful RAGBRAI is attitude. Lower your expectations, dust off your sense of humor, and roll with it. Things will go right and things will go wrong. You're going to have a great time.