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PEAKS COACHING GROUP

Article Name: Cyclocross Skills: Mounts and Dismounts

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Getting off is the easy part.

Doing it gracefully is an entirely different matter.

As the season comes to a close for most, cyclocross presents itself. 'Cross is a great way to put a little "upper end" before the dead of winter (and mind-deadening indoor workouts) come into full swing.

And 'cross can be the great equalizer. It isn't always the fittest that wins, but someone with good fitness AND good technique. Bike handling plays a big part in the cross game, and that is something that is learned in time.

But dismounting and mounting can be a huge factor as well. Someone who is proficient at the dismounts can easily make up 10-15 seconds on each set of barriers. Figure that most courses have 2 sets of barriers or run-ups, and that can easily be 30s PER LAP. This can be done to either to get ahead of the field or be able to recover for the next hard riding effort.

So let's start with a flat level dismount. There are two key elements to this that beginners often miss.

1) Put the right leg BETWEEN the left leg (still clipped in) and the bike frame.

And

2) Put the right hand on the BACK of the bike (either on the seat, or the top tube, close to the seat cluster).

These two elements will MAKE your dismount.

And here is why... by placing the right leg between the frame and the left leg, you can't "ride away" from your foot plant. Even if that were to happen, the right leg will force the left to unclip. If you were to cross the right leg behind the left, you could easily plant the right onto the ground, and ride right past it, ending up in the splits. VERY uncomfortable!

After the right leg is correctly positioned, move your right hand from the handlebars (brake hoods, bar tops or drops) to the top of the seat or the top tube, close to the seat cluster. This has two effects, first you have better control of the bike both still attached to it via the pedals, and especially after you fully unclip. If you just have the handlebars in your hands, it becomes very difficult to control the rear of the bike.

Secondly, it "pre-places" you to pick the bike up, to either run the barriers or shoulder the bike, thus speeding up that process.

This is also why dedicated crossers swap the front and rear brakes... if your hand is in the correct position, when the brakes are swapped, you can still apply the rear brake to adjust speed. Again, the correct hand position keeps the weight centered on the bike such that applying the rear brake doesn't make the bike unstable.

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These two techniques are very easy to practice to make it second nature. You don't need to be off road to practice the sequence, heck, you don't even need to be on your cross bike. I have been even known to do this on road group rides (with people you trust) to show beginners how it works.

If you have this down, let's talk about the remount. This is another crucial time that can become a time saver. Again, there are two things to focus on.

1) Set the bike down gently
and

2) Use both hands on the bars before jumping onto the saddle.

First, with the right hand on the saddle or the top-tube, DON'T drop the bike to the ground, gently set it back down. If you dump it down, it will bounce around, the chain will slap around (and/or bounce off) and you will have to wait longer to get it under control before you can jump back onto the bike.

And second, after the bike is on the ground, move your right hand to the bars. These two techniques will keep everything together. Many beginners try to jump back onto the bike from too far back. This is easy to have happen if you throw the bike down and let go of the saddle/top-tube too early. By setting the bike down gently and holding onto the bike until it is settled on the ground, you prevent the bike to "running ahead" of you and then jumping onto it from behind the saddle. If you set the bike down, move your hands to the bars, then your core should be positioned at about the bottom bracket of the frame and you won't be chasing the bike trying to jump on.

In practicing mounts and dismounts, it is important to worry first about the technique, than begin to worry about how much time on the ground you spend. If you watch tapes of the worlds best, you begin to notice that they may take 2 steps on the ground before jumping and only one step on the ground after the last barrier. And you can too, with practice. But first get the ideas discussed above worked out first.

Practice first in an empty field or city park or your front lawn. Make the motion of getting off and on fluid. Then practice with imaginary lines as barriers. This will let you make mistakes without hurting yourself when you smack into a barrier (NOT a fun pastime). When you feel confident about jumping the lines, move up to real barriers, but don't be worried about getting off too early and running 3-5 steps into the barriers, worry about being fluid in the getting off and running. The rest will come with time. Enjoy, and get muddy!



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