

2015 A-SIG FAQs

What's the goal of the A-SIG?

The A-SIG is a progressive training series that teaches group riding skills and removes the mystique from becoming an "A" rider. The ultimate goal is to produce "Great Wheels" ...cyclists that everyone enjoys riding with because their presence in a group enhances safety, predictability, smoothness, and fun. To that end the A-SIG teaches a very particular style of group cycling: The curriculum is designed to emphasize cooperative techniques that allow a group of cyclists to function as a team, capable of riding longer distances and cruising at faster speeds than the individual members may otherwise be able to. This specific style of cooperative group riding may be different from the way you ride now; ideally, by the end of the 12 weeks you'll understand the advantages and benefits of this style of riding and choose to do all your group rides "SIG style", but at the very least we ask that you embrace these techniques for the duration of the SIG program, as well as during any midweek training rides with other SIG participants.

What kind of cycling experience do I need for the A-SIG?

You should be comfortable and confident operating a road bike over significant distances and challenging terrain outside of the city. You do not need to know how to ride in a rotating paceline to join the A-SIG; it is a core skill we will teach beginning in week 3, after which all rides will be done in a rotating single or double paceline.

How does the A-SIG differ from the A-Classic SIG?

The A-SIG Classic will push you harder and faster than the A-SIG. All things being equal -- including your conditioning and athletic ability -- the A-SIG Classic will require more frequent and intense midweek training (see below) than the A-SIG, to prepare you for the greater demands. For many NYCC members, the A-SIG hits the sweet spot in pushing them to a new level of cycling ability and personal fitness without pushing them over the edge.

How fast will we ride?

Just like the A-SIG Classic, one thing you will hear from us over and over is "Smooth is Fast... Fast is Smooth." At the start of the A-SIG, our pace will be much slower than it will be at the end. We focus on teaching skills that produce predictable, smooth riders. We'll be teaching you how to ride smart, with a focus on consistent effort, not consistent speed...but with the development of your skills, the speed comes. The leaders monitor their groups and determine the pace, weighing safety and skills development ahead of any "target" pace. Our major focus is on skills development. You'll ride very slowly with us when learning to paceline (for safety reasons we don't want our riders to learn new skills while they're at their max physically), and the time you spend riding that slow will help foster the skills you will need as an "A" rider. By the final weeks of the program you will be riding >20 mph on flat terrain.

How far will we go and how hilly are the routes?

Rides progress from approximately 40 miles to 100 miles. We will ride some of the most well-known climbs in the region with >6,000' vertical gain on longer rides. All rides include a lunch break with additional pit stops added as routes increase in length.

What training will I need to do to keep up?

You will need to do some work. Here are a few basic guidelines: you'll need to put in time on the bike; quality is more important than quantity. That translates to getting out once or twice during the week for training laps in Prospect Park or Central Park with fellow SIG participants and leaders. There will be several options to choose from. This is your key workout. Riding 15-20 quick miles in a paceline will foster the skills and build the endurance better and faster than any longer solo ride you might do. As a bonus, if you can fit it in, add another quality workout such as hill repeats and/or intervals each or every other week. Adding a long and easy recovery ride once a week (most do this on Sundays) is also good practice. If you are short on time, opt for the shorter more intense workouts over the longer, slower rides. An important part of training is rest and fueling. Eat and drink well throughout the week (there are many resources for help with this and we will offer some suggestions throughout the program). Follow a hard workout with an easy recovery day and make Friday a mandatory rest day -- no workout, on or off the bike. The SIG is a commitment; train smart and you will do fine.

What kind of shape do I need to be in when the SIG starts?

Having a training routine over the winter and especially in the weeks before the SIG is highly recommended, but the truth is many leaders and participants have started the SIG with very few winter miles under their belts. The good news is that for the first few weeks the pace is moderate as we focus on improving your group riding skills. Using these early weeks to build stamina and practice the skills you learn each week during the SIG will be essential to your successful completion of the program. So don't let a lack of winter riding stop you from joining...but be prepared to work hard and train smart for 12 weeks once the SIG begins.

Do I need to use [clipless pedals](#)?

Yes, and you must have sufficient riding experience on them to clip in and out with ease.

What is the mentor program and how does it work?

At the start of the 3rd week we assign an A-SIG leader to be a mentor for each participant. Your mentor will be your advocate, your coach, your confidant, your liaison to the leadership group, perhaps even your "personal" trainer. Keep in mind we are not professionals. We are volunteers who have either graduated from the A-SIG and/or have proven skills and leadership abilities to have been chosen to help lead. We have a variety of experience, expertise and skill levels. While your mentor is there to help you to complete the SIG, the other leaders are there as resources for you to call on as well. We want you to succeed. We will certainly do our part; you will need to do yours. If you have questions, issues, concerns, suggestions, if you're having trouble with a particular skill...speak up.

How are weekly groups assigned?

We'll be mixing things up. We try to parallel the "real world" of NYCC group rides. Riding with different people on a regular basis allows you to learn how to gauge a group or an individual's strengths and weaknesses, and work together each week to make your group smooth and efficient. This includes riding with different leaders who might offer different perspectives and comments about your individual development.

How many rides can I miss?

If you're asking this question, the SIG may not be right for you. The success of the A-SIG program stems from the commitment made by each of the participants. This fosters consistency, which builds strength, skill, and confidence, ultimately leading to groups of confident, skilled riders who navigate the challenges of the road predictably and safely. Everyone needs to remain on the same page in training and skills to ensure the progress and safety of the group. While we certainly appreciate the difficulty in doing so, and we understand that sometimes a ride must be missed for health reasons or family commitments, participants are expected to attend every session. All absences will be reviewed by your mentor and the SIG captain, those that fail to meet the basic requirements, meaning they fall behind in skill development, will be asked to leave the SIG. More than two absences are grounds for dismissal.

Will I get dropped on a ride?

We hope not...but it's possible. But getting dropped can sometimes be a very good thing, and eventually make you a much better cyclist. However, no one will be left alone for mechanical issues, illness, or injury. We stop as a group and help each other get back on the road or otherwise taken care of. We foster a team environment and try to help those struggling to hang on. Within reason we try to keep the group together. However, we cannot, and will not, hold back the entire group if a rider struggles to keep up week after week. This will be very evident and in the best interest of the individual and their fellow participants we will recommend (or require) that person to resign or move to another SIG, if appropriate.

I am a woman and fear I will be in way over my head with much stronger/faster/fitter men. Should I even attempt the A-SIG?

Many of our most competent participants have been female riders. The women riding with us have become leaders in the SIGs, as well as the club as a whole. Recent female A-SIG grads (from both levels) are back this year to lead YOU, others are currently racing and doing amazingly well...their experience in the SIG was priceless in building a foundation for safe riding. We'll do everything we can to help you succeed. You'll never know unless you try...come on out and join us!

What will happen if I start and struggle? How will I know if the A-SIG is right for me?

We rely to some extent on a "self-selection" process. No time trial laps in the park to determine if you should start in the A-SIG or the Classic...we let you make that initial call. Once the SIG starts you will know quickly if it is right for you, but in case you have some doubts the leaders will help you decide. Many people have struggled early on and

come through strongly on the back end. There is movement among the programs in the first couple of weeks, so if you've chosen one SIG and belong in another, the transition is simple and easy to make.

I've heard the SIGs really push you. How hard do they push and how painful?

"No pain, no gain" is an over-used cliché. While there is some truth to it, the "pain" level in the SIG is low. Will you be tired after a ride and have some sore muscles the day after? Sure. But as the SIG (and your training) progresses, you may be very surprised (and pleased) with how quickly your body responds. The A-SIG will challenge you physically and mentally; while we strive to avoid pushing you to your limits, the very nature of our curriculum will in all likelihood extend those limits.

What is your policy on cell phone usage during the SIG rides?

Once you're clipped in, you are unavailable by cell until a rest stop. It is important to have a means of communication with you in case you get separated from the group; therefore, we highly recommend you bring your cell phone with you. Cell phones must not in any way interfere with your ability to focus on the road and on the challenges of the rides, they must be kept out of sight (they are NOT to be mounted to any part of your bike) and are not to be used while riding. At rest stops you can check your messages and make any calls you need to make. This policy applies to any such devices. Let common sense prevail here.

What kind of gearing equipment should my bike have?

It's important that your bike is equipped with a gearing ratio appropriate for your climbing strength. Some hills will be long and/or have substantial grades, and your equipment must allow you to pedal at a high cadence so that you don't exhaust yourself or others in your group. For most A-SIG participants, this is achieved with a 50/34 compact crank, or a 53/39 standard crank with a large rear-wheel cog (29 sprockets would be our suggestion). Gearing equipment can be confusing; feel free to approach the SIG captains with any questions before you begin the SIG.

Other items:

Road bikes with integrated, brake-hood shifters only, no exceptions. (No hybrids; no bar-end or bottom-tube shifters).

No aero bars; we won't be time trialing.

No "bar mitts." Save them for when you're riding alone, we need to see your hands!

No ear buds or headphones.

Two bottle cages with water bottles filled with water and/or sports drink.