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Working Together as a Team.

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and Anna McCormack

Working together as a team - On the water

Most adventure races use canoes, kayaks, local boats or rafts. Once you have mastered control of the boat, your next problem is to move your whole team as fast as possible when you are split into two boats. Try to split your team so that your most experienced paddlers are in the back of each boat to steer. Then juggle the others to equalise the paddling speeds of the two boats.

Sometimes this will not be enough: in the 2000 Adrenalin Rush our three man team was required to paddle two 17' long open canoes with three bikes in them – a tough challenge. We took double-bladed kayak paddles, tied one boat behind the other with a short elastic cord, and put our strongest paddler in the back boat by himself. It worked very well in flat water, and allowed us to keep pace with the four person teams. But in the middle of Lough Neagh in seriously large waves we capsized – the bungee cord attaching the boats made them too hard to steer. Strong cross-winds would also have caused us problems. Our opponents had brought along pieces of wood to turn their boats into a makeshift catamaran, complete with sail. They kept their boat upright and caught us up.



In general, towing with one boat in front of the other creates less drag and can greatly ease the strain on the trailing boat. However, holding boats side by side is a better option if the water is rough, since this adds a great deal of stability. Team Eco Internet took the time to tie two inflatable canoes together, one behind the other, in the Raid Gauloises in Equador. This created a long, fast boat, but relied on high levels of skill to steer it through white-water. In the Australian Eco Challenge some teams tied their sea kayaks side by side and used an improvised sail to push them along at a good speed in rough, dangerous conditions.

In any given situation you must consider whether control and stability are more important than speed. You must also weigh up the pros and cons of using sails against the hassle of sorting them out and potentially carrying them to kayak legs. Some combinations make it possible to sleep – an important consideration for long races. Whatever you do, however, beware of tying ropes to people, as this can be very dangerous on the water.

Working together as a team - On the bike

Adventure racing on the bike is all about moving as efficiently as possible as a group. If you spread out then it's easier to make navigational errors (or get split up), communication suffers, and if someone falls or punctures whilst trailing behind, you may not even realise. Without help, it will either take them longer to get going again or you will have to expend wasted energy to go back to help them. Hence, the most important rule is to stay as close together as is safe.

Learn to adjust your speed up and down hill to the others in your group. If you are a strong and capable cyclist this will both save your own energy, and minimise falls/punctures as you will be riding more within your own limits. As in every discipline, avoid the slowest rider being last in the group.

Ensure that the navigator is in front so that they can clearly see junctions etc but remember that they may well be concentrating on the map when you go past a partially hidden trail, so get into the practise of calling out factors like altitude, mileage, junctions, key landmarks etc since this will go a long way to ensuring that you don't get lost. Whilst the navigator should have a map-board on their bike (and a basic directional compass), the team member with the road book should ideally also have a map board and at least two members should have odometers (in case one fails). These are as important a navigational tool on the bike as an altimeter is on foot. Make sure they are set to zero at major junctions and landmarks

Whenever you are on an easy surface, form a "drag line" and ride in each other's slipstream, taking turns on the front. However, be wary of cars when navigating on the move or changing places in the drag line.

Towing and pushing can be useful techniques for keeping the group together on climbs in particular. When being towed, ensure that you can ride a safe distance behind the bike in front with no tension on the tow system. One of the most common mistakes is for tows to be set too short. When set thus, the person towing has to always come completely off the tow in order to reduce pressure on the person helping - even though it may be more efficient to simply stay on and draft behind for small sections between hills.




Some people give rigidity to their bike towing systems by using insulating piping. Others use fishing rods. Check out as many different methods as possible at your next race and try to chat through the pros and cons of each with the users. Having a towing system that can be easily attached to many different bikes is optimal since then you need only take one or two with you within the team and can simply transfer them as people start to falter. Each person, irrespective of strength, should have a towing hook attached to their handlebar 'just in case'. These add little to no weight since the simplest model is a duck taped mini carabiner with the gate removed.

You need to practise both towing and being towed on the bike before you go into your first race. It isn't quite as straightforward a skill as you may imagine and pushing is even more difficult. It is often worth combining pushing and towing at the same time. The strongest person should tow and the most technical rider, push - either the person towing (to give them added power) or the person being towed (to take the weight off the person towing). When pushing you tend to be riding in the worst terrain

– for instance in the centre rut of a jeep track. Hence it takes a lot of skill to control your own bike one handed whilst also helping someone else.
























Working together as a team - On Land

 Most races are won or lost on foot and therefore maximising the team's speed during foot sections is crucial. In the old days it was common to see one person trailing slightly behind their team mates, maybe without even realising that they were reducing the forward progress of the team as a whole. It is quite common, for instance, for the female to struggle to keep pace with the rest of the team when walking over long distances, and therefore to have to keep running every few hundred meters to keep up. This tends to cause more blisters to form and also makes the team feel less cohesive since one person is always excluded from team planning and chatter. To optimise performance, it is worth putting people in this scenario on tow even if they don't really need to come onto it very frequently, just for the sake of keeping the whole team together for a greater proportion of time.

In efficient teams nowadays, you may even see two members being towed at any one time – or indeed, two or three people towing one person, if that person is having a particularly hard time or it is at a critical juncture tactically, in the race.

Towing is not the only option on foot, however. It is fairly easy to swap weight between team members whilst on the move and this is sometimes the most effective measure to take if there is a great disparity in strength between team members. In stage races, we often go as far as taking only one rucksack (with water and mandatory kit) between the team, starting out with the strongest person carrying it. If someone is particularly strong on foot but weaker on the bike, try simply swapping entire rucksacks between team members rather than attempting to adjust weights. This will generally be a far quicker solution but has to be set against any negativity in terms of preferences in sports drinks, access to specific race food etc.

Whatever methods you choose to use, in whichever discipline, make sure you have talked them through with your team mates ahead of time and that you are all agreed on likely courses of action in varying circumstances. Make sure also that your towing systems work and that you know which of your team members will, all things being equal, be likely to be playing which role in each discipline.

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