
DRAFTING

It is difficult to think of an issue in Triathlon that has generated as much discussion and often controversy, than the issue of drafting on the cycle leg.

“Drafting” occurs when an athlete follows closely in the path of another athlete or vehicle on the course, so as to be physically assisted because of the slip steaming effect created by the person or vehicle in front.

Drafting is allowed in the swimming and run legs of Triathlon but, generally speaking, for reasons of fairness and safety, the rules of Triathlon and Duathlons make it illegal to draft on the cycle leg. There are some exceptions to this. The cycle leg of some elite level triathlons such as the Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games, World Championships over the Olympic distance, and World Cup races permit drafting on the cycle leg. However, these events are very much the exceptions, and are limited to circumstances where the athletes concerned have appropriate skill levels on the bike.

So unless a Triathlon is specifically promoted as allowing drafting on the cycle leg, this conduct is against the rules of the sport.

Drafting in a non-drafting race is cheating. It provides an unfair advantage to the drafting athlete. It can be compared to taking a short cut, not completing the requisite number of laps, or starting before the start gun fires.

Despite this, many people are still observed drafting on the cycle legs. Some triathletes do this deliberately, and habitually. Sometimes they get caught by the technical officials and other times, they don't. However, invariably they become known for this tendency amongst other triathletes they are competing against. Once an athlete has been labelled a drafter, it is a difficult tag to shake. Curiously, some triathletes are oblivious to the tag they have been given by their peers.

A more common reason why people draft is lack of understanding of the drafting rules. For this reason, set out below is a step-by-step explanation of the key rules that together regulate the anti-drafting rule, the **drafting** and **blocking** rules. For further details on each of these, consult the ‘Triathlon Rules’ available at <http://www.triathlon.org.au/Documents/RaceCompRules02.PDF>

Preliminary points

- ◆ It is every triathlete's responsibility to know and understand the rules. If you don't understand these rules, contact a technical official and ask for an explanation.
- ◆ The drafting and blocking rules are just as important as each other in ensuring a fair and safe cycle leg. You will need to understand and obey them both in order to avoid being caught and penalised.
- ◆ One of the greatest sources of misunderstanding about the drafting rule is the size of the draft zone. The most common draft zone competitors will face in an event is the one behind a bicycle. The draft zone behind a bicycle and motorcycle is 7 metres long and 3 metres wide. Seven metres is a lot further than most people think. It is worthwhile getting out a tape measure and measuring it out on the ground.

THE DRAFTING RULE

- ◆ Drafting off another bicycle, motorcycle (eg technical official) or motor vehicle is forbidden.
- ◆ To avoid drafting, competitors must take all reasonable steps to avoid the “draft zone” of their bicycle overlapping with the draft zone of other bicycles, motorcycles or vehicles on the course.
- ◆ The size of the draft zone varies depending on whether the vehicle concerned is a bicycle/motorcycle or a vehicle.
- ◆ The rules have some deeming provisions, to provide certainty as to what constitutes “taking all reasonable steps” to avoid overlapping of draft zones.

Draft zone of a bicycle and motorcycle

The draft zone of a bicycle (including the competitor’s own bicycle) is a rectangle 7 metres long and 3 metres wide. The rectangle trails 7 metres back from the leading edge of the front wheel of the bicycle and extends 1.5 metres on each side of the front wheel.

Diagram 1 Distance of Drafting Zone for ALL Competitors

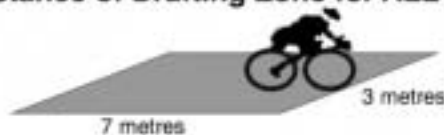


Diagram 2 Drafting

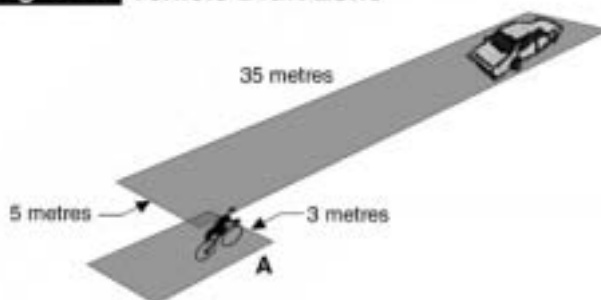


A has overtaken B and B is now drafting the lead cyclist A. B must drop out of A's draft zone before attempting to repass A. A must move to the Left Hand Side of the road when safe otherwise A can be called for blocking. B can only overtake A on A's Right Hand Side.

Draft zone of a vehicle

The draft zone of a vehicle is a rectangle 35 metres long and 5 metres wide. The centre of the front edge of the vehicle defines the centre of the leading edge of the 5 metre edge of the rectangle. The rectangle trails 35 metres back from that point.

Diagram 5 Vehicle Draft Zone

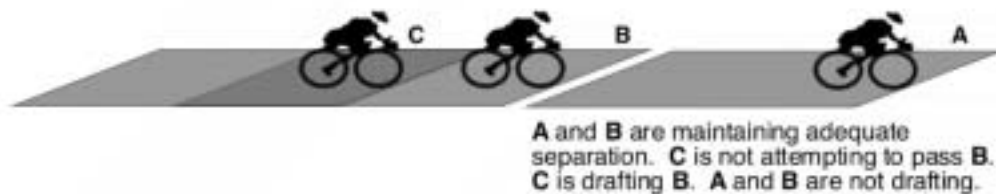


A is travelling at the same speed as the vehicle. A is drafting. A must move to the Left Hand Side of the road otherwise A can also be called for blocking.

AVOIDING DRAFTING

- ◆ The forward competitor on the cycle course has the “right of way”.
- ◆ It is the rear competitor’s responsibility to ensure that the draft zone of their bicycle does not overlap with the draft zone of the bicycle in front. If the rear competitor wishes to pass the forward competitor, in a manner which causes the draft zones of the 2 bicycles to overlap, the rear competitor may do so in a manner which results in the draft zone of the 2 bicycles overlapping as long as:
 - (1) the rear competitor completes the overtaking manoeuvre in a max^m 15 seconds; and
 - (2) at every instant during the overlapping of the draft zones, the rear competitor can be seen to be gaining on the forward competitor.

Diagram 4 Drafting and Not Drafting



Once overtaken by a rear competitor, the passed competitor loses the “right of way”. It is transferred to the overtaking competitor. This occurs as soon as the leading edge of the front wheel of the rear competitor’s bicycle has passed the leading edge of the front wheel of the other competitor’s bicycle. At that time, it is then the passed competitor’s responsibility to drop back **immediately** to ensure his/her draft zone does not overlap with the draft zone of the overtaking competitor. This can be quickly achieved by sitting up until out of the draft zone. The passed competitor **cannot** attempt to re-overtake the other competitor without first completing this manoeuvre ie dropping back to ensure the draft zones do not overlap.

THE BLOCKING RULE

Blocking is a rule that works hand in hand with the drafting rule. It is to prevent the circumstances that can lead to the formation of packs of cyclists. As you may not overtake on the left hand side, you must overtake on the right. However, if an athlete is failing to keep left and riding alongside another athlete and not attempting to pass, then faster athletes coming from behind will not be able to pass safely. They will be blocked by the athlete in front. This creates the situation where there can be a build of competitors and the likelihood of drafting.

An athlete will be considered to be blocking if they fail to keep left and impede the progress of another competitor. A competitor may be penalised for blocking even though there is not another competitor immediately behind them attempting to overtake.

The key to avoid blocking is to not ride beside another athlete unless you are overtaking them. If you are trying to overtake, you need to complete that manoeuvre by gaining constantly on the athlete you are trying to overtake, and have got past within 15 seconds (as above).

Diagram 3 Blocking



A and B are maintaining adequate separation between each other, even though they are abreast to one another. B is not drafting A in this instance. A however, is now in a BLOCKING position. If A remains out to the Right Hand Side, A will receive a blocking penalty.

ROLE OF TECHNICAL OFFICIALS

Technical officials take a pro-active approach to enforcing the rules of the sport. That is, where possible they will warn competitors that they may be about to break a rule, allowing the athlete an opportunity to avoid that conduct to do the right thing and keep racing.

However, an official is entitled to take whatever action is considered appropriate. That may be to warn an athlete, issue a yellow card, or issue a red card. The action taken will depend on the severity of the breach by the athlete, how long the athlete has been breaching the rule or whether the breach appears to be deliberate or blatant. Officials will also often exercise a level of discretion and common sense when determining how strictly they will enforce the drafting rules. In events such as a State Championships the rules will be often more strictly enforced than in entry level or novice events.

If you are caught drafting, there is no point in arguing with the technical official. They have nothing to gain by penalising you. They would in fact rather not have to penalize you, but are doing so to protect the interests and fairness of the race for the other athletes. They are just doing their job. They are not going to change their decision because you disagree with them. The most likely effect is that you will be required to wait for longer before continuing the event. In addition, the official may upgrade the violation from a yellow card to a red card (which is an indication that a violation report will be provided to the race referee, who will then decide whether the athlete is to be disqualified.)

Further, arguing with a technical official can earn you the label of not only being a drafter, but also a bad sport. If you are penalised for drafting, the smartest response (and the one that will win you the most respect from your peers), is to cop it sweet, take the penalty, and learn from the experience. No one likes drafters, but everyone hates cheats who whinge about being caught. (No one believes them either.)

If you believe you have been unfairly judged by a technical official, consider using the appeals and protest system available under race rules. Certain penalties may be appealed and protests can be lodged against other athletes. If you wish to undertake this course of action, report it to a technical official immediately after completing your race. However, note that penalties applied for drafting are generally 'on the spot' and can't be appealed. A Technical Official uses a judgement decision when calling for drafting or blocking, which is not appealable. When it comes to drafting, the key is to play it safe.

Summary

Each athlete is totally in control of whether they draft or not. The drafting rule is an important part of our sport, which you agree to abide by when you enter a triathlon. (Read that waiver you sign each event). Avoiding drafting requires an understanding of the rules and a level of discipline and concentration when competing. It is very easy to quickly find yourself behind a slower athlete

in front or passed by a faster athlete who cuts across and puts you into a drafting situation. But by being alert to what is going on around you, and understanding and the applying the rules, you can avoid drafting and enjoy a long career in triathlon without ever fearing a transgression of one of the most fundamental rules of our sport.

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Endorsed by Triathlon Australia Technical Committee (TATC)
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