



Race Around Ireland

Crew Guide

Adapted from The Race Across America

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Introduction

This guide has been put together to help you prepare for The Race Around Ireland and the Irish Ultra Challenge. The information has been adapted from articles by The Race Across America (RAAM) and combined with our own knowledge. It also includes tips and hints from other useful articles, books and research papers. You want to give yourself every chance of competing to the best of your ability and finishing the event will take great team work from your cyclists and crew. The information in this article is just as relevant to solo racers as it is to teams, the only difference is that a solo racer is part of a team with just one cyclist.

Having the best crew possible is essential to getting the racers around the 2,190 kilometre circuit. It is important that your crew have different skills and characteristics that they will bring to the experience and each should understand how it feels to cycle in tough conditions.

As every ultra-endurance rider and experienced crew member knows, people who you think you know intimately and have seen all their sides, when put into a stressful situation, in closed, cramped quarters, for days, often exhibit a whole new side of themselves you never saw. Sometimes it is not a pretty sight. As three time RAAM winner Pete Penseyres once said, the crew cannot win the race for you, but they can lose it.

What are the most important characteristics your crew member needs to have?

Your crew need to be:

Dedicated team players

Commitment to getting the racers to the finish line is essential if your team are to finish. This includes working with other crew members as a team. They should have the ability to focus on the goal and put the priority on the racer.

Flexible

The Race Around Ireland will twist any plans you might make. Everyone needs to be ready to change roles and respond to new plans immediately.

Resourceful and Inventive

Your team may encounter situations you couldn't possibly have thought of. The goal is to strive to continue down the road with whatever is available.

In possession of a sense of humour

Enough said!!

Good and Bad

Consider the following *Good* and *Bad* characteristics of crew members as outlined by RAAM veteran Michael Shermer.

Good

- Desire to crew with an urge for adventure and an ability to rough it.
- Able to not shower.
- Able to get dirty and keep smiling.
- Sense of humour.
- Thoughtful to others.
- Able to avoid arguments by biting their tongue.
- Smart and inventive.
- Able to maintain some semblance of hygiene even during the rough parts of the race.
- Someone who is totally committed to the rider, even if the rider does not perform to his or her own expectations.
- Able to catch short naps and still remain alert.
- Able to drive safely.
- Not too verbose (silence is often golden in the support vehicles).

Bad

- Egocentric.
- Will not wash even when the opportunity arises.
- Does not clean up after him or herself after preparing food.
- Lazy.
- Poor attitude.
- Lacks enthusiasm because rider is doing poorly in the race.
- Wants to be in the limelight.
- Moody, sarcastic, rude, lewd, and crude.
- Talks too much.

Navigation

Navigation is a key task in getting from the start to the finish. It's a relatively easy task that can be learned with just a little instruction and a few pages reading. When navigating in Ireland there are the possibilities of coming across signs that are either poorly marked, facing the wrong way or even giving you conflicting information but follow your routebook to the letter and you will be fine. You also have to realise that just because there is grass on the centre of the road does not make you lost. Route designer Joe Roche calls these roads "*cycling duel carriageways*". Read on and you'll learn (almost) everything you need to know about navigation to stay on course.

The Basics

The crew member in the passenger seat of the Support Vehicle is generally the navigator. They will follow the routebook and communicate with the driver and racer where they are and when the next turn is. ***Everyone should know how to navigate*** as tasks change.

The routebook is the bible of navigation so you will need to know how to read the routebook. Reading directions is usually not that hard and you might be able to figure it out on your own. The routebook itself does have a section with hints instructions to optimise your use of the routebook. Marked in the routebook you will find:

- Distances of all information points
- Turn directions
- Notes on whether a junction has traffic lights, stop signs or yield signs
- Type of junction such as, crossroads, T-junction, Y-junction, etc.
- Signposts for route direction
- Road numbers such as N69, R552, etc.
- Towns and villages
- Information on road width/condition
- Cautions such as railway crossings, descents, bad bends, etc.
- Information on climbs such as gradients and climb lengths.
- Time Station GPS co-ordinates
- Any other notes we feel are useful, such as distance to next 24 hour fuel station.
- Some parts of the route are restricted for campervans due to the nature of the roads and these sections are also marked in the routebook.

We try and give as much information as possible about route turns and if the racer passes through a turn which doesn't have a clear signpost, we will inform of a landmark (such as a church or school) which closely follows the route turn. This helps to confirm that the racer is on the correct road.

Some lines in the routebook will hold more importance than others, such as route turns. The **best navigators highlight every turn in the routebook with a highlighter marker**. This way when you open to any page you know exactly where the turns are so you don't have to scan. Every page of the route page begins at a Time Station and the mileage starts again from zero. Landmarks, reference points, and turns are identified by the mileage from the last Time Station. You should reset the **vehicle trip odometer at every Time Station** to make following the mileages in the routebook simple. If you forget to reset the trip odometer, you will have some maths to do to figure out where you are. It's best to remember to reset the odometer. **Anyone who is in the vehicle should help remind the driver to reset the odometer at each Time Station. You might consider taping a reminder onto the steering wheel also.**

As you pass each landmark, reference point, or turn you should check it off in the routebook. This will verify that you have seen each point. With landmarks marked as often as possible, you will know very quickly if you are lost. **In many building professions (carpentry, electrical, plumbing) they have a saying – "Measure twice, cut once." In other words check and double check the navigation so you follow the route.** This is really all there is to it. With some diligence and paying attention, every vehicle can get around the country without getting lost.

Recommended navigation supplies:

- Highlighter marker – to highlight turns

- Pens – to mark landmarks and make notes
 - Calculator – for data collection
 - Atlas – Each crew is issued with an Ordnance Survey Ireland road atlas which has the full route marked. These atlases are useful for giving you an overall idea of where you are situated.
 - Routebook
 - Flashlight/Headlamp – to see at night.
- A clipboard and additional pads of paper can also be helpful.

Time Station Call-Ins

At every Time Station, you must call Race Headquarters and let them know what time you arrived. Time Station Call-Ins are not a part of navigation, but it is best if this task is assigned to the navigator. They have the routebook and know exactly when the racer passes a Time Station. This can prevent confusion as to who should call in or having multiple call-ins. The original purpose of calling in at time stations was to follow the progress of the racer. It is true that this function has become more or less irrelevant nowadays through the advent of GPS tracking, however the call ins are still vital in order to maintain contact with the race organisation.

Data Collection

The routebook has plenty of space to make notes or record time and mileage data which can prove valuable during the race. Many racers also like to review this data after the race. Race strategy and planning sometimes depend on this data as well. Some racers thrive on data like this. This can also give the Navigator something to do.

You can record:

- Times at each Time Stations.
- Times at various turns or references points.
- When and where you stopped and for how long
- When and where racer exchanges happened.
- When and where you filled up with fuel.

With all this data you can calculate:

- Average speeds for various sections and for each racer.
- How long each racer is on the road?
- How efficient your stops are.
- Fuel efficiency of your support vehicles to know when the next fill up is needed.

What happens if you get lost or are off course?

Getting lost does happen. If you get lost it's best to ***remain calm and composed***, no matter how tired you are or how annoyed the cyclist may be. Being calm will help clarify thinking so you can quickly get back on course.

First, try to verify where you are. If you have a working GPS device it can tell you exactly where you are. You may have an advantage because returning to the course might be as simple as programming the GPS device to provide directions back to the route. To know where you are, you will need to find a road sign or intersection. Review your atlas which you should have with you. Call race headquarters who should be able to help you. Try driving back the way you came. Once you are back on course, make sure you restart from where you went off course. **Re-joining the route at a point further along it than where you went off-route is a rule violation.** If you're not sure go back a few miles to check. If you are lost, rules allow you to put the racer in the vehicle and drive them back to the course. Use this as a rest period for your racer. Have one or two crew attend to getting back to the course and have another crew person attend to the racer. Perhaps some rest, perhaps some food, perhaps a change of clothing, perhaps a massage. Treat the situation as a rest stop, albeit an unplanned one. Rules allow a Team member to start riding immediately from where you went off course. For this, you will need to determine where you went off course and then notify the rest of your crew. Another racer may or may not be ready to ride and it may be quicker just to get your racer back to the course. Once you're down the road a bit and feeling settled, review what happened so hopefully it doesn't happen again. Every crew member is probably going to make at least one mistake during the race, don't play the blame game. There's nothing that can be done, so get back to the race and focus on getting to the finish. This is a situation where the flexibility and resourcefulness of a good crew member is so valuable because every situation is different. It is certainly frustrating to be lost, but remain calm and take the opportunity to attend to your racer.

Sleep Management

Sleep management is critical for everyone involved with the Race Around Ireland. This includes racers and crew. If someone can't function well because of lack of sleep, they are not much use to a racer, fellow crew members, or the race; they may in fact become a liability. No matter how you are involved with the race, don't expect to get much sleep. You certainly won't get your regular 8 hours; many crew and racers will not get more than 4 hours of sleep each day. You should also be aware that your sleep may be many blocks of time versus one continuous block of time. The lucky ones are those that can sleep anywhere and in any position and of course you might gain that skill on, a round the country crewing experience. When, where, and how racers and crew sleep could be some of the most critical and logistically challenging decisions of the race. In order for you to get sleep, it must be planned, it just doesn't happen. Set out a plan so you get some sleep.

Basic Hints to Induce Sleep

Here are a few easy hints to help everyone with sleep

- Sleep whenever possible.
- An eye pillow/eye cover might be handy.
- Earplugs might be helpful.
- Try to powernap for 15-30 minutes at a time.
- Even closing your eyes for 5 or 10 minutes without actual sleep may help.
- If you can't sleep, just lay back and rest and close your eyes.

Crew Schedule

Our normal daily pattern is that we generally know we are going to go to sleep in the evening, sleep for a number of hours and then wake up. Sleep is part of a pattern and it's predictable. Ultra distance events disrupt any normal patterns of sleep, but patterns are important. You should put in place a schedule of who is doing what and when they are doing it. That schedule will also include sleep time for everyone, including the crew chief and racers. Having a schedule will help everyone to know what's happening and it will help everyone if they know they will get some sleep and when they will get it. Some of the challenge of the Race Around Ireland is the necessity to constantly change plans. The crew schedule, the scheduled times for crew changes, and regular sleep for crew should **NOT** be one of those changes. *Everyone needs to be on time and ready for crew changes.*

Team Racer Schedules

Team racers will be on a rotating riding schedule and thus can know when they have an opportunity to sleep. They will rarely get more than 1-3 hours of sleep at a time. Obviously the plan is to sleep while another team racer is racing. The sleep schedule for racers and crew may be different and you must ensure everyone has some scheduled sleep.

Where to Sleep?

For some, sleeping in a moving vehicle can be a challenge, but it's a necessity of the race. It is advisable to have somewhere horizontal where racers can sleep. A horizontal surface for crew sleep is advisable wherever possible though crew may end up sleeping in a chair or elsewhere. Racers get priority in sleeping on beds.

Sleep Anywhere

It is truly possible, and advisable, to sleep anywhere, or at least rest anywhere. Find little segments to rest. If you're the navigator and there is clearly no turns for fifteen kilometres, close your eyes for a few minutes. The driver will surely wake you if something is needed. Some opportunities can be found throughout the race.

Let Them Sleep

Once a crew or racer goes for sleep, you should do your best to let them sleep for their allotted time. If there is a true emergency, then contact them for help. For example, running out of fuel or supplies is a matter of poor planning, not a matter of emergency. You may end up contacting your sleeping crew for help if you run out of fuel – and if you do, they are more than likely to be annoyed and upset. This kind of situation is unnecessary and greatly disrupts the rhythm and synchronicity of the crew.

Staying Awake

You may have situations where you need to stay awake or you are part of a crew that follows a racer under night conditions. There are well known aids for staying awake. Caffeine in various forms usually works for most people. This can include coffee, soft drinks,

tablets, or various energy drinks. Remember – trying to stay awake is not as safe as taking a quick nap. **You also note that the race organisation takes safety extremely seriously and if a driver is deemed to be dangerously tired they will be told to stop by a race official.**

Tricks for staying awake:

- Frequent eating gives you something to do. Cereal bar, raisins, nuts.
- Drink lots and then you'll have to use the bathroom, but you have to hold it since you're driving.
- Chewing gum.
- Put the vehicle window down and have wind blowing on you. Or perhaps just aim the vents at your face.
- Crank the heat or the cold in the car and keep changing it.
- Talk. Ask deep questions of life.
- Jumping jacks, push-ups, sit-ups – something to get the blood moving. Some of these can be a challenge as while you are trying to stay awake, others may be sleeping.

To keep your Racer awake – WITHOUT putting them at risk:

- Music
- Tell jokes or read them humour
- Read them messages of support from friends and family
- Read them something they enjoy, perhaps the newspaper or magazine.

Do **NOT** use any anti-sleep drugs unless that is a normal prescription for you. This is a violation of the drug policy of the race.

Supplies

You should definitely consider bringing a small pillow or just a pillow case to stuff some clothes in to be used as a pillow.

Watch out for each other

Your success depends on everyone getting sleep and functioning well. Look out for each other to ensure everyone is getting some sleep. It is also your responsibility to make sure you are rested and well and fit enough to proceed safely.

New Frontiers

The Race Around Ireland is likely going to compel you to try things you've never tried before, including sleep. Most people have never tried going for a week straight with just a few hours of sleep a night. Perhaps you did in college as you studied for exams, but most are now a bit older. The human body is capable of mighty feats; just consider what your racer is doing. You are also capable of more than you know and you can go farther than you know. It's a rewarding experience to get there and push your limits. On the other hand, pay attention to when you've really hit your limits. Know when you are out of it and when you really need sleep.

Jekyll and Hyde

Without enough sleep, many people can get irritable, cranky, impatient – their behaviour changes. Be *patient* with each other. This is usually more of an issue during the first part of the race since most people have never been in a situation like this before. One of the most important things to remember is that it's a team effort and you are all working towards a common goal. This means sacrificing some of your own comfort and sleep for the good of the team and to help the racers excel.

Sleep Early

The beginning of the race is exciting, the adrenaline is flowing. The early part of the race is one of the most important times to try to sleep and to establish a pattern. If you get behind on sleep early on, you will struggle to catch up.

Crew Packing List

This will give you some idea of what crew should (and shouldn't) bring for the race. Bring enough clothing so that you can be adequately comfortable in warm or freezing cold weather but don't bring too much; there's just not enough room and you won't spend much time outside, you'll likely be in a vehicle with heat or air conditioning. Each crew's bag should be no bigger than 25cm x 35cm x 50cm.

Hints

- Remember space is at an absolute premium for everyone.
- Pack as if you are a college student going backpacking for a month with minimal supplies.
- Bring items that are easy to clean in a laundrette or even better in a sink.
- Bring items that you aren't too concerned about getting beat up.
- Quick drying nylon, such as often used in travel clothes, is great.
- Consider having a laundry bag for each crew. Then everyone's bag can just be thrown in together and there are no worries about sorting.

Items to Bring

- Sunglasses
- Baseball hat or other hat
- Shorts (1-2) (even if the weather is bad, crew will most likely be in a heated vehicle most of the time)
- Shirts (2-3)
- Long pants (1) – the pants that convert from shorts to long pants are perfect.
- Long sleeve shirt (sweatshirt, sweater, or fleece) (1)
- Socks and underwear
- Shoes (1)
- Long fingered gloves (1) – something thin.
- Rain jacket/wind shell (1)
- Pillow – a small favourite travel pillow
- Headlamp – this is a must

- Coffee mug or water bottle
- Driver's license
- Passport
- Swimsuit
- Watch or phone with alarm
- Camera
- Toiletries (towel, toothpaste, toothbrush, shaving supplies, lip balm)
- Cash

In general, you want to leave your duffel bag in one vehicle and in one place throughout the race. You should get at it to change clothes. You should bring a small bag to carry with you when you move to a follow vehicle.