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Racing Camouflage

Since the riders' actions will often be dictated by the course, take the time to study the course carefully. It is not only a good idea to ride a course before a race, but also to watch a race on that course. Regardless of the category of the field, certain things will happen in every race. The riders will usually choose the same route through certain areas or going through difficult turns. Make mental notes of everything that happens. Discuss what you see with your teammates, if you have any. Use this knowledge to help with your race strategy and keep your eyes open during other people's races.

One thing that can be of very real help is using what might be called camouflage. In the military, they use camouflage to hide people or things from the enemy. At the very beginning of the book we talked about having the enemy die for his country. We don't actually expect them to die, but we want our rivals on the course to work harder than we do. The objects on a course can sometimes be used to temporarily hide a rider's location.



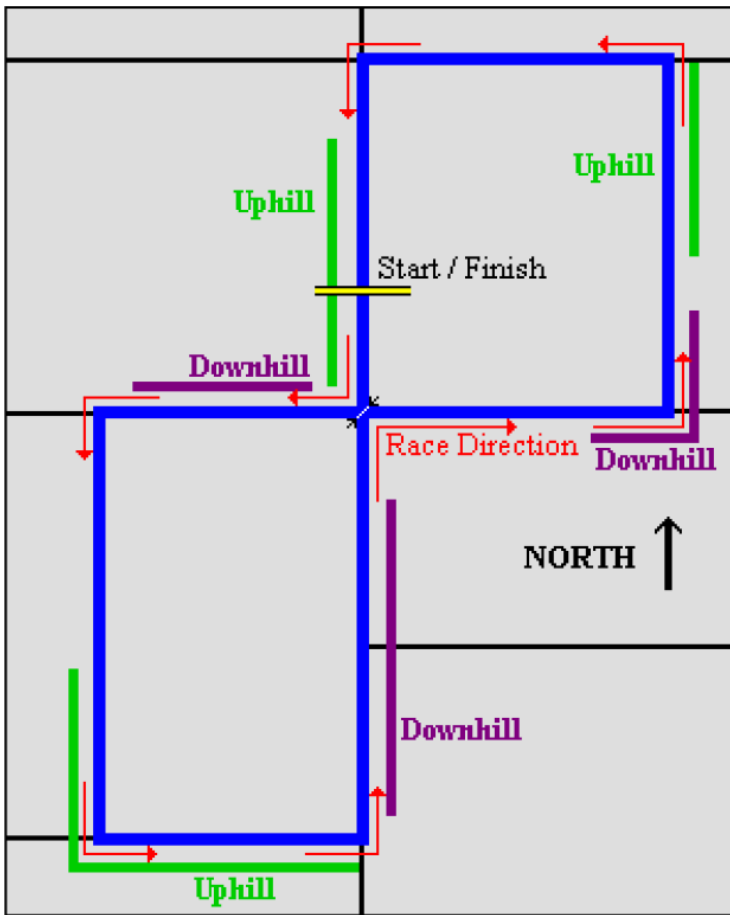
In this first of two pictures, an athlete is far ahead of the viewer. Because of the objects, shadows or visual shapes around the street, the rider in this picture is hard to spot right away. If another rider is chasing after him, it will take that chasing rider at least several seconds to spot where this rider is. Only his rapid movement along the barricades will give him away. This is why most animals will remain motionless to avoid detection by predators. Movement is what draws attention. The more dramatic the motion, the quicker the detection.

In the second picture, there are several riders up the road, but again they are hard to spot because of the shapes of the trees and the shadows on the road. Moving in and out of sunlight can make it hard to see riders ahead or judge the distance to them. Even with a good pair of sunglasses, your eyes need a moment to adjust to light conditions. If you are moving in and out of very bright sunlight, it may be very difficult to see who is ahead of you and how far away they are.



Going back to the first picture, there is another benefit in riding close to the barricades. Almost every time you ride, you experience a head wind or some type of air turbulence. Part of the struggle in riding a bicycle is overcoming the resistance of the air. The wide open area of the middle of the street is also where the greatest amount of turbulence is. The closer you are to the barricades, the less turbulence there is. This calmer air is easier to go through, so you save energy riding there. Take advantage of these types of course benefits whenever you race.

There are other types of course benefits that can help when attempting to get away from the rest of the peloton. These pictures were taken at the former home of the U.S. PRO Criterium Championship which was held for a long time in Downers Grove, Illinois. It was run right in the center of town, so there were many buildings to block the rider's view of the rest of the course. The course consisted of a squared off figure 8 on wide, smoothly paved streets with eight turns, two downhill sections and two uphill stretches. The finishing stretch was uphill coming out of a flat left turn.



On the Southwest end of the course is a small hill. The pro riders climb this hill 100 times. As the race progressed that hill would begin to bog riders down and help separate the field a bit. The hill was followed by the next half of the course being almost completely downhill. Riders who were caught in the field on the short climb often make a dash on the following shallow downhill section.

The street changed from a narrow side street to a main street 40 feet wide. Speeds would get very high and riders sometimes lost control during the mad dash down the first part of that small descent.

The changes in speed alone can wear out the riders. In a shorter race the effect is perhaps not as significant, but still plays a big part in the outcome. Changes in speed also cause riders to become anxious. Once the peloton gets split apart, it becomes very difficult for the riders to keep track of where everyone is on the course. Even with race directors using radios, riders could slip out of sight. That meant if you were chasing, you might not know how long you have to chase. It also meant if you

were in a break away, you may not know how big your lead still was.

Every course has its own version of camouflage. The secret is learning how to spot it and then use it. The riders who are the most successful have great powers of observation. They know where they are and what is going on around them. You may have strong, powerful legs, but they won't help you if you don't know what is going on. I was at a criterium stage of Superweek and a group of Pro/1/2 riders got away in a break and lapped the field. With 2 laps to go, some of those same riders attacked and got away far enough to win the race by a big margin. After the race, some of the chasing riders complained that the announcer had not told the chasing riders what was going on. The announcer replied, "It's your job to know what's going on in your race. Not mine!"

Know your job. Know what's going on.

Good Luck!