

# How to be a Cycle USA Free Lance Writer

City, State, Date (of event)

By John Doe

So you want to be a Cycle USA writer. It's relatively easy and fun to do, and while it takes a little time, it will be very gratifying. Working with clubs and promoters as a contributor will also give you an entirely new look into our sport. You'll find the more you get involved, the more you'll enjoy it. No one gets rich from doing this... but it is very cool seeing your work in print, and helping make our sport that much better along the way. We pay roughly \$2 per column inch of story, and \$7.00 for each of your published photographs. When you've proven yourself to your local club or promoter the door is open to negotiate discounted rider and gate fees. Most of our writers have had this offered to them without even having to ask. Clubs and promoters recognize how important it is to get this event coverage into Cycle USA, and for the most part, they are eager to work with someone willing to make it happen.

## **How to write your story**

Biggest tip, pick up any past issue and read a few of the articles. Identify what you like, what you may not... everyone has their own style. Find what works for you. Follow the style of this article. Type your reports in upper and lower case (not all upper case). Microsoft Word files are the most common submitted.

At the top of your first page begin with the title suggestion (headline). Next line the location and date of the event, then insert your name, and that of anyone else contributing photos or helping (see above). Then begin your story. Your opening paragraph introduces the event, and should highlight something about it... a season opener, special contingency event, or maybe just a great night that was filled with exciting racing. This is a perfect place to introduce anything special from the event. Be sure to introduce your story in your first sentence. Example: Over 300 entries made for an exciting and fast paced day at Old Settlers Park. Or, a sentence that follows up on the headline, leading the reader into the rest of the story.

Then go on with the rest of the story. The first time you mention someone, give both their first and last names. After that, use only the last name (unless multiple people share the same last name). Other exception would be if there was a large gap before that person came back into the story, such as in a different class much later. If about a race, make your story tell us more than we could get from merely reading the results. If Joe Smith won, how did Smith get the lead? What made the race interesting? A lap by lap by lap paragraph isn't as interesting as a summary with the highlights.

Get those rider comments, they tell the best story. It may feel uncomfortable in the beginning but you'll soon realize that the riders love to talk about the race and see their comments in the magazine. Include a few words from someone in the club, or the promoter. Sometimes there will be a special tone to the day because of a sponsor, if that sponsor is there, get a little insight.

When you use rider comments, introduce those comments with who they are from, and let them feed into your article. Example, if you are writing about a particularly muddy section on the track, mention it, then let a rider's comments/ insight give the details. Then make a transition to the next part of that topic, or to your next paragraph. Rider comments should only be "part" of your story, as they usually do not tell a complete story on their own. With rider comments, only use

what is relevant, you do not need to include an entire statement, as long as you don't change the intent of the comments. A small digital recorder really helps!

Don't feel required to write something about every class or division. Pick a few diverse ones and concentrate on them. Try to pick classes with different riders. If covering a motocross, don't write about one moto without mentioning the other. You get half the story. If the racing in any class was particularly boring, or if you didn't catch what was going on, don't even mention it in your story. If you cover the same type of event at the same facility month after month, skip around to different classes. It isn't necessary to always highlight the A classes, a variety is far better. Cycle USA is about recognizing all different level riders.

What made the event special? Was there major changes to the track? Special awards or payout? Was this a memorial race, or ride. A fund raiser? A rider getting their first ever win... the personal success angles like that are always a hit. Include this info with your story, and it makes it all easier to write. There's always something special and unique at any event. Sometimes finding it is a challenge, but writing on it is always rewarding.

Include results with your race reports, listing by class the top five finishes in the order they finished. Remember, we're all about recognizing riders, and including results recognizes a great number of riders that may not get mentioned in the body of an article. Getting a results file from the promoter is key. It's always best to make this arrangement in advance. Explore the type of files posted on-line, we can help with formatting the info. Now days, you should never be typing this info into an article. The results file is needed for confirming rider names and spelling, writing captions, and often for filling in details as you write. If you have any problem arranging, or getting results from an event, contact us here at Cycle USA as soon as possible.

## **Photos**

Photos complement the written coverage of any event, and like results, are a required component. A photo should tell a story. Single rider style shots are nice to look at, a pack shot at the start or during the event adds action and gives the greatest amount of exposure to more riders. "Get close", and remember that one good photo is much better than three poor ones. Some of the best photos are off the track – examples; a new rider with a first trophy, a group of riders together after or before the race, a family sharing a moment with their rider, or a group of course workers together. Something different, recognizing a moment in our sport. Keep the large files large... do not reduce the file size or quality level – we need high-resolution images. Large photos will need to be sent one per e-mail to clear our servers. Usually you are best skipping e-mail all together. A vast majority of our contributors use a free service called [www.wetransfer.com](http://www.wetransfer.com). Super easy, free, and it eliminates e-mail problems, and there's nothing to download!

## **Photo Captions**

If at all possible... include photo caption suggestions with your article, right after the article is as great. Pulling them out of e-mails, or off photo titles really slows the process. Also, if we can't identify a rider photo, there's a good chance we won't be able to use it.

Example:

1234.jpg - John Marcus with his father Tom, after John took his first win in the 50Sr class.

2934.jpg – Mark Smith clearing the new triple in the 250B class.

## **Deadlines**

Write the story while it is still fresh in your mind. To ensure that articles are as current as possible, your event coverage, photos, and results need to be sent to Cycle USA shortly after the event. Our goal is to have adequate time to give your work the attention it deserves. Materials

received long after an event may not be used. The sooner we receive your coverage, the better. When in doubt, contact us. We also try to carry only one like event per promoter per issue, insuring we have a good mix and a balanced publication. If a club or promoter runs a couple events per month, pick one that gives you enough time to get it turned around. If covering a double header, mention both days in the opening, then shift to writing on one of the days only. Pick one, and stick with it only.

### **Tips and Techniques**

- Keep a copy of your story and compare the published, edited version with your original. Write short sentences. Keep stories short, or at least to the point. Long articles are fine... if they keep moving and covering different classes, or aspects of an event. Wording just to fill space... or blue-sky text gets cleaned out. Tell us the interesting part. Leave out the dull stuff and the things that didn't happen: "We thought it might rain, but it didn't." Who cares? The word "but" often indicates it may not be needed or interesting.
- Contact the club or promoter in advance to let them know you will need access for photos and results immediately following the event. If you have a problem, we will help get the ball rolling. Doing this in advance is so much better. Also, avoid covering an event already being covered – we can only use one article... any doubts, contact us.
- The first story is always the hardest. It gets easier with time. A recorder really does help. Talk slow, and again get the interesting stuff. A full lap by lap description isn't as good as a summary with a few valuable details or comments. When you record notes make them short, and only on details, if you rattle on and on at the race, it is far worse listening to it at home when you are writing. It will quickly remind you not to write the same way.
- NOTE: All National level events, interviews and other special interest articles must be coordinated/ approved through Cycle USA in advance. We will handle those assignments on an individual basis. Our first priority is always local District based events/ rides and on our fellow members at those events.

Thanks for your interest, we're looking forward to reading your stories soon.

Chuck Melcher

chuck@cycleusa.com

(262) 321-0397