

Guide to Making Your Own Permanent

Perhaps you've dreamed of an R-12 but can't afford the time and money to travel to distant lands to get the required rides? Or maybe you just wish that the local brevet season were longer?

Design a permanent! Unlike a brevet, a permanent is a RUSA-sanctioned ride that can be ridden any time, not just on one specific date. A permanent can be any distance greater than 100K. Any RUSA member can be a permanent owner.

Until recently, you had to travel hours to a neighboring state to ride a permanent. While some states like Texas, California, and Oregon have dozens of permanents, Thornport-Caldwell is Ohio's first and, for now, only permanent. You can help build randonneuring in the Buckeye State by becoming a permanent owner and expanding our permanent options.

The rules and regulations on designing permanents and the responsibilities of a permanent owner are found at the RUSA web site at <http://www.rusa.org/permrules.html>. RUSA also addresses some questions about offering and riding permanents here: <http://www.rusa.org/permfaq.html>. While RUSA is your starting point and official source for all things permanent-related, below are some thoughts from my experience of having recently planned and designed a route and having gone through RUSA's permanent approval process:

Route design: Where do you want to go and how do you want to get there? You're the boss, so start where you want to and go wherever your wanderlust takes you. For the best way to get from here to there, consult your own experience, local clubs' maps and cue sheets, GPS maps, TOPO maps, the DeLorme atlas series, and Google Maps. Don't worry about whether anyone will ever ride your route. Build it and they will come.

Route "shape": Out-and-back? Loop? Clover leaf? Point-to-point? Each has its merits. While loops provide always-new terrain, out-and-backs are much easier to design. The clover leaf, especially on longer routes, lets a self-sufficient rider use the start/finish as an intermediate resting point where she might resupply from a stash of food or gear strategically left there. Point-to-point routes offer an option not otherwise available to solo randonneurs.

Controls: The availability of controls may dictate in part where your route goes and what shape it takes. Ideally, controls should be 30 to 60 miles apart (closer to 30 is preferable on shorter routes). Make sure that your route cannot be short-cut; if it can, you will need to add a control or re-route.

Inspect your route: There is no substitute for actually seeing your route in person. Create a draft cue sheet from your maps and other sources, and then go out and try to navigate by it. I recommend doing this by car, rather than by bike, so that you can more quickly choose and reconnoiter new roads on the fly. Your inspection may reveal badly signed turns, non-existent signage, signage that doesn't agree with any map, roads that are dirt, gravel, or permanently impassable, and dangerous conditions such as blind turns, busy roads, roads that might be especially prone to ice and snow accumulation and aggressive dogs. You'll also need to scout the controls: when do they open and close? Do they have restrooms? Are there other services

(food, hotel) nearby? What are some locations you can use for information controls and what are some potential questions and answers you can use for them? At the start/finish, is there a safe place for the rider to leave his car for the duration of the ride?

No matter how well you planned in advance, you'll need to make significant adjustments based on your inspection. You may even need a second recon trip to check your changes and re-worked cue sheet. Don't be discouraged -- this is part of the planning process. (I checked Thornport-Caldwell twice before submitting it because of the number and extent of revisions made after the first trip.) Remember, everything that you discover and fix on your recon mission is a problem that a rider will never have to confront.

Make your final cue sheet: Your efforts will result in a cue sheet that any cyclist should be able to navigate by in poor lighting conditions while sleep deprived. Everyone has his or her own cue sheet preferences, so pick whatever format you like -- you're the boss. Most RBAs and cycling clubs will share their cue sheet templates with you, so find a format you like and reach out to someone for the Word or Excel file so you don't have to reinvent the wheel.

Consider including on your cue sheet or in an additional information sheet some notes specific to your route. Potential topics are the availability of hotels near the start/finish for non-local riders, whether and where there are services between controls, unique or especially dangerous hazards, whether and where cell service can be had, and local emergency contact numbers.

To Charge or Not to Charge: Permanent owners charge anywhere from nothing to \$10 to ride a route. Of course, no one designs a permanent for its potential to generate revenue. However, a reasonable charge to recoup the costs of designing and maintaining the route and dealing with paperwork and postage is totally acceptable. Also, a nominal fee might increase the level of commitment from your registrants -- one who has even a small amount of skin in the game will more likely follow through and ride rather than become a DNS statistic.

The approval process: You'll submit to RUSA a map of your route, a cue sheet, and a sample brevet card showing your controls and their opening and closing times. Official approval takes several weeks, and you may be asked questions about your route and further revisions may be needed. Approval from every RBA whose territory your route passes through is required. Consider short-circuiting this process by sharing your route with those folks before you submit it to RUSA. Not only will it speed up the approval process, but those RBAs will likely have helpful comments and suggestions that will make your route better.

Solicit feedback and manage expectations: Once the world is riding your route, ask your riders what they think of it. How can it be improved? Did it meet expectations as far as ease of terrain, navigation, scenery, and road conditions? Recognize that your riders will come from all over and will bring a diversity of randonneuring experience to your ride. "Hilly" in Ohio means something very different than it does in California. Acceptable pavement conditions in Oregon are worse than anything you can find in Morrow County. "Dangerous dog" in Ohio means be vigilant; in Kentucky, it means wear body armor. Keep this diversity in mind when marketing your permanent and taking questions about it from potential riders.