

5. Start, finish and control points

Start and finish points

Most events start on the outskirts of towns or, where facilities are available, in the countryside. This minimises the risk that your riders will have to cycle in heavy traffic. However, remember that a road that is busy during the day may be quiet when your riders are setting off or returning.

It's best to have the start and finish at the same point. If not, make sure they're as close together as possible, and that it's easy for riders to get back to the start.

Here are a few suggestions of where to look for a base for your event.

- **Village halls** – there are thousands of village halls in the United Kingdom, and in some areas competition is fierce for business. This means you can often find one to hire for as little as £50. However weekends can be popular, so it pays to book as far in advance as possible. **Top tip!** If a hall is booked on the day you want it, find out what time that booking is. If your event has an early start and a late finish, you might be able to fit around another booking.
- **Sports clubhouses** – although very few cycling clubs have their own venues, a lot of football, cricket and rugby clubs have clubhouses attached to their pitches. Using them at weekends might be difficult during that sport's season, but you can often hire them easily at other times.
- **Cafés** – if you don't want to cater yourself, or risk the outlay of hiring somewhere, then you might be able to bribe a local café to open early or close late for you.
- **Car park** – basic events often start in a car park, ideally with a public toilet and shops nearby.

Facilities

The base that you use for your event will determine what facilities you offer. The more basic the event, the more basic the facilities.

- **Basic amenities** – if you plan to use a car park for the start, try to make sure that there are some loos and a shop open nearby.
- **Food and drink** – what you provide is up to you. It's not vital to provide anything at the start, but much more important at the finish. It's best to keep it simple, especially if you don't have a food hygiene certificate. However that doesn't mean that you should skimp on quality. Homemade cakes always go down well, as do soup and sandwiches. It's better to buy in food that you'd be happy to eat yourself, and to over order. That way, you can be sure of not running out, and any leftover grub can go into your larder afterwards!
- **Accommodation** – if your event is 300km or longer, you might want to consider finding floorspace for riders to sleep on when they get back. Sometimes organisers open the base for riders the night before the event, to make a morning start easier. Ask riders to bring their own bedding. **If there is anyone aged under 18 riding your event, make sure you provide somewhere separate for them to sleep.**
- **Toilets and showers** – toilets are essential, showers less so. However if the weather's dreadful during your event, or it's over 300km, riders may find a shower a very useful amenity to have.
- **Bag drop** – some riders find it useful to leave a bag at the base when they set off. For example, they may have cycled down to the event with panniers, and want to offload them before the event. If you can find somewhere to store bags safely, even if it's in the boot of your car, someone will put it to good use.

Top tip!

To spread the cost of hiring a venue, why not hold several events on the same day? For example, if you're running a 200km event, why not hold a 100km event starting an hour later? You're likely to get a larger overall field, and the additional cost will be relatively smaller.

Controls

Placing controls along your route serves three purposes:

- they ensure the integrity of the event distance;
- they encourage riders to use a route that you recommend; and
- in the case of full controls, they ensure that riders take rest and refreshment at suitable intervals.

Not every control has to be a refreshment stop, but they all, to a certain extent, control the route. As an organiser, these are the sorts of controls you have at your disposal.

- **Full control** – These are placed at intervals between 50km to 80 km apart. At the most basic, this will be a garage or shop. Some larger events hire village halls and cater for riders themselves. Most commonly though, these controls are cafés or pubs.
- **Information control** – This is an unstaffed point that you can use to control the route. You make sure that riders pass this point, by asking riders to find the answer to a question about the point. For example, at the point there might be a road sign that reads “Newtown 5”. The information control question might therefore be “How many miles to Newtown?” The rider could only find out the answer by riding to the sign to get the answer.

You should use information controls sparingly, as some riders dislike them. However some events make a feature of their information controls, with riders riding out and back from a central base to different points around the start.

If you run your event annually, then you will need to change any information control questions each time. You cannot use the same question two years in a row. **Top tip!** When checking your route for an event you run each year, collect several questions and answers for each information control. This makes organising next year’s event much easier.

- **Checkpoint** – This is a staffed point that you can use to control the route. Usually, a volunteer or two will drive out to the checkpoint for the duration of the event. Please make sure that your volunteers are easily visible, and parked in a place that’s safe for riders to stop and perhaps queue.

Top tip!

These are best used at the beginning of an event. The further along the route you have them, the longer your volunteers will have to wait for riders to turn up.

- **Secret control** – Secret controls are not listed in any detail on the brevet card. The card will mention that there is a control on the route, but not exactly where. Riders will know that the control is between two other controls, and nothing more. This is to make sure that riders take a specific road. Secret controls aren’t used much anymore, as Audax UK event routes are no longer fixed.

Controls at night

On routes of 400km and over, try to have at least one control where riders can get some sleep. Place this control so your slower riders arrive when it is still dark.

If you have a control that’s open at night, try to find somewhere that’s not in a built-up residential area. Although audax riders tend to be very well-behaved, even the sound of bikes being packed into cars can be a disturbance.