

USA CYCLING

The Centerline Rule



Why do we have a centerline rule?

It is the LAW!

SAFETY, SAFETY, SAFETY

The enforcement line / center line rule is a rule of the road, and applies at all times if a road is not closed to traffic. That means that the rule applies even if no centerline is painted on the road.

The Rule:

3B1. Centerline. If a course is not closed to traffic, all competitors **must keep to the right of** the center line or enforcement line.

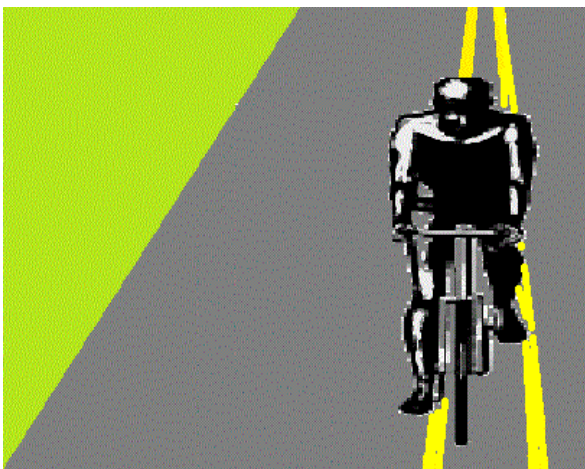
How is this interpreted?

Notice that the rule says that you have to stay to the right of the center line / enforcement line.

That means that you never touch / cross the line. [A web Link to USAC centerline discussion](#)

If a yellow or white line exists on the road, it is usually declared to be the enforcement line.

Most riders would say that the diagram below represents the limit of what is legal regarding the centerline rule. Although this seems to make sense, the rider below is in an unsafe position. Their left ear is across the centerline, placing the rider 8-10 inches into the oncoming lane, and if a car came towards them using the same logic, the rider would be injured.

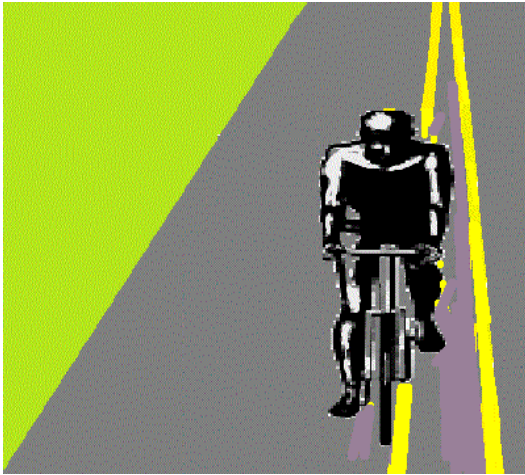


This interpretation is always wrong.

Two interpretations

1) The Finish Line interpretation

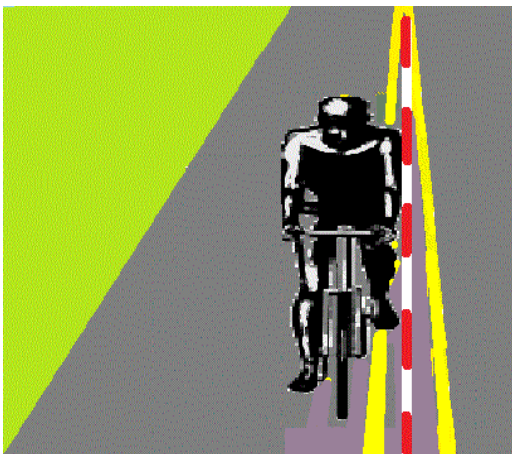
When a rider crosses the finish line, the crossing happens the moment the rider breaks the front edge of the finish line. This is the most common interpretation of the enforcement line / center line rule. Using this same interpretation which is already in use within cycling, a rider crosses the enforcement line the moment that they touch it.



The moment you touch the enforcement line, you have crossed it.

2) The Traffic Interpretation

Knowing that anything that crosses the centerline could be hit by oncoming traffic, this interpretation does not allow any part of your bike / body to cross the centerline. Imagine that you have a pair of 44 cm (18 inch) handlebars. To keep out of the oncoming lane, you would need to place your tires at least 22 cm (9 inches) from the center line. This is what the USAC Technical Director was trying to implement when they last discussed the center line rule. [Web link to discussion](#)



No part of your bike / body can be across the centerline, as it is exposed to oncoming traffic.

Knowing which interpretation will be used should be part of the race instructions, so listen up during staging of your race.

Both of the above interpretations reflect the “Edge of the World” philosophy that is often associated with the centerline rule. That is, a riders world ends at the centerline, and any crossing of the centerline puts you into the abyss, never to return to the bike race.

ENFORCEMENT LINE

So, what happens when there is no centerline?

Just because there is no centerline, does not mean there is no enforcement line, or that the centerline rule does not apply.

Traffic cones, course tape, pylons, saw-horses, barricades, fencing: all of these can be used to create an enforcement line.

At a recent event, a 4 lane road was part of the course. $2 \frac{1}{4}$ lanes were given to auto traffic ($1 \frac{1}{8}$ lane in each direction, to allow room for traffic cones), leaving $1 \frac{3}{4}$ lanes for the bike race.

After being given instructions that on this particular part of the course, the traffic cones were the enforcement line, several riders moved right of the cones, but left of the centerline (which was now in the middle of the coned traffic lane) into oncoming traffic.

During the post-incident discussion with the riders, they tried to argue that they had never crossed the centerline. Obviously they lost their argument, since they had crossed the enforcement line, which was constructed of traffic cones, which had been announced at the start.



Is the enforcement line the traffic cones? Or is it the yellow line?

The hard choice is what happens when there is no visible enforcement line, either painted or physical.

A typical road is made up of 2 lanes, 10-12 feet wide, for a typical width of 20 – 24 feet. Often times the pavement or asphalt is laid in such a way that the crown of the road is apparent.

The wider the road is, the less likely that riders will try to cross the centerline.

The difficulty comes when a road is less than two lanes wide. Having $\frac{1}{2}$ of 24 feet of roadway is less stressful than having $\frac{1}{2}$ of 15 feet of roadway

Make sure the riders are aware what measure is being used.

Is it the center of the road?

Is it the left mirror of the lead car?

Is it $\frac{2}{3}$ of a narrow road unless there is oncoming traffic?

Will the finish line be closed to traffic? And if so, when does the closure start?

Make sure all riders are informed.

Road events are hard to get, hard to staff, and have a greater potential for traffic issues. We need to continue to obey traffic rules to ensure our safety and continued access to these venues.

KEEPING RIDERS SAFE

With some riders wanting to gain advantage any way they can, including riding on the wrong side of the road, how do we maintain a safe and fair racing environment?

By using referees that follow the racers. Sometimes they are in cars following the race, but the preferred method is on a motorcycle.

Moto-refs and Follow-refs are responsible for ensuring that the race stays safe and fair. Typically they follow the bike race, watching the riders, and do not come forward unless there is an issue.

Oftentimes moto-refs will give a short toot of the horn to remind riders that they should be aware of their surroundings.

If there is a crosswind and riders are starting to cross the enforcement line, a moto-ref may lead “Shepherd” the field by passing the field of riders, and then moving to the enforcement line. They then go 1-2 mph slower than the field, drifting towards the back of the field, while staying

on the enforcement line. Riders that have drifted across the centerline have to make a decision: 1) Move right, back across the enforcement line as the moto approaches them, or 2) move left of the moto. Choice #2 is a bad decision, and is a free trip home.

If a rider chooses to advance across the enforcement line, the moto-ref strives to make an immediate appearance with the offender. Of course, traffic and terrain may prevent this.

Normally for a first offence, the moto-ref will bring the offender to the back of the field and discuss the poor choices of their decision. As this discussion occurs, they usually drift off the back of the field. For a minor infraction, this might be 50 yards. For a greater infraction, it might be 100 yards or more.

For a greater infraction, a disqualification may happen. It can happen immediately, if the referee can safely approach the rider. Riders have been known to try to disappear into the field, hoping to hide, or feign ignorance. This will not work to the riders benefit. Normally a referee will pull alongside, and call to the rider up to three times. Ignoring the referee will not help. Besides the centerline rule, they have now ignored the command of the referee and can be disqualified for failure to obey the official's request.

Even if a rider is successful at staying away from the official that does not mean that the penalty was not imposed. The offending rider can still be relegated or disqualified after the fact. No notification is required to the rider.

Nowadays with GoPro's everywhere, nearly all moto-refs now use video cameras to validate which riders did what, and for how long. I know that I have 2 on my moto. As these are normally the private property of the referee, they are not obligated to share any video of an infraction with a rider, although some may, if requested.

Moto-refs have to follow the same traffic rules as the riders. Because of this, they may not be able to immediately come forward if there is oncoming traffic, and may wait before advancing. While riding alongside the field, oncoming traffic may also require the moto-refs to move right, and merge into the side of the field. This is normal and acceptable movement for a moto ref.

We are not the Tour De France, and riders are not allowed to touch moving vehicles, and moving vehicles are not allowed to touch the riders. Moto-refs will not assist you, hand- up water to you, or let you draft if you are chasing back from a crash or flat tire.