

TTIPS VOL. 43/22 – INSIGHTS

- Benefits of Indoor Cycling -



Unless you are this guy, you don't need to wear a helmet on your indoor sessions.

Introduction

So my fellow rider, you are not persuaded to ride in the great outdoors during the winter months huh? I get it. After all, most of us who are transplants moved here to avoid old weather, so why would we volunteer for more pain? And some of you who are not transplants, well, you may also prefer to be indoors during the cold months perhaps.

I moved here from Virginia. Although I rode throughout the winter, there were times when snowy or icy conditions prohibited safe riding, and yes, sometimes it was just too cold. I remember one ride when the wind chill was minus 17 degrees F. Yep, I rode 41 miles that day. Yep, I was really cold. I was proud of myself for braving the weather. Did I enjoy it? Well, it isn't the worst thing I've done, but I don't think I'd do it again. I love being outdoors, yes, but nope, not again.

I got a "smart trainer" and I subscribed to Zwift. Huh? What's all that?

Smart Trainer: Simply put, a smart trainer connects to the internet through a mobile phone, tablet, computer. You take off your back wheel and mount your bike to the smart trainer where the back wheel usually goes. The smart trainer has a cassette of gears for your chain, just like your bike.

Zwift: Simply put, Zwift is a computer application that provides a virtual world via the internet in which you ride your smart trainer. Though your phone, computer, or tablet Zwift controls the

resistance you experience as you ride. So, for example, as you encounter a hill on the virtual course that you are riding, you feel the same resistance in your pedals as if you were really climbing a hill. But here's the great part. You can ride with other riders who are also logged on, and are on the same course....from anywhere on the globe. In my case, I call my son in Virginia who also has a smart trainer, and we agree to ride a particular course at a particular date and time. Then, we just log on, enter that course, and join up for a ride. The software is so good that you can even draft other riders. You can join group rides, you can race, or you can just explore the virtual world.

It's great training because you never need to stop for traffic, pedestrians, stop signs, etc.

Interested? Keep reading.

The Benefits of Indoor Cycling | 8 Reasons Why You Should Train Indoors

How Indoor Cycling Can Fast-Track Your Training

Bikeradar.com / Charlie Allenby / January 7, 2021

The winter months are well and truly here (in the northern hemisphere) and, with the risk of bad weather or poor light blighting many a ride, cyclists will be turning their attention to the turbo trainer, indoor bike, or rollers to keep their training on track.

It's easy to understand why. Indoor cycling has a range of benefits, from beating bad weather to targeting specific training goals when you're short on time.

From the pros of the peloton to new cyclists, almost anyone who turns the pedals can benefit from training indoors. We caught up with three expert coaches to find out why.

Time Efficient

One of the biggest benefits of using a turbo for your training is how little time it takes compared to going out for a ride outside. If you're short on time – and who isn't? – riding indoors can help you squeeze in a training session when you otherwise wouldn't.

"It's convenient, it's set up ready to go and there's no time-wasting," says Matt Rowe of Rowe and King Cycle Coaching, "You can get on the bike, warm-up, and you're into a session. Cool down, finish, in the shower, done.

"If you're planning on doing that outside, you've got to find a route and, if you live in a city centre, you've got to get out of the city. By the time you've even warmed up you could have done your whole session indoors," adds Rowe.

What's more, and as we'll come on to, the specificity and uninterrupted nature of indoor cycling means you can make big training gains in a relatively short amount of time.

Beat Bad Weather

Heading out into the cold is made a lot easier if you've got the right winter gear in your wardrobe, especially if you're riding in the rain.

It can be hard to get motivated if you're imagining the next few hours to be as cold as sitting in a fridge, and staying in bed is going to be a lot more attractive.

Investing in foul-weather kit, whether that's a good waterproof jacket or a pair of overshoes, will turn a training ride from unbearable into enjoyable, and will have you jumping out of bed and onto your bike.

Check out our guide to the best winter cycling clothing for an in-depth look at what to wear when it's less than appealing outside.

Train With Power

Indoor training technology has improved significantly in recent years, most notably with the rise of smart trainers and the latest training apps.

Smart trainers are equipped with built-in power meters, allowing riders to target specific training goals with much greater precision.

Take an FTP (Functional Threshold Power) test to determine your training zones, then you can follow power-based workouts – whether you want to improve your endurance, sprinting, or climbing performance.

Smart trainers also offer external resistance control. You can either set a specific wattage for the trainer to lock onto or allow a third-party app such as Zwift to control the trainer based on the demands of your workout.

That means, if you're doing an interval training session, you'll hit the exact numbers required to get the most out of the workout.

"Smart trainers and smart bikes are now so powerful they are essentially a lab-standard bike at home," says Dr Dave Nichols, cycle training consultant for Wattbike.

“The fact you have the ability to control power, and the bike will hold that wattage target for you, is pretty much as good as any laboratory setting,” adds Nichols.

Ride Without Interruptions

That leads us to the next benefit: indoor cycling allows you to ride without interruptions.

When riding on the road, it can be hard to complete a specific training session – particularly targeted intervals – without your rhythm being disrupted by the undulating nature of a route, or the need to stop for traffic or junctions.

Indoor training removes those interruptions and uncontrollable variables, so you can focus solely on completing your workout.

Keep It Consistent

The structured, focused nature of indoor cycling also ensures consistency from one training session to the next. If you have a goal in mind, whether that’s completing your first 100-mile century ride or racing at elite-level, indoor cycling allows you to keep your training on track.

“Every session counts,” says Nichols. “If you go on a club ride, it depends on who’s there and the pace. On an indoor bike, it’s about you and what you need to do to make the most of your training ride.

“It’s predictable, you know how it’s going to go, what it should feel like and whether you’re improving or not. It’s a really good environment for setting and doing training.”

However, it’s important not to lose focus on why we ride – getting out into the great outdoors. You can use indoor training to complement outdoor riding, not replace it.

It’s More Interesting Than Ever

If your perception of indoor training is slogging away for hours in a cold garage or spare room with just a wall in front of you to look at, then it might be time to rethink a turbo session. Interactive training apps have brought indoor training to life.

“The key to training is consistency and having the motivation to get on the bike, and things like Zwift are a great way of motivating yourself to train,” says Matt Bottrill of Matt Bottrill Performance Coaching.

Nichols agrees, adding: “[Indoor training] is much easier to get on board with than 10 years ago when it meant sitting on a noisy, wheel-based trainer in your garage. Now, you can be in that

virtual world, doing it with friends at the same time and you've got races and group rides you can do, too."

Focus on Technique

Indoor training allows you to focus on technique, most notably your cadence and pedal stroke.

"If every pedal stroke you make requires 0.5% less energy, and you make 1000s of pedal strokes within a ride, that's going to seriously add up," says Nichols.

Bottrill recommends using the indoor trainer to work on your dead spot – where you lose efficiency in your pedal stroke and are not producing any power.

"Doing drills in training to work on your dead spot is a great way of improving, especially for those riders who are new to cycling," he adds.

Ride Anywhere, at Any Time

You don't need to invest in a smart trainer or indoor smart bike to feel the benefits. Most gyms have some form of spin class or static bike, while there are also specialist turbo clubs at certain studios (Covid-19 restrictions permitting).

You can also combine indoor cycling at the gym with weight training, cross training or other off-bike exercises, Bottrill says.

That's particularly the case in winter, when the off-season gives you an opportunity to work on other areas of your performance, alongside targeted sessions on the indoor trainer.

Okay riders, did that capture your interest? I hope so. Next week we'll cover how to get started cycling indoors. Until then,

Make Every Ride Epic,

Darryl