

TTIPS VOL. 23/22 – INSIGHTS

Buidling Endurance

What a cyclist says: “I don’t have a low-enough gear.”
What a cyclist means: “I’ve gained five pounds.”

INTRODUCTION

Most serious riders want to be able to ride farther or faster, or both, during our recreational rides. We all understand that the endurance to do so, however, requires more training time in the saddle to gain physical (and sometimes mental) conditioning to do so. We either don’t want to spend that kind of time on our bike, or we just don’t have the time.

Before I retired, I had a job that demanded long days and weekends at work. During that time I decided during to try a 200-mile ride called the TOTAL 200 – a one-day/200-mile ride. I knew I needed professional help to build a training plan and sought the assistance of a USA Cycling Coach. He built for me a 14-week plan based on a method called Training Periodization. Simply put, Training Periodization refers broadly to raining that is structured around progressively-loaded training stress followed by rest. I faithfully followed the plan and completed the Total 200. It worked.

Though I was successful, I needed to ride nearly every day for 14 weeks while following that training plan. I came home from work, changed into my kit, and hit the road. During that 14 weeks I was tired and hungry all the time. Mostly, though, I had no spare time for anything but riding (a real first-world problem, I know.) As much as we all love cycling, most of us neither want nor need to dedicate that amount of time to gain the fitness level we desire.

There are other ways to incrementally improve our endurance. Another method is Polarized Training. This method can be used to improve fitness during your weekly rides and does not require dedication of large time blocks, and likely is more compatible with your time constraints and your training needs. Curious? Read On the Ride On.

YOU CAN HAVE YOUR DAY JOB AND BUILD YOUR FITNESS BASE, TOO. THIS ADVICE WILL HELP.

BY SELENE YEAGER / BICYCLING MAGAZINE

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You've probably heard that the best way to build your fitness base with slow and steady rides. That means spending 12 to 16 weeks working long, low intensity miles, so your aerobic system gets stronger and stronger, and you can then ride for longer and longer. And it's true that this method is effective—unless you don't have the time for it.

For those of us who can't get up and ride for four to six hours a day, a schedule-friendly method called polarized training presents a practical way for how to build cycling endurance on a time budget. Here's everything you need to know about this type of training and how it can improve your rides

The Benefits of Polarized Training

As the name implies, polarized training emphasizes the opposite ends of the training spectrum. That means, in any given week, you do both really hard efforts and easy aerobic rides - the best of both worlds. It's a bit controversial (polarizing?) in the sports science community, mostly because they're used to half-day base slogs. But this method is backed by a body of sound research.

"Ultimately, your 'base' comes down to your mitochondrial capacity," says exercise physiologist Paul Laursen, Ph.D., of the training service lab Plews and Prof. "Research shows that while longer, lower-intensity exercise increases the number of mitochondria in your cells, high-intensity training makes those mitochondria more powerful."

Plus, when you do a set (or especially multiple sets) of high-intensity intervals, your heart rate stays elevated during your "recovery" periods, which benefits your aerobic energy systems—especially as the session progresses, says Laursen.

However you slice it, interval training undoubtedly builds cycling endurance, even if you're already pretty fit. "Our research has found that when well-trained cyclists performed two interval sessions a week for three to six weeks, their VO2 max peak aerobic-power output, and endurance performance improved by 2 to 4 percent," Laursen says.

To that end, the best way to build endurance is by blending the distribution of your training so about 80 percent of your rides are in those aerobic 'zone 2' intensities (in terms of heart rate

zones) and about 20 percent are performed at high and very-high intensities, or a blend of zones 3 to 5 throughout the week, says Laursen.

The Ultimate Endurance Interval

Cyclists looking to optimize their interval training for endurance benefits should perform intervals ranging between 30 seconds to 5 minutes, at a very hard intensity. These build your aerobic system while also being hard enough to recruit some fast-twitch sprint fibers, which makes those power-producing fibers more resistant to fatigue over time.

“Performing three to six of these leg-burning efforts, allowing one to two minutes of recovery in between, can have impressive effects,” says Laursen. As you gain fitness, increase the number of reps and the intensity.

Aim to perform these sessions twice a week, allowing at least one day of recovery in between. Then do the rest of the week’s riding at a moderate aerobic pace. Keep in mind, too, that if you’re planning to do a 100-mile ride, you still need to clock some longer days in the saddle so you can be comfortable on the bike, practice pacing, and dial in your nutrition and hydration—all things that shorter interval workouts can’t do.

Finally, remember that interval training, though beneficial, is also stressful. It’s essential that you not only include easy days and rest days in your weekly endurance training plan, but also that you eat a balance diet, get adequate sleep, and be mindful of your general recovery.

If you don’t, “you can end up fit but unhealthy, with high levels of stress hormones and inflammation that can do real damage over time,” Laursen says. “It’s all about balance.

Okay riders, I hope that helps. Ride on and....

Make Every Ride Epic,

Darryl
