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Intermediate Bike Training News

Create a Sustainable Healthy Lifestyle

October 7, 2006

Dear Rick,

Interest in the Midlife Cycling way is growing. We are constantly adding new members to the newsletter list. I believe people are hearing about, or experiencing firsthand, how even a minor amount of structured training can create a huge improvement in their cycling abilities. When I go out on a short assessment ride with someone we fix minor problems with their bike, adjust it to fit properly, get them riding at the proper intensity, and they no longer struggle when climbing.

It doesn't take years to learn to ride a bike well. My coaching metrics are 40-50 miles in 4 weeks and a Century (100 mi) in 6-8 weeks. The Olympic Training Center discovered something about athletes that also applies to recreational cyclists.

They wanted to know what characteristics, skills, abilities, etc. do all world-class athletes have in common. They found only one - they are COACHABLE. Are you coachable?

I meet with two types of people - 1) people who come to learn and 2) those who just want to prove their training is better. There are always fine points that advanced cyclists can debate. However, the fundamental principles of cycling physiology, technique, and nutrition are well known.

Finally, several people commented that the newsletter appears to be for novices. Several other people commented that the newsletter is too advanced for them. Midlife Cycling, the Intermediate Training Group, and the newsletter are for cyclists of ALL abilities. This issue will emphasize that.

Have a great week.

Rick Russon

Beginners...



When people ask if I train beginners that is one of the hardest questions for me to answer. Thinking about it right now I would say that depends on INTENTION rather than current experience or ability.

If a person just wants to hop on a bike and motor around aimlessly then, no, I can't do much for them. When someone tells me they just want to ride and "see the sights and smell the flowers" I have to ask if their interest is really that casual or if they are just setting low expectations because of a fear of failing.

As a coach, I understand the numerous obstacles to athletic activity. The only exposure most of us have had to athletics was our school Physical Education class. Usually taught by the football coach, if weren't big and willing to handle the pain of training then you weren't an athlete.

Every one of you has athletic potential whether 20 or 70 years old, whether 110 lbs or 310 lbs, and whether healthy or dealing with something like diabetes. I have seen people terrified of crashing become very good cyclists. I have seen people who couldn't ride for more than 10 minutes go on to ride centuries. The training approach is different for each and not just "ride as hard as you can, as long as you can, as frequently as you can."

TRAINING TIP: right now you should be working on flat terrain endurance. If, by the end of this month, you can't ride at over 14 mph for an hour you need to contact me so we can find out what is going on. Forget the short, intense efforts. You don't have the cardio-respiratory system to support that. One "interval" and your ride will either end or not be very enjoyable.

Just relax and enjoy cycling. The first 60 days are the hardest to get through. Your gains will be rapid after that.

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Intermediates...



There is a wide range of what I would consider "intermediate" riders. This can be anyone from a club rider who wants to go longer and faster, to a lone rider who wants to experience group cycling, to someone coming from another sport who has no cycling experience. It can also be serious club riders who do 40-60 miles at 16-18 mph but can't seem to get out to century or multi-day century rides.

As always, no matter how advanced a cyclist you are you should still work on endurance the majority of the time. Whether that be flat terrain endurance at faster speeds or climbing endurance. You aren't there yet until you can do a flat century around 4 hours or stay in the middle of the pack no matter how steep the grade.

At this level, energy management and nutrition are what you need to work on. Energy management consists of your physical conditioning, use of gears, and pedaling technique. Nutrition going all day and not bonking.

TRAINING TIP: work on pedaling in circles, cadence of 90-100 rpm typical (120-130 peak), and climbing at 80-90 rpm. Climbing big, steep hills at 50 rpm and 6 mph doesn't do much for you. Again, other riders will tell you that you need to build "strength." If you can ride 10 feet up the hill then you have enough strength. What you don't have is enough endurance to keep going.

Endurance is not built above lactate threshold (huffing and puffing). As a matter of fact, going above LT for even a few minutes can kill your endurance training session gains. Ride a lower grade, keep the cadence up, and breathing under control. You will progress to steeper grades in a shorter amount of time than hammering them all the time.

Advanced...



The advanced rider can go anywhere. They don't ask how long the ride is going to be or what the terrain will be like. They just get on the bike and ride.

At this level, cycling becomes a team sport. Riding speed typically averages 20 mph and above. Drafting, or pacyline riding, becomes an essential factor in energy management. Fine tuning the percent of carbohydrate to protein during the ride, based on the length and speed of ride, now comes into play.

Now you have my permission to do intervals... VO2max, sprint, hill power, cadence, and other intervals. You ride a lot around Lactate Threshold. You understand lactate tolerance and managing glycogen stores. You can hit 35 mph and more on flats when chasing someone down. You ride at 110- 120 rpm regularly. And, you see 160-170 rpm in bursts.

TRAINING TIP: get a coach. Stop dorking around trying to teach yourself. Get someone who studies cycling physiology constantly and works with hundreds of other riders. I don't train people for competition because I have no experience in strategy and tactics. But, I can refer you to coaches who do.

There are lots of subtle skills that you need to learn. If one or two people jump from the pack and you aren't on their wheel immediately then you probably won't catch them until they stop and wait for you. One missed shift, sprinting 50 yards too soon, and other things will make you fall behind by several miles during a long ride. Try to make up 10-15 minutes, after your flat tire, on a pack that is moving 20 mph.

Wheelin' and Dealin'



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