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Intermediate Bike Training News

Create a Sustainable Healthy Lifestyle

October 18, 2006

Dear Rick,

Looks like the weather is not going to be kind to us this weekend. Another front is supposed to move in on Saturday. There may be a chance to ride on Sunday if the roads are clear. But it will be cold.

One of the main reasons that I started the Paceline Group, which became Midlife Cycling, was to learn from better cyclists. The advantage of being the "coach" is that I have a constant flow of information coming to me. I'm glad to see that many of you are studying and not just following blindly. As I've said before, there is no "right" way to cycle. A lot depends on individual situations.

However, though there may be no "right" way to do something, there are patterns of success. For example, I normally advocate high cadence. But I have had situations where I've made an exception. One case is where a cyclist had a background in football and power lifting. He just cannot move his huge leg muscles very fast. Another situation is where someone has an injury and we try to reduce the number of cycles on a leg joint during a ride.

When you read my recommendations and compare them to others I would like you to keep a few things in mind:

- I read a lot of the same things you do
- I also read highly technical cycling physiology info that is not available to you
- A training/riding technique must work on the road
- The technique must also have some basis in physiology and not just a random opinion
- Our primary goal is endurance
- Our secondary goal is high average speed - not peak speed
- The training must be effective with only 2-3 rides and less than 10 hours per week

There are several key concepts where Midlife Cycling differs from conventional athletic wisdom. This issue will discuss a few of those ideas.

Rick Russon

Irregular Exercise...



The #1 Midlife Cycling principle is that "ANY exercise is better than NO exercise." Conventional fitness programs focus on technique. But, the best training methods are useless if you don't do them...

Should you exercise regularly? Yes. Studies and practical experience have proven that. Do most people exercise regularly? No. It is the reason we have a major health crisis in this country. Will you exercise regularly with the right program? No. The number of people who have the discipline to maintain a

rigid schedule are relatively few. I am highly motivated to stay healthy to raise my daughter entering her teen years when I turn 60. Yet, I don't like to work out in the morning before work or at lunch. And, I often have family time or meetings in the evening. Like most of you my priorities are family, home, career, and community before exercise. I've even made fitness a second career and still can't maintain a regular schedule.

The Midlife Cycling program is based on the concept that doing ANYTHING is better than doing nothing. You exercise whenever you can – even if it is 30 seconds of step-ups at your desk while talking on the phone to a client. What matters most, is how much activity you accumulate over the week and not just on any particular day. So stop worrying about sets, reps, and fixed days at the gym. Do something, anything, whenever you can.

I remember a story told to me by an experienced engineer when I was an idealistic graduate fresh from the university. I wanted to do some complex calculations on something when he was just "guestimating" the answer. He said there was a research scientist and an engineer standing on the opposite side of a room from a buxom young woman. He told the scientist and engineer to move one-half the distance to the woman every time he said "step." The research scientist said "but I will never reach her." The engineer said "but I will get close enough."

The purpose of the Midlife Cycling program is to get you "close enough" to great health and fitness.

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Weight Training...



It is a general belief in cycling that weight training provides little, if any, benefit to cyclists. Through my own workouts and working with others I have to disagree. I believe the problem has been that most studies refer to elite cyclists riding short events and training with standard body building/shaping routines.

Elite cyclists are so well conditioned that I could agree that non-cycling specific exercise shouldn't benefit them. But, we are not elite cyclists. Most of us don't have the time to ride 20,000- 40,000 miles per year. The most force you can put on your legs on the bike is a little over your body weight (pulling up on the handlebars). But I can put a considerably higher load on my muscles and develop strength in a shorter amount of time with weight training. However...

The #2 principle of Midlife Cycling is that sustainable health and fitness is based on ENDURANCE rather than STRENGTH...

Strength training develops totally different muscle components than endurance training. It develops fast-twitch, anerobic fibers and seeks to make those fibers thicker. We want to develop slow-twitch, oxidative fibers along with metabolic enzymes and mitochondria density. Endurance comes from low muscle force and high muscle speeds. It also requires highly developed circulatory and respiratory systems along with the capillaries to move higher blood volumes to the muscle cells.

Three sets of eight reps at high enough weights to achieve muscle failure does little for endurance. Even taking the reps up to 12 or 20 before failure isn't what I think of as endurance. Sustaining this type of workout is difficult because you are constantly sore or fatigued and at a high risk for injury until you become well conditioned. However, one advantage of strength is that your muscles can operate at a lower percentage of their total capability which does help endurance.

Cycling physiology is considerably different from other sports. What a lot of coaches, athletes, sports doctors, physical therapists and others don't know or forget is that 1) our weight is supported by the bike so almost all our energy can be used for propulsion and 2) bicycle gearing allows us to keep our body under the optimal load for most riding conditions.

Our weight training routine is by no means an easy workout. Even though my leg press routine moves from 250 to 600 reps total in four months most of it is done at 3-4 times my body weight. We only work out twice a week so both upper and lower body has to be done on the same day. When someone argues with the high reps I point out that when riding at a cadence of 90 rpm I am doing 5400 single-leg leg presses per hour.

So, for those of you new to weight training, or who have tried weights before and didn't like them, try this new approach. Don't be intimidated by the amount of weight others are pushing. Work on endurance and the strength will come. For experienced weight trainers give this a try - you may be surprised at the results. After all, a lot of special forces members rotate between training muscular strength and muscular endurance about every six weeks.

Group Riding...

Every ride there are several people who want us to ride faster. They typically take off and try to ride well ahead of the main group. The interesting thing is that these are rarely the fastest people in the group.

There is a misunderstanding that our endurance rides are constantly motoring around at a slow speed. We ride at our endurance pace on flats but we often do short sprints or hammer hills/rollers. We live in a mountainous state. To me, being able to ride fast on flats but not well on hills is rather useless. We can't ride fast all the time. So rather than ride at 25 mph on flats and 10 mph on hills, I'd rather ride 20 mph on flats and 15 mph on hills. You will probably only ride 2-3 mph faster than me on flat terrain. However, if I ride 5-10 mph faster than you on long hills, it is unlikely that you will see me the rest of the ride.

Sometimes we stop a little more often than we would like. Mainly because we must wait for other riders at major turns. Or, if because we have a lot of new riders at this time of year, we need a few more breaks for them.

Regardless of this, group riding is about fellowship. It is an obligation that better riders help nurture those who are not as well conditioned. No matter how slow a ride is I can always find a way to train. I can hammer the hills and wait at the top or go back and do the hill again. I can pull others in the wind longer than I normally would. I can ride back and forth between the first and last riders. Put simply, if you know how to train you can benefit from any ride no matter what the speed or distance is.

If you want perfect training conditions then you should not go on a group ride. As a matter of fact, most competitive coaches will not allow their new athletes to ride in a group for the first year of training. Otherwise, just relax. I'll hammer with the best of them at different times in the ride but I'm not going to turn the entire ride into a race.

Supplements...



There are two nutritional beliefs that I hold from my studies at the Olympic Training Center:

- don't eat if it doesn't come off a fork
- nature makes and mixes nutrients better than humans

The first belief is really related to doping in sports. The OTC did a study of random nutritional products from GNC and found that 60% were contaminated with substances that would disqualify a competitive athlete. Though doping isn't a consideration for us, it still underscores the fact that we can't trust the ingredients of a considerable number of supplements.

Did you know that inorganic forms of calcium can inhibit the absorption of iron? The problem with

multi- vitamins is that some vitamins/minerals inhibit the absorption of others or some require a different environment (i.e. high acidity) than others. So, basically, you are shot gunning a bunch of nutrients into your system and hoping a few stick. Eating a nice salad with a variety of ingredients will give you a far better nutrient balance, and is a lot cheaper, than taking a bunch of vitamin supplements.

That said, there are two supplements that I find have a noticeable affect on me personally. The first is a pharmaceutical quality liquid glucosamine. A lot of people will tell you that there is no proof that glucosamine helps. However, there is no proof that glucosamine doesn't help either. That reminds me of a story...

Early aerodynamic studies proved that a bumblebee was incapable of flight. Yet, in spite of the overwhelming evidence against it, the bumblebee prevailed and is still flying today. Since then, our knowledge of aerodynamics has improved and we show that bumblebees fly effortlessly due to the concept of dynamic stall thus vindicating the reputation of the bumblebee.

MORAL OF THE STORY: just because you can't prove something clinically doesn't mean it doesn't work. Also, I've tried glucosamine in tablet form and felt no benefit from it. Liquids generally absorb better.

The second supplement that has an effect on me is liquid vitamin B-12. This could be due simply to a deficiency in my personal diet. Again, I have tried tablets of B-12 that not only didn't work but also upset my stomach.

There are also indirect benefits to consider. It is generally believed that protein provides a minimal benefit during sport. Though that is changing with products like Accelerade and Perpetuem. Our experience is that there is some benefit to taking in protein during a ride that is longer than 3 hours. Even if protein doesn't provide any energy contribution, does it help facilitate carbohydrate absorption? Does it delay muscle fatigue by preventing catabolism of lean muscle? Does it speed recovery by having an abundance of amino acids available immediately after a ride?

It is fun to study and live vicariously through elite cyclists. But high-performance is only one of many goals a person can have. I believe there is a lot more to learn about training athletes who want to do well but not maximize their abilities due to a lack of interest in that goal or lack of time. This is what Midlife Cycling is all about.

Conclusion...

The lesson that I want you to take away from this newsletter is that every hint, tip, or suggestion that I, or anyone else, give on cycling should be considered only a tool for you to try. You should consider your own thoughts and beliefs to be based on the best information you had at the time but also subject to change from new information you gather all the time. And, if you are happy to ride at the same level year-after-year then that is a legitimate option also.

I put together a program specifically for someone like myself who rides 4,000 miles per year. If you can ride 10,000 miles per year, use to compete, are missing a leg, work three jobs, or have other considerations then your training will be different. And, realize that your situation over time can change. I'm sure that Lance Armstrong will be modifying his training routine in the years to come.

Finally, remember to "race" to your strengths but "train" your weaknesses. I make suggestions to people on group rides, mainly about increasing cadence, and occasionally someone will tell me that they are just not comfortable at a high cadence. Well, that is why we train. Casual training rides are the time to try or adapt to new things. If someone finishes ahead of you on a group ride why does that matter? The Brevets, Populaires, and other formal events are the places to worry about time. The rest of the rides are spent preparing for these events or other favorite routes.

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