

# How to create Your Own Road Cycling Training Program

## Mindset for Training;

Get your brain over perceived obstacles:

- I have not ridden this far before
- I am not a hill climber
- I think the hill is too steep
- I won't survive a ride with "that group"
- I am scared of riding in a group
- I haven't got the time

A rider must push these boundaries to improve and to achieve their desired outcome.

## Time Spent Training:

Seven to Ten hours a week is ample time on a bike, for riders to become fast recreational riders and to achieve high levels of fitness. As one becomes more of a Pro and enters the Bike NZ competitive environment, this may creep up, particularly when more drills are being incorporated into the training plan.

A key to optimize the benefit of your training is to **know exactly what drill is your key target before you go out on each and every ride**, is it endurance, strength, speed work, hill work or sprints. **Be structured**, do not simply hop on your bike and take what comes.

## What you need to do to get fit for your target:

Nearly every sport has a similar golden rule for reaching fitness and competitiveness, without an increased risk of injury or illness:

**An athlete should only increase a correlation of:  
distance / effort / time input, by about 10% per week**

**(A week is defined as a 7 day bracket starting on the day of your choice For example you could use a Monday or a Friday as your start day)**

Take on board;

A large portion of your anti-bodies (things that fight infections) are stored in your fat cells, to rapid a weight loss through excessive training will expose you to more infections, let alone an inability for your muscles to repair from your increasing intensities.

## Stages of Training which you should include:

- **Building a base;** ie doing Kms, or laps and distances etc. This works on a basic premise that to avoid a high risk of induced injury by doing too much, too soon one creates a base of your sports fitness to work from.
- **Endurance Training;** I usually extend my Base in to the endurance phase, which basically is doing reasonable distance (to your ability) i.e. If you do 100 km in 4 hours, don't do 2 hours of endurance that you would see written down for a fast rider, it simply will not be enough. Therefore this aspect should be more distance related to your target, than time related
- **Building strength.** Taking care not to compromise speed by getting stronger, by over concentrating on strength and getting slower. This is the “gym work” on the bike, and will provide you with the strength to handle a wide range of conditions. Stair climbing repeats (on foot, not the bike) are a great substitution for in the saddle work of low cadence hard gears and is a good alternate on wet days.
- **Rest is Training;** Allow time for stressed muscles to recover. If you are twitchy and want to keep training try some alternate activity “resting on the move”. I recommend at least 2 days a week not on your bike. Swimming, a massage, or Pilates are very good “soft” options if one feels compelled to exercise every day of the week.
- **Developing speed:** This includes high intensity fartlek's and or mid distance timetrials. The aim of this is to increase your core riding speed, say from 28 kmh to 30 kmh over an extended period, as distinct from developing a sprint. You need to average quicker than 31kmph to do the Round Taupo Brevet in under 5 hours!
- **Developing your sprint;** Only if your chosen event needs a sprint effort (rarely “Taupo” for most of us). (Roughly, a peaking of real sprint speed, can only be maintained for 2 to 3 weeks so don't do this preparation all of the time). Do a warm down distance after your sprint. The longer/ harder the sprint the longer the warm down.
- **Food and Fluid replenishment;** Practice your feeding and drinking regimes, find the combinations and flavour's that suit your **before** event day.
- **Taper,** in the two weeks before an event allows muscle recovery, glycogen build up, facilitates ability to rest/sleep so on event day the athlete comes out "twitchy" ready to go.
- **Event:** Don't be over focused on a pre-planned time, as, if you have done a good program you will ride to the top of your ability as the conditions of the day or your state of health allows.
- **Recovery Ride;** After an event it is wise to undertake recovery riding, this is an easy “as it comes” ride where you concentrate on soft pedaling, (or rides) that help take the ache and strain out of the muscles.  
At the end of a hard ride in training it is prudent to finish your last 4 km or so in a spin mode as a warm down

Identify the event you wish to target to ride particularly well at, such as “K2” or “Round Taupo” and then target and balance your training to **that** special event and mesh any other event to the keys to your target.

I think it is ok to have more than one of these drill aspects on each ride, but no more than two. Strength and hills can work in the same session, endurance and speed can work together, etc (obviously rest comes after each ride).

Make all interim events "up tempo speed training". For example the race around Lake Rotorua ride around early November, is ideally placed for building core speed for the round Taupo ride at the end of November, and the trigger to concentrate more on your flat riding for the remaining time between these two events as at this stage of your preparation "the hills" should already be in your legs.

To the contrary I perceive the use of an all out attack on the K2 as part of your preparation for Round Taupo will certainly give increase endurance and strength, but don't be surprised if your base speed is compromised and you are insufficiently recovered for a personal record breaking Taupo event 4 weeks later.

## **Phases of Training:**

### **General guideline rule of training:**

Exercising twice a week = exercise and muscle maintenance

Exercising three times a week, rates some improvement but mostly maintenance of standards.

More than this and you **Start the Gold Zone**, for significant improvement.

**Exercise four times a week will give significant improvements, whereas when you get to 5 and 6 days a week you are into the serious stuff.**

However that **seventh day (and sometimes 6<sup>th</sup> day) a week can lead to "over training"** which will be worse for you than under training.

**This means that for cycling, to gain meaningful improvement, a rider needs an ideal regime that will be four or five sessions of cycling a week, augmented by suggested cross training such as;**

- **Pilates ( your core strength)and/or**
- **Swimming (breathing, oxygen conversion and cold water treatment for muscles).**

In Multi-sport, for triathletes it is 4 swims, 4 cycles, and 4 runs, although this would modify depending on intensities down to 3 of 2 of the disciplines whilst the one being concentrated on, is a 4 times over a six day week, with one rest day.

## **Creating your Own Program:**

To create your own program, try working **firstly backwards from the event date including your taper factors, then go forwards from the "now"**. The nature of the event will be a strong guideline of what should need to do in the 3 weeks immediately prior to the event. Your heaviest training loads will fall on weeks 5, 4 and 3 before an event. **The needs of the event and these three weeks are the prime dictates on constructing your program.**

If you work from event date backwards to the present day it will reveal what your present fitness and training regimes should be. It will reveal how much you can adjust to harden or soften your program to optimise your workouts.

There is usually a mis-match in the middle when you work both backwards and forwards, which lets you know that the harder efforts you have planned for the latter part of your program need to be lessened or increased, to accomplish what can safely be accomplished, or to adjust the length of your program. As your correlation of effort/ time spent and distance travelled **should never increase by more than 10% per rolling week** it can take a while to balance your program

For a Cycle ride such as “Round Taupo, 160 km” I would leave the week before the race empty to fill in as your taper, short sharp efforts, or rest as in this week you can only stuff your preparation up, not improve on it in your last week.

The second week before should be firm but lesser distance and time than the third or 4<sup>th</sup> week before and this is where it is recommended working your program back from. The distance is less but the intensity is higher.

If you are a slow rider, then your program should reflect more the time in the saddle than the distance. i.e. if you are expect to take 7 hours to ride Taupo, you need to practice lasting that long, then work on core speed to offer the opportunity of a faster time. On the other hand if you expect to complete in four hours then your program should be very much a distance program with even more emphasis on developing core speed.

Being a bit more complicated, make your programs fortnightly groupings which allows for 14 days of sessions in sequence. For Example:

Monday	rest day, but ideal day for a swim, or recovery massage
Tuesday	Strength day
Wednesday	distance and swim or Pilates or robust windtraining
Thursday	Speed intervals or windtraining if not done on Wednesday.
Friday	Rest day / or swim / Pilates or tune up massage
Saturday	distance flats / undulating
Sunday	Hills / distance, some fast bursts
Monday	Rest day, but ideal day for a swim, or recovery massage
Tuesday	Strength day.
Wednesday	Run and swim or Pilates, or wind training
Thursday	Speed intervals, or wind training session if not done the day before
Friday	Rest day / or swim / Pilates or tune up massage
Saturday	High tempo / or race or time trial efforts
Sunday	Long slow endurance ride, no tempo's

Then repeat the block and change the time, the duration and or the intensities of your sessions.

## **WRITE IT DOWN**

Having constructed a **dated written timetable**, before putting any exercise sessions in, write in your known social and personal commitments, (choir practice, committee meetings, family, conferences, courses etc) so that your program can be built around them. For a program I prefer an excel spreadsheet style where formulas self-compute and evaluate distances and time.

The techniques have enabled me and most of those for whom I have prepared a written program for, to peak for specific events, performing sometimes much better than expected, often to the surprise of their regular rivals.

### **Record what you are doing:**

In association with your written program you should record, by diary, what you have actually achieved, list injuries, coughs and colds, bad sleep patterns, plus the real good feelings. (Feeling really good after a planned session is NOT a message to do more though, more a signal that either the riding conditions were ideal, or that the program is working for you).

Next year you should use this record to temper the construction of your new program, providing warnings of what is likely to trip up your plans.

### **Duration of a Program:**

For endurance athletes, such as for Round Taupo, the Ironman, or a random marathon, most high intensity programs are encompassed in a **16 week structured program** to the event. Treat any riding and exercise prior to this, as creating your base.

My recommendation is to increase your 16 week program to a **17 week and then reward yourself with a full 7 days cold turkey no exercise** (my variation) around the mid-point, that is somewhere from week 7 to week 11. This gives muscles time to repair whilst overcoming any tiredness, it also gives a chance to catchup on the social aspects of life

If you are shrewd and aware, this can be timed to a soreness, a sickness, bad weather, social demands etc, so that missing that space becomes an “intentional” part of your training which you can feel good about, or alternatively a “reward” target to aim towards!

Particularly with younger athletes sometimes it is more important to ensure there is a formal rest off period, because of their greater levels of alternative activity having the same impact as maintaining a "base" in the sport itself.

If you are a very active adult, with an already high level of activity, then a 13 week (including a 7 day stand-down at about week 6, should be sufficient to attain fairly high levels of competitiveness.

Longer than 17 weeks an individual has a risk of going into over-training syndrome with too much tiredness, lack of drive and a much reduced ability to peak for the chosen event. If a compulsive athlete, then a no exercise week every 9 weeks is a recommended for a beneficial compromise.

## **Rest:**

**Resting is Training!** You must rest and recover between sessions and in a taper (reduce time and distance but increase intensity) as a lead up to big races, without letting laziness be the cause;

**If you are in doubt about your rate of recovery or are injured, or hurting, or sick; Rest!**

**If you are still not sure, rest again.**

## **Don't's**

**DON'T! Catch up on missed planned sessions.** Certainly substitute subsequent sessions for one you have missed, but don't increase your number of sessions. Remember your training **should not increase by more than 10% by time or distance or a correlation of both in any one 7 day period** without the risk of getting injury or burn-out.

Most written programs should be designed to have slip ups, and will achieve the desired result by achieving around 85% completion of the program.

**Don't get sucked in by mileage hogs** or by what other riders are doing, further is not better! stick to your plan.

**Don't ride until you "bonk",** (cycling and triathlon term) or, **Hit the wall**" running term.

It can take weeks or months to recover from a highly over stressed ride, run or swim! If you suffer from over-hydration or under-hydration it can take years to recover! Yes really, years.

## **An Example:**

Attached to this paper are some sample pages of a program leading towards a Round Taupo Ride (Race).

## **Mix your ride routes and terrain:**

If training for Taupo don't do all of your training on hills get plenty of flat speed work in as the two significant "crunch" times are from Tokaanu to Hatepe hill, and from the other side of Hatepe to the finish line. If you have not trained for the fast flatter sessions your highly trained hill legs will be spun out before you get to use them at the Hatepe climb.

It is therefore suggested that:

- if you ride two days of the weekend, one should be flattish and fast and the other more undulating to hilly.
- One of your mid-week rides should be a high intensity wind training session that takes you through strength, hilly and speed work simulations.
- One day should be a rest day usually Monday or Friday
- One day can be cross training or massage. Treat cross training as a rest day, and a deep sports massage as a training session.

## **Tricks;**

**If you are pressed for time**, some athletes may benefit from training the same activity twice a day at much higher intensity and much shortened duration.

For example; if your intention was to ride 120km on a day, try doing an early morning ride of 40 km at 40 km pace, and late in the day repeat this. Only 80 km completed, but at higher intensity would give a similar outcome to a 120km slog out, particularly if one of your objectives is to increase your core speed.

If you commute to work on your bike lengthen your ride to make it training beneficial, and tick it off as a well done session. If you do hard physical work through the day tick it off as a strength session, then merely top it up with an intensity session.

Don't anguish about traffic lights; treat moving away from these as practice for handling the surges likely in your event. Also your metabolism will keep at the same rate for the 4 minutes or so you are stopped. Treat traffic lights as a non-issue, so no need to run red lights or loop intersective roads.

Evaluate your event's course, how much is really up hill, how much is flat, how likely is it to be cold/hot and adjust your training to the conditions.

## **Massages:**

If you can afford it, these are good. If it is a good recovery / conditioning sports massage it should be treated as a substitute for a training session, not an activity to be taken on during your rest day, or your cold turkey no exercise week. They are highly beneficial, and if you have trouble affording them over your 17 week program try and save enough for two of three in the 6 weeks prior to the event.

## **Developing Speed and Power:**

- Except for a recovery ride, the first ride after an event, race, or very hard effort, when the entire ride should be at an easy talking pace, then every other ride should have intervals of very high effort starting from 400 meter burst, and building to 4km "bursts"

After each speed burst ride the equal distance in a very easy manner.

- Try doing high speed drills down wind or slight down hills to condition your legs to spin your hardest gears for sustained periods.

- Try and finish each ride off faster than your normal speed, but remembering to “spin out” in an easy gear the last 10 minutes of your ride.
- When riding the hills, visually break it into quarters and try to make each successive quarter faster than the previous one.
- For a warm down, it should be about a 10 minute spin, but I think most are lucky to do 2 minutes, unless you are a competitive when 10 to 20 minutes on the rollers would be a norm.

**If you train slowly you train to race slowly.**

**Make sure you include intervals and sessions of speed work on all but your long Endurance ride, or a Post Event Recovery Ride.**

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The following is some abridged quotes from noted Multisport Promoter Shane Hooks on rules for training for Ironman which are a pertinent to an approach to training.

***“Rule one - quietly.***

*QUIETLY get on with putting in your miles (note the author's emphasis on quietly). No one cares that you had an easterly headwind for 30 km in your long ride. Honestly, the world doesn't need to know such a riveting fact. Tip, you can happily re-cap any training session with those you train with at your regular coffee session.*

*Don't bore your life partner to death. They are patient and pretend to care but really, they are thinking, “just shut up will you”.*

***Rule two - be gentle on the ones you love.***

*Go easy on the ones you love the most. For most, the business end of Ironman hasn't remotely begun yet. When the big weeks kick in, go easy on the loved ones. Just because they got Vogel's 12 grain as opposed to Vogel's mixed grain it is no reason to sit cross-legged on the floor screaming that “it's ruined, all ruined.”*

*Hand on heart, come race day, the ones you love the most will love you the most. They will pour their heart and soul and passion into your day. They will still love you the next morning regardless of the day you had. **And when it is all over, give back to them the time they gave to you.***

***Rule three - don't take the bait.***

*Never ever accept the taunt “what time are you going to do?” Repeat, never ever as a first timer brag about what time you will do in your event. You don't know, you haven't the remotest clue and unless you are Terenzo (and you aren't), you will not have the foggiest idea how you will perform.*

*By all means, have your quiet targets and goals. Share them with your coach, but to the rest of the world speak in general terms. Good examples to reply with would be like “I would like to get in before dark, or any finish will suit.”*



***Rule four – don't trust the training buddy.***

*Your training buddy wants to beat you. Over time, you will start training with people of similar ability. Chances are, in training you will have better sessions than them and likewise, they with you. Guess what, they want to beat you. There are no excuses excepted, flat tyres, infringements, broken wetsuit zips, nothing but your finishing position matters, nothing.*

*I know from bitter, bitter experience. After leading a training buddy for 11 hours and 35 minutes in the Ironman and just 1 km to go, he finally catches me. He goes "come on Hooksie, let's run in together". All I said was, "(insert expletive) no thanks, I don't want you in my finisher's photo". I lead him for all but the last few minutes of the whole race. There is no counselling that has cured me yet.*

*Shane Hooks".*

Sorry Shane I dropped some of your adjectives, but good reflections to keep in mind.

## Genetic Ceiling:

Most of us visualize being an Olympic Champion, or at least beating Allan or Sue who got home ahead of you last week. But everyone has a genetic ceiling above which they cannot perform. The genetic ceiling will waver from day to day but be basically consistent.

### **So, in race / long ride preparation set realistic goals.**

If you are a wiry little 49kg person, don't expect that any amount of training will make you an Olympic sprinter. If you are over 85 kg don't expect to be a Tour de France hill climber.

Some riders have long legs, some short, some have size 32 feet whilst others have size 52, some love banana's some get reflux from them, some of us are male, some female and some don't really know, and so on.

Mentally some of us have steely resolve, attention to detail, are anal about training, some get bored with it after a while, other's do more and more kilometers hoping to get exponentially better. Some train well but don't race well, whereas others are "big day" riders, riding like you have never seen them do in training rides.

Commonly most riders have a different set of attributes, but in an individual's various combinations, can get similar results in ride speeds. Whilst you work on your weaker areas it is most important to develop your prime skill area, to maintain a balance. **Mostly, if you are feeling the pressure, so are the others.**

**The answer is to concentrate on good techniques** to ensure your expertise is at its highest level. Do the drills to get the skills. Make or buy a program.

A former mentor of mine suggested that the time to attack in a race is in two situations. Firstly if you are feeling the strain, as you can assume others are suffering similarly and the other when everyone is sitting up, joking, talking or feeding.

Fortunately our attributes allow a degree of balance, let that light-weight hammer the climb, but give it to them on the descent or the flats, or the sprint home and if all else fails before the sprint fails, out-think them.

If you come back from a ride or race, with no "ifs" or "buts" you have pretty much ridden to your genetic ceiling, so award yourself with your own gold medal. From my experience this status is not achieved too often, maybe a dozen or so times in a life-time.

**The reason for constructing a structured Training program is:  
to get to, or reach, your genetic ceiling on each of your targeted events.**

Having said that:

**I'll prove the pundits wrong" is still a positive attitude.**