

Cycle Training Advice for beginners

When you first start cycling be it for recreational purposes, commuting, keeping fit or as a regular method of working out, you will without doubt read and hear and be told about the speeds and distances travelled and achieved by other cyclists. As a result of this you may feel that what you are able to achieve as you are starting out is a long way short of what others are already achieving.

What you need to consider at this early stage is that everybody has their own starting point and any progress in the early stages will be very much dependant on your individual base level of fitness. You will also need to consider that this base level of fitness, no matter what level it is at, will have been gained from other methods of physical activity, and whereas any base level of fitness is transferable between many activities, it is only through following specific training routines, and perfecting sport specific techniques that any individual will progress in any one sport.

Many experienced cyclists will cover 60 miles at 20-25 miles per hour a couple of times a week, enthusiasts will do much more, and faster. It is this knowledge that will encourage an enthusiastic beginner to push themselves too hard in the early stages of taking up the sport, not wanting to be beaten. Mentally the desire and will to push that hard initially will be apparent but in a very short space of time this knowledge will become de-motivational, as the desired early success will not be achieved. Not wishing to state the obvious but any individual is only as good as their physical ability allows, mentally it is not wrong to be aiming high but this mental attitude needs to be harnessed and channelled in the right direction so that the training blocks can be put into place so that physically as well as mentally each individual is able to realise their particular goals.

From the very outset of starting in the sport of road cycling one of the very first things to realise is that cycling is a long-term sport. Therefore it is classed as an endurance sport and as a general rule quick results are very seldom achieved. If you are considering taking up the sport on a long term basis then it would be reasonable to expect that for the first 2-3 years your muscle groups will need to adapt to the stresses and strains that cycling can place on your body, and in time they will gradually change and become accustomed to the rigours of the sport and this will allow you to be able to achieve greater speeds and distances. When first starting to ride regularly such time scales may seem daunting, but remember that if you start from little or no cycling you will achieve some improvement in a short space of time, but it is how you progress from these early results that will determine how much success you will achieve. Rest assured that with a little motivation progress and results will be achieved.

Within the first few weeks you simply just need to get used to the bike, and get out and ride. As you become more comfortable with riding, gradually increase the distance that you are able ride. At this stage you do not need to be concerned with any sort of statistics, just be content with being in the saddle and achieving some mileage. There is no shame in only doing a few slow miles at first, and I promise you that any cyclists that go racing past you will not be thinking how slow you are, they will be mentally congratulating themselves on passing someone and how good that has made them feel! Just be happy that you have made them feel better about themselves, and fear not because you will at some point in your cycling career experience the same feeling.

As a general guide a typical beginner's speed is about 14 mph, and most cyclists would be able to achieve that average after just a few weeks, if not straightaway. You might possess more

natural talent than 'Mr Average', or live in a very flat place, in which case your initial average speed would be higher.

Having become accustomed to spending an hour at a time on the bike, you should now aim to try a ride of 2 hours or more at the weekend, as well as keeping up with the shorter rides during the week.

As a general rule the training targets of your cycle training are to gradually build up your speed and increase your levels of endurance. So a good mix of training rides is essential, as is other forms of training. It is very easy to become all too engrossed in your cycling that at times training can become a chore, so mix it up; go for a run, or circuits. Given time, if you want to push your training to a new level, you will need to structure your training to be much more specific. Within your cycling a good mix of rides is ideal; short rides where you work that bit harder will help you in your ability to increase your overall speed, and longer rides will aid you in your goal to increase your levels of endurance. These longer rides will be less focused on speed, but will serve to give you more saddle time and as a result more miles under your belt as well as providing you with the experience of being in the saddle for a reasonable amount of time. Equally if you have the means to ride off-road do that sort of riding or attend a spinning session. Whatever your training methods at this early stage, the most important training criteria above all others is to enjoy doing it. You must remember to gradually increase any training load and do not become too bogged down with analysing the statistics. Any number of outside factors can have an effect on your training, so don't always expect to improve on the time before. It really doesn't matter - speed and distance will come, if you practice regularly.

That's not to say you should take it too easy, of course. On completion of any exercise you should always feel that you have achieved something, aching legs are good but not legs that give way under you. As a guide if you feel that you could easily repeat the same ride straightaway, you are not working hard enough.

As a 'newbie' to the sport of cycling the message to you would be to try and cycle regularly, and with a reasonable amount of effort. Remember to increase your training load slowly, gradually build up your speed and distance as the weeks and months go by, enjoy the training and have a varied schedule and importantly do not overdo it. Try becoming involved with a cycle club and train with others or ride with a group of like-minded friends, it will make things much more enjoyable and you will equally benefit from the knowledge of others, also never forget the fact that everybody started somewhere. You will be given countless pieces of advice; take them all in the spirit in which they are given, but always make sure that you are in control of your own rate of progress.

Phil Hobby, dip PT, IIHST

Team Training Manager

e-mail: trainingmanager@bandiesonbikes.co.uk