

Build for Success

By Dario Fredrick

While a strong base may be the most essential part of an effective training program, the build period is when the work gets done that prepares us to race or achieve our high-end performance goals. Part of the build period may in fact be racing, but it is important to remember that racing often makes for poor training. Those accustomed to using power meters are well aware how different race files look in comparison to training files – it's surprising how much time you can spend just coasting along with the pack. Conversely, the constant surging efforts of criteriums or high intensity of mountain bike racing take a large toll on our bodies, impacting how effectively we are able to train for days after an event. While there is a certain kind of training impulse that is best achieved via the high intensity of racing, the focus of the build period lies elsewhere.

All winter long you have been patiently building aerobic endurance with long rides and controlled doses of moderate intensity, so now it's time to get down to the business of increasing your higher end muscular endurance and maximal steady state (MSS = 30 min performance threshold) power. We've got the diesel running, but how about the turbo? Effectively raising Zone 3 and Zone 4 power (approximately 85 -100% of MSS) requires consistent and repeated efforts at those workloads. These types of efforts can be best achieved on training grounds, rather than on race courses where both the terrain and the performance demands are highly variable and frequent forays well above MSS are required.

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One of the chief advantages of training over racing during the build period is the ability to focus on specific abilities (climbing, flat-land power, sprinting) in a way that is not possible in actual races. Flat sections of road races are often spent waiting for the inevitable bunch sprint or, at the other extreme, covering a series of attacks. Contrast this to the solid chunk of work done during a set of four ten-minute intervals. By the same token, even the hilliest races rarely provide the same physiological impulse as a day of climbing training that includes

forty minutes in z4 or fifty minutes in z3 – and the races certainly don't provide an atmosphere conducive to focusing on technique, cadence, etc. The higher intensity of the build period provides an opportunity to refine how we pedal, breathe, and think while performing at the upper end of our capabilities.

The higher intensity of the build period also requires greater attention to recovery. Though overall volume may have dropped slightly in comparison to the base period, the demands on our bodies have increased, not just on our muscles and cardiovascular system but also on our central nervous system. Going hard is hard! Once again, we would be wise to minimize the amount of racing we do, as the driving or flying, sleeping and eating away from home, and even standing in line for the porta potty on race day all

take their toll at a time when every bit of recovery adds to our strength down the road.

It can be hard to stay focused on the goals of the build period while our friends may be lining up for every possible early season race. After a long winter and many miles, the temptation to pin a number on every weekend is strong, particularly when base has gone well and we're itching to show our buddies just how much faster we are this year. But staying focused on the training tasks at hand and being selective about which races to contest will pay off with a longer, stronger season.

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