





11 WAYS TO SPRING CLEAN YOUR CYCLING

It's the time of year for getting rid of clutter, and that applies just as much to the bad habits holding back your cycling as to that sombrero you brought back from Benidorm...

WORDS: PAUL ROBSON



CAST OUT YOUR FEARS

Whether it's descending at speed, cornering, dealing with traffic, or facing up to a tough climb, we all have areas of our cycling where it is our minds rather than our bodies that hold us back.

Mental performance consultant Andy Barton, of *thesportingmind.com*, says there are techniques anyone can employ to conquer performance-denting fears: Focus on what you want to happen not on what you fear might happen.

"Fear comes about when you expect something to go wrong. Road racers I have worked with will often experience an increase in fear when they are coming back from a nasty fall. In such circumstances, there can be a tendency to focus on the accident, especially when they are on a similar road to where the accident happened, which provokes the rider to play a mental movie of the accident happening again and again.

"Fear comes about as a result of a perception of what might happen, not what does happen. One way of dealing with it is to re-program how you feel about the accident by replaying the experience in your mind – correcting what you did so that you stay on the bike rather than fall off. When we mentally rehearse an event vividly we actually fire the same neurons in the brain as when we really experience something, so on a certain level the mind cannot differentiate from imagined experience and reality. By regularly playing the 'good' race in your mind it can help you look forward to racing rather than dreading it."

STAY IN THE PRESENT > "Most riders will have experienced that phenomenon often referred to as 'the zone' or 'flow', where everything seems easy, where you perform using instinct rather than conscious thought and you are free of fear, stress and anxiety. One of the essentials for a racer to enter 'the zone' is that they must be in the present. As Zen Buddhists will tell you, negative emotions come about when an individual projects into the future. Emotions such as guilt and regret come about when we project into the past. But none of these negative emotions tend to bother us when we are in the present. A racer can get into the present by focusing on what they are doing in the moment (getting a good rhythm or focusing on their breathing), rather than thinking about something coming up (that testing hill in 10 miles' time)."

CHANGE YOUR PHYSIOLOGY > "A person who is experiencing fear will adopt a corresponding physiology (head down, frown etc). In the same way our mental state will affect our physiology, our physiology will affect our mental state. So if you were to purposely adopt the physiology of fear you would become fearful. Another way of dealing with fear is to change your body language to that of someone who is confident. If you lift your head up, hold your shoulders back and put a smile on your face, the mind registers that you are feeling confident and so it is far harder to feel the fear."

2 Throw away bad pacing

Even in a 10-mile TT, starting out as hard as possible can be a recipe for disaster – over any other distance, it certainly will be. And yet the temptation is always there, if we are seeking to ride a set distance as fast as we can, to set off as fast as we can.

Pacing is calculating how much energy you will need to cover the distance you plan to ride, and making sure you've got some left for the end. Mark Cavendish is an extreme case, but he spends the first 179.8km of a 180km stage using as little energy as possible so he can light it up in the last 200m. You need to do something similar.

If you're riding a sportive you will hopefully get the chance to work in a group, conserving energy by taking turns on the front, but don't get sucked into a group that's far too quick for you. Riding with faster cyclists can be an effective way to train, but on training rides it doesn't matter if your legs give up and you have to crawl home alone.

In an event where you find yourself alone then you need to listen to your body. Much better to take the first half too easy and be able to step it up in the later stages than to blow up halfway through.

Watch Sir Bradley Wiggins in a time trial and he will have a negative split – he will ride the second half of the course quicker than the first. It brought him Olympic gold in 2012, and saw him overhaul a visibly tiring Fabian Cancellara for silver at last year's worlds. Good pacing means you get the satisfaction of passing more people than you're passed by in the later stages of your event.



After a spill like this you may need 'reprogramming'!

Corbis



Tim DeWaele



4 Sort out your on-bike nutrition

Getting your pacing right is half the battle when it comes to enjoying your whole ride, but you also need to sort out your feeding. A well-fuelled ride will not only be more enjoyable but faster too.

Nutritionist Kate Percy of *gofasterfood.com* explains: “On-bike nutrition should be an integral part of your training. It’s best to try out different strategies for your on-bike feeds to find out what suits you as an individual, as tolerance to different foods under stress can vary enormously. We can store enough carbohydrate in the

form of glycogen, our primary source of energy for endurance, to keep us going for around 90 minutes of exercise. After this we resort to burning fat reserves for energy. At best this can reduce both speed and efficiency. At worst we run out of steam completely, or ‘bonk’.

“You’ll need a balance of carbohydrate and protein (a 4:1 ratio is best) to keep glycogen stores topped up and muscles healthy. In addition to this you’ll need to replace fluids and electrolytes (salts) that you’ll lose when you sweat. Regular top-up feeds of 30-60g carbohydrate, a little protein and fluids every 20-30 minutes will maintain glycogen levels,

muscle health and keep you hydrated. Foods that combine carbs and protein work well, for instance bananas, apple slices, malt loaf, energy bars, bagels or sandwiches (marmite/peanut butter/jam), handfuls of salted peanuts and dried fruit.

“Again, the amount of fluid you lose through sweat while riding is individual, so you’ll need to experiment. Sip on water regularly or, if you find it difficult to eat when cycling, a sports drink containing carbohydrate and electrolytes. Check your pee is a light straw colour when you return from your ride – if it is dark you should have taken on board more fluid during your ride.”

3 Sweep away poor pedalling technique

If the April showers are holding back your road riding during the early part of the season, then use your remaining turbo sessions to work on your pedalling. An efficient pedal stroke will enable you to ride further or faster for the same amount of energy. It will also help you to avoid injuries caused by putting excessive strain on your knees and ankles. Out on the road it can be difficult to concentrate on your pedalling motion when there is so much else to pay attention to. On the turbo or rollers you are free to focus.

There are two often-expounded techniques for achieving perfect pedalling – what the French call *souplesse* – and they are to imagine your hip bone moving in a perfect circle, or to imagine at the bottom of your pedal stroke that you are scraping mud off the sole of your shoe, thereby dragging it backwards and into the upstroke rather than letting the transfer of energy end at the base of the stroke.

Concentrate on these leg motions in training, while keeping your upper body still, and they will begin to come more naturally out on the road.

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11

TIDY UP YOUR BIKE

The British Cycling M-Check is a good way to work through your bike’s most important constituent parts and ensure everything is in good working order. A bike that’s clean and working well is much more enjoyable to ride than one whose niggly faults continually wind you up. It’s also an excellent way of ensuring your bike is safe to ride.

Start at the front axle and work your way up to the handlebar, checking that the wheel is fitted securely and spinning freely, that the front brake works well, that the tyre is in good order and pumped up, and that neither the headset nor the handlebar are loose.

Next head down the frame to the crank, checking for any damage along the way. Once at the cranks, check that your pedals are spinning freely, that the cranks themselves aren’t loose, ensure that the chainring teeth aren’t worn and that your front derailleur is clean and functioning smoothly.

Now head up to the saddle and check that it and the seatpost are secure, before moving down towards the rear axle. Check the rear brake, tyre and wheel as you pass, then have a look at your cassette and assess whether it needs cleaning or even replacing if it is very worn. Check your rear derailleur is



shifting smoothly and that your chain is clean, lubricated and running smoothly across the whole drive train.

Replace anything that has worn out, adjust anything that needs fine-tuning, and then try to keep on top of things so that your maintenance jobs in future will always be small tweaks rather than giant overhauls.

If in doubt, get a professional mechanic to look at it at your local bike shop. If they are willing to talk you through what they have done, you can learn a lot at the same time.



6 Update your riding routes

Climb aboard your bike and the world is your oyster... so how come so many of us end up riding the same routes over and over again? Time plays a part, because you know how long a fixed route will take, plus we all like to test ourselves over certain hills or Strava segments. But if you feel your riding is in a bit of a rut, why not point your wheels in the opposite direction next time you leave your road? Just remember to take a map!

7 Upgrade your training programmes

In pretty much the same way as we all need to get out and ride new roads, sometimes we all need to freshen up our training programme. This is particularly true if you haven't been achieving the level you've been aiming for previously: after all, to paraphrase Albert Einstein, the definition of insanity is repeating the same process over and over and expecting a different result.

Peter Giddings, of *honed-coaching.com*, advises taking a complete break from riding to draw a line under the past. "Take some time off, skip two or three rides and spend the time resting up instead," he explains. "If you're going to train hard you need to be fresh, and a lot of people underestimate this."

"A couple of good sessions that people could then sensibly introduce would be:

"If you're going to be racing, warm up as you would for a race (see 'Declutter your pre-event routine' on the next page) then go straight into six

periods of one-minute all-out effort with a five-minute easy period in between each one, then warm down. This will help you to develop sprint power, anaerobic power and aerobic capacity all in one session.

"For sportive riding, after the warm-up, sprint hard for 30 seconds and then ride for five minutes straight off the back of that at time trial pace before

going easy for five minutes. Repeat this four times and then warm down.

"Finally, every rider should have one ride per week that they do just because they love to ride their bike. You can do whatever you like on this ride – the only parameter by which you should measure its success is the width of your smile at the end of the ride."



Russell Burton

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CLEAN UP YOUR POSITION

If you're looking to put a new spring in your pedal stroke, then it could well be worth investing in a professional bike fit. Having your position tweaked by a master of the art will make you more comfortable and more efficient on your bike. A proper fitting process will take hours and demand a high level of expertise from your fitter, but there are things you can look at yourself to improve your riding position for the 2014 season.

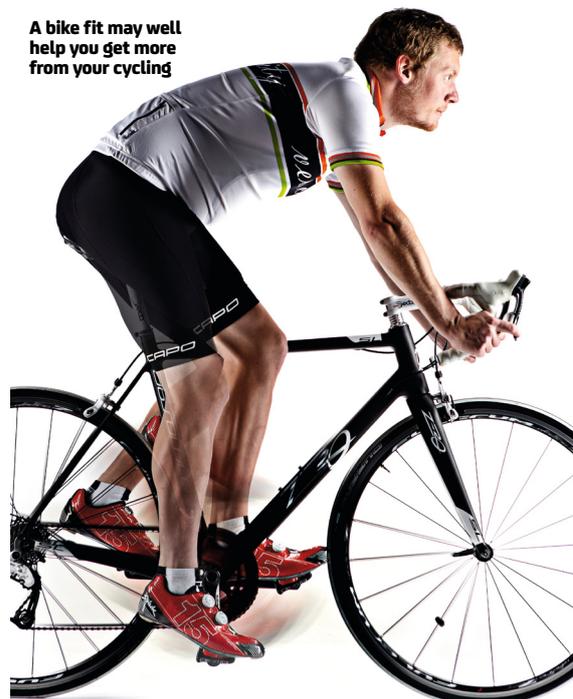
"Cleat fore and aft position is something fairly simple that people often get wrong," explains Peter Giddings, who performs bike fits under his Honed Coaching umbrella (*honed-coaching.com*). "The pedal axle – the location of which is marked on most cleats – should be somewhere between 5mm and 15mm behind the ball of the foot. The bigger your foot, the farther back it should be within those limits.

This locates the centre of pedal pressure at the point in line with where your foot is best able to support it."

To find your sweet spot, you need to locate the ball of your foot on the sole of your shoe. Standing in your shoes and with your weight on your forefoot, have a glamorous(?) assistant make a pen mark on the side of your shoe where you can feel the hard bony bulge at the base of your big toe (known as the first metatarsal head).

Measure from the back of your shoe to your mark, jot down your measurement and loosely attach your cleats. Carefully adjust them so that your pedal axle marker is between 5mm and 15mm behind this point. You will need to try your position out and microadjust it, but as a rule of thumb if you have small feet (size 4-5) you will be nearer 5mm, and with larger feet (size 13-14) you will be nearer 15mm.

A bike fit may well help you get more from your cycling



THIN OUT YOUR BODY

Not everyone needs to, but if you're a rider who feels as though one of the things holding you back is your body weight, then the dawn of a new season of cycling is a good time to target getting some weight off. With a lot of riding coming up, combining that exercise with a healthy diet should see the pounds fall off.

Nutritionist Kate Percy, of *gofasterfood.com*, says: "Make sure every mouthful of food you eat is nutritious. The calories you eat need to be nutrient-dense to fuel your training properly, satisfy your hunger and help prevent injury. Every car needs fuel: the better quality the fuel, the superior the drive. Your body works in the same way. Fill your tank with healthy nutrients and you'll feel better and have more sustained energy. Yes, if you're training regularly, it's nice to have a treat now and then! That's fine, but it's easy to fall into the trap of satisfying hunger with quick-fix treats such as pastries, pork pies, processed cakes and biscuits, chocolate bars; empty calories with little nutritional value. These rapidly release their sugars into the bloodstream, causing a spike in energy followed by a

massive slump and a renewed hunger; a spiral that is hard to break. Choose your carbs with care and combine them with a little protein to make them even more sustaining. Eat wholegrain 'energy' carbohydrates such as brown rice, oats, quinoa, lentils and wholegrain bread, plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, nuts and seeds, and oatcakes with peanut butter or hummus. Quality lean protein, such as eggs, lean meat, beans and oily fish is also good. These will help prevent weight gain, give you more consistent energy, maintain steady blood sugars and reduce hunger pangs, while at the same time boosting the immune system and mood-enhancing serotonin levels.

"When back-to-back training, refuel the body with a combo of carbohydrate and protein (4:1 ratio) within 15 minutes of a workout, as this is when the muscles are at their most receptive. Whizz a banana, an egg-white and a spoon of honey with a glass of milk for the ultimate balanced recovery shake. Topping up your depleted levels immediately after training and racing reduces hunger kicking in later on and therefore the temptation to grab fatty, 'instant-satisfaction' foods."



Geoff Waugh

10 Declutter your pre-event routine

Warming up for an event doesn't have to be complicated, but you will need to allow yourself enough time. Get to the start of your race early, sign on, use the loos, collect your number and pin it on. If it's a time trial, note the route to the start and how long it will take you to get there. You are now free to concentrate on preparing yourself.

Peter Giddings, of *honed-coaching.com*, explains just how straightforward a warm-up routine can be: "It's possible for you to get 90 per cent of the benefits of a perfect warm-up simply from steadily building up your effort over 10-15 minutes until you are working at a level where you are just able to control of your breathing. Hold that level for two minutes, and then relax. You should look to finish that warm-up 10-15 minutes before your start, which will give you time to take off your leg warmers and jacket and anything else that you need to sort out.

"That's a simple and effective routine, but if you want another five per cent on top start your routine 10 minutes earlier and, after the first part, ride easy for five minutes before going all-out for 20 seconds, then easy for two minutes, then all-out for another 20 seconds, then ease off. Again you should look to finish 10-15 minutes before your start."

11 RIDE MORE!

This is not as easy as it sounds, given all the other pressures on our time these days. But if one thing can reinvigorate your love for riding, it's getting out there and doing it, so treat yourself.