

Long Live Long Rides

There is an advertisement for a cycling product which I think is pretty good. It shows a cyclist dumping a whole bag of dog food into and all over the dog's bowl and the caption says 'Long live long rides'. That sends the message that this is likely going to be a very long ride. Long rides are great. They are the backbone of cycling riding, racing and training. One of the great things about the sport of cycling is it is something you can do for hours at a time. (Golf is another sport that takes me hours, but that's a different story). Whether you are a recreation cyclist, racer or triathlete, long rides are fun to do and are good for you too.

You see, cycling is both an aerobic activity and an endurance activity. Long rides improve both of these things. Long endurance rides obviously increase your endurance, duh! And they also increase your aerobic capacity. Long endurance rides improve a number of aspects about your body and its ability to ride longer. It changes things such as your mitochondria in your cells which generate ATP to fuel your muscles, it improves the efficiency at which you can burn fat for fuel, and it increases the number of capillaries in your muscles to get more blood, oxygen and sugars to your working muscles. Long rides also increase your body's ability to sit on a bike seat for hours, hunched over and spinning your legs around and around. Another nice thing about endurance rides is they are done at a fairly easy, enjoyable pace so you don't have to kill yourself when you do these rides. These are the rides I enjoy most – I have permission to ride at a fun pace.

Springtime is a great time of year to do nice, long endurance rides. Although you should continue to some long rides year round, you want to do more miles of riding early in the season to build your endurance – your fitness foundation for your riding to come. If you haven't been following the advice in my previous articles to a 'T' this winter (you have, haven't you??), then you will need to do some endurance or base miles to get yourself back into cycling condition. I like to think of cycling training as a pyramid. At the broad base is your strength and endurance fitness. Once you have developed that, you can begin doing more intense riding such as aerobic threshold rides. Then as you move up you move into the anaerobic intervals and at the pinnacle is the sprinting and high power workouts. To learn more about this pyramid, refer to my free eBooklet, Basics of Cycling Training, available at <http://tinyurl.com/as65lz>. Therefore, think of endurance rides as the foundation of your training program. You won't build a lot of high end fitness with these rides, but you build the broad base of fitness (e.g. conditioning) that is necessary for the training and riding that will come this summer.

So what counts as an endurance ride and how should you do them? Well, it's almost as easy as just heading out on your bike and going for a long time. But here's a few more specifics. I don't count a ride as an endurance ride unless it's at least two hours long. Shorter than this and is just isn't really long enough to elicit a lot of the endurance training effects. Does that mean you shouldn't ride if you don't have two hours? Of course not, but if you have less than two hours, you just need to work on some other aspect of fitness first, such as speed or strength. Also, early in the year, you don't want to jump right into a three hour ride. Build up gradually. A good rule of thumb is to increase the duration of your long ride by more than a half hour per week. Build your fitness back up with one hour rides, then 1.5 hours, then two hour rides. The effort you put out on an endurance ride doesn't have to be especially hard. Basically, just go at a pace that is comfortable

for you. The objective is to go for distance and time in the saddle on these rides, not to work on speed. Base miles are sometimes referred to as LSD rides, for Long Slow Distance. However, lately people have objected to the 'Slow' part and now call it 'Long Steady Distance'.

Now, there are some variations to just doing long, steady miles, once you get some longer, easier rides under your belt. Here are a few ideas. On a long ride, throw in a harder effort every 15 minutes, just for a minute or two to get the heart pumping. This will increase the intensity of your long rides. Another suggestion is to pick up the pace when you are about 20 minutes from home. Hold this faster pace until you get to 10 minutes from home, then ease up and warm down. This will help you sustain a good pace towards the end of a long ride, like when you are trying to get to the end of a long hot day on RAGBRAI®. A third alternative is to pick a hilly course (yes, on purpose) and work on hill strength while doing longer rides. Stay seated and focus on powering up the hills.

With spring coming and warmer weather and longer days, get out and celebrate by putting in some time in the saddle!

I have a whole chapter devoted to Endurance workouts in my eBook, 101 Cycling Workouts. This is available for purchase at www.101CyclingWorkouts.com or if you email me at coach@cyclesportcoaching.com, you can get it for a DMCC discounted price of \$15.

News Flash! www.RoadBikeRider.com has begun selling my eBook, Training For Busy Cyclists, and it has already risen the charts to the #1 selling eBook on this site in March (they sell 42 titles). If you aren't receiving their email newsletter, you really should. It's packed with all sorts of information about cycling, condensed down into a very readable format. It contains snippets on fitness and training, bike equipment, advocacy and racing news and lots of other stuff. Sign up for it at www.RoadBikeRider.com. By the way, I am giving DMCC members a discount on this eBook. Email me at coach@cyclesportcoaching.com to get yours for \$12.

Happy Training

Coach David Ertl

David Ertl is a USA Cycling Level 1 (Elite) Coach. He is the lead coach with the DMCC/DMOS/RDMB Race Team and the coach for the JDRF Greater Iowa Chapter for the Ride to Cure Diabetes, and he coaches individual cyclists. He is also an NSCA certified Personal Trainer. He is accepting new coaching clients and can be contacted at Coach@CyclesportCoaching.com or at 515-689-1254.