

Training Log 01: Dissecting the Ride

The first thing to do in targeting any goal is to figure out the requirement of the task, then build your path based on those requirements. So in this first article, let's analyze exactly what Tony has gotten all of us into from a physical standpoint!

- Vancouver to Austin is going to be a journey of about 4,800 km, and we'll be aiming to do that distance in 9 days while avoiding night riding as possible.
- Based on 10 teams with 18 h of team riding daily, that works out to each team riding 3-6 h daily, and an overall average pace of 28-30 km/h for all the groups.
- The key to success is that we will be riding in packs of 5 riders. This makes bike handling skills and the ability to ride in a smooth group absolutely essential for both safety and speed.
- We will be splitting up into groups of roughly equal ability, so the pace of the different groups may differ, but each group will still ride about 3-6 h daily.
- The terrain we will travel will range from flat roads, roads with lots of »rollers« (short hills that keep going up and down) and a range of mountainous terrain through the Appalachians.

One of the main challenges of this ride will be the day after day after day of riding. Most of us, with minimal training, can go out and ride for 3 h or do a really epic ride. The trick is being able to do it again the next day, and then again the day after that. I well remember the first time I sent Tony out to do a hard solo back-to-back ride. His big Irish arse was so sore at the end of the first day that he could barely fathom waking up and having to make his way back to Halifax!

The repeated riding is going to take a LOT of endurance, and the other major emphasis is on the ability to recover. In a similar manner to riders in the Tour de France, the major emphasis is on having a big base of endurance, all so that they can recuperate and ride hard again the next day.

As I wrote above, the pack riding is going to be essential to success. You can save more than 30% of your energy when riding in a paceline compared to riding at the same speed by yourself. Also, there's few things more magical in cycling than cruising along in a well-oiled paceline. So we will devote a few articles to the do's and don'ts of pack riding.

One golden rule Tony taught us last year is that he should not have been taking off his jacket while riding, resulting in the jacket getting caught in his wheels and him flying over the handlebars. While funny now, this could have been a disaster for the success of the entire project. So we will go over some essential bike handling drills that will also add to your comfort and enjoyment of the bike.

For newcomers to cycling, absolutely nothing beats time in the saddle to build cardiovascular endurance, training the muscles to fire properly, and to build toughness in the butt! However, riding at one speed, and riding solo, only teaches you to ride at that one speed. Riding in a pack, and also racing, depends on the ability to do periodic hard bouts of higher power output, then resting in the pack to recover and be ready for another turn at the front. This is the basis of »interval« training, which is a very efficient means to build fitness. Therefore, while much of our training will revolve around endurance training, we will also build in some appropriate interval training that will elevate your cardiovascular fitness and build your capacity for pack riding.

Recovery is not just about fitness, but there are specific nutritional and other strategies that you can use to maximize your ability to recuperate. So we will also talk about some recovery strategies, such as what to do immediately after your team finishes your ride for the day.

We will be getting into specific training ideas and workouts very soon in these articles. But with the winter still blasting down on us, the main thing is to start collecting our equipment and keeping an aerobic base of fitness. With the latter, anything cardiovascular is great, from spin classes, running, to my favourite of squash. Basically, the heart is fairly dumb in that it will grow stronger with any type of activity that raises the heart rate for a sustained period of time. So building and keeping that endurance base will permit us to get into the outdoor biking season with a foundation of fitness.

So there's a lot to cover and it's time to get rolling!

Stephen