

Introduction by Joe Friel

Any coach will tell you that a carefully maintained training record is a great tool for faster, stronger racing. Some cyclists are good at keeping a training diary, but others fail to take the time. Without a diary you're forced to rely on memory, which, all too often, provides only exaggerated versions of what happened months, weeks, or even days before.

There are several other good reasons to keep a diary. It can serve as a positive reinforcement and boost confidence before particularly challenging races. By looking back to workouts or other races that loomed large, but were mastered, you feel assured that you have what it takes. A diary also reveals whether or not fitness is improving by comparing recent measures such as time trials, interval results, or even resting heart rates against similar standards a year or more ago when you were in great shape. In the same way, you can thumb back through a diary to discover what has and hasn't worked before. This could be a peaking procedure prior to especially good race, a way of dealing with an injury that once proved successful, or a tactic that worked against a strong competitor.

Perhaps the main argument for using a diary is in the prevention of overtraining—a necessity for nearly every serious athlete. More on this later.

WHAT IS A TRAINING DIARY?

Record-keeping works best in accomplishing the above if it's in the form of both a daily log and journal. Technically, a log is a record of basic data, usually numbers, that relates to progress (distance, time, heart rate, etc.), while a journal is a record of your thoughts and experiences. Log information is objective while the journal portion is subjective.

Both are important. By combining the two into a diary, the information you collect covers a broader spectrum of needs. You may decide not to use all the spaces provided in this diary—that's okay.

Whatever you write down, make it only what's important and useful to you. Everything else just gets in the way when trying to analyze your training.

THE “O” WORD

The diary is most commonly used to avoid overtraining. When it seems that training isn't going well, and you aren't quite sure why, looking back through diary notes for the last few weeks may reveal a cause of the problem. Look for phrases used repeatedly such as “feel tired” or “no snap today” or “sluggish.” These are sure signs that you're doing too much—overreaching. Also check the numbers for trends and patterns.

You may find that every third day or so sleep quality is poor and fatigue is high. Such a pattern is telling you to allow more recovery time between the hard workouts. Another possible sign of doing too much is when heart rate data and workout ratings don't agree. For example, your heart rate is low, but the effort seems high. Such a review of the training diary helps you decide if it's time to take a long break, or just cut back for a couple of days.

JUST SAY “NO” TO COMPULSION

Keeping a diary is helpful for making progress in cycling, but don't let it become a handicap to your training and racing. Riders who believe they must achieve and record certain numbers in their training diary each week often lose focus of what riding a bike is all about—having fun! This diary is merely a tool to help you achieve your cycling goals, and a record of what you accomplish this year. Using a training diary as described here won't guarantee your success as a cyclist. It will, however, increase the likelihood. Happy riding!

HOW TO PLAN YOUR SEASON

Cyclists are goal driven people. Show me a rider who has no desire to ride stronger and faster, and I'll show you a rider who is not in the sport for long. Success is not possible in cycling without high motivation. Racing a bike is just too grueling to do it in an indifferent manner. Every cyclist wants to improve, but a passion to excel is nothing without a passion to prepare to excel.

Preparation is where many cyclists fail. Most are willing to put in endless hours on the road or trail, but are less zealous when it comes to planning. That's a shame, because planning is the first step in achieving any goal in life, including those accomplished on a bike. A goal without a plan is just a wish.

Most cyclists could achieve their goals by making only one small change: writing down a plan for how to train throughout the year. Just as with a diary, training plans may

comprise the most minute particulars or provide just a rough outline. Regardless of the detail, better racing will result from deciding in advance what you'll do on the bike and when.

The Annual Training Plan (see page 19) is a tool that will help you incorporate periodization into your training. Periodization is a way of training in which fitness is built from the most basic to the more complex aspects in stages or periods. The purpose of periodization is fast racing when it counts.

The following step-by-step description guides you through each part of the Annual Training Plan that follows. It may take you thirty minutes or so to design your personal plan—time well invested. It's best to write only in pencil as things are likely to change during the season.

STEP 1: SET YOUR SEASON GOALS

What are three major racing accomplishments you'd like to achieve this year? Write them down on the plan. Keep it to three or less as having more is likely to complicate your training and racing. Goals are best if they're realistic, specific, measurable, and performance-oriented. Here is an example of a goal that meets these criteria:

Break one hour for the 40 km individual time trial by August 1.

Goals are most effective when they're written down and reviewed frequently. You can also write your goals on the jacket flap so that you'll see them every time you open your training diary.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY YOUR TRAINING OBJECTIVES

Training objectives are the aspects of fitness or the workout performances needed to achieve your season goals. Just as with the goals, objectives are best if realistic, specific, measurable, and performance-oriented. You can also write these objectives on the diary flap so you'll see them often. An example of a training objective that might support the above example of a season goal is:

Complete 3 x 10 km intervals at 25 mph average with 5-minute recoveries by July 12.

STEP 3: ESTABLISH YOUR ANNUAL HOURS

How many hours did you train last year? Are you capable of riding your bike more, or do

you need to cut back this year due to time constraints? Would you like to race more competitively this year, or is this a year just to maintain your race level? The answers to these questions will help you decide how many hours to train in the coming year. There is a relationship between how many hours or miles you ride in a year and how you race. If you're unsure of your hours from last year due to poor record keeping, now is a good time to start rectifying that problem so it won't be an issue again.

Here are suggested annual hours by sport and racer category. These are not absolutes; in other words, you don't have to train at these hours to race in these categories. Some riders do more and still race poorly. Others do less and win frequently.

Road Category	Annual Hours
Pro	800–1200
1–2	700–1000
3/35+ Masters	500–700
4/45+ Masters	350–500
5/Juniors	200–350

Mountain Bike Category	Annual Hours
Pro	700–1000
Semi-Pro	600–800
Expert/Veteran	500–700
Sport/Master	300–500
Beginner/Junior	200–350

STEP 4: FILL IN THE CALENDAR

In the column titled "Week/Mon." write in the dates of each Monday in the year. For example, January 5 is 1/5.

STEP 5: PLAN YOUR YEAR OF RACING

List all of the races you may do this year in the "Races" column placing them in the proper weeks according to their dates. If unsure about a particular race, list it.

STEP 6: PRIORITIZE YOUR RACES

Give a priority ranking (in the column labeled "Pri.") to each of the races using the following guidelines.

A-Priority Races. These are the most important races—the ones that will determine success in the coming season. They are closely related to the Season Goals on the previous page. You will peak and taper for each of these races. Limit these to no more than four A races in a year. Two in the same week or a stage race counts as one A race. It's a good idea to “clump” two or more of these races together within a two- or three-week period. That way you can peak two or three times in a season. Trying to peak more times than this prevents you from coming into top form since there's not enough time between them to reestablish fitness.

B-Priority Races. These aren't as important as the A races, so you will not peak and taper for these races. A few days of rest, however, precedes each event. Assign a B priority to about eight races, again counting two in the same week or a B-priority stage race as one.

C-Priority Races. These least important races are ones that you may not even do. You'll “train through them,” meaning they are treated the same as hard workout. They are best used as tune-up races before A- and B-priority races. They also make good workouts and build experience in novice riders. There are no limits on the number of C races, but they can interfere with training, so choose them conservatively. Frequent racing without a break is a common cause of burnout and overtraining.

STEP 7: IDENTIFY YOUR TRAINING PERIODS

This where the periodization begins. You now divide the season into periods starting with your A races. A clumping of A-priority races is called a “Race” period and may last as long as three weeks or as short as one. The week or two before each Race period, write in “Peak.” Preceding each of these Peaks is a six- to nine-week “Build” period. The first Build period of the year is preceded by an eight- to twelve-week “Base” period and before that a two- to four-week “Prep” period. It's a good idea to plan for some rest after each of the Race periods by plugging in a one- to six-week “Transition.”

The suggested characteristics of each of these periods are as follows.

Prep. General adaptation to training with weights, crosstraining, and on-bike drills. The emphasis is on endurance, force (weight room strength), and speed skills (pedaling and handling skills).

Base. Gradually increase the basic fitness elements of endurance, force, and speed skills. Begin muscular endurance with training near or just below lactate (anaerobic) threshold.

Build. Develop greater anaerobic endurance fitness with intervals and sprints while refining muscular endurance and power. Work especially on improving personal racing limiters and achieving Training Objectives. Maintain endurance, force, and speed skills. To maintain and ability all you need to do is complete the specific type of workout every 10 to 14 days or so.

Peak. Reduce volume and allow for more recovery days between hard workouts that simulate racing and refine needed skills. Do a mini-race simulation workout every 72–96 hours. This may be a group workout, hill repeats that simulate a climb in the race, sprints with a partner, or anything else that you believe is necessary for success in your upcoming A-priority race.

Race. A period of focused racing with greatly reduced training. Allow for lots of rest with frequent, short, race-intensity workouts.

Transition. An extended period of rest and recovery. This may be three to five days or as much as six weeks. It's okay to exercise during this break, but no "training."

You can use the blank fold-out annual calendars (page 22a–22b) to keep track of what months your different training periods will fall in. This calendar is also useful to help you schedule testing, and to decide what days of the week are best for particular workouts. Filling in the calendar will help you see your progression of weekly hours from month to month as well as your progression of races for the entire year. The calendar may also serve as a reminder to plan your training around events in your work or personal life.

STEP 8: FILL IN YOUR WEEKLY HOURS

Write in the approximate hours you will train each week, including weights and crosstraining, based on the Weekly Training Hours table (pages 22–23). The actual hours you work out each week will vary from this based on many circumstances such as weather or other unexpected complications. This is a guideline only. Feel free to change it to meet your exact needs.

STEP 9: TARGET YOUR MOST IMPORTANT WORKOUTS

Each week check the key workout types following the period guidelines offered above in Step 7. In the “Details” column you might list something such as “three-hour ride,” “intervals,” or “hills.” Key workouts are described in the following terms. (For more details of each of these types of workouts, see *The Cyclist’s Training Bible*.)

Weights. These are strength training workouts.

Endurance. These workouts emphasize the athlete’s ability to delay the onset of fatigue and reduce its effects. This may include longer, low-intensity work.

Force. These workouts improve a cyclist’s ability to overcome resistance. For example, biking on hills or in the wind.

Speed Skills. Training to help a cyclist move effectively on the bike. These workouts usually emphasize form and technique.

Muscular Endurance. These are workouts that train muscles to maintain a relatively high force load for a prolonged period of time, by combining force and endurance training.

Anaerobic Endurance. These workouts emphasize the cyclist’s ability to resist fatigue at a very high level of effort with high leg turnover. This type of training may include long sprints or short climbs, and is best introduced later in the season.

Power. This training develops the cyclist’s ability to apply maximum force quickly. This type of training usually involves short, all-out efforts, and is best done early in a training session before the body is fatigued.

Testing. Performed on recovery weeks, testing is a good way to measure your progress throughout a season.

HOW TO USE THIS DIARY

A training diary is only as useful as you make it. If you record little or write in it inconsistently, a diary has little value. On the other hand, recording lots of needless data

that you never look at again not only wastes time, but also makes it harder to analyze later. The key is to write down immediately following every workout what was important and nothing more. The longer you wait, the greater the possibility you'll forget something or that feelings and thoughts will fade.

To ensure that it's used, keep this diary in a place that you go to following every ride, such as near where cycling shoes or workout gear is kept. That way you see it and are more likely to write in it right away. Your log is a constant reminder of your goals and progress. Filling it out after every workout will help to keep you on track throughout the season.

The text that follows describes the various parts of the diary pages that make up most of this book. You may decide not to use some parts, or you may want to modify the information you record in other parts from what is suggested here. The most important point is that you keep an accurate record of training and racing for future reference. The headings listed here can be found on each diary page.

WEEK BEGINNING

At the start of each week indicate Monday's date, and the dates for the other days of the week. These correspond with the "Week / Mon." column of the Annual Training Plan.

PERIOD

From the Annual Training Plan write in what training period this weeks falls into: Prep, Base, Build, Peak, Race, or Transition.

PLANNED HOURS

The approximate number of hours you plan to ride this week are recorded here based on what you wrote on the Annual Training Plan in the "Hours" column. This is a rough guideline only. You may decide to change this a little one way or the other. The idea, however, is to remain consistent with your plan so that a high-volume week remains much the same, as does a low-volume recovery week. On the other hand, if you aren't feeling right late in the week, it's better to cut back than to risk overtraining or illness. When in doubt—cut it out. Some riders prefer to record weekly volume in miles rather than hours. Record whichever works better for you.

WEEK GOALS

At the start of each week, write in three goals you want to accomplish that will help

achieve your training objectives on the Annual Training Plan. For example, if one of your training objectives is to “Complete 3 x 10 km intervals at 25 mph average with 5-minute recoveries by July 12,” then at some point in the season, after building the necessary fitness, this becomes a weekly goal. Prior to that, other weekly goals will build up to this with something such as: “Complete 3 x 8 km intervals at 25 mph average with 5-minute recoveries.”

week beginning:

March 5

Period: Build 1

Planned Hours: 15:00

week goals: Improve training consistency: Complete all BT workouts

Improve climbing: Climb Rist Canyon in 28 minutes by 5/31

Improve focus: Feel more focused in tempo workouts by 7/31

MONDAY ___/___/___

Write in Monday's date (also write in dates for the other days of the week).

VITAL SIGNS (SLEEP, FATIGUE, STRESS, SORENESS)

The purpose of this part of the diary is to help you listen to your body. Every day it gives you clues about what condition it is in. By closely monitoring some of the signals it sends out, you can head off overtraining, burnout, injury, and illness. The first thing you should do every morning is rate your perceptions of the previous night's sleep, your fatigue level, psychological stress, and soreness. Use a scale of 1 to 7—with 1 being the best, most favorable rating, and 7 the worst, most unfavorable rating. Write the appropriate number in the box preceding each signal. A rating of 4 or greater on any of the vital signs above should be considered as warnings that something isn't right. The more warnings, the more cautiously and conservatively you should train on that day.

Resting heart rate should be taken while you are still in bed and recorded as beats per minute (bpm) above (+) or below (–) normal, based on a one-week average found when you were well rested. While a low pulse is usually a good sign for fitness, it is not always so. Some scientific studies have found obviously overtrained athletes to have low resting heart rates.