

## Three Essential Base Bike Workouts for Ironman

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Are you new to long-distance racing? Contemplating going long in 2009? If you have already done the deed and entered an Ironman race for next season, then this could be just what you need to ensure a pleasant Ironman experience. With the focus on an Ironman next summer now is the time to put a plan in place that will bring you to a peak for your big race.

Let's just focus here on the bike leg of the race. Bear in mind that if you are new to long-course racing that your only goal on race day should be to finish the bike ride comfortably under the cut-off time and have solid legs left for running. Do *not* set a time goal.

Your bike training for the winter Base period should be focused on three fundamental building-block workouts.

- Endurance. Develop the aerobic fitness necessary to go the distance.
- Force. Build the strength necessary for turning bigger gears, riding into the wind and climbing hills.
- Speed skills. Improve pedalling efficiency so you waste less energy. This is an often overlooked but of critical importance for an Ironman-distance race.

The purpose of the Base period is to prepare you for the next part of your training plan, the Build period when the training is more challenging. All of the athletes I coach use these workouts, with the only difference between the pro and age group athletes being how much volume they can handle.

### **Workout 1: Endurance**

This is a long, steady ride at low to moderate intensity undertaken once per week. They are primarily done in zone 2 heart rate which is 80 to 89 percent of lactate threshold heart rate. If you have a power meter hold a steady wattage between 65 and 75 percent of threshold power. Aim to keep the intensity as constant and steady as possible. Avoid extended coasting, big surges on hills and into the wind, and elevated heart rate levels. If you are riding in a group you will need to especially watch out for those who want to put the hammer down. This is a purposeful workout—not a race.

These workouts may be done on the road or on an indoor trainer. If the weather is cooperative ride on the road as the duration makes such indoor workouts quite mind-numbing. Dress appropriately for the conditions; keep your extremities warm. Five hours on a bike can seem so much longer with frozen feet. And as a word of caution, if you are

spending long periods of time on the trainer watch for signs of burn out. The best sign is low motivation to train.

This workout may also be done with a group so long as everyone is of similar ability and adheres to the planned intensity. But realize that Ironman training and racing is, essentially, a solitary activity. You must eventually be prepared to ride alone for many hours on race day.

On these long rides experiment with your race nutrition strategy and the aid station products that will be provided by the race organisers, if you decide to use them. You will need to replace expended carbohydrate stores. This typically means 300 to 400 calories per hour depending on body size and experience.

### **Workout 2: Force**

Find a hill with a steady four to six percent gradient that takes around 30 seconds or so to climb. If this is proving tricky to find, elevate the front wheel of your bike on your indoor trainer by about 15cms and crank up the resistance. The aim of the session is to build strength through a set of hill intervals done with a low cadence of between 50 and 60 rpm. Do 6 to 16 repetitions of 30-seconds duration. Allow two minutes and 30 seconds of easy riding for recovery. Start off with six reps and add one or two each week. Be careful not to advance too quickly as this workout has the potential to damage your knees. They need to adapt slowly and gradually. Stop the workout at the first sign of knee pain.

Intensity is the key. It should be near maximal effort. Your heart rate monitor is of no help. If you use a power meter, which is greatly preferred, watch for a drop off in wattage of five percent after your third repetition. That will be the sign to pack up and ride home. Sit in an upright riding position, not aero. Start the session with a 10- to 15-minute warm-up and the same for a cool down. Try this session once per week. It should take 50 to 70 minutes.

### **Workout: 3 Speed Skills**

As you are hopefully doing with both swimming and running, you should be dedicating part of your training time during the Base period to develop bike skills. Pedalling efficiency is an essential part of Ironman fitness. I would recommend doing these sessions on an indoor trainer as it's safer and you can concentrate completely on the drills.

Warm up for 10 to 15 minutes then undertake three to five sets of isolated leg training (ILT) drills. Use a chair near the trainer to rest one leg, continue cycling with the single leg for 30 seconds aiming to maintain 80 rpm cadence. The focus of your attention for this drill should be pedalling horizontally. Drive your toes toward the front of the shoe as your foot moves through the 12 o'clock position and pawing our foot back as it moves through the 6 o'clock position. After each 30-second effort, spin with both legs for one minute. Then repeat the drill using the other leg.

Follow this up with three to five sets of 30-second spin ups. Starting in a low gear, gradually increase your pedalling speed until you feel yourself bouncing on the saddle. Then slowly reduce your pedal speed until the bouncing stops holding this cadence for a few seconds. Pedal as smoothly and relaxed as possible. This will improve your cycling efficiency. Build both drills up to 5 sets with the duration of the ILT drills up to two minutes and one minute for the spin ups over the course of the Base period. Try these sessions a couple of times per week to dial in your pedalling skills. They may also be incorporated into your warm-ups and cool downs for other workouts.

With both the Endurance and Force workouts allow 48 hours recovery before introducing a long run or a hill-running session. This will allow enough time for adequate recovery as running on tired legs affects the quality of the session and risks injury.

Stay focused on these three key bike sessions during your Ironman Base period and this will prepare you for the increased intensity of the Build period to come.

*Joe Friel is a coach and the author of The Triathlete's Training Bible and other books. For free training information, training plans and coaching go to [TrainingBible.co.uk](http://TrainingBible.co.uk).*

### **Test Your Progress**

**With a heart rate monitor.** Once every four weeks ride a standard course for your aerobic endurance workout as described here. Hold a steady heart rate in the 2 zone. Your time should improve indicating increasing fitness.

**With a power meter.** After *each* long aerobic endurance ride divide your average power by your average heart rate. The value should increase over time indicating improving fitness.

### **What is a good Ironman bike leg?**

Whether you are new to the Ironman distance or an old hand the key is managing your bike ride so that you have the best possible marathon. A controlled and steady bike leg is critical to Ironman success as it means you will be able to run. There is nothing to be gained by fast ride followed by a long walk. It's a triathlon, not a bike race.