

# TRAINING PLANS FOR CYCLISTS



## Road Cycling

- 30-mile
- 50-mile
- 100K
- Century
- Multi-day tour

## Mountain Biking

- 3-hour
- 100-mile
- 24-hour

GALE BERNHARDT

# TRAINING PLANS FOR CYCLISTS

Gale Bernhardt



BOULDER, COLORADO

Training Plans for Cyclists  
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# CONTENTS

*Acknowledgments* *vii*

*Introduction* *ix*

## Part I

**Getting Started** **1**

- 1** The Elements of Training **3**
- 2** Training Intensity and Volume **15**
- 3** Nutrition **33**
- 4** Equipment **57**

## Part II

**Event Training Plans** **83**

- 5** 30-Mile Ride, Level I (6-week plan) **85**
- 6** 100K or 50-Mile Ride, Level I (8-week plan) **91**
- 7** Century Ride, Level I (12-week plan) **97**
- 8** Century Ride, Level II (12-week plan) **105**

## Part III

**Touring Training Plans** **113**

- 9** Three-Day Tour, 25–30 Miles per Day, Level I (10-week plan) **115**
- 10** Three-Day Tour, 40–50 Miles per Day, Level I (12-week plan) **121**
- 11** Three-Day Tour, 40–50 Miles per Day, Level II (12-week plan) **129**
- 12** One-Week Tour, 60–80 Miles per Day, Level I (12-week plan) **137**
- 13** One-Week Tour, 60–80 Miles per Day, Level II (12-week plan) **145**

## Part IV

<b>Mountain Bike Training Plans</b>	153
<b>14</b> Weekend-Warrior Mountain Biking, Level I (12-week plan)	155
<b>15</b> Mountain Bike Racing, Level II (12-week plan)	163
<b>16</b> 100-Mile Mountain Bike Race, Level I (16-week plan)	171
<b>17</b> 100-Mile Mountain Bike Race, Level II (14-week plan)	179
<b>18</b> 24-Hour Mountain Bike Racing on a Team (6-week crash plan)	189

## Part V

<b>Building Foundation Fitness</b>	193
<b>19</b> Foundation Fitness Training Plan, Level I (12-week plan)	195
<b>20</b> Foundation Fitness Training Plan, Level II (18-week plan)	203

## Part VI

<b>Supporting Information</b>	211
<b>21</b> Workout Codes	213
<b>22</b> Strength Training	223
<b>23</b> Stretching	245
<i>Appendix A: Health Questionnaire</i>	251
<i>Appendix B: Event Checklist</i>	253
<i>Appendix C: Illness and Injury</i>	257
<i>Bibliography</i>	267
<i>Index</i>	271
<i>About the Author</i>	274

# INTRODUCTION

For years, cyclists familiar with my book *Training Plans for Multisport Athletes* have asked me, “When are you going to write a book for us?” *Training Plans for Cyclists* is an answer to that request.

Although my published work may be better known in the multisport world than in the cycling world, cycling is where I first achieved success as an endurance sports coach. I love cycling.

I have worked with a variety of cyclists, from local riders preparing for long-distance events to professional road racers and mountain bike riders. In my coaching business, I intentionally leave room for cyclists. One of the highlights of my career was working with Nicole Freedman, who secured her spot on the 2000 USA Cycling Olympic Team by winning the U.S. Pro National Championship Race that same year. My first trip to the Olympic Games was in 2000 to Sydney, Australia, as a personal cycling coach.

Coaching and teaching sport skills have long been my passion. I feel great when I can help endurance athletes reach success. I enjoy the challenge of figuring out the numerous steps that give an answer, or answers, to often complex problems. The end result is a successful athlete.

## TRAINING PLANS

Because I can work with only a limited number of athletes at any given time in a one-on-one coaching situation and still deliver the quality of coaching that makes me happy, I wanted to find a way to help more people, including those who may not need or want a personal coach. In 1995, I began assembling ready-to-use training plans to help self-coached athletes reach their goals.

Plenty of books can give you principles of training and guidelines for assembling your own training plan, but if you have no experience in this kind of planning, it can be confusing and frustrating. For many athletes, it is overwhelming. This book features 16 detailed training plans that are designed to help you achieve a personal goal based on an athlete profile and a training plan goal or set of goals.

The plans are designed so that you can use this book for multiple types of events and goals. If you are a beginning cyclist, you can start with plans to improve your fitness. If you are an experienced cyclist, these training plans will give you more structure and more

challenge in your workouts. If you are looking for training plan design methods to help you assemble your own plan, be sure to look at several chapters: This book has no cookie-cutter, computer-generated plans in which only training time or intensity level changes.

## THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

Before you dive into a particular training plan, I suggest that you review the entire book. You'll find event-specific training plans as well as foundation fitness plans. At a minimum, you should review Part I (Chapters 1–4) before you begin following a plan.

### Part I: Getting Started

Chapter 1 begins by looking at a reasonable question: “Can one training plan really work for many different athletes?” The chapter then looks at the parts of training that take place off the bike and in your head. Before you start physically preparing for your event, you should have a positive mental approach to training and racing. Chapter 1 also discusses goal setting and mental training tools.

Chapter 2 outlines training and periodization concepts and explains intensity indicators, such as the rate of perceived exertion (RPE), heart rate, and power output. Although some indicators can be measured with monitors and meters (see Chapter 4), this chapter will

Before you start physically preparing for your event, you should have a positive mental approach to training and racing.

show you how to guide your training without gadgets by using RPE. In fact, I suggest that you—and every athlete—learn to use RPE as a training and racing tool, even if you use the fun gadgets, too.

Properly fueling your body is essential to both your overall health and your success as an athlete. Fueling affects you from the inside out. Nutrition basics are covered in Chapter 3, beginning

with macronutrients and micronutrients. From there, the chapter moves to more sport-specific material to help you decide what and how much to eat and drink during training and racing. The chapter closes with information on supplements and ergogenic aids.

Another significant factor in your cycling success is, obviously, equipment. Chapter 4 begins by outlining the differences among the most popular bike styles. After you decide which style of bike you need, you should find a bike that fits you. Appropriate bike fit is critical. Never sacrifice bike fit for a great bargain on a bike that is too large or too small.

Once you find a bike that is the right size, several adjustments can be made to get the bike fitted specifically to your anatomy. Using the information in Chapter 4, you can either do the fit yourself or be a better educated consumer when asking a shop to do it.

Several myths about women's anatomy and bike fit still seem to live on in cycling culture. Chapter 4 includes data correcting this outdated information.

Choosing the right clothing is also very important in making cycling more comfortable. Learn about recommended styles of shorts, gloves, and jerseys as well as cold-weather gear in Chapter 4. The chapter ends with information about how to select other equipment such as heart rate monitors and power meters.

After you complete the chapters in Part I, how you use the rest of the book depends on your individual goals as a cyclist. More than likely, what brings you to this book is the need to prepare for an event. You've decided to enter, and now you need to begin training. You want a plan.

**Throughout the book,**

I use the words "race" and "event" interchangeably, so don't let "race" intimidate you. Whatever your goal, you are still looking to deliver the best performance possible for you. For some people, this means aiming for a spot on the podium at a sponsored event. For others, it means reaching a self-designed goal.

## Part II: Event Training Plans

Part II contains plans for 30-mile, 50-mile, 100-kilometer (commonly called a "metric century"), and 100-mile (commonly called a "century") events. If you are just beginning your endurance cycling journey, the 30-mile plan in Chapter 5 is a great place to start. You can use it to prepare for a specific event or to jump-start your fitness. I think you will be encouraged by how easy it is to go from no fitness to a 30-mile ride in just 6 weeks.

Chapter 6 moves the goal distance to 50 miles or a metric century. This plan is designed with indoor cycling class enthusiasts in mind. It is perfect for the cyclist who attends indoor cycling classes and is looking for a way to capitalize on that fitness and ride for longer distances outside. This 8-week plan works nicely toward a late-spring or summer goal.

Riding 50 miles or a metric century is often the stepping-stone to a century ride. It is a significant milestone to ride a bicycle for 100 miles. The first time you ride a century, more than likely your goal is simply to complete the event. Chapter 7 is designed for a cyclist who wants to complete a century ride at the end of 12 weeks, with an aim of averaging 12 to 15 miles per hour (mph) for the ride. The athlete profiled in Chapter 7 is riding only 2 or 3 days per week before beginning the training plan. As in Chapter 6, this plan is designed with indoor cycling class participants in mind.

Let's say you have completed a century and are looking for a bigger challenge, or you are riding 3 or 4 days per week and want to improve your fitness. Check out Chapter 8, designed for the cyclist aiming for a faster century, perhaps aiming to average 16 to 18 mph for the entire 100 miles. Chapter 8 is also a 12-week plan, but the cyclist beginning this plan is starting out with a greater level of fitness than the cyclist starting the Chapter 7 plan.

## Part III: Touring Training Plans

Part III contains training plans for multiday bike tours. Multiday tours are a great way to combine fitness with sightseeing. Pursuing a goal to ride a destination bike tour can be rewarding physically as well as mentally. The opportunity to escape from everyday demands and focus only on riding your bike, fueling, resting, and enjoying the sights for a few days can be rejuvenating. A nice side benefit is the added boost in fitness you will notice after recovering from the tour.

Chapter 9 begins with a 10-week training plan to help riders enjoy a 3-day riding tour covering about 25 to 30 miles per day. This plan is designed for riders who have base fitness from other activities and perhaps enjoy indoor spinning classes but do not consider themselves to be cyclists.

The plan in Chapter 10 is perfect to help you prepare for sightseeing tours and multiday charity events. This 12-week plan is designed for an event of 40 to 50 miles per day and includes event guideline instructions for the last week. It is for the athlete who is already riding 3 or 4 days per week for 30 to 60 minutes. At the end of 12 weeks, the athlete following this plan will ride the 3-day tour and average 12 to 15 mph each day.

Is it possible to be ready for a weeklong ride if you are currently riding 3 days per week for about an hour at a time? The answer is “Yes!”

For those of you wanting to ride a 3-day tour with distances of 40 to 50 miles per day and who want to bump up your average speed to 16 to 18

mph, the 12-week plan in Chapter 11 is ideal. You are already riding for an hour a couple of days per week, and your long weekend ride is two hours. Because you begin with a higher level of fitness, this plan includes more volume and intensity than the plan in Chapter 10.

When investigating a bicycle adventure, perhaps you find a weeklong tour during which you plan to ride for 6 or 7 days. You look at the great photos in the brochure and wonder if it is possible to be ready for a weeklong ride if you are currently riding 3 days per week for about an hour at a time. The answer is “Yes!”

Chapter 12 shows how you can be ready for that weeklong bike tour in just 11 weeks and gives you guidelines on how to ride the 6-day tour during Week 12 to get the most out of it. You plan to ride the tour at an average of 12 to 15 mph. Following the plan in Chapter 12 will give you confidence that your goal is achievable.

If you wish to ride a weeklong tour at a faster pace, averaging 16 to 18 mph every day, the plan in Chapter 13 is for you. This chapter is for the serious recreational cyclist or perhaps a cyclist using a weeklong bike tour to boost fitness for racing purposes. You are currently riding 3 to 4 days per week, with weekday rides of an hour each. Your weekend rides are longer, with one ride around the 3-hour mark. One option is to use Chapter 20 to prepare for this event-specific plan. I’ll talk more about Chapter 20 later in the introduction.

The five plans outlined in Part III bring us to the end of the pavement, and now the path turns to dirt.

## Part IV: Mountain Bike Training Plans

Part IV is for the off-road cyclist. This part includes plans for weekend warriors or sport racing, 100-mile bike races (often called “mud hunnies”), and 24-hour off-road team events.

For those of you who like to get a little dirty, Chapter 14 is designed with you in mind. Your training time is pinched during the week, but when you hit the trails, you want to be fit. If the random-riding method of training has brought disappointing results, take a look at this 12-week plan, designed to help you build strength and endurance on your 2-hour mountain bike rides. If you come into this plan with limited fitness, follow its instructions on how to use the foundation fitness plan in Chapter 19 to help you roll right into it.

Chapter 15 is designed for the cyclist who wants to be stronger and faster on 3-hour mountain bike rides. Just between you and me, you want to thrash your riding partners and leave them in the dust. It doesn't matter whether you are doing weekend mountain bike races for which an entry fee is demanded or you show up to the group rides that turn into races: Chapter 15 is your best offense. This plan is 12 weeks long and requires solid fitness before you begin. You ride 5 or 6 days per week, and some of the rides include intensity. If you need some help building your foundation fitness, you can use the plan in Chapter 20 before beginning this one.

Instead of a 3-hour off-road event, perhaps you want to try a dirty 100-mile event? The 100-mile mountain bike events are becoming more popular each year. Chapter 16 is a 16-week plan to help a time-pinched rider prepare for a mud hunnie. Though your training time is restricted and you need at least two days off from training each week, you still want to ride as fast as possible. Your training time needs to be efficient. If you are not consistently doing 5 to 6 hours of training per week before beginning the Chapter 16 plan, you can use the foundation fitness plan in Chapter 19 to help you prepare.

The plan in Chapter 17 steps up the training volume and intensity to prepare for an off-road 100-mile event. This 14-week plan is for you if you are already riding about 9 hours per week before beginning the plan and are looking for a personal best time for the event. Your two weekend rides are 2 to 3 hours long. You are doing at least two weekday rides, and each is at least an hour long. If you take a look at Week 1 of the Chapter 17 training plan and find you need some foundation fitness before you begin, use Chapter 20 to aid your preparation.

Staying in the dirt but shifting to a team event, Chapter 18 is a 6-week crash training plan designed for a 24-hour mountain bike event. With the right group of people and the right training, a 24-hour mountain bike event can be loads of fun. In addition to the 6-week crash training plan, Chapter 18 gives you other recommendations to prepare for the event.

## Part V: Building Foundation Fitness

In Part V, Chapters 19 and 20 feature plans to help you build or maintain foundation fitness. Several of the preceding training plans have suggested using one of these fitness plans, if needed, before you begin training. Chapter 19 is a 12-week plan designed for a cyclist who can devote between 3 and 6 hours per week to training. Chapter 20 is an 18-week plan for a cyclist who can train somewhere between 4 and 11 hours per week.

## Part VI: Supporting Information

Part VI is the supplemental information to all chapters and contains the workout codes, strength training instructions, and stretching guidelines. To help keep the training plans manageable and to give you as many plans as possible, I use workout codes detailed in Chapter 21 to condense information. Chapters 22 and 23 offer fully illustrated strength training and flexibility programs, along with tips on how to implement these programs safely and effectively.

## Additional Resources

In Appendixes A, B, and C, you can find more resources to help you be successful, such as a health questionnaire, an event-day checklist, and information on how to cope with illness or injury specific to cycling.

Armed with the tools and information in this book, you should be well on your way to improved performance. I hope the plans help you prepare successfully for a variety of events. Most of all, I hope you reach your riding goals and have a great time doing it!

# 100K or 50-Mile Ride

Level I

A **100K ride** (62 miles), also known as a metric century, is a benchmark accomplishment for many cyclists. Those new to long-distance rides may find it useful to begin with a 100K or 50-mile ride before tackling a full century (100 miles). Often, 100K and 50-mile events are offered in conjunction with century rides. If you are a fit cyclist looking for a new challenge, the 100K or 50-mile race might be just what you need.

## PROFILE

This plan is designed for a cyclist who is currently riding three days per week. Your rides might be outdoors or indoors on a stationary bike, solo or in a class. Two of those rides are 45 to 60 minutes long. The third ride is at least 60 minutes and maybe as long as 90 minutes. At minimum, you are able to commit to cycling three days per week.

This plan includes the option of one day of strength training per week. If you currently have a strength training program, you can continue that program on your days off from cycling. If you are not strength training but want to begin a routine, this chapter includes information to get you started.

## GOAL

Your goal is to complete a 100K or 50-mile ride at the end of 8 weeks of training. Your event can be self-designed or you can enter a sponsored event. The plan assumes your average

speed is 12 to 15 mph for the ride, resulting in a 100K ride time of between 4:08 and 5:10 or a 50-mile ride time of between 3:20 and 4:10.

## THE PLAN OVERVIEW

Take a look at the full plan in Table 6.1. Note that the plan has cycling scheduled for Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. If other days of the week work better for you, move the rides accordingly. It is best if these rides are separated by at least one day.

A fourth, optional ride is included on each Sunday in five of the weeks. If your current level of fitness is low and your goal is the 50-mile ride, you can train to comfortably complete the event by doing the three assigned workouts for the minimum times noted on the plan. You can eliminate the optional Sunday rides.

If you are aiming for the 100K, have a high level of fitness and good recovery from workouts, and have the time to devote to cycling, you can consider doing the highest volumes suggested on the plan.

Most Mondays and Wednesdays are scheduled as “day off or strength train.” As noted earlier, if you are already strength training, you can keep your current routine. You may find that you need to modify the routine, reducing sets, repetitions, or weight so that strength training does not negatively impact your cycling.

If you are not yet strength training but would like to incorporate a weight room routine in your workout plan, see Chapter 22. I suggest beginning with the anatomical adaptation phase of strength training and keeping the weight relatively light for the first two weeks.

As your body adapts to the routine, you can slightly increase the weight and reduce the number of repetitions to 12 to 15 (from the 15 to 20 suggested in Chapter 22). You can maintain this reduced range for both your strength training days, or you can do 12 to 15 reps on one day and 15 to 20 reps with less weight on the other day. You might have to experiment to see which routine works best for you.

## PLAN DETAILS

Explanations of the workout codes used throughout this plan can be found in Chapter 21. Here, let’s break down the plan by week.

### Week 1

Your first Tuesday workout is an endurance workout that focuses on cadence. Ride between 45 and 60 minutes total.

The Thursday workout is an endurance workout that challenges you to increase your cadence beyond a normal comfort zone. The workout includes 6 repeats of 20-second spin-ups. Try to spin your legs fast while staying seated (without bouncing).

The Saturday long ride starts the process of building your event endurance. Ride between 1:30 and 2:00 on a rolling course in zones 1 to 2. Be sure to carry fluids and fuel for all Saturday long rides.

Sunday's workout is the optional, easy ride mentioned earlier. Any other Sunday rides throughout the plan are structured the same way.

## Week 2

In Week 2, the Tuesday ride works on leg-to-leg imbalances in strength and coordination, and the Thursday spin-ups increase to 30 seconds long.

The Saturday ride increases in length and includes some zone 3 training. Try to accumulate about 20 minutes of zone 3 intensity during the ride. You do not have to ride *steadily* at zone 3 for 20 minutes, and I recommend that you don't in this particular plan. By breaking up the time you spend in zone 3, you will likely produce a higher average power output for that 20 minutes than if you were to ride a steady 20 minutes. Save the bigger time trial-type efforts for after you've built some fitness.

## Week 3

The Week 3 Tuesday workout is the same as in Week 2. The Thursday workout changes to a spin step-up workout with longer fast-cadence intervals.

The long ride this week is 2:30 to 3:00 and falls into zones 1 to 3. Accumulate 20 to 30 minutes of zone 3 intensity throughout the ride.

## Week 4

Week 4 is for recovery. You should strength train only one day this week, if at all. Although the plan schedules the optional strength training on Monday, you can train on either Monday or Wednesday. Just be sure you decrease the weight to allow your body to recover.

Tuesday's workout is the same cadence workout you did in Week 1, only slightly shorter. On Thursday is a fartlek (speed play) workout, which allows you to add in the speedy portions as the mood strikes you.

Saturday is your first day of structured cruise intervals, at zone 3 intensity. During this 1:30 to 2:00 ride, complete 4 or 5 intervals that are each 5 minutes long.

## Week 5

This week builds on the fitness you have achieved to this point. The Tuesday and Thursday workouts are variations of past workouts. Your Saturday long ride is between 3:00 and 3:30 and you accumulate between 30 and 40 minutes in zone 3.

## Week 6

The biggest change introduced in Week 6 is in the long ride on Saturday, which is between 3:30 and 4:00 and includes some zone 4 intensity. Accumulate about 20 minutes of zone 4 intensity throughout the ride.

## Week 7

Week 7 is for recovery, with reduced training and volume. The routine is exactly the same as in Week 4.

## Week 8

Week 8 is your event week. Limit your training volume to no higher than the guidelines shown in the plan. Your goal is to be well rested by Saturday.

This week includes only one new workout, on Tuesday. Just enough intensity is included in this workout to keep your legs feeling fresh for event day.

For your 100K or 50-mile event, relax and ride the event as you have ridden your recent long rides. Plan to ride stronger as the event progresses: Control intensity for the first half of the event, and fuel and hydrate appropriately throughout (see Chapter 3).

## Week 9

Although no Week 9 is shown in Table 6.1, cyclists often wonder what to do during the week after an event. I recommend you ride two or three times, keeping your intensity levels mostly at zone 1 to zone 2. After you have a chance to recover from your event, you can move on to a new goal.