

How do I... Switch between cycling & running?

Make sure your training is activity-specific

Jamie Ewbank

Winter can be a tough time for cyclists — your running friends are getting their marathon acceptances, joggers are gearing up for Santa-themed runs, and even on two wheels it's hard not to feel that cyclo-crossers are making a virtue of the mud and rain, while it makes the rest of us want to hang up the bike.

The biggest obstacle to tackling a different discipline is the fear that it will undermine your cycling. Many cyclists build their heart, lungs and legs into a machine capable of riding over Mont Ventoux only to discover that they still can't run for a bus. Fortunately, road cycling's overlap with triathlon, duathlon and cross means that many coaches understand the intersection between cycling and other sports that involve running.

According to Mark Walker, who teaches a degree course in cycling performance and has worked with Alex Dowsett and Helen Wyman, there's a sliding scale: unless you're preparing to win the Tour de France, it's unlikely that adding a new discipline will undercut your riding fitness.

"There is a common theme to all endurance sports, cycling, rowing,

speed-skating: you build up a big volume of base endurance training and then you build your specificity," Walker says. "If you're an amateur and you want to do a marathon and still enjoy some sportives and maybe do some cyclo-cross, there's no reason why you can't do all of that together."

While fitness for one sport doesn't undermine fitness for another, there are still concerns for any cyclist about to embark on a second sport.

"One of the issues with cycling is that you don't tend to move your limbs through a full range of motion, so cyclists can have problems with flexibility," Walker explains. "If you're a habitual cyclist, transferring to running can potentially cause muscle soreness or injury. I wouldn't have anyone transfer to, say, cyclo-cross, where you need that explosive sort of

running, without first becoming familiar with regular short runs."

Caitlin Bradley, of triathlon coaching set-up Team Dillon, reinforces the familiarity issue:

"Cyclists aren't used to impact, so running can have harsh effects on the legs. Also, we are sitting down on a bike, so our heart rate starts at a lower rate, while running has your heart rate increase immediately, so it's a totally different feeling. We also rely on masses of core strength when we run."

Essential points

■ Work on activity-specific techniques that address your own personal weaknesses.

■ Training metrics don't always translate. Just because you can do 'x' session on the bike doesn't mean you can do the equivalent run.

■ Your cycling fitness is bike-specific, e.g. working on high cadence on the bike probably won't speed up your stride rate while running. Goals must be separate.

Do: find a coach who understands your love for the bike. Your coach will recognise that and use it to your advantage by ensuring your cycling and running complement each other.

Do: use the mantra 'plan, do and review'. It's difficult to predict how you're going to respond to a new form of training. Set out a strength-and-conditioning plan before you start, try it, then be prepared to adapt as you gauge your response.

Do: buy a decent pair of trainers. You need sufficient cushioning and comfort — don't choose according to aesthetics.

Do: warm up your glutes before you run. Cyclists often lack flexibility, and doing exercises to warm up your muscles, particularly in your rear, is key for running without injury.

Do: use long, steady rides at slightly higher RPMs as a way of letting your glutes and hamstrings recover from runs while still building fitness.

Don't: continue the volume of cycling you were previously doing. You'll need to accommodate more recovery time as your body adjusts to the demands of your new discipline.

YOU SAY

Learn how to run properly. Too many folk just stamp along the pavement and wonder why it hurts so much!

George Anderson

Build up running volume very slowly: no more than 2-3 miles more each week, until properly conditioned.

Lee Woodgate

If I'm resorting to running, it's because whatever is chasing me will injure me far worse than running will!

Matt Winslow

[When adapting to a new activity] getting at least eight hours sleep each night is a must.

Ralph G. Chan

Cyclists' muscles aren't conditioned to running's eccentric contractions, so take it easy on the downhill.

Helena Samuels

EXPERT OPINION



Craig Fry is associate professor at the Centre for Cultural Diversity & Wellbeing, Victoria University, and author of *Ride: A Memoir to my Father*

Riding through rough times

When my father passed away suddenly in October 2015, the resulting grief floored me. Alongside the love and support from family and friends, I found my bike helped me most — the simple act of cycling on familiar roads through beloved places that held memories of Dad was hugely comforting. I wrote about the role of the humble bicycle in keeping me well while grieving because I believe there is something special about cycling as a coping strategy when dealing with depression, anxiety, stress, or indeed grief.

We've all heard the anecdotal claims that cycling makes you smarter and happier. There is even a cyclist's guide to depression. The

mental health benefits, for riders at all levels, have been widely discussed, and the scientific evidence suggests that, though cycling is no panacea for the most severe forms of mental illness, it can have a potent effect in "improving levels of well-being, self-confidence and tolerance to stress while reducing tiredness, difficulties with sleep and other symptoms".

Indeed, a number of cycling-specific mental health promotion activities and programmes have emerged, such as the Life Cycle UK 'Bike Minded' project, the Love Me Love You organisation's 'Ride with me for mental health' and 'Knights of Suburbia' initiatives, and the Man Ride. Cycling is also a popular fundraising activity for high-profile men's and mental health charities Movember, SANE and RUOK?

They can't all be wrong. So, why is cycling so effective a therapy? The scientific literature points to a range of possible physiological mechanisms: thermogenic and endorphin hypotheses; psychological mechanisms: improved self-efficacy, positive distraction, etc. Other theories involve positive social psychology principles and changes to brain chemistry.

The precise psychological and physiological mechanisms have not yet been established, but that hardly matters. Given the growing body of personal and scientific opinion, we've good reason for trusting the bike to help us through tough times.

"Cycling is a special and trusted coping strategy"

