

Which Way to Weight?

In the last article, I discussed the virtues of strength training for cyclists. I believe cyclists should do some sort of leg strength training, on the bike at the very least, if not in the gym. But the winter months are a good time to consider augmenting your on-the-bike training with some off-bike training. This article will discuss some of the various ways to do leg strength training. In a future article I'll discuss upper body and core exercises.

I think of strength training as having four main benefits for cyclists:

- 1) It gives you more overall leg strength which is important for massive efforts like jumps, hills and sprints
- 2) It can give you improved strength endurance – which is the type of strength you need for long hill climbs and time trialing
- 3) upper body and core training can improve your overall strength, which not only can help you as a cyclist, sitting on a bike for hours, but also helps you generally in terms of overall health and fitness, and makes you a more well rounded athlete.
- 4) It can help maintain or improve your bone density. Cyclists are known to have lower bone density than other athletes such as runners because cycling is not a weight-bearing activity. Resistance training can help with your bone health.

On-the-bike strength training:

On the road, you can do strength training by pedaling with a lot of force. This requires that you find a grade or strong headwind and use a large gear. Try doing repeats of 3-6 minutes pedaling as hard as you can at a cadence of 60-70 RPM. Spin easily to recover and then repeat several more times. You can also do these on an indoor trainer if you have one that offers good resistance. Crank up the resistance and use a large gear and do the same routine as described for outdoors. People tend to think that riding an indoor trainer is a poor substitute for riding outside. While it's certainly a much less desirable substitute, it is possible to get a good leg strength workout accomplished on a trainer. An indoor trainer also allows you to do one legged pedaling which increases the challenge. Just think about it for a moment – cycling is a one legged exercise so consider working your legs independently.

Weight machine strength training:

You can work the major pedaling muscle groups with squat using a barbell or a leg press machine. I really like squats because it is a multi-joint exercise which works the back, butt and legs and requires balance and stability. I recommend doing squats when working on strength-endurance. Strength-endurance is worked by doing a lot of reps (20+) and several (5) sets with a moderate weight. However, when wanting to work on maximal strength, this is better done on a machine as it is difficult to lift the required high weight safely with squats. For maximal strength, pick a weight which you can only lift 6-8 reps and do 3-5 sets. You can also do leg presses with one leg at a time.

Body weight leg strength training:

You can also do leg strength exercises with nothing more than just your own body weight. This actually provides a lot of resistance, especially if you are doing one-legged exercises – you are essentially lifting your entire body weight with one leg. Some body weight exercises to consider

are: one legged squats, jump squats, split squats, Bulgarian squats, lunges (forward and reverse), and step-ups. For an explanation of how to do these leg strength exercises, and more, you might check out a book I've just written, *101 Cycling Workouts*, which contains 20 strength workouts. Check it out at www.101CyclingWorkouts.com .

You should consider doing some sort of leg strength workout on a year round basis. During the summer, most of this should be done on the bike, but in the winter, you can do more of this type of training off the bike to build a good, strong base for the upcoming season.

Ride on -- David Ertl

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