

Cross-Train This Winter

Winter has arrived and looks like it's here to stay! Don't despair, my road cycling friends, there are some options to get you through the winter and still be in great shape come road riding season. In the past few articles, I reviewed some options for indoor training on your stationary trainer and doing some strength training. These are certainly important components that you should include in your 'off-season' training program, but there are other activities you can do as well. Indoor trainers are great for helping to maintain your aerobic fitness, and strength training is great for maintaining and building your base strength, but what you tend to lose over the winter months is endurance. It's just plain hard and boring to ride your trainer more than an hour, and even if you dress up warmly, it's difficult on cold winter days to get in more than an hour to an hour and a half before some part of your body freezes up. What I'm going to cover this month are some various types of cross-training workouts you can do to help maintain some conditioning and endurance over the winter.

First, what is cross training? It is a complimentary exercise to cycling which trains some of the same muscles as cycling (legs and heart primarily) but also works other parts of your body which are neglected through cycling. Examples include hiking, cross country skiing, ice skating, snow shoeing and jogging. Cross training is good to do for several reasons. First, it gives you something to do when it's too cold, snowy or icy to ride. Secondly, it's good for your body. It provides some different motions for your body. If all you do is ride, you can become very fit but also very one dimensional in terms of the muscles that you use. Cross training is a chance to use some different muscles and gain more well-rounded fitness. Third, cross training is a nice change of pace for your head. It is a new and different activity and gets you away from riding while still working on your fitness.

So what types of cross training should you consider? Here are some ideas to consider that you can do here in Iowa:

Cross Country Skiing: If we get too much snow for riding, then rejoice and try cross country skiing. X-C skiing is considered to require the most aerobic fitness of any sport. X-C skiing can help maintain your strong cycling leg muscles and heart muscle. There are some places now in Iowa where they are starting to groom some trails but there are also places such as Waveland Golf course where people ski and make their own tracks. Or take a short drive to Minnesota where there are lots of groomed cross-country ski trails. I have been cross country skiing since I was a kid and love to get out and glide around. You can easily get in a 2 hour workout and not get cold; on the contrary, you will be dripping with sweat – something nice to be able to do outdoors in January!

Ice Skating: Grab (or rent) some skates and go skating at one of the indoor or outdoor rinks in town, or one of the ponds. This is a great activity for balance and you use similar muscles as you do for cycling.

Snow Shoeing: When we get too much snow to ride, then try snow shoeing. You can go anywhere and don't need groomed trails. The more snow, the more work you do thus the better the workout! Did you know there are snow shoe races?

Hiking: You can also put on your hiking shoes and head out on a local trail such as the mountain bike trails behind the Art Center in Des Moines. If you keep up a brisk pace, you can get your heart rate up as high as when cycling, and gives your legs a good workout especially if there is snow to trudge through.

Mountain Biking: Okay, this one is still bike riding but if you have ever ridden a mountain bike off-road, you realize it is very much a different sport than road riding. Off-road mountain biking requires balance and bike handling skills, and requires a lot of attention to avoid hitting trees, logs, creeks, deer, etc. You can have a blast by bombing around through the woods and you hardly realize you are exercising. Every Saturday the DMCC Race Team has a mountain bike ride on the trails behind the Art Center. We act like a bunch of big kids out there, getting a great workout, falling down, getting dirty and laughing about it. There are miles of trails right here in Des Moines.

Other activities: There are lots of other things you can do in the cycling off-season to maintain some fitness and train some other parts of your body. Consider joining a basketball league or a tennis club. Go for a daily walk or jog. You can use treadmills or elliptical machines at home or at the gym. This is the time of year to play around with different activities. As long as they are getting your heart rate up, they are good for you. And it's one less day to grind away on your indoor trainer.

I have a whole chapter devoted to Cross Training in my eBook, 101 Cycling Workouts. This is available for purchase at www.101CyclingWorkouts.com or if you email me at coach@cyclesportcoaching.com, I will get it to you for a DMCC discounted price of \$15.

“NEWSLETTER” FLASH: I have just begun writing a cycling training newsletter. Each issue will contain a training article and will also contain a ‘Featured Workout’. To view a copy, [click here](#). To sign up for this newsletter, [click here](#).

Happy (cross) Training

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