

Like skinning a cat, there's more than one way to climb a hill

I know, I know, you don't like hills, unless you are one of those people built like a mountain goat. However, you can't avoid them, even living in Iowa, and believe it or not, it is possible to come to not fear them (although you may never actually come to 'like' them as I do!). And did you know, according to Greg LeMond (who was a pretty good cyclist), riding hills is the fastest way to get in shape? The reason is because it is impossible to slack off while riding uphill. No matter how slow you go, you have to work hard and hard work makes you stronger. Plus, most of the time, after you ride up a hill, you get to ride down the other side so they kind of make their own natural intervals for you! (See the June Draftlines training article on Intervals)

So here's some ideas for riding up hills. There are a number of ways to climb and they work different strength and energy systems.

Strength Training on Hills:

"Functional Strength Training" is all the rage nowadays in fitness circles. What this refers to is doing strengthening exercises that closely mimic the actual motion or 'function' that you are training for. Well what is more functional for cycling that actually training on the bike? Hill riding provides a strength training opportunity that is 100% functional! Here are a couple of workouts to consider:

- 1) Seated low RPM hill climbs – find a hill $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile long. Stay seated and ride up the hill in a fairly high gear – one that only allows you to pedal about 60 RPM. This high gear will create a lot of force which the leg muscles need to overcome. You may feel silly out there grinding up hills and its not the most efficient way to climb, but these are specifically for strengthening. It's like doing squats on the bike. (Warning – don't try this if you have knee problems).
- 2) Standing low RPM hill climbs – similar to above except ride the hill standing, again in a large enough gear to keep RPMs around 60.

Strength-Endurance Training on Hills:

Strength endurance is the ability to pedal with power for an extended period of time. Think of time trialists – they need to put out a lot of power over the duration of the event. One way to train this ability is to ride long steady climbs powerfully. Find a grade which is 3-5 percent that is one to two miles long and pedal up at 80-90 RPM with the maximum sustainable power that you can muster. You can find these grades on some rails-to-trails bike paths (trains don't like hills either). But if you can't, you can also do these into a strong headwind which you won't have trouble finding in Iowa!

Anaerobic Training on Hills:

Of course hills are great for anaerobic intervals – 'anaerobic' is another way of saying 'out of breath'. There are many ways to ride hills anaerobically but here is one of my favorites.

Standing hill sprints – Find a short steep hill. Approach seated but as you begin the ascent, stand and ride up the hill as hard as possible in a gear that allows you to spin about 80-90 RPM.

Power Training on Hills:

Now most of you won't need top end power, but again hills are great for this kind of training. Top end power is useful for racing as you need it on hills, attacks and sprint finishes. But even if you don't race, you might try these if you are interested in really increasing your fitness. Here's one way to train your top end power on hills:

Seated hills with jump over the top – On a fairly short steep hill, ride up seated, spinning about 80 RPM. 2/3 the way to the top, shift to your next higher (harder) gear and stand and attack up the hill all the way to the top until it levels out, or starts heading back down.

So, as you can see there are multiple ways to use those dreaded hills to your advantage. One of the best ways to improve your ability to ride hills is to mentally train yourself for them, and you can do that by purposely seeking out and riding hills. Keep in mind, if you don't train on hills, you may be forced to walk up hills, my least favorite way to climb a hill!

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If you have topics you'd like Coach Ertl to discuss in future issues, please send them to Coach@Cyclesportcoaching.com.

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