

Time to Start Getting Ready for RAGBRAI XXXVII

Happy New Year! This is going to be another great year for RAGBRAI and although it's months away, you should consider starting to get ready for it right now if you want to be in the best shape possible. I have agreed to write training articles for RAGBRAI this year. These articles should help get you ready by providing you with training tips on how much and what type of riding you should be doing to get ready, information on your bike and equipment, nutritional and hydration ideas, and tips on how to ride safely on the road with a large number of other bicycles and vehicular traffic. We want you to have a safe and enjoyable ride and this information should help you accomplish that.

A little about myself before we get started. I have been riding bicycles practically all my life and began racing in 1974 and still compete to this day. I became a licensed coach with USA Cycling in 2001. I am now a Level 1 (Elite) Coach, the highest coaching level available. In addition, I am a certified personal trainer through the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA). I am a member and coach of the Des Moines Cycle Club Race team and am also the team coach of the JDRF Ride to Cure Diabetes Ride for the Iowa JDRF Chapter. I also coach recreational and competitive cyclists interested in improving their cycling abilities. I have worked with a wide range of cyclists, from true beginners to highly competitive athletes. I have a wide variety of training articles posted on my website if you interested in learning more about cycling and fitness. Check them out at www.CyclesportCoaching.com. I am looking forward to the opportunity to help you prepare for your best RAGBRAI ever.

To start off, let's consider what you should be doing this time of year to prepare for RAGBRAI in July. First of all, you should be trying to stay active through the winter somehow. Here in Iowa we've already had our share of cold and snow so riding outside isn't a very feasible option. But there are plenty of activities you can do to maintain some of your cycling fitness. A great option is to get an indoor trainer and ride your bike indoors. While not the most exciting way to ride, it does allow you to keep pedaling when the weather keeps you from riding outdoors. Many good, affordable trainers are available on the market today. I prefer the fluid type trainers which are smooth, quiet and provide considerable resistance, similar to what you feel on the road. There are other options to exercise during the winter. Take advantage of the ice and snow and try skating, cross country skiing, or snow shoeing this winter. The nice thing about these activities is you can exercise for an hour or more and hardly even realize it's cold outside because you are working quite hard. Of course, you can also head to the gym and hop on a treadmill, elliptical machine or any other piece of cardio equipment that's available. The key point is to keep your body moving and getting your heart and breathing rates up for sustained periods – at least 30 minutes at a time several times a week. This will allow you to maintain some base level of conditioning so that when you hit the road this spring you will have some fitness already in the bank.

A second consideration is to address weight issues you may have. If you feel you need to lose a few pounds, start now. It's best to lose weight gradually (1# per week) and steadily rather than dieting drastically. Make small changes to your diet, reduce your food intake slightly and try to exercise for a half hour most days. There are a lot of weeks between now and July so you can potentially lose 20 or more pounds by then if you need to. Think how much easier it will be hauling yourself over

hills with a few less pounds. We pay hundreds of dollars to get bikes that weigh 5 pounds less, but losing weight is free, it just takes some attention and work!

Third, now is the time to be checking out your bike to see if you need any repairs or upgrades. It's always a good idea to have it checked over by a bike shop and get routine maintenance done. The bike shop employees can tell you of anything that may be in need of repair. Do it now before they get busy next spring and when you want to be out riding. It's a good idea to check to see if you need any new accessories such as clothing, gloves, water bottles or helmets. It's always a good idea to get new water bottles each year. If your helmet is several years old, consider replacing it as well. They can become brittle when they get old and lose some of their protective ability. Also, don't forget to check your spare tube to make sure it still holds air (you do have a spare tube don't you??).

In future articles I will be getting more specific about the type of training you should be doing as well as covering other ride-related topics. In the meantime, get moving. It's time to start getting ready for RAGBRAI!

Coach David Ertl

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