

Planning Your Training Mileage for RAGBRAI

The first training article was posted earlier this month and I've already received some questions about the amount of riding you should be doing to prepare for RAGBRAI. That's a great question to hear, especially in January. This article will discuss how to approach training for RAGBRAI in terms of the amount of riding you should be doing as the year progresses.

The goal is to be fit enough by July that you have an enjoyable, comfortable weeklong ride at RAGBRAI. RAGBRAI is not a race. You literally have all day to go from one overnight town to the next. So you don't need to be super fast. If you ride 10 MPH, you can ride 80 miles in 8 hours. So what you want to work on most is endurance at your comfortable riding pace. The thing that's different about riding RAGBRAI from one day rides is that you have to get up and ride a long distance seven days in a row. This requires more fitness than simply training for a one day ride. Therefore, the amount of mileage you do per week should be greater than if you are just training for a one-day event as well. So let's talk about the longest training ride you need to do, then the amount of weekly mileage you should aim for.

The longest day in RAGBRAI is usually about 80 miles, unless you choose to ride the Century loop option. The other days vary between about 60 and 80. So it would be great if you can do an 80 mile ride prior to riding RAGBRAI. If you can do a century ride (100 miles), that's even better, but not required. At the very least, you should try to work your way up to at least a 70 mile ride before the start of RAGBRAI. A great way to do this if you haven't ridden a long ride before is to sign up for a local one-day organized ride. There are numerous local rides offered throughout the spring and summer, often sponsored by bike clubs or charity groups. These are supported rides, meaning that they provide rest stops with refreshments and are monitor the course in case you happen to have problems. Organized rides can range from 25 to 100 miles.

Now don't go out for your first ride and try to do 80 miles. You need to work your way up to it during the spring and summer. If you haven't ridden at all in recent years, start off with a 5 mile ride and work your way up gradually. You should not increase the distance of your longest ride by more than 5-10 miles at per week. So if you did 15 miles as your long ride one week, next week aim for 20, then 25 the next week. Before long you will be doing 80 miles, but the key is to start riding as soon as you can. If you started by riding 5 miles on April 1 and increased your longest ride by 5 miles each week, you will be up to 80 miles by the start of RAGBRAI. Now I'm not recommending you wait until April to start training, I am just illustrating that you can start out with a small amount of riding and work up gradually to long rides. You should start riding though as soon as the weather permits. If you live in a northern climate, riding outside isn't a great option during the winter so you may consider doing a spin class to get a head start on riding.

The other component of training is the number of miles you ride each week building up to RAGBRAI. While RAGBRAI is usually between 450 and 500 total miles, don't think you need to ride anywhere near that many miles a week to have a successful RAGBRAI. You should consider working your way up to 125-150 miles in one week as you get in to late June or early July. To train yourself to multiple days of long riding, as summer approaches you should work into doing two longer rides back to back, such as on a Saturday and Sunday. For example, by the last week of June ride 50 miles

on a Saturday and another 50 on the Sunday. There's 100 miles right there. Do some additional riding on weekdays and you can quite easily get up to 125-150 for your longest training week. You only need to do this sort of mileage a couple weeks prior to the start of RAGBRAI. Keep in mind that the week or two just prior to RAGBRAI you should taper off your riding and do less so as to allow yourself to be fresh and recovered for the big event. Unlike college exams, you can't cram for RAGBRAI, so do your training ahead of time and then recover and start the ride fit and fresh. Trying to cram in training the last week or two before RAGBRAI starts will only make you tired going into the ride.

RAGBRAI is still 26 weeks away. Time is on your side right now, so the sooner you start the better prepared you will be by July.

If you would like more cycling training information, check out my website www.CyclesportCoaching.com where you will find numerous articles.

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