



The Basics

If you are new to cycling, these fundamentals are few, but they will help prepare you for the road ahead.

STARTING/STOPPING – The first time you ride find a safe area where you can practice starting and stopping. For those of you who have toe-clips or clip-less pedal systems and are new to having your feet restricted, there are several ways you can practice starting, stopping, and getting in and out of your pedals.

First, find an open parking lot or even a field that will allow you to start and stop at will without concerns for vehicles or traffic signals. Another way to do this is to place your bike in a doorway inside your home, hold yourself upright with one hand on the door frame and one hand on the handle bars, then clip in and out of your pedals. Finally, if you have the benefit of an indoor trainer, you can best practice your technique without any trouble at all by mounting your bike on the trainer and starting and stopping at will.

If you are new to clip-less pedals, you may already be aware that you must twist your heel outward (away) from the bike to get out of the pedals. Conversely, you generally step down with some pressure to get into the pedals. Both of these acts are unnatural and contrary to what we learned when we were younger, but with a little practice, you will master this fundamental before you know it.

SHIFTING BASICS – Many amateur cyclists who are new to endurance training programs very often neglect one of the most important fundamentals of cycling – proper shifting. When you practice shifting and understand how the different gears impact your cadence (pedal rotation), speed, and overall endurance on the bike, you will become a much more efficient cyclist.

Most cyclists tend to put their bikes into a gear that is much higher than what should otherwise be used. In short, the higher the gear, the harder it is to pedal and the more quickly you will feel 'the burn' (more on 'the burn' later). We will discuss the importance of a smoother, faster cadence below, but that will not be possible if you are not comfortable with shifting the front and rear derailleurs through their respective full ranges. So similar to the fundamentals above, find a safe, flat place to ride (like a parking lot), and shift your gears through their full range of motion. Look down and back occasionally to observe the gears you are in, and pay attention to how they impact your cadence. By the time your training is complete, you will have learned enough about this subject that you will be able to proceed simply by feel.

SPINNING – You are going to hear the term ‘spinning’ quite often during your training. Spinning is used to describe an increase in cadence speed – a subject that has recently received a lot of attention due to the modest success of a little known professional cyclist – Lance Armstrong. Lance and his coach, Chris Carmichael, have shown that a consistent high speed cadence improves your aerobic capacity, reduces stresses to your knees and hips, and improves your ability to climb hills. Aerobic capacity is something you should concentrate heavily on during training. As the tour is known to have a moderate amount of climbing, it will be most important to develop your aerobic capacity – or your body’s ability to use oxygen and fat as fuel – more so than your anaerobic capacity – or your body’s use of carbohydrates as fuel (the main contributor to the aforementioned ‘burn’).

So as you practice your fundamentals, also concentrate on increasing your cadence. You should be looking at a cadence speed that is consistently in the 80 to 100 rpm range to make you the most efficient that you can be. Simply stated, just shift your bike into a lower gear and count the number of rotations you perform in fifteen (15) seconds. Multiply by 4, and there you have it! Don’t be disappointed if you are initially unable to achieve a cadence in the range indicated above – you can work on that in the coming weeks as well.