

CYCLOGROSS

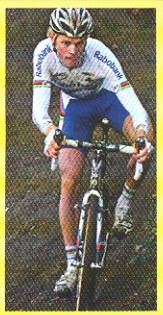
MAGAZINE

ISSUE 5



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TRAINING FOR CYCLOCROSS

PART II

BY MICHAEL BIRNER

In this series of four articles, USAC Level 2 coach Mike Birner of Mid-Maryland Coaching (www.midmarylandcoaching.com) will guide your training through a successful cyclocross season.

The Off-Season: Mid December - February

You're done. You're tired. You've hung up the bike. It's time to take a break, but not *too* much of a break. This time of year can play an important role in how you will prepare for the following season. If you take too much time off, you'll lose all of the fitness gains you made in the previous months. Take too little time off and you'll never feel fully recovered mentally or physically to put a full effort in come springtime. Finding that balance is the key to a successful off-season.

You've likely noticed that as this past season progressed that you had a 'stair step' effect in your training and recovery. Weeks of training and overload were then followed by a period of recovery to realize those gains. This was repeated throughout the season until your final tapering and peak. This same concept should also be applied to your overall plan year to year. Training should not be thought of just in terms of the season that's right in front of you. To continue your progression you want to 'stair step' your fitness from one season to the next by building on the fitness gains from

the previous year. To do this it's critical not to lose the fitness that you already have in order to avoid starting at the bottom again each season.

Closing Out the Season:

Before we talk about rest and you get too comfortable on the couch there are a few things that need to be done. Take a moment to make some notes about the season, especially if you haven't been doing so race by race. Look back over the events that you've done and list where you think you went wrong and where you succeeded.

TRAINING: OFF-SEASON

Write down details such as what parts of certain courses you had difficulty with such as a particular off camber or a certain hill. What courses suited your abilities and what types of efforts comprised that course? Also make note of where you think your training fell into place or didn't quite work out. Did you feel like you were lacking in power on the flat sections? Did you feel like you had your starts dialed in? Even include details about what you learned regarding equipment choices for each event. Would you have benefited by a more aggressive tread or a lower tire pressure or was the gearing you had not sufficient? You'll find that the more details you write down, the more it becomes clear as to what you'll need to work on for next year. Keep these notes in a safe place. As we discussed in the first article, you'll use them as a reference when you start to plan your 2009 season.

Rest:

Get plenty of it following your last race. Plan on a couple weeks off the bike to recharge. Catch up with the things you've

neglected since August. Spend lots of time with the family and friends. Try not to become a sloth though. If you're like most of us, you probably won't feel very good after lying on the couch all day. So find some activities that keep you moving and active but leave the bike at home.

Cross Training:

No, not cyclocross training, but cross training. Once you've had some time to recharge you'll probably be bored and looking for something to keep you occupied. This is a good time to mix up the routine and try some different things. Try hiking or running, perhaps swimming if an indoor pool is available or hit the gym and try weights, core exercises, rowing or stair machines. After months of focusing specifically on cyclocross it's likely that you've become a very imbalanced athlete. You'll have weaknesses in certain muscle groups that can cause imbalances in your posture and form. These imbalances can eventually turn into injuries if not corrected. By incorporating a mix of all different types

of cross training you'll become a more balanced cyclist. But, be careful to ease into each of these workouts and give your body a week or two to adapt to the new stresses and motions. Keep the workouts easy and focus on technique during those first couple weeks.

Back to Training:

After a couple weeks of rest, followed by a few weeks of cross training, mentally and physically you should be ready to get back on the bike at least occasionally and start to incorporate some workouts.

I want to take the emphasis off the word 'training' this time of year unless, of course, you have ambitions on the road or mountain bike in the spring and summer (we'll review that in more detail below). Otherwise, if your goal is to just maintain, while there are certain workouts that should be kept in your routine it is important not to get hung up on too much of a regimen. Keep the workouts to a minimum and have the freedom to adjust and modify the training, as they should not be set in stone.

Move workouts around as needed and even skip them when you really don't feel up to it. Be sure to emphasize rest and recovery because the primary goal is to minimize the loss of fitness, not to make significant gains by creating an overload in training. If you don't feel fresh for each ride you are doing too much.

Here's a typical week during the off-season:

Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Off	Cross training, walk, hike, run, row, swim, etc.	Rest or active recovery	1 hour: Upper end aerobic workout, either SST, threshold or vo2max intervals.	Rest or active recovery	Group Ride	Up to you: A group ride or mtb ride at moderate tempo or cross training.

By incorporating a manageable group ride this time of the year you'll be able to maintain some of the upper level aerobic and anaerobic fitness without putting in a heavy mental effort. Sitting on the trainer staring at a power meter or heart rate monitor can be much more mentally demanding than joining a challenging, yet social, group ride.

For the aerobic workout done during the week, it's good to change it periodically. This will help minimize the boredom of doing the same thing over and over. Also you can allow your time constraints to dictate the workout. If you find yourself short on time then go for the harder, yet

shorter VO2max efforts (3-8 minutes each). If you have the entire evening, plan on a lower intensity, but longer interval period at SST or threshold.

Finally, keeping the cross training in your plan will provide you with a more balanced routine at a time of year where specific fitness on the bike is not quite as important.

Managing the Split Season:

If your goals have you heading in a different direction, for instance a key mountain bike or road event in the spring or early summer you'll want to do more than just maintain your fitness. For you it's important to get the necessary rest and recovery immediately after the cyclocross season then enter right back into a normal training routine. If this is the case, you should return to our original article (The Early Season/Base Phase) to plan your season and 'build the engine' for your more intense efforts later. This can often be the most sensible plan because it gives you that short-term goal to focus on in the months leading up to the preparation for cyclocross.

Wrap up:

I hope this series of articles has been helpful in your training for cyclocross. As with any plan, experience and practice goes a long way towards developing the proper training routine. While I've given the fundamentals, there are always certain aspects that will apply themselves better for some athletes than others. This is where the assistance of a qualified and experienced coach can be had. If you feel that you don't have the experience, knowledge or willingness to properly plan your training but are still seeking that improvement to the next level I would recommend you contact a licensed coach in your area to see how they can help. Not sure of any near you? Ask some of your competitors—it's likely that the riders beating you already have a good coach! ▢

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