

Trick Yourself into Training

THREE EASY WAYS TO GET FIT FAST WITHOUT HAVING TO TAKE IT SO SERIOUSLY

By: Selene Yeager

Paul, a client of mine, recently lamented in an e-mail: "I freakin' hate training. Worrying about heart rate and 4x6 intervals @ 95 rpm w/ two minutes rest and hill repeats takes the joy out of cycling." The problem is, Paul also wants to improve his climbing and shave a few seconds off his finish at a local time trial — goals he'll be hard-pressed to reach with his preferred "just ride" approach. With a little forethought, training and just riding don't have to be mutually exclusive. Here's how to reach that next level, no structured training required.

MEET NEW PEOPLE: The biggest problem with "just riding" is that most people ride at only one speed, never snail-yawningly slow or eyes-bleedingly fast. As a result, they get stuck in that one speed. From a training standpoint, the best mix is 75 to 80 percent aerobic, or easy to moderate riding; 10 to 15 percent lactate threshold, the fastest pace you can maintain while still able to speak (learn more at bicycling.com/LT); and 5 to 10 percent at full-blown, high intensity. To do this without keeping track of numbers: Ride alone or with a few like-minded friends at a conversational pace most days a week; jump into a brisk and challenging group ride one or two days a week; and once a week ride, and try to keep up, with someone who can blow your doors off on hills and sprints.

THINK GOOD THOUGHTS: When you train using watts, heart rate and perceived exertion, you are forced mentally to tune in to your effort. That can actually slow you down, as you think, "Holy Moses, I'm working hard." In contrast, a large body of research shows that disassociating your thoughts from your effort can make you feel and perform better. It can be as simple as repeating "Spin up fast" as you chase the group up a long climb. Or counting to 100 in increments of five when the pace is so high it hurts. The theory is that you flood your brain, which has limited attention channels, with mantras, math or other meditations that let you at least temporarily block out the "I can't do this" signals from your screaming muscles.

TAKE JUST 3 MINUTES: Every morning before you start your day, hit the deck and do three plank poses. One: facedown, propped up on your forearms and toes, body forming a straight line from head to heels. Two: propped on your left forearm, placed perpendicular to your body, and the outside of your left foot, feet stacked, body in a straight diagonal line. And three: propped on your right forearm and foot, same as Plank Two. Start with 20 to 30 seconds and work up to a minute. The three minutes you spend in these plank positions will improve your pedaling efficiency by strengthening your core. In a study of 15 competitive cyclists, University of Pittsburgh researchers found that when a rider's core muscles fatigued, his cycling mechanics fell apart and he "flapped" his legs out to the side in a semicircular, sideways motion, instead of straight up and down, as he tried to maintain force against the pedals. That's not only inefficient, but it also can lead to pain and injury.

Selene Yeager, a USA Cycling certified coach and author of *Every Woman's Guide to Cycling*, is fit and fast, and wants you to be the same.