

Easing back Into It

Okay, so now you've taken your break. You've had some fun, some late nights out with the spouse and friends, and caught up on some long overdue projects. You've figured out what the goals are for next year and what you need to do to tackle them successfully. You're ready to get back to riding full on! Whoa, back up, you're not quite there yet.

After that nice relaxing total recovery period, we begin to *gently* ease back into things. The race season is still a ways off so there is no need to jump in to quickly.

Following a general format of at least 6 to 8 weeks, you want to begin to re-introduce a variety of workouts that begin addressing the defined weaknesses, as well as build a good base of conditioning. As with the complete rest period, the length of time of this phase largely depends on when you plan to begin racing again and when your first goals are, and backtracking the necessary training needed.

That said, there are several things to keep in mind during this phase to make it enjoyable and successful. First is to remember that even though we are back to work so to speak, this is still a recovery period, so it should be kept fun and low stress both mentally and physically. I can't stress enough how important it is to let yourself recharge to be able to have a successful season ahead.

Secondly, now that your weaknesses have been defined, you want to begin to address them. There can be many different weaknesses, thus many different ways to help develop them into more finely tuned elements of your riding. Perhaps your handling skills are lacking. Cyclocross is a great way to help with this. Getting used to riding on different terrain and constantly changing conditions helps greatly in developing the skills and confidence to handle any situation. Perhaps flexibility is an issue. Activities such as yoga and pilates work wonders for increasing flexibility, which in turn does wonders in helping avoid muscle strains and pulls. Or perhaps you are lacking in leg strength and fatigue quickly under load. Weight training can target specific muscle groups to help even out discrepancies and build strength to avoid fatigue longer. You get the idea. Again, this is an optimal area for which to have the insight of a coach. They can help tailor the specific activities necessary to build upon your weaknesses.

Finally, this period is about establishing a good base of conditioning to prepare for the longer hours on the bike you'll be putting in. This particular element is perhaps the best and most exciting as it offers the chance to do other activities that you wouldn't normally do in season. Hiking, swimming, skiing, running, weight lifting, basketball, or a combination of any or all, and more, are all great cross training activities that will keep your condition at a good level so that when the time comes that long hours are necessary to build base, you will be ready.

Now I imagine you are getting twitchy and your palms are starting to sweat as you may have noticed I didn't mention much about actually riding in this phase. Relax, you'll be riding...a little. Again, as I continue to stress the decompression from riding and structured riding, riding will take a back seat to other activities.

The optimal situation is starting back after the break by riding one day a week and mixing in the cross training 2 additional days per week. As the weeks progress, add one more day of riding and one more day cross training until you reach a peak of two days riding and three days cross training. Just like during the season, it's best to work on a three week build and one week recovery basis. This allows the same load and recover format to optimize performance. Your coach can help set up your plan in the best format to address your needs.

Remember, it's still the off season, so there is no reason to have more than a maximum of 5 days activity at this point....that time will come soon enough.