

## The Off-Season Break

After a long season that, for most riders, starts with training races in March, extends through the heat of the summer and doesn't wind out until the leaves begin to turn in September, the off season needs to be approached as serious and focused as the actual on the bike training.

The best approach to beginning the off season is to start out with a complete break from the bike. The length of time off depends largely on how long and intense the racing season was; the more you race, the bigger the break you need. Generally these complete breaks range anywhere from 2 weeks up to 4 weeks, again depending largely on the scope of your season. And when I say a break, I mean not only from the bike, but from any and all structured activities.

There are several goals to establish during this period. The first part of these goals is two-fold. First is to let your body and mind completely decompress from all the stresses put on it through the season. Racing, at any level, puts the body under severe physical and mental stress. Under these stresses, it's only natural to reach a level of burn out, experiencing decreased physical output as well as a decrease in motivation. The second part to this is, without a proper break, neither the body nor mind will be able to renew their enthusiasm and motivation needed to embark on another long season. Without this complete decompression and a thorough recharge, it is almost a certainty that next season will fizzle out way before you want it to.

The next goal of this phase is that, with some time off the bike to clear your mind, you can have an objective assessment of your season. An objective assessment is vital to see where your weaknesses lie and what needs to be done to strengthen them. This is one of many areas where a good coach is very helpful. It is never easy to admit weaknesses and to find and admit ones own faults. Having a good coach that you work closely with gives a good outside perspective to things that may otherwise go unobserved. Without this proper assessment, and planning on ways to strengthen the areas in need, you will continue to be hampered by those weaknesses.

Linked closely to your assessment should be an outline of your goals and objectives for the upcoming season. Establishing goals and having some key events to target help decide much of the structure of your program. By first assessing the season just ended, you can have a better vision of where to put

your goals and what events you want to focus on for the following season. Perhaps you didn't achieve the results you were looking for at the seasons focal events. Again, this is an excellent place for a coach to help. A good coach can give that objective feedback and help you see whether your goals are attainable and inline with your abilities. They can also help you design a program to ensure that you reach those goal events as prepared as possible to hopefully achieve the success you desire.

The final goal of this phase is one of the most important, and one of the most overlooked: keeping your support system strong and as supportive and enthusiastic about your goals as you are. By this I mean using what is normally training time as quality time spent with the spouse or family. Behind every successful rider is a supportive spouse or mate that makes many of the same sacrifices in the name of your riding. Be sure to show your thanks by using this time of the year to spend quality time together and continue to grow that relationship. No matter how hard you train and focus, without that support behind you, next season could be a bust even before it starts.

So enjoy your break, do fun stuff you've neglected all season, let yourself totally unwind to refresh and recharge for another campaign. Next season will start soon enough; be ready for it.