

THE EXMOOR BEAST

Sunday 7th November . Butlins Minehead, Somerset



Your Training Plan:

Week 1:

Monday: Thoroughly check bike and all kit ahead of tomorrow's start
Tuesday: 60 min pre-breakfast ride at zone 1 effort, indoors or on moderate terrain
Wednesday: 60 min evening ride over moderate terrain
Thursday: Two short sessions, 30 mins pre-breakfast and evening (8 sec fast efforts every 5 mins)
Friday: Rest
Saturday: 30-40% of the event distance on moderate course. Stay in zone 1 for 75% of the time
Sunday: 60 min ride concentrating on higher than normal cadence

Week 2:

Monday: Recovery day, focus on stretching
Tuesday: 60 min pre-breakfast ride at zone 1 effort, indoors or on moderate terrain
Wednesday: 90 min evening ride, mainly low zone 2, but include some long hills for 30 mins of climbing work
Thursday: Core conditioning in the gym, focus on squats, planks, lunges.
Friday: Rest
Saturday: 40-50% of event distance on moderate course. Stay in zone 1 for more than 75% of the ride
Sunday: 60 min ride in bigger than normal gear (50-60rpm cadence) pushing your effort on any inclines for the middle 20 mins

Week 3:

Monday: Rest
Tuesday: 60 min pre-breakfast ride, at top of zone 1 effort, indoors or on moderate terrain
Wednesday: 60 min evening ride on hilly terrain, working at your best zone 2 pace to stay smooth with controlled breathing
Thursday: 90 mins pre-breakfast riding of your choice (focus on your weaknesses)
Friday: Rest
Saturday: 50-60% of event distance on moderate course, staying in zone 1 more than 75% of the time
Sunday: 60 min ride in bigger than normal gear (50-60rpm cadence) pushing your effort on any inclines for the middle 20 mins

Week 4:

Monday: Total rest day, get bike mechanics sorted, kit organised, rides planned, nutritional schedule pinned down
Tuesday: 45 min pre-breakfast ride at moderate zone 1 effort, indoors or on moderate terrain
Wednesday: 60 min ride working on either climbing, descending, cornering or group riding – wherever you feel weakest
Thursday: Rest
Friday: Rest
Saturday: 25% of event distance on moderate or rolling course. Stay in zone 1 for more than 90% of the ride.
Sunday: 60 min light spin with 8-sec efforts every 6 mins.

Week 5:

Monday: Rest
Tuesday: 45-60 min pre-breakfast ride at moderate zone 1 effort indoors or on moderate terrain
Wednesday: 60 min evening ride on moderate terrain
Thursday: 40 min pre-breakfast ride, then 40 min evening ride, with 8 sec fast intervals every 4 mins
Friday: Rest
Saturday: 50-60% of event distance on hills. Stay in zone 1 on any flats and low to mid zone 2 on hills
Sunday: 80 min ride in a bigger gear than normal, pushing on the inclines for the middle 30 mins

Week 6:

Monday: Recovery day – stretching or light spin on stationary bike
Tuesday: 60 min pre-breakfast ride at zone 1 effort, indoors or on moderate terrain
Wednesday: 90 min evening ride, low zone 2, on the longest climbs you can find for a total of 30 mins controlled hard climbing work
Thursday: Work on your weaknesses, either hills, descents, pre-breakfast or endurance – but no more than 60 mins
Friday: Rest
Saturday: 70% of event distance on a hilly course. Stay in zone 1 on the flat and low to mid-zone 2 on hills
Sunday: 90 mins with speed practice on descents and 6 one-min zone 3 efforts with 2-3 mins spin recovery

Week 7:

Monday: Rest
Tuesday: 60 min pre-breakfast ride at zone 1 effort, indoors or on moderate terrain
Wednesday: 60 min evening ride on hills at zone 2 effort, focusing on staying smooth with controlled breathings
Thursday: Work on your weaknesses, hills, core, descents, endurance etc
Friday: Rest
Saturday: 60% of event distance on hilly course, or ride a sportive if there's one nearby. Stay in upper zone 1 on flats and zone 2 on hills
Sunday: 80 min ride with speed practice on the descents for the middle 40 mins

Week 8:

Monday: Rest day, focus on getting all kit and nutritional plans sorted
Tuesday: 45 min pre-breakfast ride at zone 1 effort, indoors or on moderate
Wednesday: 60 min ride focusing on weaknesses, climbing, descending, eating in the saddle etc
Thursday: Rest
Friday: Rest
Saturday: 40% of event distance on the flat in low to mid zone 1
Sunday: 60 min light spin with 8 sec efforts every 6 mins



ZONES:

ZONE 1: 60-80% of your maximum heart rate or a perceived rate of exertion (PRE) of 6-7/10 – conversation is easy and you don't need to breathe through your mouth

ZONE 2: 80-90% of your maximum heart rate or a perceived rate of exertion (PRE) of 8-9/10 – you can mutter short phrases, but need to breathe through your mouth to keep going. Controlled, but sustainable.

ZONE 3: 90% of your maximum heart rate or a perceived rate of exertion (PRE) of 9+10 – breathing's hard and laboured, your muscles are burning, you can hardly mutter words. Only for short bursts.

FORM FOCUS

ROLL WITH IT

Using an indoor cycle trainer isn't just a wet weather avoidance strategy. "When you're cycling you can't safely look down at your leg and body movement, and if you do you won't be cycling properly anyway," says Andy Wadsworth, head personal trainer with mylifept.com. "Using a roller system, put a mirror a few feet away from you and focus on your feet – make sure there's an even pace all the way round, count the cadence so you're as close to 90 a minute as possible for optimal lactic acid dispersal, make sure there's no upperbody movement and practice with your hands on the tops, drops and brake levers," he says. "What really helps is getting a free-standing mirror on a stand you can angle up so you see yourself from different positions – it makes you take a second look at what you're doing while you're riding." So you literally see yourself with fresh eyes.

BANG THE BASICS

It's when you're putting real force through the bike that you need to watch your form, says Andy. "It's then that you really lose form and efficiency and races are lost," he says. "Make sure you're pedalling in circles not triangles, pushing to outside and pulling back round as if your foot's trying to get away from crank to make the circle bigger – specifically, pull up as well as push down," he says. Keep your heels pressed down throughout full pedal stroke as pointed toes mean can't achieve a full extension and will lose up to 10% power, he says. "One of the biggest mistakes amateur riders make is putting their saddles too high – if you're hips are rolling in any way, it's too high and you won't get a proper extension, and that's wasted energy that can also translate to back ache."

FITNESS FOCUS

HIT BOTH BASES

There's a huge difference between easy training to build your aerobic system - using fat and oxygen to build mitochondria – and more intensive high-end training at around 90% of your maximum heart rate to increase lactate tolerance so you can 'push through', Wadsworth says. "The big mistake most riders make is to train for hours at 75-85% of their maximum heart rate – you need to build a base with easy aerobic riding so your heart gets more efficient at pumping oxygen to your muscles." So, do two rides a week – one 5-hour ride at less than 70%, for as long as possible, and in a separate session do ten 100% efforts for 1-4 minutes, with double the duration for the rests between. "Start with one-minute bursts and build up, making sure to warm up before and stretch fully afterwards."

HIT YOUR WINDOW

The key to endurance is regular riding, and that ain't possible if your last ride left you ragged. "Too few endurance athletes get the right nutritional intake directly after their session, which means their bodies simply won't recover properly, jeopardising any long-term training schedule," says sports nutritionist Anita Bean. During your "rapid phase of recovery", neck a sports drink that contains carbohydrates and protein, preferably in a 4-to-1 ratio, she advises. Try Multipower's Re-Charge drink (£20 for 800g) with an optimal ratio of carbs to protein to get you back out there training. "The protein repairs damaged muscle fibres, the fluid carries away the lactic acid that causes soreness, the carbs refuel your muscles before the next workout, and the total combination injects your muscles with insulin to speed the recovery process," she says. But be quick – you've only got a 45-minute window before your muscles stop absorbing nutrients.

HILLS FOCUS:

FIND FORCE

The key to hills, says Shane Sutton, overall Sports Coach of the Year 2008, is to keep your weight on your pedals at all time, don't go at too high a cadence and 'train with force'. "In training, use bigger gears than you would normally to recruit general strength in the chair," he says. "You can do this just as well on British climbs as abroad, it's about the quality of the rider to make the most of whatever's there, not the hills." Specifically, he says, you have to train in 'zone 4', or over 180bpm, at all times and at around 70rpm. "It's about strength, endurance and mental toughness – no other discipline demands as much from any rider."

HIT YOUR CORE

To 'pull' your body up the hill, you need your body to act like a chain, and that requires a cast-iron mid-rif, Sutton says. "It's all about transfer of power," he explains. "Your back, neck and shoulders are the first to go, then your lower back takes all the strain, you feel niggles, get injured and can't ride – I've seen it a million times, at every level." So focus on your work out of the saddle as much as in it, he says. "Just two 30-minute sessions doing lunges, squats and exercise ball work a week will pay dividends, not just in your climb times, but your ability to train longer and harder – I see more riders with overuse injuries through endless grinding up hills than anything else."

PLANNING FOCUS:

TAKE AIM

Identify your goal event and don't lost focus. "I see so many clients through the work I do with Sportstest (sportstest.co.uk) who simply focus on too many," says Garry Palmer, author of Elite Performance Cycling (A&C Black). "If you're going for the etap, learn the route off by heart, know what kind of climbs you'll be facing, prepare mentally and physically for every specific challenge and have a contingency plan," he says. "Fail to prepare and prepare to fail, and that goes down to your nutritional plan, your bike set-up, your clothing – if nothing else, it gives you the psychological confidence to tackle it knowing you've done everything you can – it's what gave Lance his edge, so copy him."

KNOW YOURSELF

If you've got 25% body fat don't do the Marmot as climbing for 8-10 hrs will break your soul as much as your body, Palmer says. "It sounds obvious, but knowing and facing up to your strengths and weaknesses is half the battle to becoming a better rider – no rider can do everything, not even the likes of Lance." Speak to other experienced riders and coaches and plan your attack – start slowly and gradually build up your training over a minimum of 6 months before any event, focusing on developing your strengths as much as your weaknesses. "Focus on your base fitness, then transitional fitness, then speed and then power," he says. "If you've done no riding at all before, base fitness should take 3-9 months, threshold fitness 6-12 weeks, and speed and power 4-12 weeks – training is about consistency, planning and patience."