

Crush That Century!

by Doug Katona

Anyone can ride 100 miles, but riding it strong—with energy to spare—is a completely different story. Completing a century is a benchmark in any cyclist's life; it's proof-positive that you are not only fit, but also resilient. The better you train, the more likely it will be that five to six hours in the saddle will be a rewarding journey rather than a feat to overcome.

A century is a classic endurance event. The keys to success are planning and consistency. As soon as you decide on an event, mark your calendar and begin creating a training plan using a periodization schedule. Your goal: 75% of the total distance, or 75 miles. After you've established a solid base, you'll progressively build up to riding 75 miles on a weekly basis.

Base Training

Unlike rumors you may have heard, you do not have to log a 6-hour, 100-mile ride every week. That said, to be well-prepared for a century, you have to log miles—there's no other way around it. Base training is the most critical component of your training plan; if your endurance (base) is not well-trained, you'll be searching for the sag wagon at mile 70.

To start base training, ride at least 4 times per week, with a goal of logging close to 8 hours of riding each week. I recommend keeping a training log to track your mileage, ride type, intensity and physical response. It's a valuable tool to help you focus on your century goal and keep your training on the right track—it can also be instrumental in helping prevent overtraining. To prevent over training,, do not increase your mileage or time in the saddle by more than 15% each week.

Once you have established a solid base, set a goal to do one weekly long ride that constitutes 50% of your weekly mileage goal or time. As you increase the frequency of longer rides, it's important to take inventory of a few key components: physical response to increased saddle time, mental toughness and how your body reacts physiologically (digestion, fatigue response). Your weekly long ride should simulate the terrain and conditions of your target event as closely as possible.

Listen to Your body

As you begin ramping up your training, be sure to pay close attention to your body's response to the increased mileage. While the goal of training is to increase fitness, it's also to listen to what your body is telling you. Most of the issues that create problems for riders are not rooted in physical fatigue, but from volume of riding. Neck stiffness, shoulder fatigue, tricep weakness, low back aches or Achilles tendon inflammation are common responses to spending increased time in the saddle. To prevent unnecessary overuse injuries, make adjustments before the big day—get your bike properly fitted by a local bike shop and purchase hard-soled cycling shoes that lend adequate support.



Nutrition

Once you begin logging miles, you'll start to get a sense of how your body responds to food during rides. Nutrition is one of the trickiest parts of preparation, and it's also the most personal. During longer weekly training rides, be sure to experiment with different replacement fluids and food sources to see what helps you perform best, keeps your blood sugar stable and gives you energy without stomach discomfort.

Taste is subjective—some riders swear by doughnut holes, others can't handle much food at all on long rides. For every rider that likes a certain gel or bar, another person hates it, so make it a point to experiment with different brands of energy bars and hydration drinks. Once you have established a strong base and dialed in the right nutrition formula for your personal needs, you can begin more specific (more intense) training for better results.

Intervals

Although centuries are mainly endurance in nature, mixing in higher intensities will give you an added edge. During your training week, complement your endurance rides with 1-2 interval sessions per week. The best part about these sessions is that you don't have to ride as long—a quality interval session can be completed in less than an hour! If you follow up the next day with a recovery day and then mix in your longer ride during the week, you'll have a structured program that keeps your body and mind fresh!

The type of interval that best suits a century training schedule is an extended, anaerobic threshold interval. You can do this in one of two ways: find a local time trial that's around 10 miles or takes around 25-30 minutes to complete. Or, ride by yourself at around 85% of MHR for 10-20 minutes. and repeat twice, with sufficient recovery time.

Another type of interval that helps you gain power and strength is the near maximal effort interval. After sufficient warm-up, attack using a large gear and ramp up to a high-end speed that you can maintain for at least 45 seconds, but no more than 2 minutes, without changing gears. Recover to 65% or less and repeat 3 times. Discipline is the key here. Ride hard enough (your legs and lungs will be crying mercy) and you'll experience huge rewards.

Hills

Another way to develop power and strength is to hit the hills, especially if you'll be riding a hilly century or if there's a chance of strong headwinds. Hill training is a little different than road training in the sense that hill training for centuries does not need to include structured interval segments. A once-a-week session that focuses on steady, extended climbing will do the trick. Hill training for centuries does not need to include structured interval segments. Choose a hill with at least a 5% grade and one that takes at least 8 minutes to climb. During the climb, focus on consistent, powerful pedal strokes, and time allowing, try to hit the hill between three and five times.

Once you've logged in your miles, met your weekly ride volume and stuck to your training plan, what's left? You guessed it—fuel and food. Here's a quick snapshot of key items to address to make your century a pleasant, not painful, experience.



Event Day Tips

- Drink every 15 minutes. You should go through about 1 water bottle an hour.
- Eat something at least every 30 minutes to maintain adequate glycogen stores. One of the biggest mistakes century riders make is waiting too long to eat. Get in the habit of eating something after 30 minutes of riding. Some experts recommend eating .3 grams per pound of body weight per hour (up to 60 grams per hour for most people).
- In the 4-5 days leading up to the century, be sure to eat enough. If you want to be on the safe side, consume about 8-10 grams of carbs per kilogram of body weight. Also, stay consistent with food choices leading up to the event. This is not the time to experiment with food. Know what works and keep it simple.
- Avoid high-fat foods or high-fiber foods during the 2 days leading up to the event.
- If you gain a pound or two within a week of the century, it might be a good thing! Often this means the body is storing glycogen. Carbohydrates store water!
- Don't overeat the night before. Eat a sensible, well-balanced meal. Don't worry about increasing fat, carbs or protein.
- Eat a sufficient, easily digestible breakfast the morning of and allow about 2-3 hours for proper digestion. Remember, you want your stomach to be calm before you roll out.

Remember, a century is only 100 miles. If you prepare and stick to your plan, you'll finish strong with energy to spare. Be careful with century riding—you may find yourself signing up for more!

Resources: Ultra Cycling Magazine by Pete Penseyeres.
Riding Fast Centuries by Lisa Marie Dougherty.
Bicycle Road Racing by Eddie Borysewicz ("Eddie B.").

Spinning® Instructor News, July 2004, Volume 8, Issue 6

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