

# RAMP UP YOUR WINTER TRAINING

Wrap up, be brave, and get out there!  
It's time to up the ante on winter to  
make sure you're in race-fit shape come  
spring. *Jim Cotton* goes in search of  
insight and inspiration

Photos: Daniel Gould



and March, tends to bear some of the harshest conditions, but that's offset by the lengthening days, slowly rising

heer up, we're well over halfway through winter. OK, so the remaining chunk, February

temperatures, and promise of the race season just around the corner. Now is the time to raise your game and do everything you can to make sure you're building your form progressively towards your first event of spring. Below, we set out a selection of tips and advice from riders and experts on how to ramp up your training — sow the seeds of performance now, yield big rewards come spring!

## 1 Make your sessions race-specific

Winter is traditionally a time for base miles, but as the race season approaches

it becomes ever more important to incorporate some higher-intensity riding. Russ Downing, British ex-pro who raced for many teams including Team Sky, JLT-Condor, and most recently Holdsworth, confirms that now is the time to start getting race-specific.

“At a basic level, I've always thought of training as a pyramid,” Downing says. “All through winter you're at the base, big

volume but easy. As you reach the end of winter and towards competition season, you need to cut down that volume and start doing some intervals and efforts to get your legs ready.”

Needless to say, the transition into racing will still be taxing, no matter how much fitness you've built over winter — so make sure your main event isn't your first of the new season. Think of this as

the beginning of a season-long journey.

“I was never good the first race after winter, no matter how hard I'd trained; it's like my body was being taken by surprise,” Downing explains. “But after a few races, I'd feel back up to speed. It's worth getting a race under your belt in late winter, even if it's a while until your main event. It will open up the legs and get your head in the game.”

# 2

## Check your bike for turbo traumas

As spring approaches, you may be thinking of getting that treasured ‘best’ bike off the turbo and ready for action. However, just because it’s been sheltering indoors rigged up to the turbo all winter, doesn’t mean it’s ready to ride. You need to check a few basic things, or get it to your local bike shop, before unleashing it back on the road — as Rikki Pankhurst of Pankhurst Cycles explains:

“We get a lot of problems with corrosion after a bike has spent the winter on the turbo. When you’re sweating on the bike, all that salt is very damaging, particularly at the front end. The bolts around the stem and bars can get very rusted so we inspect all of them for damage and clean them out if needs be. And bar tape will also need replacing after a winter of sweating all over it — it’s a biohazard!”

Now is a good time for a light service and thorough check: “The short, high torque, high power intervals you’ve done on the trainer may have worn the chain and cassette, and so we always make sure to check and if necessary replace these to prevent you wearing your chainrings as well. Carbon frames do not like being

held captive on a turbo trainer, so we always check the whole for any excessive loading or cracking. And we also check the front tyre, as sidewalls can easily become damaged if it’s been stuck on a wheel stand for a long time.”

# 3

## Match recovery to workload

To get yourself ready for the increased miles of spring or a late-winter training camp, you need to look after your body off the bike. If you’re not including any stretching or rehab work into your training, now is a good time to get into the habit. Laurence Plant, owner-manager of Henley Practice physical therapy and training centre advises:

“The glutes and hips are the most powerful areas in terms of force creation when we ride, but they’re also the areas that can become the most tight and knotted. Fortunately, we can work on these easily at home with a foam roller and a tennis or lacrosse ball.”

A hint of brightness is all the encouragement most riders need after the granite skies of winter

**“To get ready for spring, you need to look after your body”**

Plant is an advocate of self-massage: “The quads and IT band should be the primary focus of your foam rolling, while a ball is much better for getting into the more densely packed, tighter areas of muscle such as the glutes and hip flexors.”

He also advises including some stretching to improve the range of motion of the key hip and glute areas: “The pigeon pose is ideal for the glutes and lower back,

and to target both the quads and hips; try a low lunge, with your rear heel pulled up to the buttock, making sure your hips are pushed forward and core is engaged.”

# 4

## Build a strong core

We tend to start incorporating more intensity into our training in late winter and early spring, and to best transfer power into the bike, we need a strong core. Physio Laurence Plant offers the following tips:

“A strong core is key to high power-efforts as it ensures all the torque you apply to the pedals is propelling you forward, not causing you to rock and twist on the saddle.”

Making improvements is relatively simple: “Dead bugs, plank variations, and bird-dogs are great exercises that are specific to the core, and that you can do at home in a 15-minute session. However, technique is key here — make sure you remain stable at the hip and keep your

pelvis engaged as you do the work or you won’t be gaining all the benefit.”

Better still, you don’t need specialist equipment: “Some unweighted strength exercises such as walking lunges, step-ups, squats and single-legged squats are great additions to your core routine. Again, the key is to ensuring your torso is fully engaged and braced, and your hips are stable. This trains your lower back to stabilise the pelvis as your legs are pedalling, and will pay dividends when you start upping the intensity in spring.”

# 5

## Get back on the road for real-world skills

As the weather starts to improve and the days lengthen, you can start to spend less time doing intervals on the turbo and more out on the road. This offers you the chance to bring some race-specificity to your outdoor training. Stephen Gallagher of DigDeep Coaching cautions against becoming overly reliant on the very

CW EDITOR SAYS

## Start the ride the night before

Simon Richardson’s advice

“For me, the key to getting out the door in winter is taking away the excuses and reasons not to. When I want to make sure of a ride I start preparations the night before: filling my bottles, putting food (bars, bananas, etc) by the bike ready to grab, and laying out clothes on the spare bed. Just knowing that I can get straight out of bed and into my kit, then grab my food before heading out the door is enough to get me out even in bad weather. By making those simple preparations, I’ve committed to the ride. I’m not waking up thinking ‘Hmmm, shall I go out today?’ The decision has already been made. If you want to make your commitment public, post a picture on social media — there’s no hiding then.

“Give it a go, it’s very simple and surprisingly effective.”

controlled conditions of turbo training.

“Training at intensity feels very different indoors, compared to outdoors. There’s a different technique, and even tiny fluctuations in gradient can make a difference in your effort and power application,” he says. “You lose that feel for the road when you’re riding indoors a lot. You can be very fit indoors, but it doesn’t always translate when you’re outside — and that’s where your key races and sportives are going to take place, not on Zwift. Use the roads around you to replicate race conditions: sprint for road signs or go full-gas over climbs. This provides your interval training but makes it more real, and more enjoyable.”

Some riders believe in racing themselves to fitness. Chris Bartley, who placed second in the National 25 and 50-mile time trials in 2018, recommends

## Dress smart, stay warm

With February and March often the cruellest months in terms of UK weather, you need to get your kit choices right to stay warm and allow you to keep putting in those miles. Tech writer Paul Norman selects some of his favourite winter items.



### DISSENT 133 GLOVE LAYERING SYSTEM £95

Four pairs of gloves of different weight to tailor to the conditions, however wet or cold.



### NORTHWAVE FLASH TH SHOES £139.99

The Flash has the look of a summer shoe, but is fully enclosed and insulated, so is comfortable in wintry conditions.



### SPORTFUL FIANDRE CABRIO JACKET £200

The warm, water-resistant Cabrio has a zip-out flap covering the mid-back to add extra warmth.



## Finn and bear it!

**Our man in Finland, Richard Robinson, seeks winter wisdom from those who really understand toughing out harsh conditions**

In Finland winter is a way of life. Up in Lapland, the northern third of the country, it officially lasts seven months of the year. Across the whole country, the average temperature in March is just -4.8°C. Even in Helsinki, Finland's capital on the south coast, there is an average of 98 days' uninterrupted snow cover each winter. Yet cyclists plough on regardless, often in numbers that put the UK to shame. To find out how they keep their motivation going, and how they keep training, we solicited tips from some of the country's foremost riders and associations.



**Matti Koistinen, executive director of the Finnish Cyclists' Federation**

"Riding on winter mornings when the sky is clear and the temperature goes down to -15°C is actually a really great experience. White snow lightens up the surroundings, the sunrise is awesome, the cold air wakes you up and after a slightly long ride you get a great frost beard! In our top winter cycling cities like Oulu and Joensuu, between 30 and 50 per cent of cyclists keep riding through the winter."



**Sari Saarelainen, rider with Cogeas-Mettler Pro Cycling:**

"In November or December, I dig out the mountain bike and set off into the middle of the forest to ride on trails at a gentle pace and for my own enjoyment. I explore terrain that I don't get to see when road cycling in the summer. In the forest, you also get protection from the wind, since the icy blasts are not as piercing as when riding on the road."



**Lotta Lepistö, rider with Trek-Segafredo**

"When I spent the entire winter riding in Finland, the best moments came from the group rides on the weekends. The only dreary thing was getting dressed, which took plenty of time and a lot of mulling over. The best winter weather is lightly frozen (-5°C) and midday sunshine. Personally I don't like to ride alone inside; I'd rather ride in bad weather outdoors. But long group spin sessions are fun."



**Kjell Carlström, ex-pro and directeur sportif of the Israel Cycling Academy:**

"My general limit [for riding outdoors] was -5°C, because in my opinion you don't benefit much from cycling when it's any colder. Much better run or ski, and then finish the training inside by cycling on rollers or turbo trainer. The nice moments were naturally when you got home after a good-but-tough ride, since you got to go into a warm sauna or shower."

getting involved in an 'evening 10' series, many of which recommence in March.

"If I need to do something in training that will involve going really deep," says Bartley, "I always get the best from myself in a race situation, when I've got a number on my back and there's a lot of other riders around."

## 6

### Cook slow while you ride fast

After the extra treats and drinks of the festive season, you may have gained a little unwanted 'insulation'. The first step towards getting your weight back to where you want it to be is by shunning convenience and high-calorie ultra-processed foods, especially after a ride when the munchies take hold.

Cooking your own food from fresh ingredients will always provide the

most nutritious and tasty options. Nigel Mitchell, head of nutrition at the EF Education First Pro Cycling team, is a passionate advocate of using rice cookers and slow cookers.

"Rice cookers are great, as you can throw all sorts in with the rice; for example, chicken and veg. Prepare it all before you go out riding, switch it on when you're back, and 20 minutes later it will be all done — allowing you to get showered and dressed in the meantime."

This type of cooking saves money as well as time. As Mitchell advises, you can use cheaper cuts of meat when cooking slowly.

"Cuts such as beef shin, which is high in iron, pork shoulder, or chicken thighs, are delicious slow cooked." And slow cooking isn't just for the carnivores; beans and all types of veg are also great when slow cooked.

## 7

### Go light on easy days

As the weather warms slightly, you may want to start eating some lighter meals on rest or lower-mileage days. Forget the preconceived notion that salads are just bland leaves and miserable chunks of dry meat. "It's all about adding textures and additional nutrient-dense ingredients," says Nigel Mitchell. "Chopped pistachio nuts are great toppers; they're high in antioxidants, full of protein, and one of the lowest fat nuts. Sprinkles of seeds, or chopped avocados, are also great options that will bring the dish to life."

To make your own dressing, Mitchell advises: "Just mix balsamic and olive oil, or for a vegan option try flaxseed oil, which has more omega-3 in it."

**"After the festive season you may have gained a little insulation"**

Carefully fuel your late-winter rides for performance gains in spring



### COACH'S VIEW

## Matt Rowe's winter warmers

**The former pro rider and co-founder of Rowe and King coaching ([roweandking.com](http://roweandking.com)) gives his five top tips**

#### 1. Enter an event

Get a date in the diary for an early season event as a motivator and kick-starter. You will likely not be in peak form, but starting early will help get you fit and sharp quicker.



Pin a number on now

#### 2. Race on Zwift

During the winter, you can forget how tough racing is, so what better way to compete and get that first big race effort done than from the safety of your own garage?

#### 3. Make a plan

Plan out your training, and as you start to ramp up your training load, have a rest period pencilled — it's great to have a rest to look forward to.

#### 4. Book a training camp

It's amazing what a bit of sun can do! If you can afford it, head to warmer climes for a week's training on dry, clean roads.

#### 5. Learn from last year

Look back at what training you completed last year and reflect on it to make this year smarter. This is where a coach adds value — offering an outside perspective and providing some fresh, innovative ideas to train and stimulate your body.