



AIN'T GETTING ON NO PLANE!

It's spring training camp season — but do you really need to surrender to the hassle and expense of jetting off overseas? *Jim Cotton* makes the case for the Great British staycation camp

Photos Daniel Gould

If you log in to Strava in April, your feed is likely to be filled with rides out to the Formentor Lighthouse, images of Sa Calobra's switchbacks, or notifications of friends setting PRs on Tenerife's Mount Teide. It's *de rigueur* nowadays to jet off to sunnier climes in late winter and spring to get in some solid miles and work on the tan. That's all very well, and of course we all love spending time away on warm, traffic-free tarmac... But some of us view the stress and fuff of flying in the same way as the *A-Team's* famously plane-averse Sergeant Bosco Albert Baracus. Isn't there more to life, you damn fools, than lugging a bike box across airports, delays and stress for the sake of a few degrees extra warmth?

The Spanish islands of Majorca, Tenerife and Gran Canaria may have begun to seem like the only options for your spring camp, but it's a trend that's making it all too easy to overlook the alternatives — not least, staying at home. Hear us out! OK, so overseas camps have a huge amount going for them, but the UK has a lot of great riding to offer too, and is literally on your doorstep, making it easy on your wallet and on your annual leave allowance. So, if you want to ramp up your fitness with an intense block of training, here's why you might be better off *not* getting on a plane...

It goes without saying that staying in the UK will save you a lot of money. Simply put the bike in the car, fill her up with petrol, and head to a B&B; or, if you're lucky enough to live in an area of outstanding cycling roads, simply book a few days off work and stay at home. Any overseas trip is costly, both monetarily and in terms of time. Getting to the airport, the high-stress scramble through security, waiting around at the mercy of the departures board, transfer the other end — it's the best part of a day wasted.

A trip overseas tends to carry with it a lot of added fatigue and distraction. Even a short-haul flight is prone to leave you feeling tired for a day or two. And what's more, when you arrive, it can be tempting to explore the beach or pool rather than facing up to the chore of unpacking and setting up your bike. And



of course, unless you have the most iron of wills, the temptations of the paella restaurant, pizzeria and local bars are often too strong to resist. The warm sun, different language and funny bank notes lure us into 'holiday mode' — and we start making choices that make a mockery of our 'training camp' intentions.

Most of us live within a two-hour drive (at most) of a great training area. Hence, by clearing the decks of social events and family responsibilities, and taking just two days off work, tacked on to a weekend, you could bag yourself a solid four days of training. No bike dismantling, no check-in, no lost time.

Though there is validity in the old adage of 'getting the miles in', we know now that to really reap the rewards, training should include structure. Riding at different intensities to target different energy systems will see you make the biggest possible gains. That said, including intervals and higher-intensity efforts

day after day on a long training camp isn't really feasible for most of us. Unless you're very highly trained, your body simply won't handle it.

Stephen Gallagher of DigDeep Coaching says: "If you ride every day during a long camp and try to include intervals throughout that period, you're going to overtrain, and the productivity of the trip will be lowered, as it will take you longer to recover afterwards."

The danger is, a long training camp abroad can become more like touring, with long, steady rides every day. A stay-at-home camp can be far more focused.

Keeping it local, over a shorter period, allows each session to be more effective: you are going into each ride that bit fresher, and you don't need to reserve your energy for further down the week. Gallagher recommends a four-day block with one easier day of up to three hours at a steady pace (see box). In this way, a short training trip (or staycation) means

you get to ride every day and still include lots of intensity — giving you more training 'bang' for your time 'buck'.

Where to go?

There are plenty of great locations in the UK to serve as a base for your mini-camp. Yorkshire has become the heart of cycling in the UK, with its beautiful scenery and abundance of hills of all shapes and sizes, even attracting overseas riders — if 'God's own country' is good enough for French and Italian riders, it should be good enough for us Brits too.

You typically don't appreciate what you have on your own doorstep; the more you think about it, the more UK places there are offering the roads and the terrain to test even the fittest of us. Ed Laverack of Swift Pro Cycling recommends the Brecon Beacons for training, on the basis "there are not many places in the UK where you can do such a number of long climbs in one day." Rob Cartledge of Le

EXPERT ADVICE

Four-day training plans

Stephen Gallagher of DigDeep Coaching provides three intense schedules, each with a different focus

TO CONQUER GRAND FONDOS

Day 1

4-5hr. Hilly terrain, if available. Steady riding in Zone 2 (56-75% FTP / 69-83% Threshold HR) Include 3x 10-15min tempo (76-90% FTP / 84-94% Threshold HR) blocks spread through the ride.

Day 2

4-5hr. Flatter terrain. Steady riding in Zone 2 throughout.

Day 3

2-3hr. Steady Zone 1-2 riding. Today is an easier day to ensure you can make the most of a big final day.

Day 4

As per day one.

TO BOOST YOUR FTP

Gallagher advises: "Increasing your FTP requires different types of training for different athletes. Each reacts differently to different stimuli. If improving FTP is your sole aim, you do not need a high-volume block."

Day 1

3hr inc. 2x20min at sweetspot in first half of ride. In the last hour (when slightly fatigued) do a full-gas 10min effort right at the top end of your threshold (105-107% FTP).

Day 2

3hr inc. high threshold block in first hour: 3x 7min at 105% of FTP. Keep recovery short (max 5min). In last hour, do 30min at 85% FTP. Aside from the efforts, keep the intensity low to moderate.

Day 3

3hr inc. short mitochondrial efforts at the start and end of ride: 2x (4x 2min at 115% FTP), one set in first hour and one set in last hour. Easy in between.

Day 4

4hr-plus. Push the volume today — it's the last day of camp. Similar to Day 2, get in 3x 7min high-threshold efforts early with short recoveries. In the third hour, do a full-gas 20min effort as close as possible to FTP.

TO IMPROVE YOUR CLIMBING

Gallagher advises: "To develop your climbing, do lots of climbing! Riding both short/steep bergs and longer, more gradual hills is vital. You need to be able to handle changes of cadence, so technique and muscle agility are as important as pure power."

Day 1

3hr inc. technique work/cadence changes on different terrain. Intensity is moderate for majority of ride but on steep climbs you should be focusing on technique/cadence over short bursts.

Day 2

5hr, getting in as much elevation as possible — at least 2hr riding uphill at a tempo effort (choose a suitable area).

Day 3

3hr inc. high-intensity climbing. Focus on high power/high fatigue over short climbs of 5-8min — as many as you can, but don't overdo the volume; this is a quality session.

Day 4

4-5hr inc. long climbs and technique work. Early on, ride some tempo/sweetspot: climbs of 10-15min. In latter half, work on technique/rhythm and cadence on shorter, steeper climbs.

Domestique Tours, which has hosted training weekends in the UK, is a big fan of the Peak District: “If you’re training for a Continental sportive, it’s got sustained climbs such as the Cat and Fiddle that are a decent length and similar gradient to what you’re going to encounter overseas.”

Other great areas you may want to consider for your camp include Exmoor, Dartmoor and the New Forest or, if you’re going later in the year, the Lake District or Scottish Highlands.

Fundamental to the success of your camp is your mindset. Just because you’re not leaving the country doesn’t mean you shouldn’t take it seriously.

“It’s your mentality and approach to that big block of training, rather than the location, that makes it a training camp,” says Gallagher. “When you go away, you’re thinking about your nutrition, your bike and your equipment for weeks before — and you should do that even if you’re based in your own house.”

So, just as you would if you were jetting off overseas, give your bike a service, make sure you’re stocked with ride and recovery foods, and ensure you have the appropriate clothing for the conditions. Having saved hundreds of pounds on flights and bike boxes, you’re more than justified in investing some cash on equipment and kit.

Don’t let life get in the way

Of course, the big challenge of staying at home is switching off from other commitments to allow yourself to pour all your energy into training. When you leave the UK, it’s easier to shut off the work email and distance yourself from the relentless demands of daily life. Now, this isn’t easy, but you need to replicate this mentality if you stay in the UK: explain to your work and family that you’re off-grid — there can be no mowing the lawn, no ‘quick’ work emails or calls, and only minimal domestic chores. Make sure the cupboards are well stocked and prepare some meals to freeze or have ready in the fridge; everything should be ready to reduce your off-bike workload. The advantage of having your home comforts around you — your own comfy bed, for instance, and training aids such as your trusty foam roller — shouldn’t be underestimated. You can only train as well as you rest, and so it’s time to get friendly with the sofa.

Another benefit to basing your camp in the UK is that you can keep flexible with the timing. Whereas in Spain, the Canaries or southern France you’re restricted to late winter or spring so as to avoid the hottest months, increased traffic and soaring prices, in the UK you can be more flexible — any time from now,



Training on home turf will keep your goals in focus

“You can base your camp in the area of the target event”

right through the summer. Just check the long-range forecast and then get it permanent-inked on the calendar.

Sure, training in the Majorcan mountains in March can be a great way to find your climbing legs and get your head around descending techniques, but there are several months until your big summer event — time enough to get rusty. On the other hand, training on a 20-minute British climb such as Porlock Toll Road in Exmoor or Fleet Moss in Yorkshire in May or June can be timed to fit in perfectly with your goal. Though the climbs may be shorter, riding them can be timed for max effect. What’s more, you can base your camp in the area where your target event is going to be taking place, just as pro teams do when they spend a few days getting to know a specific location (e.g. Yorkshire), combining training with recce riding.

Staying in the UK allows flexibility, but don’t leave it too late — bear in mind, you need recovery time post-camp. “After your camp, you generally need to dedicate nearly double the duration of the training block itself to rest and easy rides in order to fully recover,” advises Gallagher.

As such, your ‘on camp’ training block should finish at least two weeks prior to any big events you’re targeting.

If you’re concerned about going somewhere new and not knowing the roads, local knowledge is invaluable. Despite riding abroad much of the time lately, having stepped up to WorldTour level, Harry Tanfield still trains regularly in the UK, in areas as diverse as the flatlands of Cambridgeshire and the hills of the North York Moors. He told us, “If you’re trying to do intervals, you can do them in any country or region, just as long as you know the roads to ride on.”

If you’re unsure where to start with your ride research, turn to Strava. Track down the club local to your chosen destination and look at their recent rides. Better still, look at the routes of sportives in the area, which typically pick out the best local roads and hills. You can use this knowledge to build your own routes.

It’s always good to go on a training camp with mates, so you can motivate each other when the fatigue kicks in or the weather turns. But don’t get sucked into doing someone else’s training. “You need to boost your fitness specifically

to the demands of the target event,” says Gallagher. If possible, therefore, find a training partner who is working towards goals similar to your own; if you’re training for Alpine climbs while your partner is honing his sprint, it’s just not going to work.

Struggling for suitable ride mates? Don’t panic, as there are plenty of ways to track down a wingman. If you’re training for an event, check if it has its own Strava or Facebook group and make contact. And, of course, you can engage with the local club. If you can secure company for only one or two days of your camp, don’t worry — you’ll still get the morale boost of having a wheel to share, and if they’re a local, you’ll benefit from their road knowledge and route-planning.

So, embargo the bike box and banish Brexit-related travel worries. Though a UK-based training camp may not sharpen the tan lines in the same way as a trip to Majorca or Tenerife, it will sharpen your fitness in a more time-effective manner, and save you a load of cash in the process. And think about it: those saved pennies might go quite a long way to justifying a new bike...

OVERSEAS TRAINING CAMPS

If you insist...

If you really must go overseas, here are a few ideas for doing so without breaking the bank

Location: Avoid locations popular for tourism, where everything comes at a premium. Consider less travelled areas such as the Sierra Nevada, the Vosges mountains, or the Pyrenees.

When: Needless to say, you need to avoid peak times and school holidays — although choosing the correct location should mitigate seasonal price hikes.

Accommodation: To make a massive saving, stay away from the hotels and find yourself a place on Airbnb with good kitchen facilities. Sharing a house with a few training partners, and cooking for yourselves, means you can avoid pricy restaurants and bars, and keep your nutrition on track.

Travel: If you’re looking to keep costs really low, choose a destination that’s not too deep into Europe, and load up your car with your bikes and your buddies. Share the driving and the costs. It’ll take aeons but it saves money and adds a road trip vibe.

Adding it up
CW’s estimate for driving your way from London to the Vosges for a four-day trip, with two other riders, in late spring:

Return trip on Eurotunnel:
£200 total

Accommodation (Airbnb):
£400 total

Petrol: £200 total

Total per rider (not including food): £270 each

MATT GIBSON

‘I prefer to train at home’



Pro rider Matt Gibson, who rides for Spanish outfit Burgos-BH, prefers to spend most of his pre-season training on British soil.

Despite being a full-time rider with Spanish Pro Conti team, Matt Gibson has chosen not to relocate. For him, the answer to high-quality training doesn’t lie overseas — he prefers home, that is, Cheshire.

“It’s all about being in an environment where I can get the best out of myself. At home I can control my training and my diet, and have things outside of cycling to balance me out,” he explains.

Training in a new country would require exploration and acclimatisation. “Going away means you have to spend time learning loops, finding where is good for efforts, where the gyms are, and where’s best to buy food. At home I know how long the routes will take, where I can do my intervals, who to contact if I want a training partner, and have better control of my diet,” adds Gibson.

And it’s not only in on-bike affairs that home sweet home has the edge: “I have friends and family here, many of whom know nothing about riding. That gives me a life outside of training, which is key to keeping happy.”