

CONDITIONING FOR THE TOUR

At the risk of disappointing some of you, we are not going to urge and prescribe some rigorous regimen of physical conditioning in preparation for your upcoming western bicycle tour. To do so might wrongfully suggest the need to prepare for some awesome physical challenge of epic proportions. Simply stated, cycling in the West just isn't like that.

On the other hand, we do want to offer a few comments in the interest of further increasing your anticipation of the tour while at the same time addressing some of the concerns that you may have.

It is our admittedly arrogant belief that every person who to any extent has been "hooked" by the thrill of cyclotouring at some point dreams of cycling in the West. Many may never do so, perhaps because they are intimidated by our terrain. Unfortunately, that anxiety is grounded more in illusion than in reality.

You, however, have made the decision to ride the West this season. Inherent in that decision is an acceptance of the fact that you and your bicycle are going to do some climbing during your visit with us. The area that we want to comment upon here, then, is how best to prepare yourself for the type of cycling you will be doing on tour.

For those of you who have cycled in some of the hilly areas of New England---Vermont, for example---or in upstate New York, in the Middle Atlantic regions of Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland or in the or in the Blue Ridge of North Carolina, you've experienced terrain more difficult than that which you will encounter in the West.

Our climbs are longer than those generally found elsewhere in the country and you clearly will reach altitudes higher than those to which you may be ordinarily accustomed. But the grades along most of our mountain passes rarely exceed six percent, perhaps very short stretches of 7 - 8 percent. Grades are significantly steeper in the hilly areas of the east and are characterized by their repetitive, or roller-coaster nature, another feature not common to the West.

By now your disappointment surely is growing at what you perceive to be a lack of challenge ahead. Those comments notwithstanding, we promise that the challenge remains. Every tour has its share of hills to climb---climbs that will maintain your attention for extended periods of time on occasion.

We believe that the best means of preparing for any bicycle tour is to ride your bicycle and ride, and ride, and ride! Running, swimming and any other form of aerobic exercise is helpful, but is not a substitute for spending time in the saddle.

Our daily mileages vary on each tour, but average between 40 - 50 miles per day on our more moderate tours to 55 - 65 per day on our more difficult adventures. Even at the high range, which may include a 70+-mile day, the daily mileage remains modest, yet involves more than just a leisurely one-hour Sunday cruise along an urban network of bike paths.

We would suggest, then, that if you are interested in a program of conditioning, consider developing a plan that includes at least one extended ride per week. Increase the distance of that ride each week, or more accurately, increase the length of the day that you have committed to an extended ride. In other words, progressively spend more time in the saddle.

A 50-mile day, or even a 40-mile day may be intimidating to the novice cyclist. How best to deal with that anxiety? Take off on that bicycle early one weekend morning with a full water bottle, handlebar bag full of goodies (granola or gorp only, by all means!) and hit the road. Plan a day tour in which you'll return home late that afternoon along a route upon which you can

maintain a reasonable, but not exhausting pace. Think in terms of cadence - maintaining a reasonably regular cadence of 65 - 75 RPM. Gear down as the terrain and wind dictate to maintain that pace without fatiguing yourself. You'll be amazed at the distance that you can pleasurablely cover and enjoy.

Most importantly, though, prepare for this trial ride. Take advantage of the increased amount of daylight that remains after you return home from work. Take the bike out and do some riding, even short neighborhood rides, a few evenings each week. Plan your weekend rides to be of increasing duration, progressively building to the longer rides. Feel your strength and endurance increase; be aware of your growing confidence in yourself, your comfort and security on the road for extended periods of time.

And then there are hills, and they are different than flatland cruising. By all means, if you have some hills that are reasonably accessible, go for them as frequently as possible. If not, ride what you have and we'll give you some "on-the-job" training when you arrive.

We believe that the most important preparation that one can do for mountain cycling is psychological, rather than physical. We would lose credibility altogether if we suggested that climbing doesn't involve physical effort---of course it does. The key to enjoying a mountain climb, however, is to achieve a mental, rather than physical, toughness. And the "toughness" to which we allude is a mental easiness, or mellowness---an inner peace that will develop when the cyclist accepts, perhaps at first with resignation, but ultimately with relish, the reality that when he or she is into a multi-mile ascent to timberline and beyond, he or she is *there* for a spell. There is nowhere else to be, hopefully nowhere else you would want to be, other than merely just there - climbing, climbing, higher and higher with reality unfolding beneath you as you ascend in a manner unlike and incomparable to anything that you can otherwise experience.

You are not engaged in a race to the summit - no medal awaits you at the top. What you are striving for in a climb is that point of physical and mental equilibrium - that point where your mind, body and machine are in harmony. You are working and you are sweating in a climb, but not to the point of exhaustion. Gear down, as far as need be to be comfortable; lift up your head and look around at the incredible beauty as you climb that hill. Whether it's a 200-foot climb, 500-feet, or a 4700-foot climb, the mind set is the same. You are where you are for whatever time it takes to reach the summit; there's nowhere else to be at the moment, so ride it out, hang in there. Before long you'll find that you are enjoying yourself--- your awareness of where you are and how your body is functioning in harmony with itself and your machine.

The more hills that you climb, the more you realize that the thrill and excitement is in the climb, and not in the downhill. The downhill moves too fast, ends too quickly, and requires a level of concentration that inhibits your ability to absorb the beauty and utter sensual exhilaration of your surroundings (but it is sheer fun). All of that, however, is available in a climb. Savor the climb. Rest when you feel the need. Look around and absorb and feel your surroundings; don't be preoccupied by the distance to the top. Just ride it out and make it last.

Ultimately, you'll develop your own technique of climbing. The more you do it, the less intimidating the climbs will appear. You'll soon be amazed at how readily you accept and even eagerly anticipate a climb to timberline as the highlight of a day's ride.

A word about altitude and what you might anticipate as you deal with our altitude. Most importantly, don't worry excessively about it. You most likely will be affected to some degree, particularly during our climbs. You may feel winded (not sick) earlier at first than you might expect in a climb. Respond to your body; take it easy at first, rest when you feel the need. In the relatively short period of time in which you are on tour, you will never fully adjust to the

elevation increase, nor is it necessary to do so. If you pace yourself initially, especially during our first day and our first climb, you will be pleasantly surprised at how rapidly you will become comfortable and “at home” with the increased altitude.

The **universal** experience of those who have toured with us---and many of our riders have been first time cyclotourists---is one of progressively increased strength and endurance as cyclists.

While you are on tour with us, we cannot overemphasize the importance of our advice to “ride at your own pace”. We have no time schedules, no pressure to keep up with the group (or to wait for any segment of the group), or to be at any certain place at a specific time. You are about to engage in a vacation experience, not an “iron-person” competition. Do your own thing, find your own rhythm. If you’ve had enough on any given day, that’s what the support van is there for.

But most importantly, prepare yourself for an exciting and thoroughly enjoyable adventure. We at Timberline are proud and grateful that you have chosen to ride with us this season and we truly look forward to sharing a memorable experience with you.