



a framework for training to climb

L'Alpe d'Huez

x 7 in one day

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A framework for training to ride L'Alpe d'Huez x7 in one day
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Hi, Menno!

In this document I've included some initial thoughts on how you might approach preparing for climbing Alpe d'Huez six, and hopefully seven times.

I suggest you have a read and make up your own mind, apply whatever you believe is purposeful, make a written plan and then execute it.

Key requirements for a successful Alpe d'Huez climb

- Sufficient training volume
- Consistency
- Endurance («fatigue resistance» at lower intensities)
- Overall aerobic capacity
- Freshness on «race day»
- Pacing and nutritional strategy

Sufficient training volume

In my opinion, this is *the* most important factor for success.

Without sufficient training volume, it really doesn't matter how well you train. The hours you put in will make up the greater majority of your success or failure on the day of the climb.

From what you said I got that you will be able to put in up to 8-10 hours(?) per week. If you are able to do so, this will give you a solid foundation upon which to complete your goal with a positive experience.

Consistency

Because June 2019 is only 4 months away now, you only have so much time to achieve the desired training volume. As such, avoiding gaps in your training will be key (you don't want time off for de-training to occur).

More specifically, this means avoiding injuries and not getting sick.

Focus in this regard should be:

1 | Avoid sudden spikes in training load. Keep weekly load fairly consistent. Some variation in week-to-week load is fine (possibly desirable), but it shouldn't be too big.

2 | Maintain a positive energy balance. Prioritizing getting plenty of sleep is perhaps one of the most important and easiest way of reducing risk of illness and injuries. Additionally, this sufficient sleep will also enhance recovery and training adaptation.

3 | Manage total «life load». Be aware of your overall load from work, travel, social life and training. Consider backing off slightly on your training load in periods with expected high load in other areas of your weekly life.

Endurance

Basically, your ability to resist fatigue (particularly at lower intensities).

You don't need to worry too much about this one, as it will come as a result from your overall training volume.

Specific training for this ability will be easy endurance rides, including some specific longer-than-usual weekend rides. Also, sub-threshold / «sweet spot» training will be of some use in this regard.

Aerobic capacity

Although your Alpe d'Huez climb will mostly occur at very low intensity, we still want to push your VO2 max as high as possible before your June, within reasonable efforts, because this will also lift your power output at lower intensities.

Regular use of high-intensity intervals interspersed with low intensity endurance training will help you achieve this.

Freshness on race day

There isn't too much to *win* on doing a perfect taper (a few percent of performance, usually). However, there is a lot to lose by getting it wrong.

In short, this involves a 2-3 week long decrease in training load, while maintaining workout *frequency* and *intensity* throughout this period.

This will allow your body to develop a positive energy balance (great «freshness»).

Pacing, nutrition and hydration

Out of all the «marginal gains» tools that could make a considerable impact on your race day, I would suggest these are the more important ones.

I don't see the need to obsess and go all «scientific» about these, but simply ensure you have an awareness of how you are going to go about pacing, eating and hydration during your climb.

Perhaps most importantly, is testing these strategies during long workouts / race simulations beforehand. That is, testing what power you can set out with without bonking/running out of glycogen stores too soon, and what food and drinks your stomach can cope with over such a long «race».

Overall training strategy February - June 2019

It's great that you've already have developed a certain base of training. This will allow us to get straight into it, without having to spend much time building tolerance for absorbing training.

June 2019 is coming up quickly, so with only 4 months to go I suggest approaching your training as follows:

Think of the next 4 months as two distinct periods.

1 | February and March

Here, I suggest focusing on:

- baseline mean maximal power testing
- building aerobic capacity (low endurance + high-intensity intervals)
- steady volume of training

2 | April and June

- increasing training volume slightly (if possible, especially longer weekend rides outdoors)
- greater emphasis on sub-threshold training for greater endurance specificity towards your «race» format
- maintenance session w. high-intensity intervals to conserve your maximal aerobic capacity
- taper (last 2-3 weeks prior to event)

Below follows some general principles I would recommend you consider.

Periodizing

The best training program is that which allows the optimal relationship between training stimulus and recovery.

As such, the best periodization model for *you* will most often be dictated by your life *outside* of training. In other words, your work and social life.

Generally, there isn't a whole lot of research to suggest periodizing heavily from week-to-week is much better than simply training steady volumes (until you reach a very high level of performance and can get onto block periodization - I wouldn't worry about that for now).

Anecdotally, some athletes prefer distributing their training weeks with alternating high and low training loads. A potential benefit is that this may be less monotonous from an motivational point of view (e.g. training «hard» for 2 weeks, and then having a mental «break» with a third and easier week).

Potential periodizing cycles to consider (referring to total training load):

Week 1: heavy
Week 2: moderate
Week 3: easy

Week 1: heavy
Week 2: heavy
Week 3: easy

Or you could simply go for steady training every week, and ensure recovery and adaptation by inserting a lighter week every now and then or when you feel the need.

Weekly training content

For period 1 (february - march) I would suggest the average week contain:

2 high-intensity intervals
2-3 low intensity endurance rides (1.5-3 hours)

In my experience, riders of your training volumes and performance numbers often respond very well to a combination of 8 minute intervals and 30/15-intervals.

I would perhaps suggest making the following your go-to intervals for this period:

4x8 minute intervals

That is 8 minute efforts, repeated 4 times. Don't worry about your FTP values. Simply aim for the highest average power you will *just* be able to maintain through all intervals (most people end up somewhere around 106-108% of FTP, but greater variation may occur). Recovery 2-2.5 minutes between intervals.

Eventually, increase the workout so that it contains 5x8 by the end of march.

30/15 intervals

Refers to 30 seconds on (high-intensity) and 15 seconds off (easy pedaling). Repeat 10 continuous cycles of 30/15 (that is 7.5 minutes in total). You've now done 1 set. Allow for a 3 min break with easy pedaling. Then repeat 10 new 30/15 cycles. New 3 min break. Do one final repeat of another ten 30/15 cycles so that the total tally is 30 cycles of 30/15.

Again, don't worry about the power. Aim for the highest average power you will just be able to maintain throughout the session.

Aim to expand this session so that by the end of march you do sets of 12 or 13 cycles (9-9.5 minutes).

Tips for getting the most out of your intervals

The key to a successful interval session is to be sufficiently recovered before performing it. The simplest and most common reason for not being well-rested is performing your long endurance rides at too high intensity. As a general rule, they should be EASY!!!

In March - April we will add some tougher endurance rides for specific race training, but these will be considered heavy sessions (load-wise). Your every-week endurance rides should NOT be.

«When in doubt, sit'em out.»

If you don't feel certain that you are well enough recovered for a scheduled interval, I suggest postponing the interval 24 hours (if possible). Some studies suggest this strategy yields greater performance enhancement when compared to adhering strictly to a pre-made plan.

Scheduling 4x8 and 30/15

I don't think it matters much how you decide to schedule these two interval formats. Personally, I like to do 2 or 3 of the same session in a row, and then swap to the other. The repeated sessions of same format makes it easy to nail your interval intensity, based on your experiences from the previous session.

Intervals and average power monitoring

When doing intervals, it is very useful to use the lap function of your computer/watch for each interval and break. This will allow you to collect average power for each intervals. By reviewing these you will very quickly be able to monitor your progress from session to session.

With sufficient training stimulus and recovery, you would expect to see some gradual increases in average power outputs from week to week.

The 30/15 session however is quite hectic. Here, I suggest deciding on lapping the individual 30 second cycles of the middle series only.

Mean maximal power testing (MMP)

Since our intervention period is relatively short, I don't suspect the MMP testing will have a big impact on your training. Based on what you've told me I probably would have recommended much the similar training regardless of how your profile turns out.

However, I can guarantee you that it will be really interesting for your future training if you make it a priority to complete a thorough power chart. I would also be really interesting to see how your chart develops throughout this period.

I suggest getting on to this as soon as possible when you get your hands on your power meter.

The tougher MMP-tests can replace an interval session. The shorter (but still painful) tests can be used as a warm-up to intervals, followed by a 10-15 min recovery before taking on a full, or slightly shortened interval session.

I suggest starting off with:

20 min FTP test (google Allen & Coggans protocol, make sure you include the warm up with the **5 min** all-out effort)

Then, over the course of the next couple of weeks, include in your workouts the following max effort tests.

60 min (make sure you store both average power and normalized power. NP important if tested outdoors)

8 min

1, 2, 3 min (can be done in same session, allow sufficient recovery between all-out efforts)

5 sec, 10 sec, 20 sec, 30 sec (can be done in same session, allow sufficient recovery)

Try and standardize your tests as much as possible with regards to preparations, time of day, warm-up protocol and recovery between multiple tests in same session. So that the next test gets the best possible reliability.

Upon completing the above, *if* you feel like exploring your MMP chart further, you can consider also performing the following max tests:

12 min

30 min

40 min

90 min

The latter will provide additional insight into the *fatigue resistance* of your aerobic system. E.g. typically, it is not uncommon that a rider will feel a lot stronger in prime race season without anaerobic threshold improving much. It could then be the case that they have rather improved their ability to *maintain* anaerobic threshold (time to exhaustion).

However, I wouldn't worry too much about the latter tests, unless you're really keen on getting a very detailed MMP chart.

Training diary

I strongly suggest you use a system for recording your training data and subjective descriptions of sessions and test results.

Not so much for my reviewing, but more for your own point of reference in the seasons to come.

I see a lot of riders being sloppy on this point. While it does take a little bit of effort, it is such a waste of data, and more importantly valuable experience.

Achieving the optimal training for YOU always requires some trial and error. Documenting your training in an electronic diary of sort will greatly help you explore your response to different training models.

Strava, Trainingpeaks (and possibly Trainerroad?) and others are all viable options. You don't even need the fancy premium editions, the most important thing is storing your:

- data
- subjective description of sessions, average power outputs (intervals) and test results

This can all be done with their free accounts.

A final word of advice

I would like to leave you with a common saying within the field of emergency medicine.

«Slow is smooth, smooth is quick.»

The above refers to getting the job done as correctly and efficiently as possible in a highly stressful scenario where time and precision of of the essence.

I would urge you to think along the same lines when it comes to your weekly training.

With a big goal in sight and a fairly short timeframe to get in shape, it is SO easy to try and make up for the short build phase by training too hard or too much. And what you achieve is the exact opposite of what you want. Under-resting, overreaching and poor performance (worst case injuries and lost training-availability).

So remember the saying and apply it to your weekly training efforts - a continuous and steady week-to-week training load will get you a lot further than panic training and sudden spikes in load.

Best of luck!

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Cheers,
Martin

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