



The year-around road map

*Common mistakes and
how to fix your racing season*

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Photo: Ola Morken

The below is a compilation of what is anecdotally quite common training mistakes among cyclists. As well as a few science-based suggestions for how to fix these mistakes.

Where people stuff up their chances of improving next year

Where people throw away progress by being scared of HIIT

Where people go into overreaching/injury because they didn't do post-season maintenance and gradual progression during build.

Where people don't peak because they are afraid to *decrease* training load sufficiently during taper

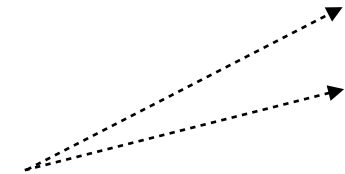
Where people are so busy tapering for frequent racing they lower their training load too often and lose capacity

Physical capacity with HIIT maintenance



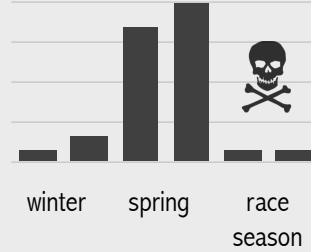
without HIIT maintenance

Physical capacity with HIIT in base

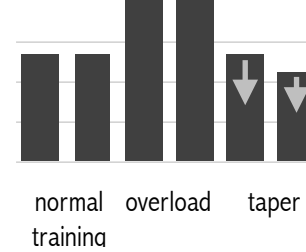


Physical capacity low-intensity only in base training

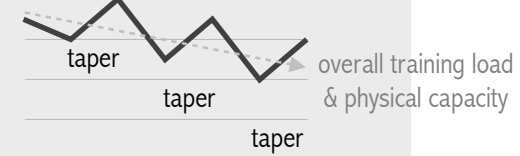
Training load



Training load



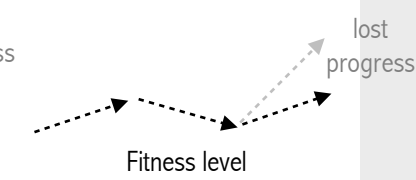
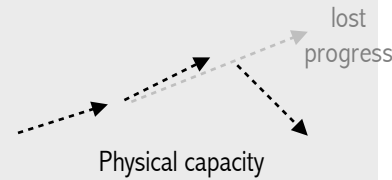
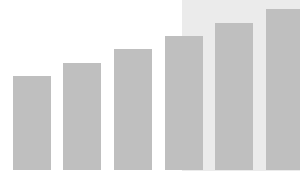
Performance level



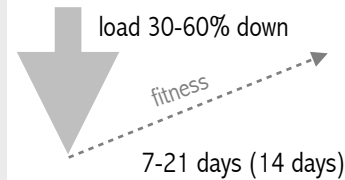
- training volume reduced
- alternative training
- regular HIIT maintenance, preferably on bike

Maintaining 50% training volume has shown great results for maintenance when HIIT is included every 7.-10. days.

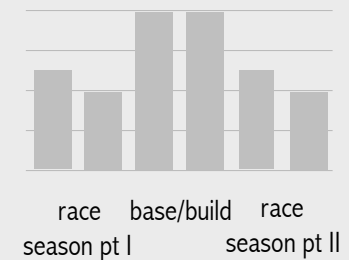
10-15% increase in training load per 4-6 week probably safe "rule of thumb". But might vary depending on training volume. The clue is to ensure gradual increase, rather than large increases in short time spans.



Decrease training load 30-60% for +/- 14 days. Maintaining session frequency & intensity is key (means you shorten your session duration).



Whenever training load has been low for a while, insert solid volumes of base/build training to ensure you maintain stimulus to re-build your physical capacity.



Post season break

Base training

Build training

Race season taper 1

Race season taper 2-X

Post season break

Many riders are blissfully unaware of how quickly their endurance capacity is washed away in the post season break - if you don't take active measures to prevent *detraining*.

Research has shown that riders who undertook an 8 week "break" with 50% of normal training load and low intensity training only were unable to return to their original fitness level after another 16 weeks pre-season training (1). However, adding regular high-intensity intervals to the post-season break made all the difference in maintaining existing capacity.

Reduced training volume and alternative forms of training and/or play are no doubt necessary to allow for a mental break and ensure motivation after along cycling season. However, when training volume is drastically reduced, it becomes all the more important to maintain some high-intensity training to keep total training load from becoming too low.

Base training

If physical capacity is low at the beginning of base training, you don't need a whole lot of training stimulus to improve. As such, low-intensity training and the occasional moderate intensity (threshold) interval might suffice.

However, multiple studies have shown that large volumes of low-intensity training alone isn't very effective in improving endurance capacity when compared with training models including more frequent intervals (2-3).

Therefore, don't be afraid of progressing to high-intensity intervals throughout your base training. The crux is to match the total duration and intensity of the intervals to your current fitness level.

Typically, you might opt for a shorter total duration compared to what you use later on in the season.

Build training

Come spring, sun and snow-free roads, training motivation has a tendency to spike. Many "6-months-a-year-riders" will drastically increase their training load at this stage.

Rapid and large changes in training load greatly increases the chances of injuries and overreaching (4). If you don't have a solid foundation of base training to build on, you are even more at risk of suffering the above.

One thing is for certain, you will NOT enjoy great race shape if you go into overreaching or get injured during spring. If your foundation isn't solid, opt for a more gradual increase in training load, and you might just stand to benefit from being patient.

Or to put it the other way around, make sure you train better next winter, to be sufficiently prepared for the training you want to take on next spring.

Taper

Research reviews on the topic of fitness peaking suggests the biggest performance gains are achieved with relatively large decreases in training load (30-60% reduction in training volume) (5).

In my experience, this is more than most people are aware of.

However, due to the large increase in volume, it is imperative to maintain the frequency of training sessions (80-100% of normal) and the intensity of your intervals (5).

The real-life consequence is that you train just as often, and just as hard, except that session duration is reduced, as well as using fewer interval bouts per session.

In season maintenance of capacity

Frequent tapering will necessarily result in a substantial reduction in training load. Although ensuring short-term race fitness, this will in time result in a loss of endurance capacity.

The key to avoid losing capacity during the racing season is to include training cycles of solid amounts of regular base/build training to maintain a training load that is sufficiently large to keep your physical capacity at a high level.

This can involve taking some weeks completely off racing. Alternatively, you can decide to race during this training, but without tapering before races. You might still be able to pull off some decent results, but you might not experience those super fresh legs that you would expect following a taper. However, sacrificing some races for keeping your training load high will benefit you when you get to bigger and more important races later on in the season.

Best of luck with your year-around-training!

- Martin

Acknowledgement:

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References:

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