

INTRODUCTION

Our cycle rides are designed to be challenging but achievable, but you do have to be prepared to train. Remember, you will be cycling for a number of consecutive days, sometimes on a mix of different terrain or in extreme temperatures and with some challenging climbs – the fitter you are, the more likely you are to enjoy it. Whatever your physical condition, the key is to build up your stamina and strength and this is best achieved by training consistently over a period of time. Don't leave it to the last minute!

You're aiming to increase the capacity and efficiency of your body's cardiovascular system and improve the endurance of your muscles – building up their repetitive movement strength allowing you to cycle for longer. You will also need to get your body used to sitting on a saddle for 6hrs a day. And the best way to prepare for a cycling challenge...is to cycle!

How you start training for a long-distance bike ride depends largely on your present fitness level, age and the amount of cycling you have done in the past. If you haven't exercised regularly for a while, you will really need to start training at least four months before our longer challenges.

ARE YOU A BEGINNER?

People who have not ridden a bike for several years or indeed at all will have to start their training regime as soon as they register for the challenge – and at the minimum a good 4 months before their challenge. Mileage should be built up gradually to avoid injury and over-exercise, and to establish a good base fitness on which to build the stamina levels you will need on a cycle challenge. To begin with avoid overstretching yourself – don't ride in a gear that's too difficult or as fast as you can. Regular training sessions will allow you to develop your speed and adjust to different gears.

INTERMEDIATE, A SOCIAL CYCLIST OR MODERATELY FIT?

This includes anyone who has been cycling intermittently over the years, perhaps by cycling to work in the summer or regular Sunday rides (20miles+) with the family. As you will have a degree of basic fitness and confidence built up from previous cycling, 3 months or so of training should prepare you for the ride, but some time should be given to improving your cadence.

ADVANCED, REGULAR CYCLIST OR FIT?

This category includes those who cycle regularly throughout the year, whether it be commuting 20 miles or more to work a day or training seriously with weekend races and time trials. People within this category should already have a good training schedule and be amply fit to tackle a cycle challenge, though should probably step

up training for long days of riding. People included within the commuting bracket may find it a good idea to step up their weekly mileage by cycling a longer route to work, or doing a brief morning or evening ride and by also doing regular weekend rides of around 50 miles or more.

CADENCE – what is it and why it's important!

From the outset you should attempt to develop your cadence, which is the speed at which your legs rotate (revolutions per minute/RPM); this will improve your aerobic capacity, meaning that your heart and lungs will grow stronger and be less stressed when cycling or exercising. To develop your cadence you should select the gear that feels most comfortable when you are cycling on whatever gradient. If you can keep a steady RPM of around 60 – 70 (for beginners) most of the time this would greatly aid the speed at which you become cycling fit and will increase your strength and stamina which you can then build on. Before you know it you will find yourself being able to push harder gears while maintaining the same RPM - gradually stepping up the mileage.

HOW TO START & FITTING TRAINING INTO YOUR BUSY LIFE

This training guide is just that, a 'guide'! With work, family and fundraising commitments you might not be able to follow it to the letter, but you can maximise your training time by making some small changes to your routine. Here's some suggested tips:

- Join the Norwood Cycle Club for our regular RIDE OUTS from Radlett. It is open to all ages and abilities and is a great opportunity to cycle with other challengers and get some great tips from our more experienced riders.
- Join our free Norwood Spin Class, every Wednesday in Elstree. It is always better to train outdoors but variety helps and one hour of QUALITY workout in the gym is worth two hours out on the road. Spinning classes are excellent, leg weight-training is also recommended and circuits of rowing, cross-country skiing, stepper/climber and exercise bike for example, will give you a good aerobic workout that will overall help improve stamina and fitness levels.
- Before commencing any training it is always advisable to warm up, try jogging on the spot and circulating your arms to get the blood really pumping through your body.
- Try to cycle at least 2-3 times a week, building up the distance you cycle each week. If you haven't cycled for some time, start with around 1/2 hour – 1 hour. Whatever your fitness, it is better to do four separate hour-long rides than one long ride per week.
- Get up an hour earlier and go out for a quick cycle with some stretching in the morning before work, it will get you moving and ready for the day!
- If you can cycle to work, do so. If you can't cycle the

whole distance between work and home, why not cycle to a station/bus stop in between home and work and then continue your journey on public transport. You will obviously need to be happy that you are able to leave your bike in a safe and secure place!

- Use your lunchtimes to take regular brisk walks or cycle around where you work.
- Find a steep set of stairs i.e. five floors of a department store/office block and climb them five times, at least three times per week.
- You still need to cycle as much as possible in 'real' conditions and in the kit you would want to use in your challenge. The more you can train in similar conditions, both in terms of terrain and weather, the better. Get used to: cycling with wind resistance, drinking from water bottle while riding, hill climbing, long periods of

time in the saddle, cycling off-road – on gravel, sand and rough terrain, getting knees accustomed to hours of peddling, learning how to use gears properly.

MOVING ON TO A TRAINING SCHEDULE

As you get into your training, you should aim to gradually increase the intensity and your distance a bit each week, moving up to the next level as soon as you are ready, before eventually designing your own programme and reaching 6-7hr rides. Finally, ride safe, wear a helmet, high viz and follow the highway code! Plus don't forget to plan adequate rest/recovery days as part of the training – they are just as important!

Some guideline starter plans can be found below:

BEGINNER

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7
WEEK 1	Rest Day	45mins/1hr on the flat (8-12 miles)	1hr gym/spin class	45mins/1hr on the flat (8-12 miles)	Rest Day	1hr on the flat (8-12 miles) with family and friends	1.5hrs on hilly ground (8-12 miles)
WEEK 2	Rest Day	45mins/1hr on the flat (8-12 miles)	1hr gym/spin class	45mins/1hr on the flat (8-12 miles)	Rest Day	1hr on the flat (8-12 miles) with family and friends	1.5hrs on hilly ground (8-12 miles)
WEEK 3	Rest Day	1hr on the flat 10-12 miles	1hr gym/spin class	45mins/1hr on the flat (8-12 miles)	Rest Day	1hr on the flat (10-12 miles) with family and friends	1.5hrs on hilly ground (10-15 miles)
WEEK 4	Rest Day	1hr on the flat 10-12 miles	1hr gym/spin class	45mins/1hr on the flat (8-12 miles)	Rest Day	Rest Day	Target Distance

INTERMEDIATE

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7
WEEK 1	Rest Day	1hr (10mins pushing hard) (10-15 miles)	1hr gym/spin class	45mins/1hr on the flat (8-12 miles)	Rest Day	1.5hrs (20mins pushing hard) (15-22 miles) with family and friends	2hrs on hilly ground (30mins pushing hard) (20-30 miles)
WEEK 2	Rest Day	1hr (10mins pushing hard) (10-15 miles)	1hr gym/spin class	45mins/1hr on the flat (8-12 miles)	Rest Day	1.5hrs (20mins pushing hard) (15-22 miles) with family and friends	2.5hrs on hilly ground (20mins pushing hard) (25-37 miles)
WEEK 3	Rest Day	1hr (20mins pushing hard) (10-15 miles)	1hr gym/spin class	45mins/1hr on the flat (8-12 miles)	Rest Day	1.5hrs (20mins pushing hard) (15-22 miles) with family and friends	3hrs on hilly ground (20mins pushing hard) (30-45 miles)
WEEK 4	Rest Day	1hr (20mins pushing hard) (10-15 miles)	1hr gym/spin class	45mins/1hr on the flat (8-12 miles)	Rest Day	Rest Day	Target Distance

CYCLING TIPS FOR BETTER CYCLING

1. Your riding position. Saddle height is very important. If it's set too low you'll have much less strength when pedalling and your legs will become tired. A good rule of thumb is to sit on your saddle, feet on the pedals and when you pedal is at its lowest point, and you should have a slight bend in your leg. With your feet off the pedals you should be able to touch the ground with the balls of your feet (on tip toes).
2. Gears. The gears on your bike are there to assist you. Learning how to use them properly will dramatically improve cycling ability. You should practice changing gear when cycling uphill (into a lower gear, so the peddling becomes easier and quicker). When cycling fast on-road, you should be in as high a gear as possible (harder to peddle, but faster on flat terrain). It is important to get a good balance, so your knees aren't strained or you become too tired.
3. Shifting. Lower gears make it easier to pedal, and higher gears make it harder. Learn how the gear combinations between your chain ring (at the pedals), and the freewheel (at the rear wheel) make it easier or harder for you to pedal. Part of the fun of cycling is anticipating changes in terrain and shifting your gears accordingly. It's a good trick to shift to a lower gear ratio as you end your descent downhill so that you don't have to start the uphill in too high a gear, which can stress your knees.
4. Rhythm. Use your gears to keep a rhythm to your pedalling. Spinning between 80 and 100 revolutions per minute (rpm) is much less stressful on your knees.
5. Climbs. There are many hills you will need to climb on your challenge, so it is essential you get out there and start practising on as many hills as you can! Firstly, don't be put off – you will probably find the first hills you start to tackle may beat you and you have to get off and push. Just try to get a little bit further up that hill each time you go out on a training session.
6. Tips for climbing. Try to think quitting is not an option and that pain is good! Mentally shrink the hill down to a size that you can dominate in your own mind. (Most people quit long before they really have to.) Sing to yourself, count your breaths, look only 4 feet ahead, and say "just 4 more feet, just 4 more feet". Try and enjoy it! Relax your shoulders, drop your elbows, relax your jaws, neck and anything else you may be unconsciously tensing up, and then sing to yourself to take your mind off the climb. It's OK to get out of the seat and rock the bike back and forth a little as you pedal up a hill. However, too much rocking or pedalling in too high a gear wastes energy and is hard on your knees. Try and save one last gear in case you need it.
7. Descents. It is essential you feel confident going down-hill too! After all that slow climbing you will want to make the most of freewheeling downhill. On a steep descent, move a little backward on the seat and put your weight over the back wheel to improve your balance, try to ensure your heels are down, as if you are digging deep into the hill. Always keep a good eye on the ground so you know what is coming ahead of you. Keep your distance from your fellow cyclists.
8. Braking. The front brake usually has about twice as much stopping power as the rear brake. Applying the front brake suddenly during a steep descent or even on flat terrain can send you over the handlebars. Instead, start with the back brake and gradually bring in the front brake or use both brakes gradually and simultaneously. (A pumping action on both brakes will mean you can regulate a slower pace downhill).
9. Cornering. Don't begin braking while turning. Brake gradually to a safe speed before you go into the corner, and then begin to accelerate as you come out of the corner.
10. Looking the part. Whilst Lycra only looks good on a few of us! Wearing the right padded shorts is crucial for comfortable riding. We can recommend Enduro, Purl Izumi or DHB.
11. Safe riding. Always wear your helmet and gloves. Always carry water, a small first aid kit and mobile phone.

AND FINALLY

There are numerous apps that will take all the planning out for you, plus online training plans with recommended bodies and organisations:

<https://www.britishcycling.org.uk/knowledge/training-plans>

<https://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/training/cycling-training-plan-beginner-153317>

<https://www.bicycling.com/training/a20024513/training-plan/>

Don't forget our own Norwood Cycle Club has a wealth of experience, with our regular cycling challengers on hand to give advice. Contact Julie Braithwaite at julie.braithwaite@norwood.org.uk for more information.