



Cycle Prep

BY **DAN PROULX**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DAN PROULX**

If you're an avid cyclist, it's easy to daydream about meandering single track in lush green forest or winding roads on pristine mountain passes. But springtime conditions in western Canada can vary dramatically from hot sun to cold snow and everything between. How can you maintain or develop your fitness for an amazing season of mountain biking or road cycling when the local conditions are nothing like the sun-drenched pictures in your favourite cycling magazine?

The spin bike is your friend

As we transition into the height of the spring cycling season, it's important to remember that the indoor trainer still has a place in your cycling program. Whether you trained diligently all winter or just started back in January, a couple of structured sessions each week will help you develop your summer fitness quickly. When the warm summer weather arrives, you will be ready to take full advantage.

Muscular endurance sessions

In a one- to one-and-a-half-hour training session, complete a series of efforts focused on extending the amount of time you can produce

moderate to high levels of sustained power. After a good warm-up (twenty to thirty minutes), ride for eight minutes steady in a gear that will allow you to pedal seventy to eighty revolutions per minute (rpms) at eighty-per-cent effort in a seated position. Take four minutes to recover and repeat the effort. Progress this set from two to four efforts over a four-week period. Do this type of workout a couple of times per week. If the weather is nice outside, perform this workout on a hill that has a three- to five-per-cent grade. As the month progresses, you will naturally be able to pedal a harder gear for the same cadence and effort level. If you feel any pain in your knees, stop the workout,

rest, and use an easier gear next time. Cool down for twenty minutes.

Aerobic power sessions

Assuming you have a solid fitness base built up over the last two to three months, you can slowly introduce some higher-intensity efforts into the mix after the four-week muscular endurance phase. Steep road or trail climbs require maximal ability to use oxygen. In a one- to one-and-a-half-hour workout, complete a warm-up that gradually builds to eighty-per-cent effort for five minutes. Take five minutes to recover, then complete four minutes at ninety-per-cent effort and ninety to one hundred rpms. Take



four minutes' rest between repeats. Progress this workout from one to four efforts over the course of a month. When the weather is nice, you can do this workout outside. Use a moderate hill, quiet road, or well-known trail circuit. Cool down for twenty minutes.

Insure that you get thirty-six to forty-eight hours of recovery or low-intensity riding in before attempting a second intensity workout.

If you're a mountain biker, get out on the road

I coach several riders who like to compete at the Sea Otter Classic in California each April. For these athletes, it's important to get out on the road for at least one or two extended endurance sessions per week when trails are marginal. In your road sessions, you should ride on your mountain bike for two and a half to three and a half hours at sixty to seventy-five per cent of your maximal heart rate. Try to maintain a cadence of approximately ninety to one hundred rpms throughout this ride. This session develops aerobic pathways in your body (basically building more plumbing in your cardiovascular system) and helps you to develop the physical and mental stamina required for harder rides or races in summer. It will also tune your body to the fit and feel of your mountain bike. Start with a shorter session and gradually build up to the amount of time you would typically ride on your favourite trail or race course.

If you are new to training or out of shape, you should skip the aerobic power sessions and replace them with additional endurance sessions of one to one and a half hours. Endurance rides should be fun and focused on enjoying the simple pleasure of being out on the bike with the stunning view of snow-capped mountains as your backdrop.

If you are a road cyclist, get out on the mountain bike

Road cyclists can start the season with some mountain biking to enhance their bike handling skills. Riding the trails will rekindle your connection with the bike and will help you to develop cat-like reactions that can help you to stay safe on the road. When the weather is



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constantly changing during the spring, your weekly mountain bike sessions can be a nice respite from the cold wind of the open road. You can get fit and stay warm as you explore a local park or venture onto some of the lower elevation trails in the mountains. As a bonus, you will also be introducing a bit more power and strength into the mix, which will pay big dividends at your first race or sign sprint with friends.

Try adding at least one ninety-minute session of mountain biking to each week of your road cycling program.

Take a trip

So what happens if you do all of this riding and the weather is still marginal in your area? One of the best ways to maintain your passion for cycling is to enjoy a riding vacation in a warmer climate.

Moab, Utah, is a classic destination for mountain bikers wanting to ride warm-weather trails. Fruita,

Colorado, is another destination attracting a devout following in the off-road community.

On the road, you can take part in many camps and clinics offered in spring and early summer. Popular early season destinations for western Canadians include San Diego, California, and Tucson, Arizona. A little closer to home is Penticton, British Columbia, where you can enjoy summer-like weather in early May.

So what are you waiting for? Stop daydreaming about summer riding and get out there! The fitter you are, the more fun summer riding will be. **H**

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