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WHAT'S YOUR WORKOUT?

By JEN MURPHY



Hitting the Road: Making the Move from Spinning To Biking on the Open Road

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Editor's Note: This week we depart from our regular look at busy people's fitness routines to get tips on biking from a cycling expert.

Summer sunshine and long daylight hours make outdoor workouts more of a treat. Here we talk with Sam Callan, coaching education manager for USA Cycling, an organization headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colo., that helps promote biking and the sport of bicycle racing, about how to make the transition from indoor spinning classes to biking on the open road.


(Some comments have been edited for clarity.)

WSJ.com: How would you recommend someone new to cycling start out biking on the road? What about someone who has already been taking indoor spinning classes?

Mr. Callan: I look at building time on the bike first and foremost. Cycling for beginners can be uncomfortable because you're in an awkward position that you get used to over time.

Beginners should start out with an easy exertion level. They don't want to be gasping for air. If they start out biking

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WORKOUT TIPS FROM A COACH

Enough with those gym-based cycling classes, already. It's time to take your fitness routine out into the real world and ride your bike instead of a glorified hamster wheel.

Chris Carmichael, coach to Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong, offers a workout to replace your gym routine. Here, he's developed an intermediate 60-minute cardio workout.

Warm-up: 10-minutes of easy riding.

If you live in a city and want to ride to a parkway where there's less traffic, use this time to warm-up. During the last three minutes of a 10-minute warm-up, spin your legs as fast as you can for 30 seconds, followed by 30 seconds of easy pedaling. This will prime your muscles and your heart for the higher-intensity work to come.

Workout: 10 minutes at a moderate intensity where you're breathing hard, but you feel like you could maintain the pace for an hour.

15 minutes of Tempo riding, which is riding at an almost race-like pace. You should be just above the threshold where you can hold a conversation while riding.
 5 minutes at moderate intensity.
 4 12-second intervals as follows:
 Shift to a hard gear and slow to almost a stop, then jump out of the saddle and drive the pedals around



Courtesy of Sam Callan

at an easy pace three to five times a week for 40 to 60 minutes then they'll eventually begin to build up their endurance and speed. Gradually increasing the difficulty level is key.

If you've already been taking spinning classes at the gym or cycling indoors then you're ahead of the game and have fitness to carry over. Pick an intensity that you can carry for 30 to 45 minutes. If you're struggling to keep that pace then you know to scale back for the next time and work from there. If that pace seemed easy and you felt you could keep riding another 15 to 30 minutes then go further next time.

WSJ.com: What are the challenges of making the transition from cycling inside to cycling outside?

Mr. Callan: A challenge with moving from indoor cycling classes to riding in the great outdoors is getting the same intensity of a workout in a short period of time. Indoor cycling has an instructor screaming instructions. Plus, there's music playing and you have inspiration from your classmates. Indoor cycling also lacks a major impediment that is common in the outside cycling world: traffic and stops.

One way to increase the intensity of one's workout riding outside is to steal a workout that runners like to do: Fartlek training, which is unstructured, moderate-to-high-intensity stretches of exercise. The time you spend riding can be of any duration you choose and the time between each period of riding can be as long or as short as you like.

The beauty is that you aren't tied to a specific time, duration or distance for the hard effort. You can vary the distance or duration depending on terrain and conditions.

Also, when moving outside, don't feel the need to ride the biggest gear on your bike. Your knees and legs might appreciate more time in the lower gears before trying to push the biggest gear possible.

SAMPLE BEGINNER WORKOUT

Warm up as needed or use the time it takes to

WSJ.com: When is the best time to stretch?

as hard as you can for 12 seconds. Follow each interval with five minutes of riding at moderate intensity.

Cool down: Five minutes of easy riding followed by 15 minutes of full-body stretching with a focus on your legs and hips.

Those that are new to using cycling as a workout can shorten the Tempo-ride portion by five minutes, knock off two of the intervals and add 15 minutes to the first 10-minute block of the workout. If you want to ride longer, say 90 minutes, delete intervals and shorten the Tempo portion of the workout by five minutes. The rest of the ride should be at a moderate intensity.

Olympian, U.S. Olympic Committee Coach of the Year, and bestselling author, Chris Carmichael coached Lance Armstrong to seven Tour de France titles and is the founder of Carmichael Training Systems, Inc. based in Colorado Springs, Colo.

ABOUT WHAT'S YOUR WORKOUT?

What's Your Workout? is an occasional Wall Street Journal Online column that looks at the lifestyles and fitness routines of busy executives. It's written by Jen Murphy, an assistant editor at Food & Wine magazine. Ms. Murphy, an avid runner and fitness enthusiast, was a personal trainer for three years at Northeastern University's Marino Fitness Center. She earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from Northeastern University.

QUESTIONS ON FITNESS?

Email your questions on working out and dieting, plus suggestions and thoughts on the column, to Jen Murphy at workout@wsj.com¹.

Read [previous installments](#)² of this column.

get away from traffic congestion or lots of stops (traffic lights, stop signs, etc.) to warm up. Pick a spot up ahead and go "hard" until you reach that spot (maybe pick a stop sign or a Starbucks). Recover for as long as you want or need. Pick another spot up ahead and push toward it. Recover. Repeat as often as you like. Cool down.

Mr. Callan: After a workout. If you have a recurring injury or if something is particularly tight then you might want to stretch before. I like to do a warm-up first. I ride a few miles, stop and then stretch. Or if I'm riding and feel tight then I'll stop, stretch, finish the workout and stretch again.

WSJ.com: What are the benefits of cycling?

Mr. Callan: It's a great cardio workout with the added benefit that it takes you outdoors so you can see a lot more of the area around you even on a 15-mile moderately paced ride. A good run probably only covers half of that distance.

One of the biggest benefits is that it's low-impact. So a lot of people who are runners and have developed bad knees look at cycling as a workout option. The caveat is that your bike has to be set up properly. If it's not then you can cause further injury or discomfort. It's a good idea to have someone at the cycling shop take a look at how you're seated on the bike.

WSJ.com: What should people look for when buying a bike?

Mr. Callan: Most bike shops will have bike-fit specialists who can help get you seated properly and comfortably on a bike and will show you how to make adjustments. They'll look at saddle height, which is when the leg is extended all the way -- at this point, you want about a 10 degree bend in the knee. Reach -- how far your arms extend to the handle bars - is largely personal preference. You should always make a notation of what level the seat and handle bars are raised or lowered so you can go back to it.

WSJ.com: What are some of the most important safety tips to remember when cycling on the road in the summer?

Mr. Callan: There are so many simple rules that people forget to follow. First, always wear a helmet. Look for an (American National Standards Institute) ANSI-approved helmet (it has standards of testing helmets to make sure they survive an impact of a certain degree) or if you go to a reputable bike shop you'll be pointed to an appropriate helmet. They'll usually fit you and show you how to wear it correctly. It drives me nuts when I see someone wearing a helmet like a yamaka with their entire forehead exposed -- if you go head first you're going to lose the battle.

At the beginning of the season or whenever you're taking your bike out for the first time after it's been sitting in a shed or basement you should take it to the bike shop to get it tuned and to clear off the dust and gunk. A tune-up will ensure that none of the cables are stretched out and nothing is broken.

People should be prepared and always ride with the proper equipment to at least do basic repairs. It's also smart to carry a cellphone in case of emergencies.

WSJ.com: What is the proper attire for cycling outdoors?

Mr. Callan: I always like to tell beginners to assume they're going to wreck on every ride and to dress accordingly. It's a good idea to wear good padded cycling gloves to protect your hands from sliding across the pavement. Gloves also keep your hands from getting numb from gripping the handlebars for long periods of time. Clothing should be thought out from a performance point of view. You don't want to be wearing loose clothing that can get caught on something. If your shirt snags a tree limb it just might take you and the bike down. It's fine for beginners to wear sneakers as opposed to clip-in cycling shoes. It's one less expense to worry about. Sunblock should always be applied in the summer and try to wear something sport-specific that won't mix with sweat and run into your eyes.

WSJ.com: Any tips for staying hydrated?

Mr. Callan: You always want to maintain good hydration, especially in the summer when you're sweating more and losing electrolytes. The ideal beverage is a drink with six-to-eight percent carbohydrate solution and some sodium. Most major sports drinks like Gatorade and Powerade will have this mix.

WSJ.com: Do you have any suggestions for people who are looking to ride with others?

Mr. Callan: Ask at local bike shops. They often hold group rides. To find cycling clubs in your local area log on to www.usacycling.org³.

Write to Jen Murphy at workout@wsj.com⁴

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