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ADVENTURE

Cycling Challenge Training Guide



Introduction

This is a practical guide for preparing for multi-day cycling challenges, with clear advice for beginners, intermediate riders and experienced cyclists.

<p>Why train?</p> <p>To improve endurance, reduce injury risk, increase comfort and make the challenge more enjoyable.</p>	<p>When to start</p> <p>Beginners should allow 4 months. Intermediate riders generally need 2-3 months of structured preparation.</p>	<p>Important note</p> <p>Anyone returning from injury or starting a new exercise programme should seek medical advice before training.</p>
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Taking on a cycling challenge is an exciting and rewarding experience. Challenge events are achievable for people with average fitness, but they are far more enjoyable when riders arrive prepared. A structured build-up helps you cope with longer distances, repeated days on the bike and the physical demands of hills, weather and unfamiliar terrain. Good preparation does more than improve performance. It also increases confidence, helps you recover better between challenge days, and reduces the likelihood of soreness, fatigue and avoidable injury.

Understanding your starting point

The right plan depends on current fitness, recent cycling experience and available training time. Riders should choose the level that best reflects where they are now, not where they hope to be in a few weeks.

<p>Beginner</p> <p>New to cycling, returning after a long break, or currently riding only occasionally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow at least 4 months • Build consistency before speed • Gradually increase time on the bike 	<p>Intermediate</p> <p>Already commuting, doing weekend rides or riding semi-regularly with some confidence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow around 3 months • Add structure and intensity • Work towards back-to-back longer rides 	<p>Advanced</p> <p>Cycling regularly through the year and already comfortable with longer or harder rides.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain current routine • Add challenge-specific sessions • Practise consecutive long days
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Training objectives

- Improve cardiovascular fitness so the body can deliver oxygen efficiently during long rides.
- Build muscular endurance so the legs can keep producing repeated effort over several hours.
- Increase comfort in the saddle and prepare for multiple days of riding in succession.
- Develop confidence with pacing, hydration, fuelling and varied terrain.

Training principles that matter

For most riders, success comes from consistency rather than occasional heroic rides. The most effective training is regular cycling, with distance, duration or intensity increasing gradually over time.

- Consistency beats sporadic big sessions.
- Progress gradually to reduce the risk of overuse injuries.
- Use challenge-relevant training whenever possible: similar bike, terrain and conditions.
- Listen to your body and adjust the plan if fatigue becomes excessive.
- Warm up, cool down and include simple mobility or stretching work.

Do's and don'ts

Do	Avoid
<p>Ride safely with appropriate kit, visibility and awareness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track your rides so you can see distance, time and effort improve. • Use hills, steady rides and easier recovery rides for variety. • Wear comfortable kit, including quality padded shorts. 	<p>Do not jump straight into long or very hard rides.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not rely only on a single short ride each weekend. • Do not ignore persistent pain, poor recovery or unusual fatigue. • Do not leave back-to-back long rides until the final weeks.

Fitting training into real life

Most riders are balancing work, family and other commitments, so the plan needs to be realistic. Training works best when it is scheduled rather than left to chance.

- Plan the week in advance and protect time for key rides.
- Use commuting miles, lunch breaks or early mornings for shorter sessions.
- Use indoor trainers or spin classes when outdoor riding is not practical.
- Make weekend rides the anchor of the plan and include hills when possible.
- Where appropriate, involve family or friends to make training more sustainable.

Missing an occasional session is not a problem. The real objective is to avoid long gaps, get back to the plan quickly and keep the overall trend moving forwards.

Cadence and efficiency

Cadence refers to pedal speed, usually measured in revolutions per minute. Riding at a steady cadence improves efficiency, reduces strain from pushing overly heavy gears and helps riders maintain effort more comfortably over long distances.

Beginner riders	Aim for roughly 70-80 RPM while keeping the pedal stroke smooth and controlled.
Intermediate and advanced riders	Aim for roughly 80-90 RPM and change gear to maintain rhythm on different gradients.

Challenge-specific preparation

The closer training matches the challenge, the more useful it becomes. Riders preparing for road-based events should spend most of their time on roads and on the bike they expect to use during the event.

- Prioritise steady road miles, hills and longer endurance rides.
- Hilly challenges: include climbing work and longer rides with sustained gradients.
- All challenges: practise riding for 6-7 hours and eventually on consecutive days.

Structuring the training plan

Breaking the programme into 4-week blocks helps stay focused and makes progress easier to track. At the end of each block, set a clear target, such as a first 50-mile ride, a club ride, a local sportive or a weekend with two longer rides.

Weeks 1-4 Base Build routine, comfort and steady aerobic work.	Weeks 5-8 Progress Increase ride duration, hills and controlled effort.	Weeks 9-12 Specific Add challenge-style rides and back-to-back days.	Final 1-2 weeks Taper Reduce volume slightly and arrive fresh, not flat.
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. You should aim to be able to achieve the following as a minimum by the end of your training plan:

- Be able to cycle comfortably at least 90% of the maximum distance required on the longest day of your challenge with similar elevation gain.
- Be able to cycle on the following day after your maximum distance ride again aim for 90% of the actual second day of the ride.

If you are doing a 3 or 4 day ride you do not need to cycle 4 consecutive days as part of your training or try to replicate the total challenge distance. Repetition of two consecutive days will help get you to where you need to be.

Example weekly structure

The exact mix can be adjusted to suit the rider, but most successful programmes include a blend of shorter weekday rides, one cross-training or recovery session, one or two rest days and a longer weekend ride.

Rider level	Typical weekly focus	What to build towards
Beginner	3 rides + optional spin/gym	Comfortable 2-3 hour weekend ride, then longer as confidence grows.
Intermediate	3-4 rides with some intensity	Longer hilly rides and eventual back-to-back long days.
Advanced	4+ rides with specific sessions	Challenge-paced endurance blocks and consecutive 6-7 hour rides.
All riders	1-2 rest / recovery days	Recover well enough to train consistently the following week.

Beginner 4-week sample block

This sample block is for riders building a base. The emphasis is on frequency, comfort and gradually increasing time on the bike. Once these sessions feel manageable, repeat the block or progress to the intermediate structure.

Week	Key sessions	End-of-week goal
1	2 short flat rides, 1 spin or gym session, 1 gentle hilly ride	Complete 30-90 minutes comfortably.
2	Repeat frequency and add a little time to the weekend ride	Ride a little longer without overreaching.
3	Keep three rides, include varied terrain, extend the long ride again	Reach a steady 90-minute to 2-hour ride.
4	Slightly easier week and finish with a target ride	Complete a confidence-building longer ride.

Intermediate 4-week sample block

This block keeps the same overall structure but adds more duration and some controlled harder efforts. The aim is to move towards the demands of a multi-day challenge, including longer hilly rides and eventually back-to-back days.

Week	Key sessions	End-of-week goal
1	1 steady ride with short harder efforts, 1 easy spin, 1 long hilly ride	Complete a 2-hour ride and finish feeling in control.
2	Repeat with slightly more time or distance at the weekend	Push the long ride towards 2.5 hours.
3	Increase the long hilly ride and keep one quality midweek session	Reach around 3 hours on varied terrain.
4	Ease volume slightly, then finish with a target or group ride	Consolidate fitness and prepare for the next block.

Final preparation checklist

Training readiness

- Bike fit checked and comfortable for long rides
- Kit tested on training rides
- Hydration and fuelling practised
- Hills and longer days included

Challenge readiness

- At least one block of back-to-back longer rides completed
- Pacing strategy understood
- Recovery and sleep prioritised
- Final week volume reduced

Final advice

The simplest message is still the most important: ride regularly, build gradually and stay consistent. You do not need to train perfectly; you do need to train often enough, recover well and arrive at the start line feeling prepared rather than exhausted. A well-structured build-up gives you the best chance of enjoying the challenge, coping confidently with long days and making the most of the experience.

In the final weeks and days before departure, the goal is to arrive fresh and organised. Reduce training volume, avoid trying to gain last-minute fitness and focus instead on recovery and rest.

Final week

- Reduce overall volume but keep a little gentle movement in the legs
- Prioritise sleep, hydration and steady nutrition
- Get your bike serviced
- Avoid unusually hard or very long rides close to departure

Event day mindset

- Start conservatively and ride within your own pace
- Eat and drink before you feel depleted
- Use easier gears and a smooth cadence on climbs
- Focus on completing each day well rather than starting too hard