

Black week for cycling

This has been a bad week for cycling. The death of Wouter Weylandt in the Giro d'Italia is not only a loss for road cycling, it was a dark and very sad day for cycling as a whole, and a horrific reminder that we take part in a dangerous sport where, if things go wrong, you can get badly hurt very quickly.

We are all aware of the dangers of cars and taxis, but too often we arrogantly ignore the realities of our sport. We may ride thousands of kilometres in training and races with only the odd scrape or bruise and maybe a broken bone or two if you are unlucky, but Weylandt's accident was a stark reminder that a fall at the wrong time or place and things can be a lot more serious than a simple roastie. For us MTB riders, trees and rocks are also an ever-present threat which we too often blissfully ignore.

But on the other side, cycling is something we (hopefully) are all doing because we love it. The pleasure of riding is something I would struggle to give up. I can only speak for myself, but the joy and sense of being alive as I ride a beautiful flowing single track through an indigenous forest far outweighs the ever-present risks of injury.

But please remember to ride within yourself and, even in a race and struggling to shave seconds off your time, be safe out there.

On that subject of risk and reward, this week I came across a well-written article by team manager Jonathan Vaughters which highlights the two sides of the sport we love – the sense of fulfilment from riding a bike and the extreme risks. I am not going to reprint it, but simply point you to the website – if you want a good read, go to www.cyclingnews.com/blogs/jonathan-vaughters/to-live-and-be-alive and appreciate every ride you go on.

Training

One way to make sure you go faster without having to take those risks is to make sure you are fitter and stronger, and I am pleased to say I have been tested to be 20% better this week than I was at the beginning of March.

If you are a regular reader of this column you may know I have been doing a course through Cadence Cycling Performance Centre in Durban North. It is the second time I have done one of their courses and once again they have made me a better cyclist and improved my riding (yes, I know, that is not very difficult). Last time (about a year ago) my power output improved by roughly 15 percent and this time it has improved even more.

I did my final test this week (the course involves a power test at the start and another at the end of the eight-week programme) and my average power for a 20-minute ride has improved by almost exactly 20%. That does not mean I will be going 20% faster (I wish), but there is no doubt I have improved – just ask the guys I ride with.

I honestly believe the cadence power training I have been doing is one of the best forms of training for cycling.

Firstly, although obviously not unique to Cadence, it is a structured course which has to be better than simply heading out and randomly training on your bike.

Secondly, and probably most importantly, it makes the best possible use of your time. I struggle to fit in training time because of work pressures, but twice a week to fit in a one-hour session is not a lot – but the benefits of a 20% power improvement (on a lower heart rate) says it all. I have been training on the bike as well, but not a lot – this is simply a great return on investment for me.

Thirdly, few people understand training properly and this course enables everybody to make use of a personalised structured programme. One of the keys to the success of people using this programme is that it is not simply a generic spinning class. I am not doing the same training as the guy next to me. Yes we will both be riding (for example) a five minute "interval" but I am doing it at a pace (power zone) that benefits me, while he or she will be doing it at a pace that is best for him or her.

I know this is not the only method of training, and I am not advocating you stop riding your bike and just do this, but if time is an issue, I cannot believe there is a better way of maximising your training hours.

Coming up

The Joberg 2 C is done and dusted, and now it is time for the Sani 2 C. I am particularly excited about the Underberg to Scottburgh annual dash because for the first time I am fit and feel I will not be a total handbrake to my partner.

As always I am sure the organisation will be spot on and there are also a few new innovations to add to the fun and excitement.

The week after Sani is the Compendium MTB Derby which provides Durban riders with a relatively easy course right on their doorstep.

The 40km race takes in the Shongweni and Giba areas and has a mix of everything with a surprising amount of non-technical single track, a few climbs, and some cane road riding. The 20km and the 5km kids race are both easy but fun courses which give the less experienced riders a fun but safe outing. Entries on www.roag.co.za

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