

Century Training, Schedules, & Event Tips

Riding 100 miles in one day is a terrific challenge—and a landmark event in the career of any cyclist. Here are some tips to make your century event easier and more fun.

Training schedules follow after the tips.



CYCLE ARTICLE

Train Enough

Train fitness with enough volume, intensity, and climbing.

Generally, build up to ride at least 75 miles in a day three times before your event.

Work hard at least one day per week.

Include climbing in your workouts. Build up to climb at least as many feet in a day as in your event, up to 10,000 feet. Do this three times before your event.

For suggested programs in building up, see the training schedules that follow at the end of this article.

Train Right

Build up your mileage systematically and progressively. Increase mileage no more than 10% to 15% weekly.

Plan to allow for proper rest and recovery. Taper slightly before your event.

Train to Improve Speed

Ride 10% of your weekly mileage above your predicted event pace.

Training Holidays

Missing a day or two here or there, or even a week due to illness, work, or family won't affect the big picture.

However, a constant pattern of misses will.

Training More Than Fitness

Work on safety and skills training.

Learn how your bike works and how to keep it operating safely.

Learn how to ride safely over and around road hazards, alone and in groups.

Learn energy conservation through drafting and other riding strategies.

Get and fine-tune the right equipment.

Learn and apply the basics of athletic nutrition.

Get Padded

Protect your rear end and hands. Padded cycling shorts, handlebar tape, and gloves work.

Keep It Safe

Obey the vehicle code. Obey all traffic rules as if you were driving a motor vehicle.

Wear a helmet and cycling gloves.

Pay attention to the road. Keep alert for cars, other cyclists, road hazards, dogs. Learn and practice defensive riding.

Ride straight. Do not cut people off, and do not shave fractions of a second cutting corners too fast. Don't ride over your skill level, putting yourself in dangerous situations.

Centuries attract riders with a wide range of abilities and skills. Ride defensively. Give riders you don't know a wide berth. Let more space open up between riders close to you when descending, riding around corners, and on poor pavement.

New Stuff

Don't try new, unfamiliar things during your event. Bike equipment, clothing, food, sports drinks: Test and make sure these work well in training.

Frame & Wheels

Sure you can do a century on a mountain bike with knobbies. But a road bike will outperform a mountain bike or hybrid. Lighter bikes improve cycling enjoyment.

Slick high-pressure tires will improve any bike's speed. Aerodynamic (with fewer than the standard number of spokes) or lightweight wheels will also help. But don't sacrifice reliability for small aerodynamic or weight benefits. As previously noted, don't try new equipment for the first time on race day.

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Get a Tune-Up

Have your bike working perfectly two weeks before your event, and check it out again the day before. A clean, lubed, efficient drive train makes you faster. Properly inflated tires are a must.

Don't get a tune up and plan to ride the century without a test ride first. Minor adjustments are often needed after shop servicing.

Be Prepared

You need to take with you on your bike: a spare tube, tire irons, patch kit, pump, and Allen keys. Know how to use them.

You also should carry a mobile phone, ID, health insurance card, and some money.

Some toilet paper is a good idea too—you may find the distance to an aid station too far, or the porta potties may be out of paper.

Consider carrying a disposable camera.

Bring the Right Clothes

Use tested and broken-in clothing.

Be prepared for cold weather or rain. A lightweight wind or rain jacket is often a good idea. Always pack a big, clear garbage bag, which can be used as an emergency rain poncho, in your travel bag. You don't need to bring it on the ride if the weather is perfect, but it's nice to have it in case you need it. If traveling to the mountains or other possibly cold areas, long-fingered gloves and tights or leg warmers can be useful.

It's okay to be slightly cool at the start—that way you won't have to start disrobing 10 minutes into the ride.

Riding until the late afternoon? Be prepared for chillier air.

Take Medications? Plan Ahead

Exercising for many hours may reduce or eliminate the need for some medicines. Exercise may increase the required dosage of others.

Anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen are increasingly being recognized as contributing to kidney problems during exercise.

High blood pressure medicines and insulin commonly need dosage adjustment.

If you take *any* prescription or non-prescription medication, check with a physician familiar with its use in exercise.

Dine Wisely the Night Before

Carbo-loading dinners are fine. Most riders should salt their food.

Save the partying and alcohol, if that's your style, for the night after your century ride.

Set Things Out the Night Before

Pin your number on your jersey. Try on the jersey; make sure the number doesn't tear away.

Lay out all the clothes you will need on a chair or in a pile.

Set out sunglasses and sunscreen—it is easy to forget those items when you get up and go out in the dark.

Do the two-minute safety equipment check. Pump up your tires.

Hydrate

Lost fluids decrease performance. Dehydration increases heat stress and hyperthermia.

Pre-hydrate and drink often while you ride. Plan to drink one waterbottle per hour if the weather is cool and you are not riding hard. Drink up to two waterbottles per hour if it is hot or if you ride at a high-intensity level.

Carry two waterbottles or the equivalent in a hydration system such as CamelBak.

Drink before you are thirsty. Cool fluids go down more easily. Drink some calories while you're at it. Perhaps half-strength fruit juice, Gatorade—whatever you've tried before that works for you. (Check before the event what the organizers have planned. Try it out ahead of time. If you don't like it, or it doesn't agree with you, bring your own powder.)

Don't Over-Hydrate

"Drink! Drink! Drink!" Important advice. But too much of a good thing can cause problems too. Unless trained to do so, most athletes can't process more than one quart of fluids per hour.

Too much fluid can cause gastrointestinal bloating.

Too much fluid can also result in low blood sodium—described next.

Get Salt

Water and most fluid replacement drinks don't have enough sodium to replace that lost with sweating. Your body usually has enough sodium reserves for about five quarts of sweat—five hours of moderate exercise in cool conditions or just a couple of hours when working hard in the heat.

Continued

Low blood sodium (hyponatremia) is the main medical problem necessitating emergency treatment and hospitalization in endurance aerobic sports such as centuries and marathons.

Most riders should plan on consuming salty foods the day before and at the breakfast of their century.

Most prepared foods (sandwiches, cookies, muffins) are high in sodium.

Consume salty snacks during long rides, and choose fluids, bars, and gels with high-sodium content.

Eat

The century will use up a lot of calories—at least 2,500. You need to eat before you ride (have a good breakfast). You need to eat while you ride, and during rest stops along the way.

During your training rides, train to eat. A 150-pound rider should generally try to average at least 300 calories per hour.

Fig bars, bananas, bagels, energy bars, carbohydrate gels. They all work as energy sources. As stated above, try foods before your event to see what you like and make sure they agree with you.

Consider Caffeine

A little caffeine before and during the ride may help delay fatigue and keep you going. Don't try this for the first time on the day of your event—if you are interested, try it before. (Caffeine, a diuretic, may also mean you have to stop more often to urinate.)

Wear Sunscreen

Of course it protects your skin. It can also prevent you from getting overheated and can keep you working longer. Preapply, carry, and reapply as necessary.

Maps & Directions

Read over your training route or century route before you start riding.

Carry maps with you.

Pace Yourself

Don't go out too fast. Ride steadily. Use your gears. Although effort surges and intervals should be incorporated into most riders' training, during events such efforts reduce overall time unless made strategically to stay in the draft of a group.

Too much early enthusiasm can lead to exhaustion later in the day. Know your limits. Deliberately hold yourself back a little at the beginning—you will be able to finish more strongly at the end.

Ride With a Group, Draft Efficiently

Riding in the slipstream of others at speed often reduces the work by about 25 percent.

Riding with others is also less mentally fatiguing, and helps the time pass more easily.

Learn how to draft safely and efficiently in training.

During your event, find the right group to help you keep your average speed faster than you could accomplish alone.

Be cautious about riding too closely to riders whose skills you do not know.

Watch the Climbs

Stronger riders: Pushing a little on the climbs in the event will improve your overall time.

Weaker riders: Be conservative when climbing. Save your energy—you've got a long way to go.

The lead rider of a paceline reduces the usual intensity effort when at the front on a climb—since following riders are not receiving as much aerodynamic benefit as on level ground.

Breathing

Especially when climbing or riding hard on level ground, concentrate on your breathing. Get a rhythm coordinated with your pedal stroke—you'll go faster.

Rest a Little If You Need To

If you need a breather and to sit down for a few minutes, that's fine. But don't sit around too long, or stiffness and lack of motivation may overcome you.

Six stops with just ten extra wasted minutes each add up to an extra hour of time. You might enjoy those 60 minutes—and that's fine. If you are a slow rider, keep in mind that you may not have that luxury if you want to finish within the time cutoff.

Apart from one major refueling break, keep stops short.

Change Positions

Don't get locked into the same position. Stand up, shrug your shoulders, move your arms, wiggle your fingers and toes. Learn to stretch and relax on the bike.

Continued

Think Positive

Motivation improves performance. Focus on your goals, train properly, and go to your event with confidence.

Remember why you are riding before you even start. It will help you if you face a crisis.

Look at the century as ten 10-mile rides. By breaking it down into sections, it's less overwhelming.

If you can get a cheering group positioned at the halfway point, it may provide a morale boost.

Plan on a reward at the end of the ride, and focus on it if the going gets tough near the end.

Allow Yourself to Have a Bad Day

Wake up and feel sick? Having problems with altitude or heat? Just not sure why you don't feel well?

Don't place unreasonable demands on your body. Allow yourself to ride more slowly than your original goal, or to choose a shorter route. It's okay. Even Olympians feel poorly some days.

Obey Rules, Time Cut-Offs

Follow the direction of event staff. It is harder and harder for promoters to obtain permits and put on events, especially when civil authorities observe riders violating the law or riding unsafely.

Most centuries require you to finish in daylight. This is generally a civil, county, or state permit requirement placed on the promoter.

Cut-offs also make good sense because aid stations close, medical and other support vanishes, event-day vehicular traffic control disappears, and riding in the dark is inherently more dangerous.

If you can't keep the required pace, allow yourself to be sagged (carried in a vehicle) out of the event or forward to a spot that will allow you to finish in time.

Keep It Fun

You're doing this for fun. It's not a job. Enjoy the scenery, make new friends.

Try to thank at least a few volunteers at the start, along the way, and at the finish line.

Avoid placing too many demands on yourself. Keep your perspective. Concentrate on what you can do, not what you can't.

AB

Century Training Schedules

Planning to ride a century? How should you train?
Below you will find the basic training principles for all riders.
Schedules for recreational beginners to seasoned racers follow.



CYCLE ARTICLE

Century Training Schedules

During the first half of a program, ride a minimum of three times a week. During the last half of a program, ride a minimum of four days a week.

The program must have progressively increasing mileage, with long rides to at least 75% of the target event distance. Advanced riders may train to a higher percentage of the target event distance. Weekly mileage totals should peak at least at 150 miles.

The crucial training ride of the week is the long ride. For those working Monday to Friday, it is best to schedule the long training ride on Saturday. This allows for Sunday as a back-up day.

Vary ride intensity. Since riders tend to ride harder and longer on group Saturday rides, Sundays should be easy rides.

Beginners will normally naturally work harder when riding up hills. Those seeking to improve their times or riding in a racer-like fashion may schedule informal or formal interval workouts once or twice a week.

When distances and riding days increase in the second half of the program, a short easy day on Friday helps ensure that equipment is ready for the week's most important training—the Saturday ride.

One of the two midweek rides in the second half of the program can be of harder intensity.

An indoor (or outdoor) stationary trainer class can be ideal for one or two of these mid-week rides, especially with limited daylight, during inclement weather, or when a diverse-fitness group wants to train together.

The program must have a progressively increasing amount of climbing over the training distance. If local terrain allows (for example, this may be difficult in Florida) train to at least 75% of the target event elevation gain. Intermediate and advanced riders may train to the target event elevation gain.

Examples of training programs for El Tour de Tucson, a 111-mile target event, follow on the next few pages.

Program A—Beginners (First-Timers)

Read the notes on century training schedules that precede this section.

A *Building a Base—The First 9 Weeks*

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Weekly
Intensity			=			= +	-	Mileage
1			5			15	10	30
2			5			20	10	35
3			10			25	10	45
4			10			30	15	55
5			10			35	15	60
6			10			35	20	65
7			10			40	20	70
8			10			45	20	75
9			10			45	25	80

B *Building Up—The Last 9 Weeks*

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Weekly
Intensity		=	+		-	= +	-	Mileage
1		10	15		5	45	15	90
2		10	15		5	50	20	100
3		10	20		5	55	20	110
4		10	25		5	60	25	125
5		10	30		5	65	30	140
6		15	30		5	75	30	155
7		15	35		5	80	30	165
8		15	35		5	80	30	165
Century Week		20	10		9	111		150

Riding Intensity Definitions

(=) Pace: The effort you wish to maintain during the century.

(-) Below pace: Easier than you plan to ride during the century. Riding so that you are breathing normally. It is quite leisurely. If you use a heart rate monitor, it is under 65% of your maximum heart rate.

(+) Above pace: Harder than you plan to ride during the century. Riding a few miles an hour faster than your century pace, or interval work. Breathing rate and depth are significantly elevated.

<i>Overview</i>	<i>First 9 Weeks</i>	<i>Second 9 Weeks</i>
Mondays	Off	Off
Tuesdays	Off	Pace
Wednesdays	Pace, or above	Above pace
Thursdays	Off	Off
Fridays	Off	Below pace
Saturdays	Pace, or above	Pace, or above; long distance
Sundays	Below pace	Below pace

Program B—Intermediates (Seasoned Riders)

Read the notes on century training schedules that precede this section. If riders are seasoned and fit, the first few weeks can be omitted or the volume increased.

A Building a Base—The First 9 Weeks

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Weekly
Intensity			=			= +	–	Mileage
1			10			20	10	40
2			10			25	15	50
3			10			30	15	55
4			10			35	20	65
5			15			40	20	75
6			15			45	20	80
7			15			50	25	90
8			20			55	25	100
9			20			55	30	105

B Building Up—The Last 9 Weeks

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Weekly
Intensity		=	+		–	= +	–	Mileage
1		10	20		5	55	30	120
2		10	25		5	60	30	130
3		10	30		5	65	35	145
4		15	30		5	70	35	155
5		15	35		5	70	40	165
6		15	35		5	75	45	175
7		15	35		5	85	45	185
8		15	35		5	95	45	195
Century Week		20	10		9	111		150

Riding Intensity Definitions

(=) Pace: The effort you wish to maintain during the century.

(–) Below pace: Easier than you plan to ride during the century. Riding so that you are breathing normally. It is quite leisurely. If you use a heart rate monitor, it is under 65% of your maximum heart rate.

(+) Above pace: Harder than you plan to ride during the century. Riding a few miles an hour faster than your century pace, or interval work. Breathing rate and depth are significantly elevated.

Overview	First 9 Weeks	Second 9 Weeks
Mondays	Off	Off
Tuesdays	Off	Pace, or below
Wednesdays	Pace, or above	Above pace
Thursdays	Off	Off
Fridays	Off	Below pace
Saturdays	Pace, or above	Pace, or above; long distance
Sundays	Below pace	Below pace

Program C—Advanced (Race-Like Training)

Read the notes on century training schedules that precede this section. If riders are seasoned and fit, the first few weeks can be omitted or the volume increased.

A Building a Base—The First 9 Weeks

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Weekly
Intensity			=			= +	-	Mileage
1			10			25	15	50
2			15			30	15	60
3			15			40	15	70
4			15			45	20	80
5			20			50	20	90
6			20			55	25	100
7			25			60	25	110
8			30			60	30	120
9			30			65	35	130

B Building Up—The Last 9 Weeks

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Weekly
Intensity		=	+		-	= +	-	Mileage
1		10	25		10	65	30	140
2		10	30		10	70	30	150
3		15	30		10	75	30	160
4		15	35		10	80	30	170
5		20	35		10	85	30	180
6		20	40		10	90	40	200
7		20	40		10	95	45	210
8		20	40		10	95	40	205
Century Week		30	10		9	111		160

Riding Intensity Definitions:

(=) Pace: The effort you wish to maintain during the century.

(-) Below pace: Easier than you plan to ride during the century. Riding so that you are breathing normally. It is quite leisurely. If you use a heart rate monitor, it is under 65% of your maximum heart rate.

(+) Above pace: Harder than you plan to ride during the century. Riding a few miles an hour faster than your century pace, or interval work. Breathing rate and depth are significantly elevated.

Overview First 9 Weeks

Mondays Off
 Tuesdays Off
 Wednesdays Pace, or above
 Thursdays Off
 Fridays Off
 Saturdays Pace, or above
 Sundays Below pace

Second 9 Weeks

Off
 Pace, or below
 Above pace
 Off
 Below pace
 Pace, or above; long distance
 Below pace

