

# Ride On Time

Thinking of taking up cycling for fitness? Here are the muscle groups you use, as well as a useful schedule to help to build up that perfect cycling physique

Winter seems to be treating us well enough this year to go for a ride without freezing to death. So what exactly does it take to hammer out a few laps of Richmond Park? Well, we know that a cyclist's legs generate the power needed to work the pedals, but let's look at how the whole power system works.

## Fit, strong and hard

Fitness, muscle strength and muscular endurance are the major contributing factors to making a good cyclist. The muscles most used are the Tibialis anterior (shin), Gastrocnemius & Soleus (calf muscles), Quadriceps muscles (stretching down the front of the thigh from the pelvis to the knee) and the hamstrings (muscle running the same path, but at the back of the thigh). Strong abdominals and Erector Spinae (lower back muscles) are also crucial. If you're going off road on a mountain bike or plan on playing Evil Knievel on your BMX, strong shoulder and arm muscles are needed. We've focused here on road cycling, but your fitness professional should be able to help you with the right exercises for both.

## Challenge, target and plan

An imperative if you want to get cycling fit is to work towards a goal. It may be a social or competitive event, or a personal target. Beginners, or those that haven't encountered a bike for aeons, should start training 4 months prior to any challenge they tackle. It is necessary to commit yourself fairly seriously, since cycling is as much about endurance as it is about strength.

**1st - 4th week** should consist of a 5-10 mile (8km-16km) ride every other day. Focus on consistency in your diet, your training and your cadence (Speed at which your legs rotate - rpm). Use a gear that allows you to maintain 60-70 rpm. As time progresses, you'll find yourself able to use more difficult gears.

**4th - 8th week** step it up to 15-20 miles (24-32km) 3 times a week and every second Sunday - it's a big one, 25 miles (40km)

**8th -10th week** - 20-25 miles (32-40km) 3 times a week and time to start sweating with a 30 miler on the Sunday.

**10th - 13th week** - Same mileage but let's get up a bit earlier on Sunday to experience what happens to your legs after 40 miles on your bike. If you're feeling hardcore, introduce an extra training day into your routine - just a short one (10 -15 miles).

**13th -15th week** - 30 miles (48km) 3 times a week and the human body can handle 50 miles (80km) on a Sunday morn; probably not so well after a Saturday Slug session, but if you stay disciplined, you should be willing and able.

**15th -16th week** (last week before your challenge) - time to start increasing your carbohydrate intake and tapering down, 3 x 10 -15 mile sessions and a weekend of carbs and chilling.



## Cycling tips

- If your diary is already overbooked - gain cycle miles cycling to work, the shop or on a stationary bike.
- London is fairly flat, so seek out some good hills that will help prepare you for any steep gradients you may encounter in your challenge. (Putney, Wimbledon and Southfields all offer a more than average climb).
- Use a training diary to monitor yourself and your improvements in distance, time and gear level used. Please be sure to consult a doctor/fitness professional before beginning any cycling training programmes.
- Happy cycling, but remember to wear a helmet.

## Exercises

### Hamstring curls on the ball (Hamstrings)

Lie on your back on a mat, feet on a Swiss Ball. Start by lifting your hips as high off the floor as possible. Now roll the ball in towards you as you push your hips even higher. Then return the ball to the starting position. 3-4 sets of 15-20 reps.

### Squat and hold (Quadriceps strength and endurance)

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and abs pulled in. Slowly push your hips backwards as if you wanted to sit on a chair about 15cm behind you. Allow your chest to move towards your knees for balance as you descend. Keep your knees aligned with your toes as you squat down to 90°. Go down and up for 10 reps & hold for 10 seconds 3 times. Try completing 3-4 sets.

### Plyometric vertical jumps and calf raises (for explosive power and calf strength)

**Two foot ankle hop** - Keeping your feet together, hop up and down using only your ankles and calves. Focus on good height and exploding off the ground as soon as you land. 10 reps.

**Standing calf raises** - Stand with just the balls of your feet on a step, drop your heels as low as they'll go, and then up as high as possible, 20 reps. 3 non-stop sets!



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