

TTT: Time Trial Thoughts

The Race of Truth? Well, nowadays it seems to be more about the Race of Money! Discs, integrated seatposts, wind tunnel testing, power meters... If you don't have the goods, it's borderline impossible to compete against the very best...

Time trialing, however, is still by far my favorite aspect of competitive cycling. You can peak for a hilly road race, then get boxed in, get a flat, crash, miss the feed, clip a wheel, miss the move, watch a teammate take off, etc... A million different variables. Having said that, this is what is so magical about winning a big road event – there are so many variables that absolutely have to go right.

With time trialing, you set a goal. “I want to place top-5 at States.” So you build towards that goal, and if your form is good and your mind is strong come race day, it's up to you and only you to rip a great time. No excuses, no variables. There is no peloton, no drafting, no attacking, no sprinting. Just you and your bike. And a whole lot of pain!!!

You are that number on the board at the end of the event. If you coulda gone faster, you woulda.

Put up or shut up.

That's the beauty of these events. Hence, the Race of Truth...

Last year, I was speaking with a talented young rider about time trialing. He was a good roadie, an excellent sprinter, but he had never tried TTs before and thought he'd be good at it... Well, he didn't get the result he was hoping for and I explained that time-trialing certainly is an art, something that takes time to perfect. I told him not to get discouraged – the only way to get good at them is to train specifically and do plenty of real time trials!

Here are a few tips to ensure time-trialing success:

The morning of a time trial, wake up 3-4 hours before your start time and have a few small bowls of cereal, preferably cereals lower on the Glycemic Index. Foods high on the Index will spike your blood sugar, and then your pancreas releases insulin to bring the blood sugar level back down – but too much insulin is always released, leaving you feeling tired. So small breakfast, LOW glycemic foods. I've found that a small breakfast works best: the guys seem to perform best showing up with a light stomach... After all, we're only racing 15-50 minutes...

In your time trial suitcase: shoe covers, TT helmet, skinsuit. No gloves! Dressing to succeed could mean the difference between 1st and 2nd, 3rd and 6th. In the Race of Truth, take every advantage possible. Control what you can control. There's a lot out there, like competition and health and the weather, which you cannot, so control what's within your reach and try to realize your absolute potential.

Get to the TTs EARLY. Try to arrive at the event at least two hours ahead of your start time. One of the first things I do is pin my number to the skinsuit. A trick is to cut your number to make it smaller and better fitting – just make sure you don't make it so small an official will notice because cutting the number is “frowned upon” by some officials. Also, use a minimum of 8 pins – even pin down the middle. Adhesive tape is becoming popular. But pins work fine – get into a tuck and have someone pin the number completely flat. Get that number on, put the skinsuit on, and make sure it's flat – one of the first things that should be completed.

The shorter the TT, the longer the warm-up. At 7-mile time trials, I am on the trainer for 75+ minutes. To quote Coach Pete, the warm-up is a Turn On, not a Warm Up. You are not “warming” your legs up, so to speak. You actually would not want to do that. You’re actually just turning the body on, priming the cardio system, getting blood flow to the legs, opening the capillaries, prepping the muscles for the hell that’s to come.

So, this means EASY riding, nothing over Endurance pace. You don’t want to increase your body temp too much – then you won’t perform as well! Just sit on the bike and turn the legs. Zone out. Loosen the legs up. I see guys hammering away, doing 3 hard minutes of max effort. Stupid. No good. This is only slowing them on the road.

Save the pain for the TT. There is absolutely no need to ride hard during the warm-up. Perhaps schedule a block of “Tempo” intensity, maybe some higher cadence stuff, taxing the lungs, not the legs. But you absolutely should not feel any lactate build-up in your legs during a warm-up. Trust me.

This is Carmichael’s routine pre-TT and pre-crit, and I’m against it. Try an easier warm-up for one event, then the CTS model for the second. See which one you like better...

Warm-up	
20 minutes	Endurance Miles
10 minutes	Tempo, 75 to 90 rpm
2 minutes	Recovery Ride
4 minutes	Steady States, 90 to 95 rpm
2 minutes	Recovery Ride
2 minutes	Power Intervals, 105 rpm
2 minutes	Recovery Ride
2 minutes	Power Intervals, 105 rpm
2 minutes	Recovery Ride
46 minutes	TOTAL Warm-up

As you’re warming up, drink a form of sports drink. Extran. Accelerade. Cytomax. Gatorade is BAD – too high concentrated. Also munch on a Clif bar or another after-market nutrition bar. 45 minutes before your start time, take down a Gu. 15 minutes before, take down another one. You should never feel hungry, but you should never feel full.

If you’re using race wheels, most likely you’ll have to get off the trainer about 10-15 minutes before your start time. Put the rear wheel on and make sure the bike is PERFECT.

I like to get to the Start Area early, ask the guy what time it is, then ride around with allotted free time. Get back to the line when I have less than 2 minutes to go. In my opinion, there’s nothing worse than just sitting there. You stare at your competition. Your legs get tight, heavy. You get nervous. You start messing with your shoe covers, your helmet. You start thinking too much.

I like to roll up just as my minute-man is off, as my 30-second man is getting ready. Now you can’t think. The TT will go much better this way!!!

The beginning of a TT is tricky: if you had a power meter, you’d have a goal wattage to peg. Let’s say 350w. So as you jump from the start house, you want to hit 700w for 10 seconds or so. It’s not an all-out

jump, just strong and solid. You have much more in the tank. So you jump away, steady. Sit down, settle in. Take a few deep breaths. By 30 seconds in, you should be up to goal wattage and full speed... Your body is not a machine. You cannot jump from line and go max out for 20 minutes. Start steady, sit down, and ramp up.

Do not stare at HR monitor as it is worthless until about 2-3 minutes into TT.

For shorter TTs, you will ramp up quicker. You have to. At Readington, Mike Gisler and I jumped hard. If you're strong, you should have the fitness to start faster. If the TT is longer, don't jump as hard from the line and build up steadily, taking 30+ seconds to get to your goal wattage.

Time trials are hell. It's entirely anaerobic. You are riding ABOVE your threshold at all times. Whoever suffers the most, wins. If it's easy, you're not going hard enough! Mike Gisler, the 2007 NJ State Time Trial Champion, says all TTs hurt the same. If you're strong and on form, you just ride faster. But it's always going to hurt. That's what it's all about – pushing yourself to the edge, seeing how you react, what you can really do when you're suffering. That's why it's called the Race of Truth... You have to push to the edge.

Time trialing is almost pushing yourself to absolute exhaustion. Push too hard, you crack. Push too little, you lose. It's a very, very, very fine line...

All TTs are different. If you have FT of 330w, and if the TT is 7 miles, you'll be putting out close to 350-360w. There are many different approaches to pacing: start out just below your target wattage, then second half ride just over it. Some guys like to go out hard and just pin it. On a great day, you win. On a bad day, you fall apart. After a bunch of events, most guys find what works for them. Having said that, the courses all differ from one another, and you have to recon the terrain and see where you can make up time and when to really light it up... There is no one Formula to time trialing success...

The turnaround: keep it short. As you approach, keep speed up. About 5 seconds away, shift up 2-3 gears. Take the turn WIDE. Coming in, come as close to the cone as possible. Take the turn WIDE, keeping speeds as high as possible. Use the entire road, curb to curb. Accelerate hard out of the saddle. As you spin the gear out, sit down again, finding the proper gear. You want to be out of the saddle for a minimum amount of time. STAY AERO. Don't stand for too long... Keep the turnaround short and simple.

During the TT, stay in the saddle. Up rollers, around turns, up hills. If you see anything over 22 mph, you should NOT be standing up. Success in time trialing heavily relies on aerodynamics. You may think standing, where you can put out more power and seemingly go faster for short periods, is going to make you faster, but it's only going to kill your aerodynamics, screw up your rhythm, and slow you down in the long run. Ride steady, stay seated for as much as you can. You WILL ride faster this way.

If you are doing it right, when you see the 1k To Go sign, you should not be able to accelerate. You should NOT be feeling good when you see the 1k sign. You should be full of lactic acid, praying for the finish. If you can accelerate and go substantially faster, then you didn't do TT hard enough. Seeing the 1k sign, you should not say, "Okay, I can empty my tank now." You should be praying you don't crack and go slower for that last kilometer... Your goal is to hold your full-tilt effort straight to the line.

Riders like to say they go harder with 1 or 2 minutes to go. In reality, they're not going much faster. They say this to themselves so they don't go any SLOWER. For final 120 seconds, just pin it with all you've got. If you come across the finish dizzy-eyed, lungs filled with black fire, then you did something right. When you do a good TT, it's a satisfying feeling – you know even before the results are out that you're in the hunt, that you couldn't have gone one second faster.

Not to beat the cliché to absolute death, but every second does count. This weekend, as I blew my nose a few times AND ACTUALLY WIPED MY FACE TWICE and fumbled with the shifters at the Cape May Time Trial, I lost a few seconds and took 3rd. 2nd was only 4 seconds away. This is life – if I coulda gone faster, I woulda...

Feel free to e-mail me any questions. If you have a HR monitor, we may be able to find your training zones (Recovery, Endurance, Tempo, Ultra-Tempo, Sub-Threshold, etc...) by completing a simple Fitness Test. Time-trialing is an art. Success takes time. Champion time-trialists suffer like dogs in crits and road races, but because of their specialized training, their acclimation to their fast bikes, and proper technique and superior mindset, they dominate TTs and put in blistering times. You can get there.

If it were easy, it wouldn't be any fun.

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