

WHAT ARE BASE MILES?

By Kenneth Lundgren

I have riders ask me this question quite often. The winter training period, in my opinion, is THE most crucial block of the year, and unfortunately also the one that most riders screw up...

Back in the day, base miles were considered to be easy, long miles -- LSD (long slow distance). You are building your "base." I suppose this term is best connected with the Italians, who in the winter are known to go out and log 5-6h days, rolling up their sleeves and working on their tan lines! Easy rides, just time on the bike. The rides are entirely aerobic, building endurance. In order to go fast, you have to go slow... When you build a huge platform, a huge base, then when you start to specialize your training, your peak will be higher -- your pyramid of fitness will have much more potential... For a professional cyclist, who is racing 130+ mile events, competing in 10-20 days Tours, this base is necessary...

However, in my opinion, for most of us base miles are almost a dead concept. I shouldn't say "dead," but there are much more constructive ways to spend this time other than going out and noodling around. For one, you don't have to do huge volume on the bike because even if you're a Cat 2 there aren't many races over 3h. The key is quality, not quantity -- in my opinion...

To begin, you have to determine your goals, your objectives. What are some races you want to do well in? What is your training objective for the year? You need to specialize your training, design it around these two aspects. Once you have a direction in your training, you will improve drastically as a rider.

Gavi Epstein, a Cat 1 from Sakonnet, used to do LSD all winter. Well, I took over his training, and although we continued with the necessary endurance work, we really hit his aerobic engine hard, and the following year he had this best year ever, powering the small break at Bear Mtn, winning a stage race and two road races, and earning numerous other placings...

Rich Hofbauer, who currently took 7th at WV Cross, raced the State RR in June, and then we shut it down. He wanted to do well in cyclo-cross, so in July he was working on "base." He had a few weeks of aerobic cross-training (mtn biking, running, inline skating, swimming, climbing, yoga), really getting away from hard training, and then his body -- and mind -- was fresh and ready to go...

Then we got back on the bike. When you first start riding again, the key is to keep the rides short. No need to go out and do 4 or 5h -- you aren't doing yourself ANY favors. For the guys with whom I work, I run them through 2 or 3 weeks of Transition training, where we focus on short rides, cadence work, and pedaling efficiency drills.

A cycling-specific periodized weightlifting program, chock full of tons of core work, is also introduced at this time...

As the body begins to acclimate, then we progress to a block of Preparation training. THIS is where we can begin to toss in some longer rides. A typical week will see heavier pedaling efficiency drills, some pure sprints (yes, SPRINTS), and aerobic intervals mixed into the endurance rides... The key in this 2-week "camp" is to get the body ready for Foundation training, which is to follow... The periodized weight program continues... Over years, from reading and trying ideas out and getting feedback, I've

found that riders feel GREAT after this block...

Now the athlete is ready to commence Foundation training, in my opinion the most important block of training all year. Cycling is an aerobic sport, thus the aerobic engine is the cornerstone for success. I firmly believe most riders go too hard, never quite developing their aerobic engine properly, and it's here, during this long phase of training (that lasts almost 3 months) that the rider can truly prepare the body to get stronger and handle the training load during the following season...

During Foundation, the rider is focusing on endurance rides packed with specific aerobic intervals, different types of force work, quality pedaling efficiency drills, tempo rides, and the occasional group ride.

The weights also keep progressing in the gym. We are never quite 100% recovered during this point, kind of in a gray area, but we are never overtrained, continuing to push forward... Also, it's important to complete workouts that address your weaknesses. The winter and second half of Foundation is a great time to work on this, not during late-Builds when you're looking to maximize your strength...

Foundation for most Elite Endurance athletes lasts 12 weeks. By week 8, the weights are phased down to Maintenance workouts, and this is when the Endurance Rides (if necessary for that athlete) can be increased. NOW the body is ready to go, after a full-on prep... You don't do your 5h in November. You don't do your 5h rides when you're lifting hard in the gym. You shouldn't lift hard and do endurance at the same time -- too much is going on. You try to get great at two things, you go nowhere... After the weight program subsides, THEN you move onto endurance...

If you have PowerCranks, this winter block is the time to ride them... The majority of your work and improvements on those things will come during these months...

Long Slow Distance, LSD as it was called, is the term associated with "base." But, as you can see, it's no longer in use! I tell all the guys: the winter is the time you need to reload, change your body. The "harder" you work in the winter (of course in my opinion "hard" doesn't mean hammering), the better your body will respond to the season training and the stronger you will become. It's almost like you're priming your body, throwing gasoline onto your bike... You keep priming, keep priming... When you finally do light that match, you're going to have a very violent, strong response...

Thanks for reading.

Kenneth Lundgren

Coach@EliteEndurance.com

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www.EliteEndurance.com