



## **TRAINING/BIKE TIPS - by Bill "BJ" Joss**

The following will cover two main areas; the bike and the man riding it!

Contrary to popular opinion, cycling isn't just about getting fit and climbing aboard – there is as much technical content and physical technique involved as any other complex sporting activity. The critical areas are:

**Bike Fit - Bike Posture - Technique - Physical Conditioning - Preparation.**

Obviously diet and hydration are also critical, but this isn't going to cover those; the rule is simple, however – **lose weight**, eat whilst riding and keep hydrated!

During an endurance bike event I would be eating every few minutes after the first 45 minutes or so, carrying various carbohydrate sources about my person. I personally use Torq products and High 5 Carb drink.

In descending order, dried figs, bananas and potatoes are the fastest to digest and process – but for practical reasons, I use figs and concentrated carbohydrate drink, having carried a banana for the first half hour and then consuming it. I always use a gel every hour, or just before a big climb or series of ramps.

You will burn between 700 and 1000 calories per hour whilst riding at reasonable intensity, so it is essential to refuel regularly.

You will need to take on board a reasonable amount of water per hour, and again, regular intake is essential. You may need more if you sweat freely or if it is hot. As it happens, I use much less water than most people, so half a litre an hour is fine for me.

I discovered during my first events that stopping at all the food stops wasted huge amounts of time, and although I ended up within my target time I still felt disappointed that I could have saved over an hour by organising my own calorie intake better.

**Tip number 1 for a Sportive; plan a nutrition/water strategy which minimises time at Feed Stations.**

We also have to cover the sensitive issue of power to weight..... Which is what cycling is really all about.

If you seriously want to perform to optimal ability in a long distance event with a significant level of climbing, then you just have to be as lean and light as you can be.

So diet is crucial; and contrary to popular belief, this doesn't mean giving up lots of goodies. I am 6 feet tall, 42 chest and weigh 76Kg. I drink far too much wine and eat chocolate and all sorts of other things. But I do have a regime; no sugar, skimmed milk, no butter, always low fat rice pudding, etc and I eat immediately after exercise to replace carbs and protein. I use Recovery Drink to help this.

Everyone can work out their own regime, but there is simply no substitute for weight loss on a bike. It IS possible to shed a few kilos, and this will make the single biggest difference to your 100 time.

## **So, to Bike Fit/Posture.**

As I said, the ideal spec for this type of ride at an average amateur level is a comfortable sportive style frame and a seat/bar differential which isn't too radical. Obviously the bike has to be comfortable but also reasonably quick, and of course these days there are plenty of sportive geometry frames around. Aluminium tends to be rigid over long distances, and steel is typically heavier but more responsive. Carbon fibre is ideal, but may not be as durable.

The most important characteristics of the bike are its size and its geometry; too "aggressive" a geometry and you'll end up with a crippled neck, back etc.

Tend towards slightly large rather than slightly small – it is more comfortable that way. Don't have the saddle massively higher than the bars as this will also cause discomfort.

**Tip number 2 – go to a bike shop and have a proper sizing/fitting done. This will give you your measurements and ensure that your own bike is set up correctly.**

The length of the top stem is important; if you rest your elbow on the front tip of the saddle and have your arm parallel with the stem there should be about a couple of inches maximum from your finger tips to the front edge of the handlebars. When you're on the bike, your back should be more or less parallel with the top stem whilst down on the handlebars.

In terms of height, when at the bottom of the "downward" stroke of the pedal your foot should be at a slight angle, toes pointing slightly down and forward. Your leg extension should be about 90 to 95% of fully straight. You shouldn't be able to put both feet on the ground at standstill. Handlebar width should be almost the same as your shoulder width. Cycling is all about the efficiency of your levers (i.e. your legs), and the longer the lever the better.

The most important other factor in comfort and speed is actually the wheels; when buying a bike, spend money first on the frame, then on the wheels, then the groupset.

**Tip 3 - if you want to make a fast and material upgrade to a decent bike, then make it the wheels.**

They shouldn't flex too much when you're out of the saddle climbing, but too rigid and they'll transmit too much road vibration. The tyres should be 700c by 23mm.

## **Technique.**

Note above comments, but also:

Aerodynamics will add between 1 and 2 mph to your speed – and of course conversely, poor aerodynamics will chop that off again. Put another way, you will save energy by being the right shape on the bike, and waste it by not being so.

When riding at speed, you should be down on the bottom section of the handlebars, with your backside moved slightly forwards on the saddle to engage your quads fully. Your feet should describe a circle, but your toes should remain pointing slightly downwards and forwards throughout the circle.

When riding uphill or into a headwind, you shift back in the saddle to engage your gluteal muscles fully, and your feet should now have the heels down at the finish of the stroke to fully engage your calf muscles as well. You should have your hands up on the top section of the bars to help you sit back. Don't rock from side to side; efficiency is all about transferring all the energy straight down through the cranks. Your upper body should be as still as possible. Any upper body movement just displaces energy.

The best technique requires that you maintain even cadence with the pedals; i.e. you shift gears to maintain the same number of revolutions. Around 80 to 90 per minute is good.

When climbing, best technique is to remain sitting and drop down the gears; if you have to stand on the pedals, then do so for short bursts only.

I have to say here that I am from the Pantani School of Climbing; I do get out of the saddle a lot, and I need to as I don't have the upper leg strength to stay seated. But good climbers can power up climbs whilst firmly rooted to the saddle. When on an extended flat section, spin the pedals at a higher cadence in a medium high gear rather than driving a big cog with your quads.

After strenuous uphill effort, don't stop pedalling to rest on the downhill – just spin a small gear to encourage the lactic acid to disperse.

And of course, breathe deeply, slowly, and through your nose as well as your mouth!

## **Conditioning.**

You probably know a fair bit about fitness training, but here are the basics;

To ride a long way, you need to train a long way..... Not every ride, and not every week – but it just isn't possible to deliver a great time on a Century ride if you have only ever ridden 30 miles.

This means "LSD" as we say in the peloton (but not the recreational drug variety..). In other words, get out and do a few 60/70 milers, and if possible, a longer ride before the target event.

Without being arrogant, any reasonably fit cyclist can go and ride 70 miles, and can probably ride 100 miles, but if you want to ride it in style, then you have to get the miles into your legs, and more importantly, into your head.

Long, Slow Distance.

Winter is when you build basic stamina and get comfortable on the bike for extended periods. I keep a training diary when I am aiming at an event; it helps motivate me or make me feel guilty, whichever is appropriate at the time.

I personally ride 6 times per week, including at least one or two 2/3 hour or more rides. The more the better, within reason. At some point you will need to do some harder rides, but leave those until just before the event.

Concentrate for the next couple of months on getting into the saddle and just building up stamina, aerobic capacity and leg strength.

Don't ride fast – stay within 70% of maximum heart rate at all times.

Use a heart rate monitor, and stay disciplined. Sprint sessions, if you are already quite strong do little for the build up towards a Sportive.

## ***Finally, Preparation.***

*It is essential to train at least some of the time in the same gear, carrying the same load, etc as you intend to do the event in.*

*Never introduce changes or innovation immediately before the event, and become completely accustomed to the food, gels, clothes, hydration packs, etc that you will use in the event.*