

On Your Bike

with Steve Cole

Your bike is probably your most expensive piece of triathlon equipment, but it's not necessary to spend a month's wages on a superlight machine with all the latest 'go fast' equipment. You can compete on just about any model from shopping bikes to mountain bikes. The most important factor is that your bike is roadworthy and fits you comfortably.

Cycling Tips

This is the area of the triathlon where your performance relies not only on your own fitness and preparation, but also on the preparation of the equipment you will be using. For your own safety the BTA will not let you race without a helmet. Make sure that you buy a helmet that meets the British Standards approval or the alternative American safety standard, Snell. Suitable helmets should have a sticker on the inside so you can check they are certified to the appropriate standards.

If you haven't already got a water bottle and cage, fitting one is to be strongly recommended. Working hard on the bike can easily lead to dehydration if fluids aren't replaced. Dehydration should be avoided at all costs as it can do permanent damage to your body. It's also strongly recommended that you carry a frame-fit pump, a spare tube and puncture changing tools.

You can wear your running shoes on the bike, but as you become a more experienced cyclist you'll probably want to get bike shoes with cleats and racing pedals. Together these give added pedal leverage - they make you go faster. Once you become a competent and confident rider, using tri-bars would be a logical step. These give a more aerodynamic position on the bike and therefore enhance speed.

If you don't wear prescription glasses, a pair of sunglasses or clear glasses are a good idea for added eye protection.

Before the Event

Jargon Buster

Cleats attach your feet firmly to the pedals allowing you to introduce more power and control throughout the full cycle of the pedal

Tri-bars are handlebars that allow you to allow you to make yourself more aerodynamic

Stem is the upright tube section of the bike frame which the handlebars are attached to

Saddle pillar is the vertical tubular section of the bike frame that the saddle fits into.

Race information is usually sent out a week or two prior to the race; study route maps carefully. If the event is close to home, why not cycle around the route and find out where the hills, descents and sharp corners are, so on race day you'll be suitably ready? When you set out your cycling kit in the first transition area before the race, make sure you know the direction of flow through the area (know where you are entering the transition after the swim, where you exit on the bike, where you return on the bike and where you exit on the run). It helps to walk it through, with the aid of a marshal if possible. Physically run through your transitions so you can locate your bike at speed. For further details see the transition feature on page 29. Practice exactly how you'll rest your bike on the racking - under the brakes or the saddle is a good option. Practice taking your bike off and returning it to the bar (racking) a couple of times.

During the Race

Try to relax when riding and don't push 'big' gears. You should be trying to achieve 80-90 revolutions per minute. If your pedal revolutions per minute are less than 80, you are probably in too big a gear. Similarly, if you are pedaling well over 100 revolutions per minute, your gearing is probably too easy. Pushing big gears saps your energy, slows you down at the end of the cycle section and leads to you feeling more tired on the run.

Try to remember these simple points and the cycle split should be a breeze.

Concentrate on your breathing so you are able to get into a steady rhythm.

Pace yourself for the whole of the cycle discipline. Don't go out too fast.

Top 10 Bike Tips

Make sure that your helmet conforms to the necessary British or American standards.

It's strongly recommended that your bike has a water bottle and cage fitted.

Be sure to carry a frame-fit pump, spare tubes and puncture changing tools.

Adding cleats and tri-bars to your bike will help you to be more aerodynamic and, in turn, improve your speed.

A pair of sunglasses is recommended to help protect your eyes.

Practice the transition stage, with the assistance of a marshal if possible.

Watch out for dangers on the road, including potholes, loose surfaces and other road-users.

Taper your training down as you near the race so that you're fresh on the big day.

Be absolutely sure that your bike is in a fit state to race. Check that the tyres are roadworthy and all nuts and joints adjusted to the recommended settings.

Study race information as soon as it is sent to you. Don't be tempted to leave it until the day before the event.

Try to drink frequently. As mentioned earlier, dehydration is always a risk when you sweat and fail to replace fluid loss adequately.

Be alert for danger which includes sharp bends, descents, potholes or grit on the road. Most importantly, watch out for other riders and traffic.

In the last mile ease off the pace or at least ride in lower gears so your leg muscles get a bit of a rest. You could also try standing out of the saddle and stretching your legs out in preparation for the run.

Eight week Bike training schedule

This eight-week cycle training programme has been produced to help you complete the cycle section of your triathlon event as easily as possible. Remember the training is only a guide - for more experienced cyclists it may seem easy, while vice versa those of you new to cycling may struggle. See the training programme for further advice on tailoring sessions to suit your needs.

Week	Session 1	Session 2	Comments
1	30 mins (easy)	45 mins (easy)	Don't push 'big' gears. Spin the pedals, trying to achieve 80-90 revolutions per minute. (To count your revolutions, concentrate on counting the number of times one leg completes one full pedal rotation - 360°)
2	30 mins (easy)	45 mins (easy)	Much the same as week 1, except push your 30min cycle a little harder.
3	30 mins (steady)	1 hour (easy)	For your

			30min cycle, increase the pace every 10mins from easy to fairly hard
4	30 mins (easy)	1 hour (steady)	For your 1hr cycle do 20mins easy, 20mins fairly hard and 20mins steady
5	1 hour (easy)	45 mins (steady)	Session 2: Ideally try a swim before this session, build up the pace as the cycle progresses
6	1 hour (steady)	45 mins (steady, followed by 20 min run)	Session 1: this week is the same as session 2, week 4
7	1 hour (steady)	45 mins (steady)	Week 7 is the same as week 5, but hopefully by now it will feel easier
8	45 mins (easy)	Triathlon Race	This is your taper week (you are tapering your training down so you will be fresh for the race)