

“Rome was not built in a day”

Quote from the new 2008 Australian road based champion, Matt Lloyd.

“Something I’ve both learned and been taught a great deal over the years are not to force and push progression. You see loads of riders, at every level, going out and trying to create miracles overnight, and it just does not work, or at least it’s not sustainable. Progression and building is a long game, and the foundations need to be solid-just like the proverbial pyramid syndrome; build it and force it too high too fast then it all crumbles at the slightest tremor and it’s pretty tough to rebuild without that strong foundation to start from.

At times the temptation can be to go out and dramatically increase your training loads and intensity in the belief that you will suddenly make big improvements, but it’s tough mentally, and is really not good for your body and development; and all too often the physical and mental stress just blows the whole thing, so I really believe strongly in the steady and sure building and development process”

We have looked at two different training philosophies and examined briefly the pros and cons of each method, but how using these methods do we increase our fitness over time? In this respect every training program has the same basic structure and again, these basic principles are often overlooked.

The basic principles of training are that we create a continually increasing physiological load overtime, interspersed with recovery, to allow for optimal physiological adaptation. This physiological load should be specific to the demands of the event or the activity performed. Eg to get good at riding a bike – you ride your bike. This means the basic principles are specificity of exercise, progressive overload and recovery. Create a plan with these simple principles in place with the correct dosage and the athlete should get fitter, stronger and faster.

Unfortunately , by its simple definition progressive overload is open to misinterpretation and what may be progressive overload for one person may constitute overreaching for another and when carried out over a number of months may lead to overtraining. As Matt Lloyd alludes to in a quote from Cycling Australia, it is fundamentally important to build slow and strong and trying to dig too big a hole for oneself in terms of diving straight into 4-5 hour rides at the beginning of a training program, allows no head room and progression throughout the program, and can often lead to burnout (both physical and mental), illness or injury and in worse cases glandular fever, shingles and immune problems.

As a coach the biggest problem I face is educating riders on the benefits of the long haul and the simple analogy that “Rome was not built in a day”. Magazine articles and pro riders’ diaries paint a picture of long and hard training days and massive power outputs. The fact is professional riders have been riding for many years and when they started they were not cranking out massive Km’s. Even those who have made it into the pro ranks are held back and looked after by the best

managers, so as not to push the rider too hard too soon. The Tour is often the last of the major races for an aspiring pro to race; again this is just an example of progressive overload.

The use of power meters and the fantastic analysis tool of Training Peaks, has allowed us to quantify training load relative to an individual's Chronic Training Load (CTL) which is the accumulated load over months of training (This has a default setting of 42 days). This CTL is built up/made up of the riders Acute Training Load (ATL) which is the riders' most recent rides (This has a default setting of 7 days). Now it's quite obvious to most people that if you ride hard for 7 days straight then you will be fatigued, do this continually for months on end and you are likely to be overtrained. When designing a training program I look to increase CTL by around 4 – 7 points/week, this sort of increase I have found to be manageable by most riders and doesn't lead to burnout and illness. My upper limit is about 10 points/week and I have found that I can only sustain this for about 3 weeks followed by a recover week.

The next thing to consider is then the different workouts to structure into a program to elicit a 4 – 7 point/week increase. It can be done with lots of volume or smaller amounts of intensity. It can be built with big weekend rides and maintenance through the week, or consistent workouts throughout the week one method digs bigger holes and needs more recovery built in and one method is more consistent and builds without the need for as much recovery built into the program.

The big question is how do we put it all together and what method is best for what riders?????
Next month we will investigate putting it all together and creating a program for a sample/generic rider.