ZERO TO SPORTIVE HERO

The roadmap to smashing a sportive
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Why now is the time to ride better

Kickstarting your cycling programme to improve your performance can be daunting, especially when you’ve already worked hard to get to where you currently are.

This guide will provide you with a plan on how to improve your cycling performance in the lead up to your cycling event – whether it’s a race, sportive or for a personal achievement or another goal.

So strap your helmet on and let us help you achieve your performance goals by taking your training to the next level!

Featuring Lizzie Armitstead (now Deignan) Olympic Silver Medallist, National Road Race Champion and Cycleplan Ambassador.
01 Training

As you’d expect, training is the most important part of preparing yourself for a sportive. Knowing you’ve done some serious road mileage gives you the confidence you need going into the event, as you’ve done all the hard work to perform at your best. Everyone trains at different levels so the best training plan both mentally and physically will vary from person to person. However, a 12-week training plan is a great place to start. If you’re planning on doing a lot more exercise than you’re used to, remember to consult your GP before you start putting your plan into action.

What you will need:

- A heart rate monitor
- A cadence sensor
- A reliable and roadworthy bike

Functional Threshold Test

Functional threshold represents the highest physical intensity that you can sustain for an hour and is used as the most accessible measure of fitness – when combined with weight and heart rate data.

Functional threshold is your cycling “redline”. If you ride above this functional threshold intensity, fatigue sets in very quickly and your pace suffers – from this figure you can calculate incredibly accurate and personalised training zones.

It’s important to remember that a threshold test is an extremely hard effort, so make sure you’ve had at least one rest day prior. You will also need to find a course that allows you to ride uninterrupted for 30 minutes – steep climbs, traffic lights, sharp bends and heavy traffic should be avoided where possible.

Top Tip:
Each time you complete the test, make sure you’re doing it on the same circuit and bike to ensure consistency. It’s also worth bearing in mind that this test is meant for those who regularly cycle and want to improve their performance.
How to complete the test:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warm-up</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>✓ Either a ride to your circuit of choice or the warm-up you usually complete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ There should be an increase in intensity during the warm-up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main test</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>✓ Ride as hard as you can physically sustain for 30 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ After 10 minutes start recording your heart rate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Keep your reps between 90 and 100rpm using your cadence sensor to help consistency for next time you do the test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Note down your average heart rate over the last 20 minutes of the test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool down</td>
<td>10 – 20 minutes</td>
<td>✓ Easy riding to gradually bring down your heart rate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Training plan

Who can do a 12-week training plan?

12 weeks is the perfect amount of time to improve your performance if:

✔ You have been cycling regularly but haven’t been following a training plan.

✔ You want to get back into cycling after a break.

✔ You’re already active, but aren’t a cyclist.

How to build your own 12-week training plan

You have to adapt your training schedule to fit with your life. Here are some pointers to designing your training programme:

✔ Perform the functional threshold test in the first week and again in the ninth week to monitor your progress.

✔ Aim for 3-6.5 hours of riding a week, starting at 3 hours in the beginning and increasing the hours as the plan progresses.

✔ Try to fit in some cross training once a week - strength training for your legs will be particularly beneficial.

✔ Overtraining can be detrimental to your performance and risks injury so make sure you factor at least two rest days a week into your training regime.

Top Tip:
If you’re unsure where to start, British Cycling has a range of in-depth training plans for you to use or adapt to fit your needs.
Honoring your riding technique

Bike positioning

The most important thing to consider when positioning yourself on the bike is your comfort. Followed by being as aerodynamic as possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For comfort</th>
<th>For aero</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☑ Keep shoulders relaxed.</td>
<td>☑ Tuck your elbows in so they fall directly in front of your knees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Maintain a neutral spine.</td>
<td>☑ Bend your elbows to lower your torso, so your back is straight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Keep your knees parallel to the frame.</td>
<td>☑ Lower your head and ride on the drops.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identifying and improving weaknesses

Every cyclist has a cycling weakness – climbing, descents, pacing to name just a few – but identifying and improving them is how you make progress. So, be honest with yourself about where your weaknesses lie.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short, steep, repetitive hills</td>
<td>✓ Leg strength training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ A stronger endurance base.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ More practise tackling these types of climbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ A more thorough warm-up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining momentum towards the end of a ride</td>
<td>✓ High volume, low-intensity training to improve endurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Better nutrition (see section 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low cadence</td>
<td>✓ Interval training: (10×15 sec at 100+ RPM with 45 sec recovery).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Gradually increase the length of intervals and decrease recovery period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility &amp; range of motion</td>
<td>✓ A regular stretching routine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Yoga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous flat riding</td>
<td>✓ Training for long periods with your heart rate in the cardio zone without stopping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovering properly</td>
<td>✓ More rest days to allow your muscles to build strength and recover.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
02 Nutrition

Eating the right combination of carbohydrates and protein can help you become a stronger and faster cyclist, and help your muscles recover quicker from each cycling session. The nutrition plan that suits you will mostly depend on your amount of training and what works best for you. Remember to bring up any concerns you may have about changing your diet with your GP.

Eat smart

You can have your training programme running like a well-oiled machine but, if your nutrition is all wrong, making serious progress will prove difficult. As a cyclist, this is what you need to prioritise:

Carbohydrates

Carbs for a cyclist are extremely important. They:

✔ Help regulate muscle contraction – glycogen (stored carbohydrate) regulates muscle calcium function which you need for muscle contraction. If you’re not getting enough carbs, your power output will suffer.

✔ Burn fat and provide energy – your body needs glycogen to convert fat molecules into energy. If you have no stored carbs on board, it will break down your muscle tissue for energy instead.

How much to eat

The more you’re riding, the more you need. Here’s a rough guide of how to work it out:

✔ Less than 1hr a day – 1.5-2.5 grams per lb. of body weight
✔ 1-3 hrs a day – 2.5-4.5g per lb. of body weight
✔ 3-5 hrs a day – 3.5-5.5g per lb. of body weight


Good sources of carbohydrates include:

✔ Porridge oats
✔ Sweet potatoes
✔ Brown rice
✔ White potatoes with skin
✔ Whole wheat bread and pasta
✔ Quinoa
✔ Beans and lentils
Protein

Protein is a staple of any fitness diet. It:

- **Aid muscle growth** – Eating protein in the period after a ride amplifies the body’s response to that ride, so more muscle proteins are built.
- **Muscle repair** – protein aids the repair of exercise-induced muscle fibres and helps replenish depleted energy stores. After an intense ride, a high-protein meal should follow shortly after.

**How much to eat**

The amount of protein you need will depend on the riding you’re doing:

- **Endurance cycling** – 1.2 to 1.6g per kilogram of body weight per day.
- **High-intensity riding, steep hill riding, strength training** – 1.6 to 2g per kilogram of body weight per day.

Source: [www.cyclist.co.uk/in-depth/1058/as-a-cyclist-are-you-eating-enough-protein](http://www.cyclist.co.uk/in-depth/1058/as-a-cyclist-are-you-eating-enough-protein)

**Good sources of protein include**

- Chicken and turkey
- Eggs
- Greek yoghurt
- Seafood
- Soya
- Nuts and seeds
- Beans and lentils
- Cottage cheese

**Top Tip:**
How you spread your nutrition throughout the day is completely up to you – whatever your body likes best!
**Hydration**

No matter what type of event you’re training for, if you’re not keeping yourself hydrated, you’ll be limiting your training progress and performance and making your recovery longer.

**The impact of fluid loss on performance**

When exercising you lose a lot more fluid from your body and this can impact you in a variety of ways:

- **4% drop in body weight due to sweating** – capacity for your muscles to work will decrease.
- **5% drop in body weight due to sweating** – heat exhaustion sets in and your body’s capacity to work will drop by as much as 30%.

**Everyday drinking**

Whether your riding or not, keep an eye on your hydration levels by checking your urine colour.

**Hydration hack:**

Always try to drink 2-3 litres of fluid a day – this includes fruit juices and sports drinks as well as water. Unfortunately, tea, coffee and alcohol do not count as they’re diuretics.
After a ride
Make sure you stay hydrated even after a ride – especially if it’s a hot day.

Hydration hack:
As well as a high protein and carb recovery meal, a recovery drink that contains electrolytes will hydrate you again and replace electrolytes lost by sweat.

Before a ride
As long as you’ve been keeping hydrated throughout the day, there’s no need to go overboard on fluid before a ride. Too much fluid intake before a ride will only mean you’re constantly stopping for toilet breaks.

Hydration hack:
Sipping on an isotonic sports drink in the run-up to a long ride will be enough to make sure you’re hydrated, and your energy reserves are stocked up.

During a ride
Most cyclists lose anything from 500-1000ml of fluid an hour while cycling and while it might not be possible to replenish all of this you should aim to replace at least 75% of it.

Hydration hack:
From the start of your ride drink little and often. For rides shorter than an hour, just drinking water is fine – anything longer and you’ll need to be drinking an isotonic sports drink to give you energy with carbohydrate content to replace electrolytes lost by sweat.
03 Equipment

You can throw yourself into training and nutrition with the best will in the world, but without the right equipment, it'll be very hard to make serious headway. From getting yourself some new lycra, to making adjustments to your current bike, there are plenty of ways you can use cycling equipment to your advantage.

Getting the most out of your bike

Bike adjustments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjustment</th>
<th>Why</th>
<th>How to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower front end</td>
<td>✅ Improved aerodynamics – your body is forced to ride in a more aerodynamic position therefore helping you to go faster.</td>
<td>✅ Assuming your headset has spacers, removing a few is the easiest way to lower your handlebars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✅ Lower the front end gradually to avoid injuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddle height</td>
<td>✅ Wrong height can cause injuries and discomfort.</td>
<td>✅ The distance between the top of the saddle and the bottom bracket should be your inseam measurement minus 10cm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✅ Wrong height makes you slower by decreasing efficiency.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Bike adjustments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maintenance tip</th>
<th>Why</th>
<th>How to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep your bike clean</td>
<td>✓ Psychological advantage.</td>
<td>✓ Keep on top of it by giving your bike a 5-minute wipe down after each ride.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Makes your bike more efficient as less grime will affect the drivetrain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lube it up</td>
<td>✓ A well-lubed chain will make the drivetrain more efficient.</td>
<td>✓ Slowly add lube to the inside of the chain while rotating the cranks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Less grime will be picked up in wet weather.</td>
<td>✓ Wipe off any excess once you’re done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check tyre pressure</td>
<td>✓ Having tyres that are too soft will add unnecessary resistance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Having tyres that are too inflated will decrease grip.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tighten the brakes (if needed)</td>
<td>✓ Properly adjusted brakes will give you more confidence going into corners.</td>
<td>✓ As your brake pads wear, make sure to tighten the brakes to make sure they always stay the same distance away from the rims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tap it tidy</td>
<td>✓ Loose bits of handlebar tape and cables can snag or limit handlebar movement.</td>
<td>✓ Tape up lose handlebar tape with electrical tape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Zip tie loose cables.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accessories

Marginal gains can be made with a lot more than just your bike – accessories can make all the difference too.

Lycra:

✔️ It’s designed to regulate your temperature by wicking away sweat.
✔️ It is comfortable.
✔️ It makes you go faster – skin tight clothing helps cut through the wind, therefore making you more aerodynamic.

Aerodynamic helmet:

✔️ A standard cycling helmet is as non-aerodynamic as you can get – the vents are designed to capture air to keep your head cool.
✔️ An aero helmet will make you go faster as it features fewer vents – which means less heat ventilation.

LIZZIE SAYS:

“Save your aero helmet for event day itself and use your standard helmet for everyday training.”
04 Out of the saddle tips

Just because you’re not in the saddle doesn’t mean you can’t be implementing habits that can improve your cycling performance. Whether it’s stretching, meditating or even sleeping, there are lots of things to help you that don’t involve pedalling.

A good night’s sleep

Having a sleep schedule that allows you 6-8 hours every night is vital for your body’s recovery.

Top Tip:
Going to bed and waking up the same time every evening and morning will make it a lot easier to fall asleep and wake up.

A solid stretching routine

Stretching before and after each ride will keep you pedalling efficiently and prevent injuries as well as aches and pains.

Top Tip:
As well as stretching after you’ve ridden, having a morning stretching routine will do your muscles a lot of good.

Keep stress down

Having high-stress levels will affect your sleep and therefore your recovery. Keeping stress to a minimum will also ensure fewer distractions while on the bike.

Top Tip:
If you find yourself stressed out quite often, set some time aside each day to read, meditate or to do something else that relaxes you.

Don’t overtrain

You might think it’s a good idea to hammer the training, but your body won’t progress without rest days to fully recover. On top of that, you’ll increase the risk of injury and of getting ill, meaning even more time off the bike.

Top Tip:
No matter what structure your training plan follows, make sure to have at least 2 rest days a week.
05 Event day

It’s the big day – all your hard work and dedication has come down to this. It’s time for that final push to make sure you put in a performance to be proud of!

Pre-event prep

Here’s a few helpful tips:

✔️ During the week leading up to the event, make sure you get a good night’s sleep every night.

✔️ Know the race details before the day of the race.

✔️ Give your bike a once over to make everything is working as it should. You don’t want any nasty surprises!

✔️ If the details of the event route are available, take some time to look it over. Knowing what’s to come will help keep your nerves down.

LIZZIE SAYS:

“Make sure you have a map of the course just in case – you’d be amazed how many people get lost during a sportive!”
Event day checklist

After all your preparation it’s important to ensure you have everything you need for the event. Use this handy checklist to make sure your kit is complete, plus we’ve left some space for you to add any extra essentials!

- Bike (obviously)
- Helmet
- Shoes
- Socks
- Gloves
- Sunglasses
- Jersey
- Event registration
- Bibs/shorts
- Winter/rain clothes (being caught off-guard can make for a miserable race)
- Race food
- Electrolyte drink
- Plenty of water
- Heart rate strap
- Bike floor pump
- Puncture repair kit
- Post-race, warm change of clothes
- Post-race recovery drink/snack
- Map of course
- Sun cream
- ............................................................
- ............................................................

Visit us
Day of event

Morning routine:
It can be difficult to stomach food early in the morning, with pre-race nerves kicking in; getting up early gives you plenty of time to eat. Some riders like to start the day with yoga or some stretching and then have breakfast. Lizzie prefers getting as much rest as possible.

Breakfast:
A high carb breakfast on the day of your event is essential to fuel your body. It’s all about finding what works best for you – one size doesn’t fit all.

LIZZIE SAYS:
“Some of my teammates have bread, ham and cheese for breakfast, but I couldn’t start the day without my oats! Whatever you decide, make sure you have slow-releasing, carb-rich foods.”

Top Tip:
Make sure once you find your ideal morning routine you stick to it. You don’t want your body being caught off guard on event day.
Controlling nerves

Getting nervous before your event is completely normal. After all, you’ve worked hard to get here. Learning how to use these nerves to give your performance a boost is where the secret lies. Here are a few tips:

- **Music** – create a playlist that’ll help calm and motivate you. It’s also a great way to block out unnecessary distractions.
- **Confidence** – have confidence in your ability and all that you’ve done to prepare.
- **Ignore other riders** – hearing about the preparation other riders have done is only going to ramp up your self-doubt. Just concentrate on yourself.

Some riders like to have a 10-minute ride to warm themselves up. Lizzie, however, advises against it:

**LIZZIE SAYS:**

“I prefer to conserve all my energy for the race itself; my advice would be to save as much as your energy as possible.”
During the event

Pace yourself
It can be very tempting to go as hard as you can straight away, but you won’t be able to keep this up for the whole event – save your energy and attack when other the other riders are tired.

Be mindful of the wind
Every cyclist knows being on the wrong side of the wind can be harder than climbing. Check the forecast before riding, and if the windy weather is forecast make sure your positioning on the bike is as aerodynamic as possible.

Play to your strengths
If you know you’re a strong climber, take advantage while other riders are struggling. Similarly, if your strength lies in sprinting, wait until later in the race when others are tired and turn on the accelerator – you’ll be glad you paced yourself at the beginning!

Keep yourself fuelled
Make sure you have enough food on you. If you know you have a hill coming up, have a caffeine gel or electrolyte drink 20 minutes beforehand, so you know it’ll kick in at the right time.

Stay motivated
When energy is running low it can be easy to lose your motivation.

Leave fuel in the tank for the finish
However hard you push yourself, make sure you have some juice left for the finish. Knowing the end is in sight will give you that extra boost to give it everything you’ve got.

LIZZIE SAYS:
“I picture the feeling of disappointment I’ll feel if I know I haven’t given it 110%.”
Post-event

You’ve done it!

You’ve put in a performance to be proud of so, first of all, take a moment to pat yourself on the back! The next thing to worry about is how to make sure your body recovers.

✔ Your priority should be a cool down to bring your heart rate back to rest. 10-15 minutes of easy riding should do it.

✔ Next, drink a recovery drink or meal that’s high in carbs and protein as your body will be seriously low on both of these things.

✔ It can be tempting to collapse as soon as you’ve finished if you’ve exhausted yourself. But Lizzie warns against this.

✔ If you picked up an injury during the race that doesn’t require total bed rest, try to stay active and mobile whenever you can. That way, you won’t lose all of the muscle memory you’ve built up during your training.

✔ Your evening meal should be hearty and healthy, with a high vitamin content. Your muscles will thank you the next day.

LIZZIE SAYS:

“Resist the urge to collapse on the sofa – try 5 minutes of stretching first. You’ll be glad of it the next day when you’ve avoided the worst of the cramping.”
Specialist Cycling Insurance is a sensible precaution for any cyclist committing to a sportive training programme. Lizzie Deignan says, “I don’t know any cyclists who would risk training without insurance. There are too many potential hazards out there not to protect your bike and yourself with a specialist cycling insurance policy. It’s a small price to pay if something does go wrong.”

Get insured, stay cycling

A Specialist Cycling insurance policy from Cycleplan covers the cost of repairing or replacing your bike if any of the below happen:

- Theft from your home
- Theft away from home
- Theft from a motor vehicle
- Accidental damage to your bike
- Malicious Damage to your bike

PLUS, New-for-Old cover is included as standard. So, if your bike is less than 3 years old and you bought it new, we’ll replace it NEW!

You can also choose to add the following to your Cycleplan quote:

- Personal Accident
- Loss of Earnings
- Public Liability cover
- Accessories cover
- Legal Expenses
- Competitive Use
- European and Worldwide cover
- Excess Waiver

SPECIAL OFFER

Get 10% OFF all quotes when you use this link: [www.cycleplan.co.uk/CPG19](http://www.cycleplan.co.uk/CPG19) or quote ‘CPG19’ when you call us on: 8000 92 92 98.

“Every year in the UK 500,000 bikes are stolen, that’s one every minute”

Bike Register
LIZZIE SAYS:

“I would recommend deep breaths and visualising the finish line. If you’re racing in a sportive, it’s because you enjoy cycling, so don’t let the nerves suck the fun out of cycling. Good luck!”