



Boulder Performance Network, LLC

IMBA Training Tips for 24 Hour Racing

OK, so you have registered for a 24 hour race, now what?? Time to “train”!

So you have sent in your entry fee, registered your team (or yourself if racing Solo), and you are all psyched to get to the race, have fun hanging out with your friends, and ride your mountain bike at night. After all, what’s not to like about that?

But now is the time to also start thinking about actual “training” for the race so you have the fitness, stamina, and confidence to get out there and do it; whether you are racing solo, or just want to make sure you are giving an honest effort to help your team do well. Even if a top finish isn’t your #1 goal for the race, you will have a lot more fun if you are in shape and feeling strong. Trust me on that!

Even if you have a busy job, kids, home life, etc, you can still put in a few short rides during the week and some longer rides on the weekend and attain good fitness. The key is to have some type of structure to your riding, so that you make each ride count and be a positive benefit to your fitness and preparation for the race.

At a minimum, it is preferable to give yourself at least 10-12 weeks of following some type of a structured training program to build up the endurance necessary to race for 24 hours straight (or if you are on a team, you still need the endurance and fitness to be able to ride hard for an hour or two, recover, and do it over again a few times during the 24 hour period).

For Solo and Duo riders it is preferable to be able to put in some really long rides on the weekends (building up to as long as 7-8 hour rides). However, if you are racing on a 4 or 5 person team, you can get very fit and race ready with as little as 8-10 hours a week if your time is limited to train. But again, the key is to make each ride count. During the week you might have shorter but faster rides, with harder efforts on climbs thrown in to help increase your power and speed when riding at a fast pace. Weekend rides will be longer and focus more on a steady Endurance pace that you can keep up for 3 or 4 hours at a time.

It is very important to make sure you gradually increase your weekly riding time (don't start from riding 5 hours a week, to attempting to do a 15 hour week the next week). Also make sure to allow for Rest weeks every 3rd or 4th week, where you cut your riding time in half and take a few days when you just sit on the couch, put your feet up, and catch up on all those Sopranos episodes you have TiVoed but haven't had a chance to watch yet.

The focus of this article isn't to provide a detailed training plan (that is for another article); just to give you an overview of what makes a good training strategy. Training hard doesn't bring on fitness, it is the combination of training hard AND taking adequate rest at times that makes you fit. So remember more training is not always better. SMART training (combining structure, progression, and rest) is better!

Good luck with your training!

Pre-racing Planning – what all do I need to bring?

So it is one week out from the big 24 hour race. Over the last 12-16 weeks you have been disciplined and followed at least a loosely structured training plan, eaten healthy, and tried to get adequate sleep and recovery. You are feeling fit and excited about the upcoming race. Your body and mind are ready for the race, but are you logistically ready? Whether on a team or racing Solo, traveling to a 24 hour race and bringing everything you might possibly need takes a bit of planning. After all, there usually aren't bike shops and grocery stores next to the race course. Once you are out at the race venue and camped out, you need to make sure you have all your bases covered.

Bike: I probably don't need to mention this, but I will. Hopefully at least a week before the race you or your local bike shop has been able to thoroughly clean and inspect your bike for any potential issues. It should be shifting well (now is a great time to replace your chain and cassette if they are worn out), your brakes should be functioning and have plenty of pad life left (if not, again time to put new brake pads on), your shocks should have proper air pressure and function correctly. Basically, make sure your bike is in as like-new condition as you can make it.

Equipment: This covers everything except your bike, clothing and food. So this can be bringing an extra chain in case you break yours during the race, and extra pair of clipless pedal cleats in the unfortunate event yours falls off your shoe while racing (yes I have had that happen!) Spare light batteries and bulbs, chain lube, old rags, spare inner tubes (maybe even an extra tire or two), and if you have a portable work stand bring that also. Try to foresee any potential issue you might have to fix on your bike (so don't forget the toolbox with all of the tools). Also bring any gear to make things more comfortable in

your little camping area. Folding chairs, blankets, tent/rain tarps, small burner for cooking hot food in the middle of the night, folding table, etc.

Clothes: At most 24 hour races, it can be very HOT in the daytime and very COLD at night (the desert definitely has these extremes). So bring both bike and off the bike clothes to cover any potential weather conditions. Better to bring more than you need, than to not have it when you need it. If you are racing on a team and are racing in shifts, you want warm and dry clothes that you can immediately change into after your bike leg. A sleeping bag is great to curl up in, get warm, and try to get an hour or two of sleep in the middle of the night before you get woken up to get dressed and back out on the bike. And it is nice to have clean and dry bike clothes to put on, not your old sweaty and smelly clothes you wore your last bike leg. And don't forget that rain jacket, just in case!

Food: = Fuel = Energy. It is impossible to race a 24 hour event without food (and fluids) and constant refueling. Also, I have found that in the course of 24 hours and lots of riding, that what tasted good and satisfied me early in the race, just doesn't do it 18 hours into the event. So I always suggest bringing a huge variety of food (hot, cold, bland, spicy, salty, etc), so that you have something that might hit the spot depending on what sounds good at the time. For team riders you want food for both riding (gels, bars, drink mixes, etc), but equally important is to have off the bike food you can eat in between your riding shifts to speed recovery of muscle fiber damage and refuel your glycogen stores so that you are ready to go out and ride again when your turn comes. For Solo racers, the majority of your fuel will probably come from on the bike foods; but it is always nice to have a hot bowl of soup or warm spaghetti in the middle of the night also. The key for on the bike foods though, is to make sure you have tried everything out in training BEFORE the race, so you know ahead of time what works for you. Drink mixes are especially important, because a lot of the really sweet and concentrated drink mixes can upset your stomach a few hours into the race, especially if it is hot.

I definitely recommend writing out a huge list of ANYTHING and EVERYTHING you might potentially need, then bring as much of it as you have room for. You might be surprised what comes in handy at 3:30AM when it is below freezing!

However, the MOST important thing you can bring is the right attitude!! 24 Hour racing is hard both physically and mentally. So bring a positive attitude, have fun, and be prepared to suffer a bit!

Pacing and Sleep Strategies for 24 Hour racing

So you might be thinking; Strategy for a race? Why do I need to have a strategy, don't I just go out and ride as hard as I can for as long as I can?

Well, yes, you do need a strategy unless you want to crash and burn at midnight and not be able to keep riding anymore. Of course then you can go get in your tent, curl up in your sleeping bag, and wake up when the race is over!

However, if you want to race smart, feel good (as good as you can feel in a 24 hour race), and still be strong at the end and hope for a good finish, strategy is huge! Strategy covers a few different areas. I will talk about pacing (Solo and team riders) and sleep (or lack of) in this article.

Pacing for the Solo Racer: This is perhaps the biggest mistake riders make, even more experienced riders who should know better. Everyone has heard of the story about the tortoise and the hare. Well, with 24 hour racing, the Solo racer is the tortoise. The race is 24 hours, not 4 hours, not 8 hours, nor even 16 hours. So you can't get caught up on your placing after 8 hours. Races are won with solid and consistent riding for the full 24 hours, and if you pace yourself right, hopefully you will have something in the tank to turn on the juice a bit come sunrise. You have to race the course and ride within yourself for the race, or you will end up slower, explode, bonk, quit, or all of the above!

The Start: Most 24 Hour races start with the LeMans style run, then you hop on your bike, then everyone goes as hard as they can. For the Solo racer who is pacing themselves and is cognizant that they only have so many "matches" to expend for the next 24 hours; well, getting caught up in the frenzied run just doesn't make much sense. You expend tons of energy running really fast, and it spikes your heart rate very early. Then you are getting on your bike about the same time all the really fast team riders (the hares) are starting out, and it is just hard to control yourself and not get caught up in the fast pace the top team guys (who are only racing for an hour or so before they get a rest) are riding. This (lack of) strategy will quickly lead to the Solo racer spontaneously combusting a few hours into the race

The smart Solo racer casually jogs the LeMans start, gets on their bike near the middle or back of the field, and instantly gets into THEIR rhythm and pacing, and doesn't worry about how fast others are going. Racing a 24 Hour race Solo is all about Endurance, so you want to get that diesel engine rolling, but keeping the revs down and look at the big 24 hour picture. I don't have room in this article to cover training zones, but the smart Solo racer will race the majority of their race in Endurance (zone 2) Heart Rate and/or Power zones.

Pacing for Team Rider: So you are on a 4 or 5 person team, and you and your teammates have decided that everyone will only ride one lap at a time, so you might potentially be out there 5 or 6 times during the next 24 hours. This means you will have time for a nice break in between your riding shifts, where you can refuel and rest a bit. This strategy is almost 180 degrees different from those (insane) Solo racers! With a larger team, when you have 3 to 4 hours off the bike to sit around, you can afford to ride each lap very fast, knowing you will be able to refuel and rest. Still, your first few laps in a race, I would caution you to remember that it is a 24 hour race for your team, so

don't get too caught up in the position of your team after 4 to 8 hours. Even with the rest and recuperation you get, you still don't get 100% recovery in between your laps. So the cumulative fatigue will build up over the race. I would advise you not to go into your Anaerobic zone (this is a pace above what we call your Lactate Threshold, so an Anaerobic pace is a very fast pace that cannot be sustained for more than a few minutes at a time – it is a maximal, short effort) early in the race. 24 Hour races are won and lost in the middle of the night and early morning, so save something for those times.

Sleep Strategies: For Solo riders, I have observed that the best riders, with correct and smart pacing, do their best when they do not sleep, or even lie down and rest. Stopping and sleeping feels great, but it is hard to get up again and get back on the bike in the cold night! Better to ride a bit slower, not be as fatigued, but be able to ride for the majority of the 24 Hours. Being able to get off the bike every other lap and sit down and eat is nice, but don't let yourself get too comfortable, as it is hard to stand back up and get going again. A 20 minute or so break in the middle of the night to change out into some clean and dry clothes and get off your feet can be very beneficial though. This strategy can be a bit individualistic, and after your first race you will know what works for you and what doesn't.

For Team riders, I recommend that when you finish your lap, you IMMEDIATELY change into dry and warm clothes, sit down, and refuel. Don't eat too much at one time, but enough to replace a lot of the sugars and glycogen you have burned through. Try to lie down as much as possible out of the sun, and at night if you can catch a few hours of sleep here and there and stay warm, it will definitely help you to feel fresher and more recovered when your turn to ride again comes up.

So race smart and try to avoid the common rookie mistakes on pacing and sleep!

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