

Preparing for the Tour des Trees

So you've signed up for Tour. Now, you're staring down the challenge, unsure where to start, and maybe a little concerned whether you can really do this.

You can. Believe me. With steady, consistent, preparation, you can finish strong and really enjoy the experience. The secret to your success will be hitting key elements in your training, including specific types of riding, off-the-bike training, and general preparation.

To help, I recommend you institute this 18-week training plan.

The Plan

18 weeks out for 4 weeks: Develop a solid endurance base.

Having a solid foundation will be key to your success in a multi-day event. Ride at least five to seven hours or 60 to 75 miles a week.

14 weeks out for 2 weeks: Do a 50- to 60-miler.

One weekly long ride is key to your event prep. During these rides, practice pacing to finish as (or almost as) strong as you start: keep your heart rate effort at about 70 percent of your max (or maintain a pace where you can carry on a conversation).

12 week out: Hold a plank for 30 to 60 seconds.

Planks don't just work your abs; they build strength in all of the muscles that surround your spine. Planking regularly will make your

core strong enough to support you day after day and prevent back and neck aches. Aim for a 60-second hold by the time your event rolls around by adding five to 10 seconds each week.

10 weeks out: Complete a three-day ride streak.

Plan a three ride streaks before your event to get your bodies contact points and the supporting muscles used to being in the saddle for consecutive days. Make two of the days longer and/or harder than the third.

8 weeks out: Conquer a single-day, mass-start ride.

This will help you become more comfortable riding with and around others at the Tour. Do a long one, like a metric or full century, and practice pack riding, refueling at rest stops, and pacing.

6 weeks out: Find your go-to ride snacks and drinks.

Don't wait until the Tour to find out what doesn't agree with your belly. At this point, practice drinking at least one bottle and eating 120 to 240 calories per hour. Experiment with different options until you find something that works. Botching your fueling not only wrecks your day, but on multi-day rides, it can sabotage your ability to comfortably complete the Tour.

5 weeks out: Master recovery.

Within 30 minutes after each ride, snack on carbs and protein—a banana with peanut butter, chocolate milk, a handful of nuts—and keep your feet elevated in compression socks. Add in some foam rolling to keep tired muscles loose and ready for the next ride.

4 weeks out: Brave the elements.

You may encounter rain, cold, wind, or heat during the Tour, so deliberately go out in inclement conditions to build mental toughness and be sure that "waterproof" jacket really is.

3 weeks out: Make sure your bike is ready, too.

Don't wait until the night before the Tour to realize you need a new chain. Have local bike shop give your bike a thorough check a few weeks out. Get all of your other gear—pump, multi-tool, tubes, etc.—together and make sure you know how to use it all.

2 weeks out: Download the course to your GPS computer.

Please note that the Tour des Trees no longer marks the route, so it is imperative that you know how to use your cycling computer to self navigate. Even if the ride file is not available yet, you should familiarize yourself with the course, figure out how to download the file to your cycling computer, and use it for navigation when it is posted or shared.

1 week out: Taper your training.

At this point, cramming in some last-minute miles will only tire you out. Do a couple of short rides that include a few short, hard efforts such as a tough climb or a town line sprint, but otherwise, rest and let your muscles repair and restock with glycogen (stored fuel) so you're ready to rock it on day one.