**What is “Tempo” Riding?**

**Riding Tempo**

I want to add some clarity to the training ride goal and style of riding, and hopefully in doing so we all learn to appreciate a tempo bike ride and its benefits.

We'll be riding at a consistent effort vs. a consistent speed, this is called "riding tempo”. Tempo predates watts, heart rate or even V-meter.  We'll maintain 18-19mph on flat ground, then adjust our pace accordingly climbing and descending to maintain the effort. This keeps the ride smooth and everyone together.

You’ll often hear TV announcers point out who’s at the front of the peloton riding “tempo.”  Just what is tempo?  How hard are they riding, and should I build this into my training?

Tempo bike rides are 76-90% of your FTP, so think of it as you can still talk to your friend next to you, and although it may be slightly labored, you can speak in short bursts of sentences. You probably need to catch your breath here and there if you are telling a story. Many of us ride tempo intensity quite often, whether we call it this or not.  Tempo could be considered the intensity of a typical brisk group ride, a pace line or a ride you might do on your own when you’re under time constraints and have to finish quickly, but you don’t want to go so hard that you blow up.

***Tempo level rides are considered Zone 3 in the 7-zone scale I use.***

***As a reminder, Zone 1 is “Recovery” and Zone 2 is “Endurance.”***

**Zone3 / Tempo Characteristics:**

* 76% – 90% of threshold average power (30 minute time trial)
* 84% – 94% of threshold average heart rate (30 minute time trial)
* Level 3-4 of 10 Perceived Exertion scale
* Tempo is at the upper end of aerobic efforts, so fatigue will set in much faster.
* Requires focus to maintain this level effort, especially when riding alone.
* Breathing is definitely deeper than Level 2/Endurance riding.
* Back to back days of tempo riding is possible, depending on length of time riding at this level.

**Key Physical Adaptations:**

* Increased muscle glycogen storage
* Increased mitochondria density (these are the “power house” of the cells that create energy)
* Increased lactate threshold
* Conversion of certain fast twitch muscle fibers to take on characteristics of slow twitch (Type IIb -> Type IIa)

**Additional benefits gained from Tempo level training include:**

* Increased stroke volume from your heart (more blood is pumped with each heart beat)
* Increased blood plasma volume
* Improved muscle glycogen storage

**“Real World” Applications:**

A significant amount of time riding tempo early in the season can help improve your upper-end aerobic fitness.  Gain the ability to ride at this level for 45 – 90 minutes continuously and you’ll find yourself being able to hang with most group rides or breakaways.  But it may take weeks of dedicated effort training at continually longer intervals to achieve this level.  The good news is that over time you WILL notice your improved power and endurance at faster paces.

Keep in mind that while this is an important piece of your training, especially early in the year, don’t ignore training other levels as well. Bottom of FormTop of Form