2027 EDITION

# Ride Into Spring Stronger

*A winter training plan for riders who want to enjoy their next trip*



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READING ON A PHONE?

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# Introduction

"Winter training sets the foundations for a strong and enjoyable season. The work you do now builds the endurance, resilience and power that make riding in Italy feel smooth and controlled, not like survival.

This playbook gives you a clear structure for winter months. The goal is not extreme training. The goal is to arrive fit, confident and able to enjoy every moment on the bike.

You do not need perfect days. You need consistent weeks."

**Sam Williams**
Performance coach and former professional cyclist



## What this guide includes

- Key winter cycling sessions
- How to use power or heart rate zones
- How to train well without technology
- Strength and conditioning guidance
- Stretching routines for mobility and recovery
- Fuelling and nutrition principles
- A four-week structured plan
- A simpler plan if you ride for fun or on an e-bike

# How to use this guide

Two ways in. Pick the one that sounds like you.

PATH ONE

## Regular rider

Follow the 4-week plan.

Read the training fundamentals (pages 5 to 12), then start with the plan overview on page 14.

PATH TWO

## Ride for fun or on an e-bike

Start with page 13.

Two rides and one short strength session a week. No tests and no gadgets needed.

WEEKS 5 TO 8

Weeks 5 to 8 arrive by email, one a week, if you've asked for them.

BEFORE YOU START

Please read the short note on health on page 22.

TRAINING FUNDAMENTALS

# Winter training principles

### Consistency

Short sessions done regularly build more fitness than occasional long efforts.

### Progression

Increase training gradually: more minutes, slightly harder efforts or more strength load.

### Quality

Easy days must be easy. Hard efforts must be controlled.

### Recovery

Adapting to training happens during rest. Tired training is wasted training.

COACH NOTE

These principles apply whether you train five hours per week or fifteen. The structure remains the same. What changes is volume, not approach.

# Training zones and testing

One set of zones is used throughout this guide. Test with power, heart rate, or both.

## Functional Threshold Power (FTP) test

1. Warm up for 20 minutes.
2. Ride 20 minutes at the hardest steady effort you can maintain.
3. Multiply average power by 0.95.
4. Result = FTP.

### Use FTP to set zones

| ZONE | % FTP |
|---|---|
| Zone 2 | 55–75% |
| Tempo | 75–88% |
| Threshold | 95–105% |
| VO2 max | 110% and above |

## Lactate Threshold Heart Rate (LTHR) test

1. Warm up for 20 minutes.
2. Ride for 30 minutes at your maximal sustainable effort (one that you could barely maintain for 30 minutes).
3. Record your average heart rate for the last 20 minutes of the 30-minute effort.
4. Result = LTHR.

### Heart rate zones used in this guide

| ZONE | % LTHR | % MAX HR |
|---|---|---|
| Easy / recovery | below 80% | below 68% |
| Zone 2 / endurance | 80–89% | 68–83% |
| Tempo | 89–93% | 83–88% |
| Threshold | 94–100% | 88–95% |
| VO2 max | above 100% | above 95% |

### Estimating max heart rate

A common, though less precise, method to estimate your maximum heart rate is the formula: **220 minus your age**.

> COMMON MISTAKE
>
> Testing too frequently disrupts training rhythm. Test once at the start of winter, once mid-block if progress feels significant. Otherwise, trust the process.

TRAINING FUNDAMENTALS

# No power or heart rate? Train by feel

Both technology and feel work. Many riders benefit from combining them.

| EFFORT | HOW IT FEELS | TALKING |
|---|---|---|
| **Easy** | Smooth, relaxed, light legs | Full conversation |
| **Endurance** | Controlled, slightly heavier breathing | Short phrases |
| **Tempo** | Strong, working but stable | One-word answers |
| **Threshold** | Hard and sustainable | No talking |
| **VO2** | Very hard, short efforts | Focused breathing only |

WHAT MATTERS MORE THAN YOU THINK

Learning to feel effort accurately takes time. Keep notes after sessions. Over weeks, patterns emerge. Trust develops.

# Key cycling sessions

## 1. Tempo and Surges Session

Goal: improve threshold power and repeatability of efforts.

1. **Warm up**
   15 minutes progressive, finish with three short controlled sprints. Progress from Easy (below 80% LTHR / 68% max HR) to Endurance (80–89% LTHR / 68–83% max HR), with sprints reaching VO2 max (above 100% LTHR / 95% max HR).
2. **Main set**
   3 × 10 minutes at Tempo (89–93% LTHR / 83–88% max HR). Start each block with a 30-second strong effort. Repeat a 30-second surge every 2 minutes (aim for Threshold to VO2 max, 94–100% LTHR / 88–95% max HR).
3. **Recovery**
   4 minutes easy between blocks (below 80% LTHR / 68% max HR).
4. **Cool down**
   10 minutes easy (below 80% LTHR / 68% max HR).

## 2. Tabata VO2 Max Session

Goal: improve top-end aerobic capacity and repeatability.

1. **Warm up**
   20 minutes progressive, building to Endurance zone (80–89% LTHR / 68–83% max HR).
2. **Main set**
   3 blocks of:
   - 20 seconds hard effort (VO2 max: above 100% LTHR / 95% max HR)
   - 10 seconds easy spin (Recovery: below 80% LTHR / 68% max HR)
   - Repeat for 8 reps
3. **Recovery**
   3 to 5 minutes easy between blocks (below 80% LTHR / 68% max HR).
4. **Cool down**
   10 minutes easy (below 80% LTHR / 68% max HR).

TRAINING FUNDAMENTALS

# Endurance ride

Steady, controlled ride, 60 to 120 minutes.

Endurance pace (80–89% LTHR / 68–83% max HR). Maintain a smooth cadence and relaxed upper body. Fuel every 30 to 40 minutes.

Riding steadily builds the aerobic engine that makes climbs feel smoother and increases recovery capacity between efforts.

> IF YOU ARE SHORT ON TIME
>
> Two 90-minute rides deliver more benefit than one three-hour ride. Consistency matters more than single session duration during winter months.




Epic Italy riders, Colli Euganei.

# Strength and conditioning

Focus: movement quality, single-leg strength and core stability. Training once or twice weekly is ideal.

## Priority exercises

- Goblet squats
- Single-leg deadlifts
- Lunges or split squats
- Glute bridges or hip thrusts
- Press-ups or bench dips
- Planks, bird dogs, dead bugs
- Controlled plyometric work when ready

No kettlebell or dumbbell? Use a loaded rucksack. The goal is stability and strength, not maximum load.

## Stretching and mobility

A short routine after rides prevents tightness and supports long-term comfort.

- Hamstring stretch, 30 seconds each side
- Quad stretch, 30 seconds each side
- Hip flexor stretch, 30 seconds each side
- Glute stretch, 30 seconds each side
- Cat-cow, 5 controlled rounds
- Child's pose, 45 seconds
- Chest opener, 30 seconds each side

Consistency matters more than duration.

COACH NOTE

Strength work feels slow at first. Benefits appear after four to six weeks. Stay patient. The work compounds.

Pictures of each exercise are on pages 20 and 21.

# Nutrition and fuelling

## Daily nutrition

Protein at every meal (aim for 1.6 to 1.8 g per kg bodyweight per day)

Carbohydrates matched to training load

Vegetables and healthy fats for recovery and hormone support

Two to three litres of water daily

## Fuel on the bike

### Targets per hour

- Women: 30 to 60 grams carbohydrate
- Men: 40 to 80 grams carbohydrate

Eat small amounts often. It prevents energy dips and improves training quality.

## Real food equivalents

| FOOD | CARBOHYDRATE |
|---|---|
| **Banana** | 25 g |
| **Energy bar** | 25 to 40 g |
| **Gel** | 20 to 30 g |
| **500 ml drink mix** | 30 g |
| **Dates, 4 to 5** | 30 g |
| **Jam sandwich** | 40 g |

## Recovery nutrition

WITHIN 30 TO 60 MINUTES OF TRAINING

**20 to 30 grams protein**, plus carbohydrates to replenish stores. For example: protein shake and banana; yoghurt with honey and fruit; pasta with vegetables and olive oil; wrap with chicken or tofu.

# The Italian diet advantage

Incorporating the principles and ingredients of the Mediterranean and Italian diet offers significant advantages for cyclists, supporting both performance and recovery. This eating pattern emphasises fresh, whole foods, healthy fats and complex carbohydrates, providing the sustained energy needed for long rides and the essential nutrients for efficient repair and adaptation after training.

| INGREDIENT | BENEFIT FOR CYCLISTS |
|---|---|
| **Olive oil** | Healthy fats; anti-inflammatory properties aid muscle recovery. |
| **Tomatoes** | Rich in lycopene and other antioxidants, supporting cellular health and reducing oxidative stress. |
| **Garlic** | Known for immune support and improving circulation, beneficial for overall well-being during training. |
| **Basil** | Contains anti-inflammatory compounds and magnesium, important for muscle function. |
| **Pasta** | Provides complex carbohydrates for sustained energy, crucial for fuelling long rides and recovery. |
| **Parmesan cheese** | Good source of protein for muscle repair and calcium for bone health. |
| **Balsamic vinegar** | Offers antioxidants and aids digestion, contributing to nutrient absorption. |
| **Pine nuts** | Supply healthy fats and protein, adding calorie density and nutritional value. |
| **Rocket** | Contains nitrates for improved blood flow and iron for oxygen transport, enhancing performance. |
| **Lemon** | Excellent source of vitamin C, vital for immune function and aiding post-exercise recovery. |
| **Red wine** | Part of the Italian table. Enjoy it in moderation, after the ride. |
| **Dark leafy greens** | Rich in folate and iron, supporting energy production and combating fatigue. |



# If you ride for fun or on an e-bike

**Who this is for:** you ride for pleasure, a few hours then lunch, or on an e-bike, and want to feel comfortable on a cycling holiday.

## The simple plan

Two rides a week plus one short strength session.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Ride 1** | 45 to 60 minutes easy, chatting pace. |
| **Ride 2** | 60 to 90 minutes steady, with two or three short hills or 5-minute stretches a little harder (short phrases only). |
| **Strength** | The Week 1 routine on page 15 (10 to 15 minutes), once a week. |
| **Each week** | Add 10 minutes to the longer ride. |

### On an e-bike

Use a lower assist level for part of every ride; the aim is time in the saddle and comfort, not speed. Practise on hills and get used to the bike's weight and handling.

### Comfort matters as much as fitness

Build up to two hours sitting on the bike. Check your saddle and bike fit before a trip.

NO TESTS, NO GADGETS NEEDED

Use the "train by feel" table on page 7.

# 4–week winter training plan

**Simple** | **Consistent** | **Sustainable**

The core philosophy of this plan focuses on:

Ride 3 times per week.

Complete 1 strength session.

If life gets busy, do the key sessions and move on. No catching up.

## The four weeks

Week 1: Foundation 15

Week 2: Base Building 16

Week 3: Progress 17

Week 4: Confidence and Control 18

# Week 1: Foundation

Focus: establish routine. Smooth effort, relaxed technique.

KEY PRINCIPLE Consistency over intensity

## SESSION 1
### Steady Spin

*Controlled breathing, smooth cadence and posture.*

**WARM UP**
10 min easy

**MAIN SET**
30–40 min endurance pace

**COOL DOWN**
5 min

## SESSION 2
### Cadence Pyramid

**WARM UP**
10 min

**MAIN SET**
5 rounds:

- 2 min high cadence (above 90 rpm), hard effort
- 2 min easy spin

**COOL DOWN**
10 min

## SESSION 3
### Endurance Ride

**MAIN SET**
60–75 min steady endurance pace

**FUELLING**
Start at 30–40 min. Small amounts regularly.

## STRENGTH SESSION
### 2 rounds

**WORKOUT**

- 10 bodyweight squats
- 10 reverse lunges each leg
- 20 sec side plank each side
- 10 glute bridges
- 10 bird dogs each side

**POST-WORKOUT**
Stretch hips and quads

# Week 2: Base Building

Focus: increase time at tempo. Stay relaxed at higher effort.

KEY PRINCIPLE Increase time at tempo. Stay relaxed at higher effort.

SESSION 1
## Tempo Taster

WARM UP
10 min

MAIN SET
3 × 5 min tempo

RECOVERY
3 min easy

COOL DOWN
5–10 min

SESSION 2
## Smooth Power

WARM UP
10 min

MAIN SET
4 × 3 min hard

RECOVERY
2 min easy

COOL DOWN
10 min

SESSION 3
## Endurance Ride

MAIN SET
75–90 min ride

OPTIONAL
Last 10 min tempo if feeling good

FUELLING
Every 30–40 min

STRENGTH SESSION
## 2 rounds

WORKOUT
- 12 dead bugs
- 12 single-leg RDLs each side
- 20 sec side plank each side
- 10–12 calf raises
- 15 glute bridges

POST-WORKOUT
Mobility-focused finish

# Week 3: Progress

Focus: longer tempo work. More control under fatigue.

KEY PRINCIPLE Longer tempo work. More control under fatigue.

SESSION 1
## Extended Tempo

WARM UP
10 min

MAIN SET
2 × 8 min tempo (4 min recovery)

COOL DOWN
5–10 min

SESSION 2
## Pyramid Intervals

WARM UP
10 min

EFFORT LADDER
- 1 min hard, 1 min easy
- 2 min hard, 2 min easy
- 3 min hard, 3 min easy
- Then descend back down

COOL DOWN
10 min

SESSION 3
## Endurance Ride

MAIN SET
90–105 min ride

FUELLING
Consistently throughout

FORM FOCUS
Calm breathing, quiet upper body

STRENGTH SESSION
## 2–3 rounds

WORKOUT
- 10 goblet squats / loaded backpack squats
- 10 split squats each leg
- 15 sec plank with alternating leg lift
- 20 deadlifts (kettlebell or backpack)
- 15 reverse lunges

POST-WORKOUT
Stretch glutes and hamstrings

# Week 4: Confidence and Control

Focus: sharpen. Don't chase exhaustion. Finish feeling ready and strong.

KEY PRINCIPLE **Sharpen. Don't chase exhaustion. Finish feeling strong.**

## SESSION 1
## Progression

**WARM UP**
10 min

**MAIN SET**
3 × 8 min tempo (3 min easy recovery)

**COOL DOWN**
10 min

## SESSION 2
## Speed Surges

**WARM UP**
10 min

**MAIN SET**
10 rounds: 30 sec hard, 30 sec easy. Aim for smooth accelerations.

**COOL DOWN**
10 min

## SESSION 3
## Endurance Ride

**MAIN SET**
105–120 min ride

**FUELLING**
Early and often

**FOCUS**
Rhythm and posture

## STRENGTH AND MOBILITY
## 1–2 rounds

**WORKOUT**

- 10 step-ups each leg
- 8 single-leg glute bridges each side
- 10 bodyweight squats
- 12 rows (band or table)
- 10 controlled rotation punches

**POST-WORKOUT**
Stretch hips, chest, upper back

**WHAT NEXT?**
Weeks 5 to 8 arrive by email, one a week, if you've asked for them.

# Glossary

A quick reference to the key terms used in this guide.

### (An)aerobic

Aerobic exercise uses oxygen to generate energy (e.g. Zone 2 riding). Anaerobic exercise generates energy without oxygen, for short, intense bursts (e.g. sprints).

### Cadence

The rate at which a cyclist pedals, measured in revolutions per minute (rpm). Developing a smooth, efficient cadence is vital for performance.

### Core stability

The ability of the deep abdominal and back muscles to support the spine and pelvis, providing a stable base for movement of the limbs. Critical for efficient power transfer and injury prevention in cycling.

### FTP (Functional Threshold Power)

The highest average power in watts that a cyclist can sustain for one hour. A key metric for setting training zones and gauging fitness.

### Hip hinge

A fundamental movement pattern where the hips are the primary joint of movement, folding back while maintaining a neutral spine. Key for exercises like deadlifts and squats, and for good cycling posture.

### LTHR (Lactate Threshold Heart Rate)

The highest average heart rate in beats per minute that a cyclist can sustain for one hour. Similar to FTP, it is used to define heart rate training zones.

### Pedal stroke efficiency

How effectively a cyclist applies power throughout the entire 360-degree rotation of the pedal stroke, minimising dead spots and maximising forward propulsion.

### Periodisation

The systematic planning of athletic training. The goal is to maximise performance at key times (races) and minimise injury by varying training intensity and volume over cycles.

### Power transfer

The efficiency with which the energy generated by the muscles is transmitted through the body and equipment (like a bicycle) to produce movement. Good power transfer minimises wasted energy.

### Progressive overload

A fundamental principle of training that involves gradually increasing the demands on the body to keep making gains in strength, endurance or skill. This can include increasing duration, intensity or resistance.

### Protein synthesis

The biological process by which cells build their specific proteins. Crucial for muscle repair, growth and adaptation in response to exercise.

### Recovery

The process of allowing the body to repair, rebuild and adapt after exercise. Essential for preventing overtraining, reducing injury risk and optimising performance gains. Includes rest, sleep, nutrition and active recovery.

### RPM

Revolutions per minute, typically referring to pedal cadence. A higher rpm often indicates a lighter gear and faster leg speed, while a lower rpm suggests a harder gear.

### Tempo

A training zone above Zone 2, where effort is moderately hard and sustained, but not all-out. It builds sustained power and muscular endurance.

### Threshold

A training zone at or just below FTP/LTHR, representing the maximum effort you can sustain for an extended period without accumulating excessive fatigue. Improves lactate tolerance.

### Unilateral training

Exercises that train one side of the body at a time (e.g. single-leg squats, lunges). Improves balance, addresses muscular imbalances and enhances stability for activities like cycling.

### VO2 max

The maximum rate of oxygen consumption attainable during maximal exercise. Training at this intensity improves your body's ability to use oxygen and deliver power.

### Zone 2

An endurance training zone characterised by a comfortable, steady effort where you can hold a conversation. Crucial for building an aerobic base and fat-burning efficiency.

REFERENCE

# Strength exercise reference

A quick visual guide to the strength exercises in the 4-week plan.



Goblet squats



Single-leg deadlifts



Reverse lunges



Glute bridges



Side plank



Bird dog



Dead bug



Calf raises



Romanian deadlifts (RDLs)

REFERENCE

# Stretch and mobility reference

A quick visual guide to the stretches and mobility drills in the 4-week plan.



Hamstring stretch (seated)



Hip flexor stretch



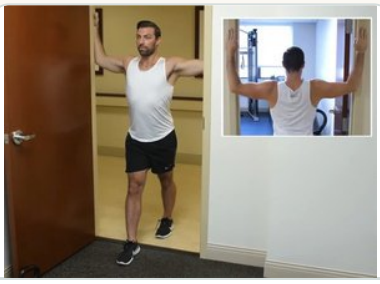
Figure-4 glute stretch



Cat-cow



Child’s pose



Chest opener (doorway)

BEFORE YOU START

# A note on health

Check with your doctor before starting a new training programme, especially if you have a health condition, are returning after injury or haven't exercised for a while.

Stop and seek advice if you feel pain, dizziness or chest discomfort.

This guide is general advice, not a personal training or medical plan.



WHERE TO USE IT

# Bassano del Grappa

We live in Bassano del Grappa, at the foot of Monte Grappa in Veneto. Quiet roads, long climbs, the Prosecco hills, and lunch that's worth riding for. We plan private guided and self-guided cycling holidays here for couples and friends.

If you're thinking about a trip, we'd love to help you plan it.

*Susi and Benji*

**Book a 30 minute chat with Susi and Benji**

calendly.com/epicitaly-info/30min

www.epicitaly.cc · WhatsApp +39 353 478 7980

## Webinar

Coming in January: a free live evening with Sam, Benji and Ewen, an osteopath in London, on winter training, aches and pains, and where to ride. We'll email you the date.

## Coaching with Sam

Want a plan built around you? Sam coaches riders one to one: **sam@n51coaching.com**

CLOSING NOTES

Winter is the time to build steady strength and resilience. The aim is not to arrive shattered from training. The aim is to arrive ready to ride, able to enjoy every kilometre and confident in your ability.

Train with focus. Rest with purpose. Keep momentum. You will feel the difference on the first long climb in Italy.

*See you on the road!*

**Sam Williams**
Performance coach and former professional cyclist

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