



## Cape Epic Training Guidelines

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### Introduction

So, against expectations, you got lucky in the Epic lottery. Now what? How, you ask, am I going to finish this race with body and sense of humour intact, and preferably in front of whoever put me up to it in the first place? Well, in short, by finding the time to develop a really close relationship with your bike - and by pacing yourself correctly in the race, but more on that later.

These training guidelines are presented to show you how to decide what training is most suited to your ability, fitness, and time available to train, rather than as detailed program that attempts to suit everyone. The recommendations are aimed at those riders who have a basic level of fitness, and are aiming to complete rather than race the Epic, with limited time available to train. By limited time I mean those who have about 8 hours in total on weekends on in the region of 90 min-2 h on 3 weekdays. If you have more time, great, because the more time you have per week to train, the more competitive you will be – or the more comfortable the ride will be, depending on your goals. With more training time available, your training isn't that different, you just do more of the same, although that in turn means you will be able to spend more time at higher intensities closer to race-day.

To give you an idea of the range, one of the top 2005 Epic riders, Shan Wilson, trained about 30 h/week on average, with a maximum of 44 hours when in full flight, while down in 2<sup>nd</sup> last place, one half of Team Olympic Cycles-Bike Addiction rode about 6 hours/week for 2 few months, while the other rode about 9 hours on average, and 15 at most. This shows several important things: mainly, you shouldn't be panicking if you haven't done much yet and you want to just finish the race, although 6 h/week training makes for a supremely uncomfortable Epic and is a thoroughly bad idea. Next, despite what some would have us believe, we are patently not all created equal, so some people need a lot more training than others to get to the same level. Finally, you somehow you need to fit in 10 hours per week at the very least in the last 3 months before the race to finish it without undue trauma, so if you know you can make this time available,



you're going to finish the race unless you crash. If you can do 15 - 20 hours per week and still keep your job/partner/sanity then you're going to have a good ride. More than 20 hours and you're looking to race it, and your job/partner/sanity had better take a number.

Before getting to the specifics of the training, the overall training approach can be determined by a quick look at the demands the race will place on you. We're talking several to many hours per day (four to eight or even more) to cover the 900 km race distance, with a lot, a lot, of climbing en route, for 8 days in a row. With a bit of training, anyone can ride 120 km off-road; the real issues are doing up to 3500 m of climbing en route, and recovering sufficiently to do it all again the next day. Last year it was about 16 000 m in total, that's twice the height of Everest! There is some consolation in the fact that, as a result of the long stages, the average intensity is moderate, although the severity of the climbing means that the intensity is often substantially higher than you'd like. In heart rate terms, this translates into an average of 65 – 75 % of maximum heart rate (mhr) for the longer stages, and in the region of 80-85 % mhr on the steeper climbs, depending on how fit and fresh you are.

Using an approximate distance of about 900 km and a short last day of about 70 km means the average daily distance is 120 km. Using last Epic's total altitude gain, and ignoring the last day, means the average daily altitude gain is in the region of 2 000m, with a day or two around the 3000 m mark! Now you have a clear picture of what you're facing. You have 10 h to complete stages up to 120 km long and with 2000 m or more of climbing, giving a minimum required average speed of 12 km/h, which gives you a way of comparing your form. The training prescription is given in hours to accommodate your speed and preference of riding on the road or mtb, but you still need to keep an eye on your speed, or distance covered, bearing in mind your minimum required average speed of 12 km/h. This average speed will of course be a lot tougher on the days that you have more climbing, but at least you now have an absolute measure of what is required of you come race day. After all, if you're diligently doing 6 h on an easy route on the weekend and only covering 60 km, then you're going to be in real trouble.

In simplest terms then, unless you have ambitions to race the Epic, the ride itself, and therefore the training, is all about endurance and strength and day-to-day recovery at these intensities. Let's face it, whatever your aspirations for the race are, and whatever you do, it's gonna hurt, so be prepared for that. This means you need to extend yourself in training, and to experience some hurt then, otherwise you'll struggle more when it comes to pushing through the inevitable pain in the race.

Now that you have an idea of the requirement of the race, you need to check what sort of shape you're in, so that you can set goals and adjust the training. You needn't rush off to the nearest sport science lab to get tested, as two simple field tests will tell you what you need to know about your heart rate and fitness. There is no use in using the formula 220-age to guess your mhr, as it can be spectacularly wrong. Rather pick a steep hill that you can sprint over in about 20 seconds, and hit it at a steady hard pace, and then sprint over it as hard as you can. The next test – definitely not during the same ride - is a hard effort to measure your

race-pace hr and speed. Pick a loop that you reckon will take you about an hour to cover if you ride pretty hard but not flat out, and which includes a substantial but not monster climb. A road or mtb course will do but a mtb course is much better. Pace yourself according to your recently-determined mhr, riding at a steady pace of close to 75 % mhr. Record the distance, average speed, and average hr, and a rating of how hard the ride was, using a 10-point scale. You now have your mhr to set your training zones according to the table below, and an idea of your racing speed, which you can compare with the required minimum average speed. These are used to set your training zones and track your fitness over the coming months.

Ideally, your Epic partner should do the same test ride, so that you can measure your performance relative to each other, which will help with the training approach and pacing in the race. After all, if one rider is substantially stronger, then it doesn't make sense for that rider to thrash it in training and widen the gap. Depending on how hard you intend riding the Epic, you can expand this approach to doing a flat time-trial and a hill-climb time-trial at full pace, i.e. a steady 85 – 90 % mhr, as this will accurately show any differences between you and your riding partner, and show where the focus of the training should be for the next few weeks before repeating the test. When it comes to deciding the approach, it's simple really - the weaker climber needs to do more climbs and the weaker flats-rider needs to do more riding on the flats. Still, any differences in fitness should soon become apparent when training together without doing a time-trial. You should repeat this ride every month weeks to track your form, and it gives you an idea of what sort of pacing is reasonable come race day, because it's very easy to get carried away and ride way too hard on the first day, particularly in the first few hours, which can come back to dog you later in the race. Even with the best of intentions and most modest of goals, friendships will be severely tested if one partner starts clobbering the other, so to reduce strife, it's best to be as closely matched as possible. If not, you need to ride at the speed of the slower rider – unless you're very different in your climbing and flats-riding, in which case the climber can press on and let the stronger flats-rider partner catch up on the flats. This is as important at the outset as on race day, because you should rehearse this approach in training so that you don't lose each other in the race.

Having established that the biggest requirement for the Epic is time in the saddle, from now until the end of the year you simply need to do as much low to moderate-intensity riding that you can comfortably complete per week. This means you need to adjust the intensity so that you recover completely on a week-to-week routine. At this stage, it's almost impossible to do too much training provided you follow this rule – some riders are already doing 25 hours per week, but they have serious ambitions. Below is the overview of the progression in your training from now until race-day, after which there is a detailed weekly plan showing what your training should look like. The riding is prescribed according to time, rather than distance, to take into account different fitness levels, and so that you can ride road or mtb. There is also considerable variation in the duration and intensity, so adjust to fit your legs, using the guidelines above.

## Summary of training zones

This table describes the training zones and the main training goal of each zone. Although the full range of workouts is presented in this table, there is limited training at higher than 85 % mhr, as that is usually for fitter and more competitive riders, but at least you can now see what sort of workouts you can include in your training if you have the fitness and the inclination. There is a massive range in the duration of the rides, but that also depends on your fitness.

Zone	Description	Heart rate (% of max)	Workout Duration and type	Purpose
1	Endurance	50 – 60	1 – 8 h. Includes up to 2h strength work (50 – 75 rpm)	Recovery from hard rides; Easy endurance training
2	Endurance	60 – 75	3 – 8 h. Includes up to 2h strength work (50 – 75 rpm)	Improves endurance, strength, and recovery from moderate-intensity rides. Improves climbing
3	Tempo	75 – 85	1 – 4 h. Includes up to 90 min strength work (50 – 75 rpm)	High intensity endurance training, serves as preparation for race-pace interval training, improves climbing, race-pace endurance and day-to-day recovery from racing.
4	Threshold	85 – 95	Mostly done as interval training of 5 – 15-min reps for a total of 60 -90 min per session, 1 – 2 x weekly. Done more on hills than on the flats.	Increases threshold power, which improves climbing and race –pace.
5	High Intensity	90 – 95	1 – 2 min reps for a total of 10 - 20 min (depending on fitness) per session, 1 – 2 x weekly.	Improves race speed and climbing for shorter climbs
6	Sprints	n.a.	10 s: 20 reps max 15 s: 20 reps max 30 s: 10 reps max	Improves sprinting power for getting over short steep rises and responding to attacks.

### **Non intensity-specific workouts: strength and leg speed**

These workouts are done from the lowest intensities up to 85 % mhr, and to a lesser degree during interval training (to prevent injury from the double stress of high power and heavy gears). Should you head for the gym to improve your strength? Absolutely not, unless you're recovering from an injury that needs specific rehabilitation, or you are a track sprinter. Strength training for road cycling is best done on the bike. There is absolutely no point in doing 60 or so repetitions of a heavy weight in the gym when the demand on your legs is thousands of repetitions at a moderate resistance. Yes, strength training in the gym makes your legs stronger, but the strength gains from riding at lower cadences will be greater than doing gym work. In addition, doing your strength training on the bike recruits the muscles in the exact same way they are used for cycling, while weight training does not. On-the-bike strength training is done by simply riding in heavier gears, or more accurately put, at lower cadences. If you have the time and inclination, you can do upper-body strength work in the gym to your heart's content, as your back and shoulders will take a hammering in the Epic. Pilates or a gym program that works on your upper body is also a good idea. I also strongly recommend that you ride at least one of the weekly rides off-road to help your back, shoulders and neck adapt to the demands of off-road riding.

Strength training is best done by riding intermittently at 65 –75 rpm sitting, and 50 – 60 rpm standing. If your bike computer does not measure cadence, you can get a good idea by counting the number of revolutions in 6 seconds and multiplying by 10. A good structure is to ride one minute out of every 5 alternately sitting at 70 rpm and standing at 55 – 60 rpm, with the cadence between these strength-training efforts anywhere between 85 – 95 rpm, as you prefer. As you get stronger, you can increase the low-cadence duration to 2 min out of 5, and eventually 4 min out of 10, as legs allow. "As legs allow" is a crucial proviso to much of the training prescription, because ultimately, your legs are the boss, so you adjust the training to fit your legs, rather than smashing them just to do what's listed in the program. Eventually, you should be able to roll along at a comfortable pace in a heavy gear for hours, although of course only during training to build strength, never in racing.

Leg speed is very similar in the approach, except the cadence here is 95 – 110 rpm. This may sound way too fast, but you will often have to ride at higher cadences, so you need to be able to pedal smoothly at this cadence, and without your legs feeling ripped off. It is very important to be able to ride at higher cadences, because the higher the cadence, the lower the force per pedal stroke, which reduces fatigue. This is crucial in the Epic because of the length of the event: because the climbs are very long, many riders revert to grinding a heavy gear, which is a very bad idea, as it just wears you out and puts you at increased injury risk. It is quite an acquired skill to climb at high cadence, but it is very important, so work hard at sticking to the specified cadences in the program. You should include some high-cadence riding in all your rides, because it is one of the cornerstones of your training.

Finally, you need to be able to switch between high and low cadence and high and low power, both to reduce the fatiguing effect of changes in pace, and to reduce the chances of cramp developing. Cadence variation happens anyway as a result of the varying terrain, but you should be aware that you need to be able to switch between spinning and pushing a bit, so that you include it in training.

### **Cross-training and racing**

What about doing other forms of exercise to improve overall condition? The short answer is, stick with some upper body work and, at most, 2-3 short easy hike/runs per week. You will inevitably spend a fair bit of time pushing up steep climbs in the Epic, so running is not really necessary; rather do some hilly hiking, but these should not reduce the time you spend riding. As far as racing is concerned, you can do as many races as you like, as long as you don't race your legs into shreds, and you stick to the guidelines on limiting your exercise as required to ensure you recovery completely from week to week.

### **The logbook**

A program can only have its maximum effect when used in conjunction with a logbook. A logbook is not simply a record of the training that you did so that you can brag about your distance ridden, it is a vital partner to your program, because without it, you have no means to systematically evaluate your condition and the effectiveness of the program, which means you cannot refine the program to get the most out of your training. You need to record all the usual data such as the route, distance ridden, average heart rate and speed (and altitude gained, if you have an altimeter), but also, how you felt during the ride, as this final bit of information enables you to interpret the results of the ride properly. After all, it makes a massive difference whether you're feeling nothing or flogging yourself to do the suggested training, so this needs to be recorded. Use a 10-point scale to record how hard you found the ride, where 1 is the easiest, and 10 the hardest. Tracking this score alongside an average speed and/or heart rate will tell you a lot about how you're feeling. The point of this scale is not so much the score you give yourself, but as a relative indicator of how much effort it is to a certain amount of training, so what you should be watching is an increase in average speed, and a reduction in your rating of how hard that ride was. Also bear in mind that your hr will drop for a given speed as you get fitter, so you can also track the relationship between average speed and average hr of your rides to get an indication of your increased fitness. This is where repeating your initial ride will give you a good idea of where you are. Add any comments about the ride, for example if it was very hot or cold or windy, and how you felt at the end of the ride.

### **Overtraining**

If you follow the guidelines on monitoring yourself and adjusting the training load accordingly, you should never be in danger of overtraining. Still, you should be aware of the symptoms that show that you could be on your way to overtraining. It takes a lot of hard training and ignoring your body to become over trained – it is not an overnight thing but a gradual decline. This can easily be avoided by tracking your performance, because the surest sign of overdoing it is a gradual and persistent drop in your performance, usually seen as a drop in your average speed, together with a drop in your mhr, and the sessions will feel harder.

Don't rely on your resting hr to show you that you're tired, because it is not a very sensitive indicator of fatigue or developing overtraining: if you are tired from the preceding day's training, your resting hr may be normal, but you'll find it difficult to ride at the usual intensity. If you do a really big ride, your hr may well be elevated the next day, but that would indicate nothing more sinister than a temporary hangover from that ride. Still, it does tell you to take it easy for a day or two, but your legs will tell you that as well. So, listen to your legs rather than simply going by heart rate. By the time your resting hr is elevated for several days in a row, you are already in serious trouble and in need of at least several days' complete rest – until your resting hr and your overall vigour returns to normal.

### **Cadence sensor and altimeter**

These tools will ensure you finish the Epic! Run, don't walk, to your nearest bike shop and install a cadence sensor if you don't have one, no argument, and if you want to train really effectively, get an altimeter as well, as altitude gain is what the Epic is all about, so knowing how much climbing you're doing is an invaluable training tool. If you think an altimeter is over the top, then get maps of your hilly training routes so that you at least have an approximation of the vertical gain on your rides.

### **Training Overview**

This summarises the progression in your training from now until race-day, to give you an idea of where you should be, so that you can tailor your training accordingly. The program assumes that you have been riding for about 6 hours per week for the last 4-6 weeks, which is the minimum you need before slotting in with the suggested training.

#### *December and January*

Regardless of your current fitness, this period is all about endurance and strength work, mostly at easy to moderate intensity (55 - 75 % mhr), for 4 – 5 days per week, depending on your capacity. Most of the riding is done on flat to easy undulating terrain, but you should also do one to two hilly rides per week, climbing at up to 80 % mhr. Do one hilly ride in the midweek, and the other on the weekend. Distance is the most important thing here, so ride as much as you have the time for, and as easily as is needed to ensure you recover fully on a weekly basis. This is usually the period that people have the most time to ride, so increase the distance, as well as number of consecutive days. By now you should be riding Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday and Saturday-Sunday. In January, strength work and total vertical gain become increasingly important. The intensity stays mostly moderate to accommodate the increase in distance, although you should be riding the hills harder, at 80 % mhr, and with longer periods at 85 % by the end of January.

### *February and March*

The critical period, because if you don't at least get the distance in for these 8 weeks then you're risking not finishing the race. However, you if you get to the beginning of February with not much more than failed resolutions to show for January, you can still rescue your race – simply start with January's routine. For the fitter riders, the average intensity doesn't increase much compared to January, but the weekend rides become longer and hillier, with the hills ridden at 80 - 85 % mhr – which sounds very high, but even modest climbs will pretty quickly drive your hr this high. As a bare minimum, you should be doing 12 hours per week by the start of February, and 15 hours per week for the whole of March. By the end of March, you need to be able to do a 20-h week, riding 5-6 days per week, including 6 h on two consecutive days at an average of 65-70 % mhr, including about 2500 m of climbing on both of those days, and still feel like you could do another 4 hours the following day.

### *April*

You can still do lot in April, but you can just as easily do too much. It's better to do a few sessions fewer than you could have, than to realize on day 1 of the Epic that you did a few more than you should have. After all, unless you only started training in March, there's not much fitness that can be gained here. The first week is similar to the training you did in late March, while the last two weeks before the race are really just to relax and rest up for the race, so that you are 100% ready in race day.

Finally, despite the directive of moderating the training to ensure complete recovery from week to week, it is still a very good idea to take regular easy weeks to ensure that you don't inadvertently slip into overtraining. Take every 4<sup>th</sup> week as a recovery week, in which you ride no more than 75 % of your usual time, and do all the weekdays at a steady comfortable pace, end reduce the hills on the weekend. If you do plan to do a monthly follow-up test of your fitness as described earlier, then do that on the Saturday, when you'll have your best legs of the week.

## **Weekly Training Schedules**

### **December**

Because you need to adapt to multiple days of riding, the best arrangement is to ride Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday and Sunday as your departure point. At this stage, it's better to spread your time over 4-5 days per week, than to cram your quota in on Saturday and Sunday, as this risks injury and overtraining. The rides should leave you only slightly to fairly tired – if you're smashed at the end of a ride then you need to do reduce the intensity or distance next time out. The same applies if you do not recover completely from week to week. Ride at 55 – 75 % mhr, depending on the terrain and how fresh you feel, although your hr will inevitably be higher than this on the climbs, so stick to easy climbs that you can ride at no higher than 80 % mhr, but don't get spooked if you occasionally see 85 %. The main thing is, don't force it. This is usually the best time of the training – easy riding, just increasing your endurance, enjoying the sights and discovering new routes.

At this stage you could do all your weekday riding on the road, although you should do at least one off-road ride per week, especially if you're relatively new to mountain biking; Saturday is ideal. The upside - or downside, depending on your time available and fitness - of riding off-road is that it is usually harder than riding on the road, so you might have to do a shorter ride to compensate if you're off-road. Remember, your legs are always boss over the program, not the other way around. The final words on this period are, if you have the time and your legs are up to it, ride further, not harder.

The main focus is distance and strength, with a gradual increase in climbing during. Include regular technical rides to improve your skills, and push it a bit on the downhills to build confidence and skill – and to have fun! After all, what's the point of slogging uphill if you're not going to have any fun on the way down. Practice riding no-hands to improve your balance and handling, and to learn to relax your upper body while riding to save your neck and back. Being able to ride no-hands also enables you to stretch while riding – which you should do frequently.

If you can comfortably ride for 10 hours/week on easy undulating courses, then it's time to increase the climbing. If not, stick with increasing your endurance on flat to undulating rides. Ideally, you should be doing about 12 h per week now, but given that you can usually do the most training in late December and early January, it's ok to capitalize on the extra time now to do a lot of riding, even 20-25 h per week, specially if your time will again be limited in February and March, but **ONLY** if your legs can cope with this volume. You will not lose the benefits that you gained by doing huge distance now, partly because it takes less training to maintain a level of fitness than to get there in the first place. Use the extra time available to travel a bit to different locations for your rides, so that you don't get bored from doing long rides on the same routes all the time.

If you are planning on doing huge volume over the holidays, then spread the hours a bit more evenly over the days, drop the intensity as required, but still keep two big climbing days per week – up to 1500 m each – but not on consecutive days unless you are already really fit.

Monday: Rest.  
Tuesday: Recovery ride, 90 min, flat route, no higher than 60 % mhr.  
Wednesday: Hilly ride; 2 h at 60-70% mhr mostly, including an hour's climbing in total at 75 - 80% mhr and at 85 -90 rpm.  
Thursday: Strength session: 2 h at moderate to brisk tempo pace on a flat to easy undulating course at 70 – 80 % mhr, including 45 – 60 min of strength work as described.  
Friday: Rest or a loosener spin of 60 min at no higher than 60 %  
Saturday: 3-5 h, 55 – 75 % mostly, but include long climbs at a steady 80, occasionally 85 % mhr, at lower cadence (seated at 75-80 rpm and some standing at 60 rpm) to increase your strength. By the end of December you should be able to comfortably climb 1500 m at close

80 % mhr during this ride – not that this means it should be easy, rather that you should be able to do it without being smashed afterwards.

Sunday. 2 – 4 h, slightly easier than yesterday, 55 – 70 % mhr, 85 – 95 rpm mostly, on an undulating course, with a total of 750 m – 1000 m climbed en route. Ride further rather than harder if you have the time and the legs.

## January

It's more of the same as December, with the main difference being an increase in the climbing, and the total climbing is more important than the intensity at which you do the climbing. The intensity, as indicated by hr, doesn't increase much, but your speed (and therefore distance ridden) will have increased, so there is a progressive increase in the training load. Again, there is a big variation in the duration of the weekend rides, but this is to accommodate your routine – ride further if you have the time, and drop the intensity as required. If you don't have that much time, ride at the higher end of the range specified, but always bearing in mind you need to recover fully on a weekly basis. The target duration is 12 - 15 h per week, and ride Saturdays and Wednesdays off-road, and Sunday as well, if you're up to it. Because your weekday time availability is unlikely to increase, the increased time is managed by riding for longer on the weekends.

Monday: Rest.

Tuesday: Recovery ride, 90 min, flat route, as easy as you like, and definitely no higher than 65 % mhr.

Wednesday: Hilly ride; 2 h at 60-75% mhr mostly, including an hour's climbing in total at 80 % mhr, up to 85 % occasionally, at 85 -90 rpm.

Thursday: Strength session: 2 h on a flat route at medium tempo pace, 70-75 % mhr, including 60 min of strength work, bearing in mind you need to have recovered by Saturday.

Friday: Rest or loosener spin of 60 min at no higher than 60 % mhr.

Saturday: 4 - 6 h, 60 – 75 % mostly, but include long climbs at a steady 80, occasionally 85 % mhr, at lower cadence (seated at 75-80 rpm and some standing at 60 rpm) to increase your strength. By the end of January you should be able to climb 2000 m at 75 - 80 % mhr during this ride, but you should be pretty tired by the end of this ride.

Sunday. 2 – 4 h, slightly easier than yesterday, 55 – 70 % mhr, 85 – 95 rpm mostly, on an undulating course, with a total of 750 m – 1250 m climbed en route. As with December, ride further rather than harder if you have the time and the legs.

## February

Again, there's no radical difference from one month to the next, as the progression is that you will be riding faster at the same hr, and recovering better from the harder rides. The most important aspects remain the total distance climbed, and total distance ridden, while the intensity at which you climb remains the same as previously. However, the time available to train might be less than in December and January, in which case

the average intensity should be slightly higher, so you need to adjust to fit your schedule and recovery. The pattern is two consecutive hard days, twice weekly, separated with easy riding to ensure complete recovery from these double-dose rides. As before, your guide to how much you can do should do is you need have recovered substantially by Saturday, and recovered completely by Wednesday. The target duration is 12 - 15 h per week; more time is a bonus. If your weekday time is limited, you can do as much as 10 h on the weekend, and then just ride at easy pace - up to 65 % mhr - during the week. As before, do Wednesday and Saturday off-road, and Sundays if your legs allow.

- Monday: Rest.
- Tuesday: The weekend dose means you won't have recovered fully by Tuesday, so this is just a recovery spin to ensure you're 100% for Wednesday and Thursday's rides; 90 min on a flat route, as slow as you like, and no higher than 60 % mhr.
- Wednesday: Hilly ride; 2 h at 65-76% mhr mostly, including 75 – 90 min climbing in total at 80 % mhr, up to 85 % occasionally, at 85 -90 rpm, with a fair bit of riding done standing at 60 rpm, to finish fairly tired at the end of the ride. Total altitude gain should be in the region of 1000 m.
- Thursday: Moderate-effort 2h ride of 65-75% mhr on an undulating route, 85 – 95 rpm. Ride some of these small climbs (a minute at a time) quite hard, so that your hr reaches 85 % mhr by the top of the climb. Total altitude gain should again be in the region of 1000 m.
- Friday: Rest, or dead slow recovery spin of 60 min at no higher than 60 %.
- Saturday: 4 -6 h, 55 -75 % mostly, including at least 2 h of climbing on long climbs at a steady 80, occasionally 85 % mhr, at 80- 85 rpm or more, with minimal standing, as this will tire you out, but stand on the climbs for short periods to stretch. By the end of February you should be able to climb close to 2500 m at 75 - 80 % mhr during a longer ride of 6 – 7 hours.
- Sunday. By this stage your recovery should be such that despite feeling tired at the end of yesterdays ride, you should have recovered quite well by Sunday. This means you should cope with 3 - 4 h at 55 – 70 % mhr, but mostly about 60 %, at 85 – 95 rpm mostly, on an undulating course, with one long climb of 20 min, giving a total of 1000 m climbed at the beginning of the month, and up to 1500 m by the end of the month.

## March

The critical month. By now you'll have a good idea of your form, specially if you've been tracking the altitude climbed. The altitude climbed continues to increase, as does your average speed during the rides at the same hr as previously, although the total riding time does not increase that much. Still, you should barter or bribe your way to being allowed to do at least one mammoth ride of 9 h and 120 km including 3000 m of climbing, so that you have that reference point to draw on during the race. Do this ride in the last week of March – this should be on Saturday the 1<sup>st</sup> of April - ! this is no April fool's ride, as you will get a massive physical and psychological benefit from doing what amounts to the hardest stage of the Epic. Often, it is the experience of having done something similar that gets you through an effort you could not have imagined. It

might seem like overkill to do a stage simulation in training, but after all, this stage will be a lot harder when it is done in the Epic, as there it will be done with a lot more kilometres and climbing in your legs than in your hardest week's training, so it is a very good idea to finish your training with a monster ride. For this ride, the intensity is not that important – you just need to know that you can do it in the time allowed. You should ride at least Wednesday and Saturday off-road, or, if you're well-conditioned to off-road, ride Saturday and Sunday, and if you're really going well, you should ride at least one week on Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday.

- Monday: Rest.
- Tuesday: The weekend dose means you won't have recovered fully by Tuesday, so this is just a recovery spin to ensure you're 100% for Wednesday and Thursday's rides; 90 min – 2h on a flat route, as slow as you like, 85-100 rpm, and no higher than 60 % mhr.
- Wednesday: Hilly ride; 2.5 h at 65-75% mhr mostly, including 90 min climbing in total on longer climbs at 80 to 85 % mhr at 85 -90 rpm, with a fair bit of riding done standing at 60 rpm, to finish fairly tired at the end of the ride. Your target altitude gain is 1250 – 1500 m.
- Thursday: Moderate-effort 2h ride of 65-75% mhr on an undulating route, 85 – 95 rpm, including strength work for 2 min out of every 5 as described, for a total altitude gain of 1000 – 1250 m.
- Friday: Rest or loosener spin of 60 min at no higher than 60 %.
- Saturday: 4-6 h, but it really should be 6 h, at an average of close to 14 km/h and at 55 -75 % mostly, including at least 2.5 h or 2000 m of climbing on long climbs at a steady 80- 85 % mhr, mainly in lighter gears, i.e. 80 -85 rpm or more, including frequent standing for a minute or two at a time. By the 1<sup>st</sup> of April you should be able to do a 9 h ride, covering very close to 120 km and climbing very close to 3500 m at a steady 75, up to 80 % mhr during the climbing, which should leave you very tired by the end.
- Sunday. By this stage your recovery should be such that despite feeling tired at the end of yesterdays ride, you should have recovered quite well by Sunday. This means you should cope with 4 h at 55 – 70 % mhr, at 85 – 95 rpm mostly, on an undulating course, including one long climb of 20 min, giving a total of 1000 m climbed at the beginning of the month, and up to 1500 m by the end of the month.

## April

With three weeks to go it's time to consolidate, which means easing up on the total time ridden. You need to reduce the proportion of high intensity riding as well, but you still need to do some hard riding. The last three weeks are critical in that you can easily do too much, but you need to keep riding to maintain your form rather than losing some hard-earned form by resting too much. Provided you have followed the guidelines on regulating your training so that you don't get to this stage feeling drained, you can quite safely – and

should – keep up the riding in the last 3 weeks, because too much resting will leave you feeling sluggish at the start of the race.

#### April 3 –9

A difficult week, because you can still benefit a lot from some hard training now, but only if you're still fresh, but you could just as easily overdo it now if you've been head-down and hammering for the past few weeks. Still, with a two-week taper to race-day following this week, you can afford to really lean on the pedals a few times. At this stage, you should have developed a good feeling for what state your body is in and therefore how much riding is appropriate. So, by all means do some hard riding, but drop the volume to about 75 % of your usual training.

Monday: Rest.

Tuesday: Recovery ride of 60 min, flat route, 60 % mhr,

Wednesday: Hilly ride; 90 min at 60 % mhr mostly, including 10 x 2 min efforts along the way at 85 – 90 % mhr on short steep climbs, seated at 85 – 90 rpm.

Thursday: Easy ride of 90 min of 60 % mhr on a flat route, including a mixed bag of 5 and 10-sec brisk fun sprints along the way.

Friday: Rest or loosener spin of 60 min at no higher than 55 %.

Saturday: Off-road, 4 h, 55 -65 % mostly, including about 1 h of climbing (or 750 m) on long climbs at no more than 80 % mhr, at 85 rpm, as well as 10 x 1-min climbs at 85 – 90 % mhr.

Sunday. 3 h spin, road, on a flat route with short climbs, at 55 – 60 % mhr mostly, including 500-750 m of climbing on short climbs at no harder than 75 % mhr on the climbs.

#### April 10 – 16

The training is now done, all you need to do is easy riding to recover from any residual fatigue, while still doing very limited high-intensity riding to preserve your speed. For the less competitive riders, only doing steady-pace easy riding will not result in any drop in performance, so if in doubt, do less, but it is important to keep up the number of rides, so that you keep the rhythm of day-to-day riding. Your total riding is now less than 50 % of your usual riding.

Monday: Rest

Tuesday: 60 min loosener ride, 60 – 70 % mhr on an undulating ride, with a few 10-sec sharp accelerations en route.

Wednesday: 2 h tempo ride, 70 – 75 % mhr on an undulating route, with 4 short climbs of 3 min each at 85 % mhr en route.

Thursday: 90 min moderate ride, steady effort on flat terrain at 60-70 % mhr, including some brisk 30-sec accelerations en route, to finish feeling good.

Friday: Rest

- Saturday: 2h min very comfortable ride, mostly flat terrain, 55 – 60 % mhr, but with 20 min of climbing in total at about 80 % mhr, to finish feeling very fresh.
- Sunday: Rest, or, if you have the legs, an easy recovery ride of up to 90 min, as slow as you like, on a flat route, with some fun 5-10-sec easy sprints en route.

April 17 – 23

Final Week! Now it's just about staying loose. It's much better to keep active than to rest completely, otherwise you'll feel sluggish at the start. Fitter riders will need do as much as 5 h in the final week to keep up their rhythm, so don't be afraid to do a bit more riding if you feel better for it, but don't overdo it – by the end of the week you should be just about pawing the ground with excess energy, so don't blow off too much steam during the week. None of this riding needs to be done off-road, so you have a few days to get that final service done AND take it for a test-ride to make sure all is as it should be.

- Monday: Rest.
- Tuesday: 60 min easy ride on a flat route at 60 % mhr, but include one 3-min climb at 80 % mhr, all in light gears, as well as a few 20-sec easy sprints, seated, reaching about 80 % mhr.
- Wednesday: Rest.
- Thursday: 45 min easy ride, no higher than 60 % mhr, with 5 x 10-sec easy accelerations, not sprints. .
- Friday: Depending on what you prefer, rest or do a loosener ride, although a loosener is better than total rest; a 20 min spin at 55-60 % mhr with a few easy 5-sec accelerations will do it.
- Saturday: Race starts!