

Prepare for an endurance race

From bike set-up to what to eat, here's how to get mind and body in shape for enduring hours in the saddle.

A 24-hour solo race is the ideal way to test your skills and fitness, allowing you to push yourself to the limit within a relatively safe environment.

How can you prepare yourself for a whole day in the saddle? Here are a few top tips that delve a little deeper than your average racing advice.

BODY AND BRAIN TRAINING

You may think that to complete a 24-hour event you need to practise riding all day, but if you can ride for six hours non-stop, the remainder is mostly mental. To ride for six hours, your body will be conditioned for fat-burning and long-distance riding, so the real challenge becomes a mental one.

Having the mental strength to carry on isn't easy to practise, but not sacking off a ride because it's raining/too cold/too windy/you've no kit ready is a good place to start.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

If you're new to endurance racing, supplementing nutrition products with real food is the way to go. Keep a constant supply of easy-to-digest carbohydrate sources going in throughout.

If you're craving eggs or chicken at 3am, you likely need protein. If you want something sweet, you may be low on carbs. Decrypting the information your body gives you isn't always straightforward. Carb-loading is a complex grey area; shovelling plates of pasta in the night



before a big race is not carb-loading and will bloat you.

BIKE AND KIT SET-UP

Try an ergonomic-style grip, or failing that, something fat and soft. Your hands and arms will take a beating, so do what you can to ease the pressure. A large-volume tyre will also help with comfort.

Ditch any unnecessary weight on the bike – you don't want to be carrying superfluous bits for 24 hours. Whatever changes you make, don't leave them until the night before.

LIQUID REFRESHMENT

While a hydration pack might be king on the trail, water bottles are the best choice for a lapped endurance race: they're easier to refill and change on the go, and you can see exactly how much you're drinking. Tubes, puncture kit and multi-tool can all be carried in a rear pocket or strapped to the bike.

It's a lighter, simpler solution and keeps your back cooler at the same time. If you're tackling a point-to-point challenge, you might need the extra water-carrying capacity of a bladder.

YOUR PIT AREA

The secret to a good solo race is a good team. All the top racers will have helpers in the pit area who are as experienced at supporting a race as they are at riding one: they provide moral support, keep track of your nutrition and hydration, give updates on your progress, keep you motivated when you start to doubt yourself – and make or break a race.

Give your team a plan with notes about what foods you like, an idea of what you want to achieve, and bike measurements, such as saddle height, suspension set-up and tyre pressures.

Make sure they're prepared as you won't be able to tell them when you're riding.

CLOTHING CHOICE

Layering is the best method. Use shorts and a jersey as a base; then, include extra items such as arm warmers, knee warmers and gilets, which are quick and easy to add or remove.

If it's a wet race, waterproof shorts are a godsend. Having a wet backside is a quick way to get saddle sore.

TOP 24-HOUR EVENTS TO CONSIDER

24 Hours of Oak Valley, Grabouw/Elgin, February
Not for the sprinters – an 8km lap with 260m of ascent means just rolling for 24 hours will see you climbing four to five vertical kilometres...
Dirtopia, 021-884-4752

Ride 24-hour Southern Skies, Parys, April
Flat, fast and festive; Free State hospitality meets multi-lap mayhem.
Attie Koekemoer, 082-335-3358

The Vlei 24-hour MTB, Gauteng, August
Deep in the heart of Jozi; hard, fast and singletracky, and a heap of fun.
Wendell Bole, 082-900-0749

Trans Baviaans 24-hour MTB Challenge, Willowmore to J-Bay, Eastern Cape
230km, one go, no laps, just Cape nature at its best, and a couple of hundred equally mad guys to ride it with.
Elmarie van der Walt, 083-508-9642

The Munga, Bloemfontein to Stellenbosch, December
Mad dogs and mountain bikers meet the Karoo sun, in December, for a 1 000km non-stop, first-team-home-wins-Eight-Million-Rand adventure.
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