

Forward Motivation

A PRO'S TIPS FOR GETTING ON YOUR BIKE THROUGH THICK AND THIN

By Marla Streb



*Editor's Note: This is an excerpt from Marla Streb's recently released book, *Bicycling Magazine's Century Training Program: 100 Days to 100 Miles* (Rodale Press, 256 pages, \$14.95).*

SELF-HELP

There are really only a few people in the world who do exactly as they want, when and where and how. Children under the age of 4, for example. Rap stars and the Dala Lama. The rest of us do those things that we have to do pretty much from some sense of fear.

We go to work from fear of losing that job if we take the day off. We file our taxes because we know what will happen if we don't. Everyone fears the IRS.

As a pro rider, I'm terrified by the possibility that if I slack off for a day, my competition will get a leg up on me. Maybe you think the same. Or that you should ride lest your bad HDL will creep up and you'll drop from a heart attack, or that you'll never be able to fit into that Donna Karan pencil skirt that you just bought. Perhaps you'll get your ride in because you're terrified of the ragging that your riding buddies will give you if you miss the group ride. Maybe you're afraid of looking at yourself in the mirror that night as you brush your teeth before bed, knowing that you didn't make your ride that day. Fear can be a big motivator for getting on your bike, but I don't think it's the best.

Fear works. No doubt. You might be thinking there are more positive motivators out there, like guilt and remorse. But better still are a road map and your training plan, and the mantra, "I'm going for a bike ride this morning! Yes!" You gotta say that to yourself a few times until its meaning makes you smile: a bike ride. It's healthier to be positive. If it's cold and miserable out there, I assure myself that I'll feel great and vindicated once I start sweating. I tell

myself once again, the hardest part is getting out the door.

This is not a robotic step class, one-two, one-two, up-down, up-down, in some expensive sweat club. This is a bike ride. Freedom. And speed. And the outside with its shapes and colors, smells and sounds that give rise to the thoughts, observations, and amusements on the inside. So real you can choke on it if a wet bug smacks you in the teeth. Spread that road map out. See on which roads you have chugged along before in a car, and choose one to take now by bike, and expect to be surprised by the

longer than any ride to date? Maybe you'll be a little late for work, but as long as you get your stuff done by the end of the day, who cares. There will be some pain, some heavy breathing, but you are on a bike. Stare at the check mark and exclamation points just beside yesterday's training ride. And the check mark beside the day before that, and so on all the way to Day 1. You want to give yourself another check mark, don't you? A gold star for today? Don't you?

Even though I'm a pro and despite being paid to ride, I don't ride because I get paid. I ride my bike because it's the best part of

Enlisting the aid of your partner can be another whole book. But let's face it, if one wakes early, that means the other is waking early, too. Maybe not happily. You have to keep that in mind. If your training means a change in your eating habits, it's so much easier if your partner also adopts the new menu. If that long weekend ride requires the support of your partner in the family sag wagon, you better be prepared to return the favor with a dinner and a movie afterward.

In a perfect world, the person who shared your bed would also share your century riding lifestyle. And your partner may, but not necessarily to the same degree. But more likely, you will be the only one in your house training for a century. Be positive that down the road, that may change as your craziness becomes catching. The world is largely imperfect, and even if you both ride, one is likely stronger or faster. One might have a lighter load at work, making it easier to put in the time on the bike. You may be able to squeeze in your riding in the morning, your partner during the afternoons.

If you're training solo for a century with the blessing of your better half, you may find that the daily give-and-take on the small scale isn't sufficient. Consider a give-and-take on the large scale. That's basically the arrangement that Marc and I have come to. He supports my little happy bike riding, and I support his sailing, where we have to hand-steer in the cold rain for miles over long passages.

SOME LITTLE TRICKS

Whatever arrangements your household has agreed upon in theory, there will be some practicalities that will have to be worked out. Getting out of bed is just the first step.

It's All Downhill after Getting Out of Bed

If you're the one for whom the early morning alarm bell tolls, try placing the

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difference. On your road of choice in a car, the only part of you that's alive might be your ears filled to the brims of your pinnas with the cacophony of the radio. In the car, you shuffle your zombie feet a little bit. One hand is dead on the wheel and the other crawls around looking for something to do while the world whizzes past on the other side of the safety glass. The only time your heart jumps a beat is when a jolt of spilled hot coffee galvanizes your lap like a bolt of electricity zapping some dead frog's legs. On your bike, this is a different road. The power plant of your own body is building this road with each pedal stroke. This road can take you through a world that is not artificial, or a shadow, but a world that is made live by the exertions of your own creation.

What is the plan for today? A 30-mile loop? Some sustained efforts, maybe in duration

every day. Sometimes even a pro can lose track of that; that's why I know it can be even easier for a guy like Dave to stay in bed longer than he'd like to.

There are a couple of other tricks to get you out of bed and onto your bike in the right frame of mind.

THE PARTNER PLAN

If you're sharing a bed with someone, you need to have their support if you hope to stick with a 100-day training plan for a century ride. Good luck trying to hide anything for 100 days from the person with whom you share a bathroom. Give up or put up whatever you have to to win that support. I am lucky to have Marc. He's lucky I let him have a piddly little job as my manager, where he gets to hang out in coffee shops all day.

alarm clock so that it's physically out of arm's reach. Like on top of a dresser on the other side of the room, so that in order to shut it off, you have to climb out of bed and walk a few steps. I find the best kind of alarm is the old-fashioned windup mechanical type, with the two bells on top and the gonging striker. I keep my clock in the sink, and the ring echoes out like a blaring fire engine doing donuts inside my head. The only way to shut it off is to get out of bed, stumble over to the sink, and flail around at the bottom until I can strangle the clock into submission. Then I splash my face with water until I become a civilized person again.

Trip Over Your Stuff

Another motivating trick is the strategic repositioning of my bike. At night I display my bike in a prominent place, so that once I'm awake, I cannot pretend that I don't know I have one. Confronting my prepped and shiny bike first thing in the morning is a big hint that I'm supposed to ride it. I tried leaning it right against the bathroom door, but I didn't consider what would happen in the middle of the night. Marc is a very supportive partner and he said his bruises would heal quickly, but I have since found a more strategic location for my bike alongside the wall right opposite the bed.

The Bathroom Mirror

The bathroom is well known as a place where we confront the naked truths. Since we all have to deal with the harsh reality of the bathroom scale at some point during the day, take the opportunity for a little self-motivation. Hang a poster of someone you emulate, like Floyd Landis, or pin a Polaroid of someone you detest, like that guy on the Merlin who's always decked out in that Motorola kit and only takes pulls during the last half hour of the group ride. You can also motivate yourself with this morning's weight compared to yesterday's by scribbling any change onto a corner of the mirror with a grease pen. Use the mirror. Talk to it while you chew your morning multivitamins. "Today, I am going to be a monster." Make muscles, suck in your gut, and admire the powerful cyclist that you see in the mirror. It sounds silly but it works. I don't use the mirror as a motivator as much as Marc does: When he's training for one of his semiannual personal goals he sticks a small square mirror on the floor. He has the mirror set at such an angle that he can admire his calves as he brushes his teeth.

A friend of mine uses a supermodel calendar as motivation. He only allows himself to turn to the next month when he has finished all his workouts. I've seen him hammering a climb, telling me he wants to get to Miss September. Whatever works is less crazy than simply not trying.

CYCLING IS INHERENTLY A SOCIAL PURSUIT

As far as motivation, your life partner can help with encouragement, but added pressure from that person is not recommended. It's very tricky business. The line between the support from someone you love and pressure from someone you love is a line you don't want to ever be

near. But peer pressure is too powerful a prod to leave unutilized. (In my book), I provide some tips on how to actually latch on to group rides, but for now just keep in mind that riding with a peloton of buddies will probably be the single most significant motivator for riding a century.

Road riding is easier with a group. Physically, that is. The greatest effort a cyclist makes is not the energy transfer between muscle exertion and the drivetrain's forward inertia. The largest obstacle to overcome is not the rider's strength-to-weight ratio, although a high ratio is handy on steep climbs. A cyclist's biggest battle is with an adversary that most everyone would agree is so minute as to be invisible, so weightless as to have no mass, so universal as to be forgotten: air. A rider puts out 30 percent less effort when drafting, which is sticking to someone else's wheel.

THE POWER OF PEER PRESSURE

A peloton primarily fights air pressure better than a solo rider. A riding group puts on its own kind of pressure as well. The peloton exerts a primal pressure immeasurable beyond any scale of foot-pounds. All peer groups do. The power of peer pressure was exacting enough to convince you to get that tribal tattoo on your ankle, persuade you to pierce your nose, or cajole you into going out on that disastrous blind date. But enlistment of peer pressure to motivate you onto your bike is a shrewd move. You'll find yourself scrambling to be on time for the start of a group ride solely because you told some people that you'd show.

The psychology of why peer pressure works can be reduced to two terms: shame and pride. If you have committed yourself to riding with a couple of others, you'll find it almost impossible to avoid them forever if you have shamefully dodged them once. They will hunt you down now that you have revealed a weakness and they want to exert their dominance over you. Your riding buddies with whom you may share mutual friends, common political opinions, educational backgrounds, and a keen appreciation for the finer coffee concoctions are actually a pack of feral dogs. There is the alpha and then a squabbling, jostling, striving hierarchy of everybody else. The exhilaration of pride that you'll feel on the friendly Saturday morning ride when your group works as a team to drop your best friend knows no bounds. You'll see. Group rides are more fun than you can imagine.

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Marla Streb is a U.S. National Downhill, World Cup, and Single Speed World Champion cyclist. She has neatly segued from a promising career as a biomedical researcher into life in the fast trail. Besides her successful career as a bike racer with the Luna Women's Mountain Bike Team, she is the author of two books, "Downhill: the Life Story of a Gravity Goddess," and "Bicycling Magazine's Century Training Program: 100 Days to 100 Miles."

After having her first child this Spring, Streb, now 41, plans to get back on her bike and resume racing.

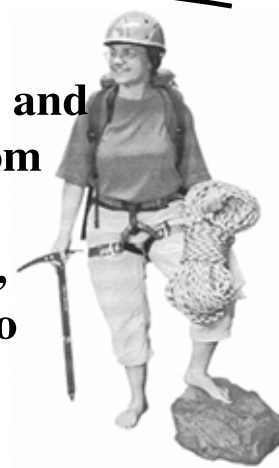
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