

Add Intensity to Your Pre-Season Training Program

As you get closer to the beginning of your racing season it is important that you increase the intensity of your workouts to prepare you for the actual intensity of racing. No matter what type of off-road racing that you do, it is important that you prepare yourself physically to be able to ride effectively and safely for the duration of the race. And, one of the most difficult aspects of training is to recreate the intensity of a race through training.

In this article I will outline some ways to increase the intensity of your workouts by using circuit training. Circuit training is a great method of developing both your muscular strength and endurance at the same time. In essence, you are “killing two birds with one stone”.

Circuit Training

What is circuit training? Circuit training is a type of training where you set up several exercises and perform them one after another with little rest in between. The only rest that you get is the time it takes for you to move on to the next exercise. After doing one set of the 4 or 5 exercises that you choose (a circuit), you take a short rest – 1-3 minutes – then you repeat the circuit. It could be weight lifting exercises, bodyweight exercises, sprints, agility drills, or a mix of any of these together.

Regardless of the exercises that you choose, the main idea is that you limit your rest time between the exercises. When you do this, your body is forced to adapt, and your strength and endurance improve. This not only improves your physical fitness, but it also improves your mental toughness. When you have to push yourself **beyond your comfort zone**, you make yourself both physically and mentally tougher. This will come in handy at the end of a long, tough race.

You can also do this type of training with weights, but remember to use light weights and maintain proper form when you start to get tired. For example you could make a total body circuit using the squat or deadlift, incline or bench press, situps, leg curls, and pulldowns. You could also do separate circuits for upper body and lower body. There's any number of variations to this type of training. Don't forget to work your core or midsection, as well as your arms, forearms, wrists, hands, and grip strength.

Again, the focus with circuit training is to increase aerobic capacity and muscular endurance as well as increase strength. When you use circuit training you are able to combine all of these elements of exercise into one workout. Just be sure to balance your exercises between upper and lower body work to create a total body workout. I would also recommend that you warm up and stretch your muscles before starting any form of exercise. This is important to avoid injury. Ten minutes of light activity such as jogging and stretching should prepare your body to begin the workout.

There are many different ways in which you could set up a circuit, but here are a couple of examples using bodyweight exercises and running:

Circuit #1 - Hill sprints + Squats + Pushups (you can substitute Stadium steps in place of a hill)

- Sprint up a hill (or stadium steps)
- Do 10-20 Pushups (and / or Situps)
- Walk / Jog down the hill
- Do 20 bodyweight squats or Lunges
- Sprint back up
- Repeat for several sets

Circuit #2 – Sprints + Pushups + Situps (you can use a track or run on a grass field)

- Sprint 50-100 yards
- Do 10-20 Pushups
- Sprint back
- Do 20 bodyweight squats or Lunges
- Sprint back
- Do 20 Situps
- Repeat for several sets

You can put together any combination of exercises that you like. You could substitute jump rope instead of running, or jump squats in place of squats, or use all strength exercises. Experiment and create what works best for you. If you are forced to work out indoors because of winter weather, rain, etc., then you can substitute jumping rope for the running and get a good workout.

Circuit #3 – (Indoor Workout) Jump Rope + Pushups + Squats + Situps + Pullups (if you have a pullup bar)

- Jump Rope 1 minute or 100 reps
- Do 20 Pushups (mix in different types of pushups)
- Jump Rope 1 minute or 100 reps
- Do 25 Squats
- Jump Rope 1 minute or 100 reps
- Do 5-10 Pullups (or Towel Pullups)
- Jump Rope 1 minute or 100 reps
- Do 25 Situps
- Repeat entire circuit for 2-3 sets (or more if you want)

These workouts will not take very much time, but you will get a good total body workout from them. Increasing the intensity of your workout through circuit training is an

excellent method of preparing yourself for your upcoming racing season. This is also a great way to train for athletes who do not have much extra time to work out in addition to their riding.

Give these workouts a try as you get closer to your racing season, and you will see improvement in your overall fitness and conditioning. In turn, you will also see your racing results improve.

Pre-Season Training for Motocross and Off-Road Riding

Previously, I have discussed the need for different phases of training when preparing for your racing season. Off-season, pre-season, and in-season are the three most common methods of dividing up the training season.

The winter is usually considered the off-season for many off-road and motocross racers because of the cold and wet weather, and in a previous article, I described a sample off-season type of workout that one could do at home during the off-season. In this article I will go a little further by describing what you should do as you get closer to your racing season, or the pre-season phase of your training.

Pre-Season Training

The major goal of pre-season training should be to increase the intensity of your training to prepare you for the rigors of motocross, enduros, hare scrambles, or any other off-road riding. Before you start this phase of your training program you should already have several weeks of basic training to establish an adequate strength and conditioning base, you should now be ready to embark on a more strenuous training program.

First, we will talk about strength training. If you are currently doing the workout of pushups, pullups, situps, and bodyweight squats that I outlined in the previous article then you should have developed a good strength base. Now I will recommend that you do two things to alter your workout and make it more difficult. First, you need to increase the resistance of the exercises, and, secondly, you should decrease the amount of rest time between sets and exercises. This will help you develop more strength and more endurance in your muscles, and your workouts will increase in difficulty.

How do you add resistance to bodyweight exercises? An easy way is to wear a weighted vest, or a backpack with some added weight, when you do your pushups, pullups, and squats. Resistance can also be added by changing the angle of the exercise. For example, pushups can be done with your feet raised up on a chair or bench. Another great way to do pushups is with your feet on a stability ball and your hands on the floor, or with your feet on the floor and your hands on the ball. Either way it forces your body to work harder to stabilize itself which will develop muscles throughout your entire body.

It would also be advisable to add some different exercises to your program to avoid burnout or boredom. For the lower body you can add lunges or stepups on a bench or stairs. For the upper body you could add one or two of the pushups described above. In addition to situps, you can do leg lifts lying flat on the floor. For a more difficult version of the pullup, you can try towel pullups. Get a large towel, roll it up, throw it over the pullup bar with the two ends hanging down at an equal distance, grab each end tightly, and either hang for time or do pullups. This is extremely difficult, but it is great for

developing your hands, grip, and forearms. Give it a try – this is a great exercise for motorcycle riders.

If you work out at a gym with weights, then you would simply substitute an appropriate weightlifting exercise for the one described above. Just remember that you are training to be an athlete, not a bodybuilder. Those who lift weights should concentrate on athletic movements such as power cleans, push press, squats, deadlifts, bench press, barbell rows, pullups, and core exercises.

For your endurance / aerobic conditioning I would recommend that you continue to run, bike, swim, use a rowing machine, or jump rope. However, it would also benefit you to add more high intensity **interval type** of training to your program. On a bike, or any other machine, you would sprint for 30-60 seconds, then back off for 15-30 seconds, then sprint again. Alternate this pattern for several minutes or for the entire workout. I am also a big advocate of sprinting, especially up hills or stadium steps. This type of high intensity training, with little rest in between sets, is extremely effective in developing strength and endurance in all types of athletes. Keep up your endurance training, but add this type of high intensity training 1-2 times a week for an added boost to your program. Once you do, you will notice the difference in your riding.

Once you decide on your exercises, it's time to set up a workout. Here's a sample workout that would be good for someone who has completed several weeks of basic strength and conditioning as described previously:

Strength Workout - *Keep rest times between sets under 60 seconds

- Jog in place or bike for 5 minutes
- Stretching for the upper and lower body – 5-10 minutes
- Stability Ball Pushups – 4 sets of 10-20 reps
- Towel Pullups – 4 sets of 5-10 reps or hang on for 30 seconds
- Situps – 4 sets of 20
- Leg Lifts – 4 sets of 10
- Stepups on a Bench or Stairs – 4 sets of 20
- Lunges or Bodyweight Squats – 4 set of 10-20 reps

Endurance Workout

- Jog, Bike, Swim, Rowing Machine, or Jump Rope (or any other endurance / aerobic activity) for 30+ minutes, or
- Interval Training as described above, or
- Hill / Stadium Sprints

If you don't have time to do the entire strength workout in one session, then divide it into upper and lower body workouts and do them on alternating days. Strength training should be done 2-4 times per week. Endurance training can be done on the same days or on alternating days with the strength training. Add or subtract exercises according to

your personal needs. If you also like to lift weights, you can include them in your program. Remember - adjust the workouts to work on your weaknesses and maintain your strengths.

Training During the Racing Season

By now, if you have followed an off-season training program, you should be in good physical condition. If your racing season has already started then your strength and conditioning should be much improved from what it was in December or January. In a previous article about pre-season training, I talked about assessing your weaknesses before the season starts. Once you start racing on a consistent basis this process will continue. In fact, the focus of your in-season training should constantly address this issue.

In-Season Training

Once your season starts the focus of your training should be your riding. In order to improve your skills and riding endurance, you should be riding as much as you can during the week before the weekend's race. However, you still need to maintain a regular strength and conditioning program. This is especially important if you do not get to ride much during the week.

Of course the obvious question is – What type of workout should I do? In addition to your riding time during the week, you still need to include some endurance, flexibility, strength, and quickness training. This is a tall order when you are already spending time practicing your riding.

As previously mentioned, your in-season training priority still needs to be correcting your weaknesses. In essence, you need to fine tune your workouts to fit your needs. If you are struggling with your endurance then obviously you need to do some more running, biking, jump rope, rowing, or similar activity. You can either, increase the number of times per week, or up the distance and / or time. The intensity of the exercise may need to be increased also to achieve the desired result.

If you find that specific muscles or muscle groups are tiring prematurely or are excessively sore after a race, then you probably need to work on those areas some more in your strength and flexibility program. For example, if your back is sore then you may need some more stretching of the muscles in the area and some more strength work there.

These are just some common sense ideas, but if you haven't had a consistent training program up until now, you may not have thought much about them. However, the question of training time can also be a problem. Not everyone has several hours a day to devote to riding or training. Therefore, it is imperative that you use your time efficiently. For the average amateur racer I would recommend that you do some physical activity 4-5 days during the week. For example, if you are able to ride two days during the week then it would benefit you to train at least two other (three if possible) days during the week. Even if it is a quick 20-30 minute workout you will get some positive benefits from it. Do this several times a week and you will maintain the higher level of strength and

conditioning that you achieved during the off-season. In fact, if your goal is to just maintain, rather than improve, your current fitness level, it probably won't take much more than a couple of days per week of a good workout program.

What kind of program should I do during my racing season? You need to put together a total body program that stresses working your body as a unit, often called "functional training". This is the type of program that I have written about in other articles. If you train at home without weights you can do the previously mentioned exercises such as pushups (different kinds), pullups, situps, and squats. You can also include sprints, cycling, and jump rope. These are all great exercises that will build strength and endurance. There are many other exercises that you can do without weights.

Circuit training is also a fantastic way to maintain (and even improve) your strength and conditioning during the racing season. Just be sure to mix up the workouts every couple of weeks to avoid boredom and burnout on the same exercises and training program.

The main thing to remember during your racing season is to continue to train outside of your riding at least a couple of days a week. And, be sure to cover all of your bases with endurance work as well as flexibility and strength training. It is important to train the entire body to work efficiently as a coordinated unit to insure that you are improving your physical fitness in addition to your riding ability. Not only will this approach make you a better athlete, but it will also make riding safer for you.

Training for Motocross and Off-Road Riding

If you want to improve your results in motocross, enduros, hare scrambles, or any other type of off-road motorcycle or ATV racing, you need to maximize your strength and conditioning. When you develop a good training program that puts you in top condition, you will ride faster for longer periods of time, have less fatigue, improve your racing results, and, ultimately, have more fun. Improving your strength and conditioning will also improve your overall health, and, most importantly, it will help to prevent injuries.

However, many riders don't train properly, or train at all, other than their riding sessions. As a strength and conditioning coach, and lifelong off-road and MX racer, my goal is to provide you with some strength and conditioning advice that will help you to improve your fitness and strength specifically for your sport.

In fact, my specialty is creating home training programs which will help you improve your strength and fitness without having to go to a gym. Some of you may already go to a gym to work out, which is fine, but there are many exercises and workouts that you can do at home, with little or no equipment, which will give you a great work out and help you improve your strength and fitness.

And, there's no better time than the off-season to start planning a training program to prepare you for the next racing season. So, let's get started!

Off-Season Training

Many trainers will divide up the year into training cycles or phases. The most common phases are off-season, pre-season, and in-season. We will first address off-season training, which is where many of you are at this time of the year.

First, off-season training should be utilized to heal up your injuries and address your weaknesses. If you've been injured make sure you are completely healed before embarking on a strenuous workout program. Be sure to consult a doctor or physical therapist to determine when you can start your training program. Once you are cleared to start training, you need to pinpoint your strengths and weaknesses and set your training goals.

Before designing a training program you should take note of your weaknesses from your most recent races. Was your endurance a problem? Did you get arm pump? Are your legs weak? Is your upper body weak? Are you overweight? Etc. These are the types of questions you should ask yourself when creating a plan for next year's racing season. Once you establish your strengths and weaknesses, then you can design a workout plan that will create a complete athlete.

The first part of your off-season plan should be to establish a good conditioning base which you will build upon as your training program progresses. This is the time to start

with some jogging, biking, swimming, etc. to condition your body before adding more strenuous activities to the program. Before you start any of these activities make sure you warm-up and stretch your muscles to prepare for your workout. This should also be done before you race.

If cold / wet weather limits you to indoor training, then you can use a stationary bike, rowing machine, treadmill, or jump rope. In fact, a jump rope may be the best way to get a good conditioning workout in addition to being the cheapest. Of course, there are many other exercises that you could do, but these are simple and will help you get started.

As far as strength building exercises are concerned, you can start with 2-3 sets of pushups, pullups, squats, and situps in addition to the endurance / conditioning work that you are already doing. Here's a sample beginner's workout that you can do 3-4 times per week to help you establish a good strength and conditioning base. This will help to prepare you for some more intense work to come later.

Beginner's Workout

- Jog in place for 5 minutes
- Stretching for the upper and lower body – 5-10 minutes
- Pushups – 3 sets of 10-20 reps
- Pullups – 3 sets of 5-10 reps
- Situps – 3 sets of 20 reps
- Bodyweight Squats – 3 sets of 10-20 reps
- Jog, Bike, Swim, Rowing Machine, or Jump Rope (or any other endurance / aerobic activity) for 15-30 minutes

This is a simple, but effective program. If you struggle with any of these activities, just do what you can, and try to add a rep or two to each workout. If the aerobic work is difficult for you, start with 10-15 minutes and add some more time at each workout.

Follow this program for 3-4 weeks on a consistent basis, and you will see some positive results. If it becomes too easy for you after a week or two, then add some more exercises, sets, reps, or time to increase the difficulty. If you are already in good shape, then go ahead and add more to the workout from the start.

This type of program should help you establish a good base of strength and conditioning. Bodyweight exercises are a great way to get into shape, and this type of workout will be beneficial to all athletes, regardless of their current level of strength or fitness. Just adjust the workout to your individual preferences and fitness level and you will be on your way. Once you create a good base of strength and conditioning, then you can move on to some more advanced workouts with more resistance and intensity.