



Brick workouts. Hard, physically demanding, race simulating efforts that all triathletes need to do three times per week in order to perform at their best? Not necessarily. Read on and find out how to plan multi-discipline workouts during various times of the season that will help improve your triathlon-specific fitness and have you prepared for your specific event.

Why do “Bricks” need to be incorporated in a training program?

Triathlon is a sport on its own, not just a combination of three separate disciplines, which means that it needs to be treated as such in training by including sessions that incorporate more than one event. The unique thing about triathlon is the transition period that occurs between swimming and cycling and cycling and running. This does not refer to T1 and T2, but the period of time at the end of one discipline and the beginning of the next discipline. Your body needs to be able to effectively and efficiently prepare itself for the next demand and then recover from and forget about the task you just completed. Brick workouts help you get used to this dynamic, and also train your body to handle the aerobic, anaerobic, and muscular demands that you will experience during these important parts of the race.

Brick workouts can accomplish a variety of goals within a training program. As with the rest of your workouts, each brick needs to have a specific goal that corresponds to the phase of training that you are in and targets the physiological system that you are currently targeting.

When should brick workouts be introduced in a season?

Early in your program (the base or foundation phase), your goal is to improve your aerobic capacity, build strength, and work on general endurance in all three disciplines. Bricks during this phase should be focused on long, low-intensity efforts, which keep you well below your lactate threshold, or muscular efforts such as hill climbs with low cadence riding. In the middle (preparation phase) of your program the goal is to improve your sustainable speed or power by further improving your aerobic system and increasing your lactate threshold. Brick workouts during this phase can start increasing in intensity by incorporating race-pace efforts and intervals. When race season (specialization phase) finally arrives, all that is left to do is work on increasing race-specific fitness. Effective brick workouts during this phase of training will be either speed oriented or specific to the demands of your event.

Brick workouts, while they are not specific T1 or T2 practice sessions, can still be a great opportunity to focus on transition skill and proficiency. Working on your transitions across all three of the training phases will make you faster and more efficient in your races.

The following workouts are divided by the phase in which they would most effectively be included in a training program.

Foundation Bricks

- 2-4 hour endurance ride (below lactate threshold)
- Short transition (10 minutes or less)
- 30-60 minute endurance run (below lactate threshold)

- 60-90 minute swim workout
- Short transition (10 minutes or less)
- 2-3 hour endurance ride (below lactate threshold)

- 2 hour endurance ride with 4x6 minute Muscle Tension intervals (low cadence, high resistance, muscular effort, not anaerobic)
- Short transition (10 minutes or less)
- 30-45 minute recovery run

Preparation Bricks

- 1-3 hour endurance ride with 30-40 minutes of Tempo intervals
- Short transition
- 30-45 minute endurance run with 15-20 minutes of Tempo running

- 30 minute cycling warm-up
- 15 minute bike slightly below race pace
- 5 minute running slightly below race pace
- 10 minute rest
- Repeat intervals 2-4 times
- 30-40 minute running cool-down

Specialization Bricks

(sprint or olympic distance)

- 30 minute cycling warm-up
- 10 minute bike at or slightly above race pace
- 5 minute run at or slightly above race pace
- 10 minute rest
- Repeat 2-4 times
- 30-40 minute running cool-down

(1/2 or full Ironman distance)

- 30 minute cycling warm-up
- 30 minute bike at race pace
- 10-15 minute run at race pace
- 0-5 minute rest
- Repeat 2-3 times
- 20-30 minute running cool-down

Brick considerations

Just as with any skill, you should practice the individual components of the whole action until you're competent before putting them together in a multi-discipline brick workout. This suggests that bricks should not be a year-round workout, rather, the earliest they should be introduced is at the end of the foundation or base phase of training, and carried through the racing season.

Multi-discipline workouts are more intense and physically demanding than single sport workouts, meaning that they require more preparation and recovery time. It is important to go into a brick session feeling fresh and relatively well rested. It is an important part of your training and should be treated as such. Similarly, it is important to realize the requirements for recovery following such a workout. Long or intense workouts may require up to 3 days of easier training in order to allow for glycogen replacement and muscle repair. It is safest and most beneficial to include a brick workout, especially a long or intense effort, no more than once per week.

Many triathletes perform two workouts on multiple days of the week. Due to family, work, or other time constraints, it is necessary to complete both workouts in the same session, effectively creating an "unintentional brick". The same guidelines apply to these workouts as apply to your scheduled weekly brick. The longer workout depletes your glycogen stores more, and requires more recovery time. With a break in between normal daily workouts for rest and caloric replacement, each session will be more effective and you may recover from the day more quickly. If a break between workouts is not possible, then decide which workout is more important on that day. If you have a running tempo or intervals scheduled along with a recovery ride, then complete the running workout first to ensure that it is high quality.

In regards to racing, brick workouts are demanding enough that they should be incorporated into your schedule near a race with extreme caution. During your pre-race taper, bricks should be shorter, less intense, and have plenty of rest scheduled afterwards. One effective brick that can be safely included in the day or two before your race is a pre-race effort. A 30-45 minute easy ride which includes 3-4, one minute sprints separated by 5 minutes of easy riding can be followed by an easy 15-20 minute run with 3-4, 30 second surges separated by a few minutes of easy running. This brick will have you rested and prepared for your race the next day.

If you correctly match the type of brick workout to the goal of your current training phase and utilize adequate recovery and preparation methods, you'll be able to use them as great way to boost your triathlon-specific fitness.

CTS is now the "Official Coaching Company" of Ironman and Ironman 70.3 events. The coaching authority trusted by 2008 and 2009 Ironman World Champion Craig Alexander, CTS has a long and successful history of preparing triathletes of all ability levels to achieve their competitive goals. Over the past 10 years, CTS has improved the performances of thousands of triathletes including Ironman champions Normann Stadler, Tim DeBoom, Peter Reid, and Heather Gollnick.

This camp focuses on training for Ironman triathlon distance and will concentrate on tools and techniques for increasing the quality and effectiveness of your training sessions year-round. You will also get insight into the training and racing strategies that helped Craig Alexander and others conserve energy on the bike for their Ironman-winning performances. The camp is two and half days of training and presentations, and is open to athletes of all abilities and experience levels. You will learn the skills needed to produce your best finish at your Ironman race.

The focus of this camp is a reconnaissance of the Ironman Wisconsin triathlon race course. Gather firsthand knowledge of the course, including all the major climbs and descents, turns and water currents. Learn strategies and skills to help you improve energy conservation optimize fueling and hydration, and get two long days in the saddle in your legs and arms to help you prepare for race conditions. This training camp is designed for beginner to advanced triathletes. With small groups and a high coach-to-athlete ratio, this non-competitive learning environment is designed to accommodate individual learning needs.

Camp fee includes entry into the 2010 Ironman Wisconsin Race

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