Finding Time – A Training Guide for Mere Mortals

How many times have you abandoned goals, binned entry forms or missed workouts because you just haven't got the time? Too many! In the age in which we live, life is increasingly hectic and time increasingly scarce. What this means is unless you're an Olympic contender or an obsessive/compulsive workout junkie, training quite rightly ends up playing second fiddle to family, friends and careers. However, what it doesn't have to mean is an end to your goals – because by better utilising your time and understanding basic training principles even we mere mortals can achieve results of which we'd never dared dream.

Finding Time

First things first; if you can't find an hour a day for a sport that you supposedly love then you're either wasting a hell of a lot of time or seriously need to find a life!

Think about it… an hour, 60 minutes, less than 5% of your daily life – that's lunch, the morning commute, your Saturday café stop, Sunday sleep in, Friday drink and summer evenings sitting on the deck. All worthy past times each taking approximately 60minutes, the very same time that too many of us can't find for training.

People talk about time management, but really it comes down to creating some time to manage. Any of the following would free up an hour most days for training, but without sacrificing other commitments. One day a week wake an hour earlier to fit in a workout. One another day get in a workout straight after work before going home. Better still make use of that commuting time by cycling or running in and out of work. Make use of your lunch hours with a workout and make up for the lost calories by snacking throughout the day. On weekends, rise early and get the workouts out of the way before the family even rises and you'll be both more popular and fitter. Heed Steve Gurney's example and have your gear on the car ready to squeeze in workouts in any spare time – for example how many times have you sat on your thumbs in the car while kids are at ballet or car is being fixed. All these and more will free up an hour a day for training. From there it's just a case of saying, "I'm going to reserve and hour a day to do what I want with my life." That might sound selfish, but an hour a day out of 24 – who has the right to begrudge you that!

Finding this hour holds the key to exploring your potential. Whether running, cycling, swimming or kayaking, an hour is the benchmark to good fitness. Being able to train for an hour non-stop generally means you could race for two or three hours non-stop, which depending on how you look at things is anything from an Olympic distance tri to three quarters of the way through a half Ironman or the first day of the Coast to Coast. The point here is that whatever time you can devote to training, the huge mileages you hear aren't the be all and end all of endurance training.

Take the Best of the Basics

OK, so we're found some time for training it's time to look at making better use of that time. For a lot of reasons, making better use of whatever time you have available for training is the first step toward achieving your potential. Sure, you may never have the time or inclination to notch up Cameron Brown-like 40 hour week, but unless you're vying for Cameron's world ranking such huge mileages are neither necessary nor desirable.

We all realise that the elite have special talents, but what's not often appreciated is that an ability to absorb huge training loads is part of that talent. Not many of we mere mortals have the time or could handle the training loads that are the making a full-time professional like Cameron Brown. Fitting in 40 hours of training around our 50-hour workweeks, family and friends would have most of us living life on the edge of injury, illness, divorce and general depression. But by following similar training patterns and making better use of the time we do have, we can come close to being the best that we can be… and you can't ask for much more than that!

While we can't expect to follow elite-like regimes the same physiological principles behind what Cameron Brown does also applies to each and every one of us. Essentially, all he does is a combination of long sessions for endurance, hill sessions for strength and quality sessions to build anaerobic threshold (AT), and structures it all in a manner specific to the demands of triathlon (event length, order of disciplines etc) while allowing adequate recovery. What's so hard about that?

By adopting the meat and potatoes of what elite athletes do we can get the same benefits. In a given week if we do something long, something hard, something hilly and something specific then we won't go too far wrong. Plenty has been written about these things in the past, but what we need to know is how make best use of it.

Making Your Week Work

Athletic development – no matter how fast, slow, serious or otherwise the athlete might be – is dictated by recovery. How much we improve relates to how well we recover – if we don't then we get

injured, ill or just plain tired. As well as an inbuilt ability to absorb huge workloads, most elite athletes have the advantage of not working. As such they recover faster because of the absence of stresses outside training. For most of us though, both the time available for training and how well we recover from that training is dictated by the workweek.

Essentially, you need to structure your week to allow recovery while getting some training. In this instance you need to work with what time you've got. Logic decrees that long sessions are reserved for weekends, because with work, few people have time or can handle tiring long runs or rides during the week. Next, if we're going long on the weekends we need to reserve Mondays for recovery; that's ok, because Monday is usually a hell day at work. Likewise, by the time we get to Friday the workweek is getting us down and we've done a few days training since Monday; so Friday becomes the other recovery day. That leaves Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, which being in the work week are still limited for time; this makes them perfect for AT and hill workouts, although never on consecutive days.

Of course, not everybody works a Monday to Friday, but you can see this regime is easily adaptable. If you have Mondays off work, that's a good day to go long and Tuesday becomes the recovery day, etc, etc.

Shortcuts

Of course, life doesn't always favour routines. How many times has your long run been missed because of family commitments, your lunchtime time trial forgotten because work was hectic, or your three swims a week been reduced to one because the kids were sick? Life has a habit of upsetting even the best-laid plans, but even then there are tricks of the trade that allow the odd shortcut.

For example, what do you do if you don't have time for a long run? You head for the hills! Long runs build muscular endurance via repetition, but hills can build a combination of strength and endurance via resistance that is the next best thing. Long runs on hills are the ultimate!

Hills are also good for replacing hard AT sessions. If you haven't got time to do a full speedwork type session or maybe your training has been interrupted to the extent that you're not ready for hard speedwork… in either case training solidly on the hills is the next best thing. The resistance builds leg strength that will get you ready for speedwork while the effort of the hills produces similar heart rates to speedwork. In short – you're working just as hard, but not as fast. In fact, being that triathlon-type events are more about endurance than speed, many would argue that some hard hills is of more use than fast speedwork.

Another example is trying to fit in training for several disciplines. We've all suffered this frustration; with three or more things to train for one of the disciplines is always missing out. If this sounds like you try combining workouts; e.g: instead of running in the morning then kayaking after work, trying running and kayaking at the same time. You'll save some time by showering only once and have only one workout to organise. What's more, you'll be a step ahead of your mates because you'll be training for race day; after all multisports is about putting together several disciplines all at once. Down in Christchurch it's quite common to see Steve Gurney cycling off into the hills with running shoes tucked into his cycle shirt – and he's the master of putting it all together at once.

Annual Base Plan

While we all struggle to fit our sport into every day life, most of us do actually manage one big goal a year. Every year we scrounge together time for Ironman, Coast to Coast or similar major events. However, once the big race has been and gone, we're back squeezing in a bit of basic fitness around the rest of our year. What many of us miss, however, is that just because we go into maintenance mode doesn't mean we can't still be kicking arse.

"Kicking arse," of course is relative to one's natural ability. The point is that by along with the better planning and understanding of basic principles, we can actually sit back on the training we did for that big annual goal.

It's called a base – all that training you do for a Coast to Coast or whatever – and studies show that you can maintain that base fitness for several months on half the input. Someone like Craig Watson does it on purpose, building up at home in Christchurch during the summer before heading overseas for six months of competition where with racing and travel almost every week he has stuff all time or opportunity for anything but recovering for and from races.

The wonderful thing about periods of hard training is that it develops an aerobic capacity and muscular endurance that can be held together on not much more than the thought of training. What this means is that as well as being a goal in itself, your yearly stab at something like the Tauranga half Ironman should also set you up for the rest of the year.

What we're talking about here is a well thought out maintenance program that sees you racing surprisingly well for as long as it takes you to wrap your mind around another big goal. For some people that could be two years, for others two months, but for most people it's about a year, and all of a sudden you have an annual plan that sees you racing to your potential all year round. (See Table 1.)

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Table 1: **Annual Plan** (*adaptable to any major event in the country.*)		
Month	***Emphasis***	***Training Volume***
1	Major Build Up	50% max mileage
2	Major Build Up	65% max mileage
3	Major Build Up	80% max mileage
4	Major Build Up	Max Mileage
5	Major Goal Race *(e.g: Ironman, CtoC etc)*	Reduce 20% per week
6	Maintenance Training	Rebuild 0-40% max
7	Maintenance Training	40-60% max mileage
8	Maintenance Training	40-60% max mileage
9	Maintenance Training	40-60% max mileage
10	Maintenance Training	40-60% max mileage
11	Maintenance Training	40-60% max mileage
12	Recovery *(followed by next 20 wk build up to major goal)*	0-25% max mileage

Maintenance Training

Putting together major build ups has been written about at length in past issues of this magazine; the focus for this article is on finding time to train and as such the maintenance training part of the annual plan is our main concern. In fact, many of us would be quite happy and race quite well simply by following the maintenance schedule all year round.

Essentially, maintenance training is a cyclical regime that sees you covering the standard principles of long, hilly and hard, but mostly the emphasis is on using the actual races to train. That's right – when done correctly training can be the best sort of training. After the big race you slip into a four week cycle where you train for 2 weeks, taper for a week before a race, take it easy for a week after the race, before going back into the two weeks training for the next race. (See Table 2.)

Looking at the four week schedule you'll see that the long sessions, hill sessions and hard sessions are still in there, but weekly races in the individual disciplines and the major monthly tri-type race is the main focus. Note also that the overall structure is based on recovery from both training sessions and your workweek.

The program will work best when you have a solid base such as you're left with after building up for a big goal. Of course, some of us might never have the time or inclination to build up for something like a Coast to Coast or Ironman. That's ok though, the maintenance training will still work for you because it is designed to get the most out of whatever time you have to put in.

In fact, because the structure of this four-week cycle is based on sound training principles you can use it not only for maintenance training, but also as a blue print for all your training. That's right, whether backing right off or building up for a major event, the structure of the four-week cycle will work for you. Just adjust the total mileage to suit your goals, time and current motivation and you have an all year round plan designed to help mere mortals achieve results of which they'd never dared dream.

Table 2: **4-Weeks Maintenance Cycle** *(The following 4 week schedule is for both swim and kayak triathletes. It is based on the observation that only elite or very committed mere mortals train beyond 15hrs/wk and as such is designed for the keen age-grouper.)*								
E.G: 4 wks	**Week 1** (35% max)		**Week 2** (50-65% max)		**Week 3** (50-65% max)		**Week 4** (35% max)	
	Swim Tri	***Kayak Tri***	***Swim Tri***	***Kayak Tri***	***Swim Tri***	***Kayak Tri***	***Swim Tri***	***Kayak Tri***
Mon	Day Off	Day Off	S - technique	K-technique	S - technique	K-technique	Day Off	Day Off
Tues	S – easy	K – easy	C – Solid	C – Solid	R – Solid	R – Solid	R – easy	R – easy
Wed	Day Off	Day Off	S – solid C/R – hills	K – solid C/R – hills	S – solid C/R – hills	K – solid C/R – hills	S - technique	K-technique
Thur	C/R – easy	C/R – easy	R – relaxed	R – relaxed	C – relaxed	C – relaxed	C – easy	C – easy

Fri	S - technique	K- technique	S – solid	K – solid	S - technique	K- technique	Day Off	Day Off
Sat	C – long	C – long	C – race	C – race	R – race	R – race	C/R – short	C/R – short
Sun	R - long/hills	R - long/hills	R - long/easy	R - long/easy	C - long/easy	C - long/easy	**TRI RACE** *(then re-start 4wk cycle)*	