

This 16-Week Century Ride Training Plan Is Perfect for Beginners



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There's nothing quite like the accomplishment you feel after completing a [100-mile ride](#). And while there's no getting around the [fatigue](#) you'll inevitably face during the event, the more

prepared you are, the less it'll slow you down—and the more you'll enjoy the journey to the finish line.

Enter this 16-week century ride training plan. Four months gives you plenty of time to gradually ramp up your cycling volume, but not so much time that you'll burn out on structured training before your season is over.

Here, we're sharing a “Goldilocks” plan from pro CTS coach [Jeanna Miller](#).

Your 16-Week Century Ride Training Plan

This plan features four rides per week, two days of active [recovery](#) in the form of [yoga](#) or [stretching](#), and the option to include one or two days of [strength training](#). While any of these rides can be completed outdoors or on a [trainer](#), you'll definitely want to ride outdoors enough to feel comfortable maneuvering your bike, so that come century ride day, you're not a safety threat to your fellow cyclists—or yourself.

Who This Plan Best Serves

This 16-week plan is designed for beginner or intermediate cyclists who have no more than six to ten hours available to train, says Miller. Ideally, you'd go into week one feeling comfortable riding for 90 minutes (or 15 to 20 miles) a few times a week.

While it's not out of the question to begin this plan straight off the couch, if you go that route, Miller suggests cutting the ride times

in half for the first month, building gradually from there in order to minimize the risk of overuse [injuries](#) and [saddle sores](#).

Regardless of your fitness level, you should get the green light from your physician before you begin training, says Miller.

How to Conquer the Workouts on the Plan

Interval Sessions

Your weekday rides are generally 60 to 90 minutes and feature different types of [intervals](#). (To dial in your [training zones](#), you'll kick off your training with a field test; instructions on how to execute it are [here](#), but you can also do any [functional threshold power \(or FTP\)](#) test.) While you don't necessarily need to do them on Tuesdays and Thursdays, it's important to put at least one [easy day](#) between interval sessions so you can recover adequately.

You'll see [tempo](#) (zone 3), [threshold](#) (zone 4), and [VO2 max](#) (zone 5) intervals all on the schedule. A workout called OverUnders on the plan requires you to go just over your FTP (105 percent) and just under your FTP (95 percent).

Endurance Rides

The bulk of your mileage is concentrated in your weekend [long rides](#), which are scheduled on Saturdays and Sundays and designed to be executed at an endurance pace, or four to six on a rate of perceived exertion (RPE) scale of one to 10.

Your longest ride tops out at four hours, with these rides scheduled on consecutive days. That means you'll go into your Sunday ride on tired legs from Saturday's ride. This provides the training stimulus you need to [prepare for a century](#), but unlike a monster five- or six-hour ride, it won't leave you so wiped out that you struggle to execute the following week's workouts, says Miller.

If your schedule makes it impossible to fit in one of your weekend [long rides](#), Miller suggests moving your Thursday interval ride to Friday and doing a long endurance ride on Saturday, so you can still take advantage of the training benefits of riding long with some [fatigue](#) in your system.

Active Recovery

If you're pressed for time, it's easy to skip your [mobility session](#)—but the more time you spend in the saddle, the more important it is to prioritize it. While yoga is a great way to fit it in, if yoga isn't your jam, [stretching](#) on your own works, too. “I'm not here to turn anyone into a yogi,” says Miller. The goal is just to move your body in all planes of motion in order to counteract the strains that one-plane repetitive movement and static [upper body](#) positioning puts on your body.

An alternative to blocking out 15 to 30 minutes for stretching is to insert short “stretching snacks” throughout your day. Miller says she takes advantage of short windows of time, like when she's waiting for her coffee to brew or sitting on a Zoom call (with the video off) to [stretch](#), and advises her clients to do the same,

especially if their [mobility](#) sessions aren't making it onto the calendar.

Strength Training

While [strength training sessions](#) are officially optional, unless you're "a super beginner" or you really need the [rest](#), they should be a regular part of your program, says Miller. While resistance training improves endurance and prevents injury, it's also crucial for maintaining [bone density](#), which naturally begins to decline around age 30, says Miller.

If you struggle to make time for it, consider combining [resistance training](#) with a trainer ride. Miller suggests warming up on the bike, doing your strength training, and then hopping back on the bike to complete your ride.

Whatever you do, keep it simple. "You don't need a gym membership," says Miller. A set of [dumbbells](#) or even [bodyweight](#) and 20 minutes is all it takes to get in an effective session.

If you need to shift workouts around your schedule, you're better off doing a lower body session immediately after your Tuesday interval session so that you have enough time to recover before your next hard day on the bike.

Showing up to the start line having logged all (or most of) the workouts on your plan is a huge confidence booster—but to get the most out of those miles, you'll also need to be intentional

about how you approach them. Here are some factors to consider during the months leading up to your [century](#).

“[Sleep](#), rest, food, and [hydration](#) are even more important than putting hours in on the bike,” says cycling coach, physical therapist, and Olympian [Ann Trombley](#). Pushing through [fatigue](#) to complete a workout might be good for your ego, but it’s not good for your body, especially if it becomes a pattern. “If you’re stressed and you’re putting in hours on the bike, it’s only breaking you down,” not building fitness, she says.

Trombley suggests taking an active recovery day (an easy spin or a [yoga class](#)) if you’re experiencing leg muscle [soreness](#) or signs of sickness like sore throat. If, on the other hand, you’re having full body aches, a fever, or any GI symptoms, it’s best to take the day completely off.

Dial in Your Nutrition Strategy

Especially if you’re new to [long-distance riding](#), start experimenting with taking in hydration and calories as soon as you can. While you might not know exactly how a certain drink, gel, or snack will feel on a long ride until you try it, it’s never too early to experiment with different options on your [shorter rides](#). That way, you can at least determine whether you like the taste or if it doesn’t sit well in your stomach, says Trombley.

While everyone is different, under normal weather conditions, you should aim to get in about 20 to 30 ounces of fluid per hour, says Miller. While calorie guidelines have a lot of individual variation, she says a 200-pound person should generally aim to get in about

200 calories per hour during a century. And the longer you're on the course, the more important it is to stay [fueled](#) and [hydrated](#).

Ideally, you'll show up to the start line with all the food and drink you need and a plan for how frequently and how much of it to consume. However, it's always a bonus if you can take advantage of what's available on the course. Trombley recommends finding out which hydration mix and [snacks](#) will be available and testing them in advance, so that if you can tolerate it well, you'll have the option to grab a [bottle](#) or some solid food at an aid station. (And if you can't, you won't have to find out in the middle of the event.)

Keep It Fun

Following a [training plan](#) doesn't necessarily mean throwing joy and spontaneity out the window. After all, "we ride because it's fun," says Miller. All it takes to keep it that way is a little strategic planning.

If you and your partner normally ride separately, ride together at the slower person's pace during your recovery, suggests Miller. Recovery weeks are also a great time to explore new [routes](#), try the same loop in a different direction, or just ride without your [computer](#).

A group ride (which is both fun and excellent practice for riding among hundreds of other cyclists at your century), on the other hand, is a great option for one of your weekend endurance rides.

Make Your Training Course-Specific

You might be [building the endurance](#) to pedal 100 miles, but are you comfortable with the type of terrain you'll be covering and riding in the weather conditions you'll encounter during your century? If not, be prepared to suffer more than you need to.

If you live in a flat area but are training for a hilly course, consider doing some of your workouts on a [smart trainer](#) to simulate the types of ascents you'll climb on the course, or even getting away for a training weekend in a hilly area, says Miller. If you're traveling to a warmer climate than you're used to, she suggests doing your [indoor workouts](#) without your fan or even spending time in a [sauna](#) to get your body used to the heat.

Your [legs](#) might be ready for the big day, but how fit is your mind? You'll inevitably encounter challenging moments during your century—so start the practice of approaching them with the right attitude during training. Instead of beating yourself up when you can't execute as planned, think of those hurdles as an opportunity to build your [mental fitness](#).

Over 16 weeks of training, “one brick at a time, you're making this wall of mental toughness. Each workout won't be perfect. Some will be hard [but] that's where you're building resilience.” says Miller.

When you find yourself struggling to embrace a can-do attitude, she suggests remembering why you decided to [train for a century](#) in the first place. Inevitably, you're going to wonder what made you want to do this, but if you “keep peeling back the onion” you'll find the heart of your [motivation](#)—and that's what you can

count on to keep your will strong, even when your body feels like quitting.