



Effective Training with 'Focus Weeks'

by Coach Ian Briggs

You've made your New Year's resolution and signed up for some of your 2010 races. Now the anxiety starts to set in as you try to fit your tri-training in with the rest of your life. Don't worry, you are not alone! Most athletes have schedules that prevent them from training as much as they'd like, as much as they really need to, or as much as their training programs would suggest. Yet with a clear strategy, you can improve and realize your season goals.

Focus on the time you do have and be realistic. A basic training week might have two sessions in each discipline, two strength/core sessions, a flexibility session and a rest day. With your limited time, it can be hard to address all aspects of your training in a single week.

Instead, you can incorporate "focus weeks" into your training plan. These are specific periods when you concentrate on a particular discipline to boost your fitness and race performance. In order to use focus weeks, follow the steps below.

Step 1: Determine your season's goals

With limited time to train, you don't have the luxury of racing every weekend, so you may only get in a couple of really solid races. Begin your season by establishing your goal races, and rank them as "A", "B" or "C" -- "A" being top priority, "C" being lowest.

Step 2: Establish limiters

Review how you performed last year in your main races. Where did you notice shortcomings in your performance - climbing hills, Bike power, Open water swims – and make a list of all your limiters in these races. Then list the main A events that you have selected for this year in *chronological order*.

Think about the distance, the course, the conditions, etc, and how do they map to your limiters? Place a check mark next to each limiter that applies under that specific event. This will give you a clear picture of which limiters you need to work on for each part of your season.

Step 3: Focus Weeks

During a focus week you will spend about half of your overall time on a particular discipline. So for an



athlete with ten hours a week, a swim focus week could mean five hours of swim work. If your first A event is a sprint triathlon with an ocean swim that has you concerned, you don't need to schedule a run focus week during that particular training cycle.

While each focus week is concentrated on one discipline, the type of work you do is determined by your annual training plan.

During a focus week, you should maintain a basic level of work in each sport. In addition, you should consistently include strength training and flexibility in your training plan. A bike-focus week of four hours leaves you with four hours. With one hour being allocated to strength training and 30 minutes for a quality flexibility session, the remaining 2.5 hours could be split up as a Masters swim session (60 minutes), a steady run (45 minutes) and a brick day (swim 30 minutes, run 15 minutes).

Step 4: Focus Week Rules

Firstly, when planning a particular period of your training plan, start with the run, then bike and then swim. You can enter a swim-focus week a bit tired, as a swim week can be technique focused. A run-focus week when you're tired will cause your form to suffer.

Secondly, focus on only one discipline for a focus week. These are the key workouts you can't miss. Review your limiters and give each workout a specific task: Will you work on technique, group-riding skills, or increased leg turnover?

Thirdly, start easy. Your first focus week may only be a few hours, and build in duration over your training period. Don't stack your focus weeks: Give yourself a break between focus weeks, especially if you are a beginner.

Finally, if you're on a four-week cycle, for example, your first and third weeks can be focus weeks. Remember that focus weeks require a lot of physical and mental energy and you need to have both to complete each week successfully.