

Building aerobic fitness

Training tips from Simon Burden, Active Interest

To complete the challenge it's important to build on your base fitness levels to ensure you are in your peak condition. Read on for tips on how to enhance your aerobic fitness.

Fitness

The Cisco EuroChallenge is a multi-disciplined event and as such you need to ensure that you are aerobically fit for different activities that utilise different muscle groups across different terrains, in varied postures. For this reason we recommend that your aerobic training includes a combination of the following exercises:

- Cycling
- Running
- Swimming or rowing
- Circuit classes or boxercise

Further variety should be added to your training by ensuring that you work at different intensities of effort throughout your training programme. Varying the intensities of your workouts will enable you to build endurance, increase speed, improve overall fitness and reduce likelihood of injury.

Long runs or cycles

These workouts build endurance and increase your ability to conserve and use energy. The workouts should be done at a steady, conversational pace with a perceived exertion level of 6-7 (out of 10) or 60% of max heart rate. The workouts should last between 1-2 hours.

Interval training

This is where hard, intense bouts of activity are interspersed with recovery periods of slower, less intense activity. The following are types of intervals and tips for doing them:

Fartlek – This is common in running, and comes from the Swedish word for speed play. This is an informal, unstructured session where you can change the intensity and duration of your fast bursts by using landmarks such as trees, lampposts, roundabouts etc to run fast between and then drop back down to a steadier pace. This can also be done cycling.

Long intervals – These bursts of speed last for between 3 to 6 minutes at a pace that can be sustained and should be followed by recovery periods of the same distance. The intensity should be a perceived effort level of 8 or 80% of max heart rate.

Short intervals – High intensity bursts of sprint activity lasting between 10-30 seconds accompanied by 1-2 minute recoveries.

Pyramid training – a simple technique to move out of the ‘comfortable’ running or cycling zone is pyramid training. A typical session could be 5 minutes warm up at an easy pace followed by:

1 min hard effort – 8/9 on perceived effort scale (out of 10)
1 min easy effort
2 min hard effort – 8/9 on perceived effort scale (out of 10)
2 min easy effort
3 min hard effort – 8/9 on perceived effort scale (out of 10)
3 min easy effort
4 min hard effort – 8/9 on perceived effort scale (out of 10)
4 min easy effort
5 min hard effort – 8/9 on perceived effort scale (out of 10)
4 min easy effort

Rest and rRecovery

It's important to take into account rest and recovery when creating an exercise training programme. Bouts of sustained exercise place the body and immune system under stress and it's therefore important that you take into account the following:

Rest days – If you are a beginner start with no more than 3 exercise sessions a week with a rest day in between and build up to 5 if you are more advanced. It's important to have a rest day in between sessions of the same activity.

Progressions – In your programme, the duration and intensity of training should increase in 3 week cycles and drop off for the fourth week to allow the body, and mind to recover. Equally don't increase the duration of a long session by more than 10% each week. Increasing distance or speed too quickly significantly increases the likelihood of injury.

Tapering – For an endurance training programme you should include a 7-14 day period where you taper (decrease) the amount of exercise you do in the lead up to the race day. This includes the frequency, intensity and type of exercise. Avoid heavy lifting or strength training in a 4 -6 week period before an endurance event.

Training programme

Your training should be tailored to your current levels of fitness and expertise. However a typical weeks programme should include the variety outlined above:

Week 1						
Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
40 min Fartlek Swim, Run or Cycle	Rest	Body condition/Core Strength Gym session	30 min long interval run or cycle	Rest	1 hour Long run or cycle	Rest
Week 2						
Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
45 min Fartlek Swim, Run or Cycle	Rest	Body condition/Core Strength Gym session	35 min long interval run or cycle	Rest	1.10 hour long run or cycle	Rest
Week 3						
Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
50 min Fartlek Swim, Run or Cycle	Rest	Body condition/Core Strength Gym session	40 min long interval run or cycle	Rest	1.20 hour long run or cycle	Rest
Week 4						
Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
30 min Fartlek Swim, Run or Cycle	Rest	Body condition/Core Strength Gym session	30 min long interval run or cycle	Rest	50 minute long run or cycle	Rest