

“So You Want to Do the Coast to Coast!”

with Michael Jacques

So! You've departed with that \$535, and by now Mr Coast to Coast has confirmed your entry. Unfortunately, from here on in things only get tougher. An event as long as the Speights Coast to Coast offers ample scope to unhinge the fittest of us. For first timers it can be especially gruelling, after all you don't go from cruising around the local park or water front to covering the 239km between Kumara and Sumner overnight. However, whether competing as a team or individual with a little advice and a lot of planning even the most inexperienced athletes amongst us can meet that challenge.

With 143km of cycling, a 26km mountain run, and 67km of kayaking, there is a lot to train for in the Speights Coast to Coast. The first thing though, is to know what exactly you're training for. Ok, sure - you're training for the Coast to Coast. But are you an individual or team? Do you have an understanding spouse? Are you a first timer? Does your job mean that much to you? Are you there for fun, or to race? All these questions and more will decide how much of a commitment your Coast to Coast will become.

If you're new to the sport or simply coming back for more fun then two or three sessions per discipline for a total of eight to 12 hours/week is ample. If you're trying to beat your training partner, improve your time, or slip into the prize list then three or four sessions of each for 12-18 hours will see you approaching 85% of your potential. And if you were wondering about that last 15%, well it requires almost twice as much work and is usually reserved for the elite.

Knowing how much you're willing to put in is one thing, but knowing how to do it is another. The next step then is ensuring that you make the best use of the considerable time you're about to put in.

Understanding Endurance

With three disciplines over 239km, it doesn't require a degree in exercise physiology to realise that endurance is everything at the Coast to Coast. However, what is often overlooked is that regardless of the sport at hand endurance is attained by the same basic principles - stressing the body for continuous periods in a manner specific to the sport.

What this means is a lot of general running, cycling and kayaking, eventually building up to distances involved. Logic might say that you'd just try to do a bit more every week. However, with all that is involved in the Coast to Coast it is not enough simply to go out the back door for another run, ride or kayak.

Specificity

If endurance is everything at Coast to Coast, then specificity is everything to effectively developing your endurance. To understand this, we need an appreciation of how our bodies work. The human body is an adaptive organism with a memory bank. Everything we do is stored in this memory bank. The information is then processed through millions of cells so that the next time we do that activity, whether it be kayaking or macramé, the body has adapted to enable us to do it more efficiently. In regard to multisport, because we become more efficient we burn less energy, which means we do those activities faster and for longer.

The more specific we make our training the more effective we will become at what it is we are trying to do. As well as needing endurance, at the Coast to Coast you must be accustomed to running with legs tired from cycling and kayaking in white water when your co-ordination and character is undermined by glycogen depletion. There are certain techniques involved, such as holding your composure and someone else's wheel when surrounded by 100 not always experienced cyclists, running over rock strewn river beds and cross raging torrents, and handling white water while trying to peel bananas on the deck of your kayak.

In short - with three disciplines to develop and a life to lead as well, it's crucial to make sure your training is specific to the task at hand.

Recovery

So, we have to build endurance in a manner specific to the task at hand. However, hard training alone does not make you stronger or faster. Even more important is the recovery factor.

It comes back to the body being an adaptive organism. When you get the flu the body adapts, building an immunity so that we don't get that flu again. Training is the same; we stress the body with cycling, running and kayaking and it actually adapts to that stress by increasing muscle growth, oxygen uptake ability, and co-ordination.

This adaptation process, however, only works well when the body is allowed to fully regenerate. Ever notice how if you don't rest when you're sick you just get sicker! So it goes with training, if you don't back off, both after hard sessions and after two or three weeks of hard training, then you'll get either injured, overtrained or both. And you don't get fitter sitting in your sickbed watching old Coast to Coast tapes!

Training Schedules

The principles surrounding endurance, specificity and recovery are the corner stones within which we lay down a schedule. From there we need to look at how to apply them.

Run Training

For most people, the Coast to Coast run involves three to five hours of rock hopping, river crossing and hill climbing, with a good amount of rough bush tracks thrown in for good measure. The best way to train for this is to train each of these elements separately, then once a week put them all together. Say you're doing three runs a week; that means one run over rocky river beds, one run on hilly bush tracks, and one run where you bring all this together with a few river crossings thrown in.

Despite all this talk of specificity though, it is both ridiculous and inadvisable for anyone to do three to five hours every time they go for a run. Instead we make up for this with an effort vs distance scenario. The three weekly runs might be made up of one shorter run at faster than race pace, another run of average distance at race pace, and a third longer run of close to the race distance but slower than race pace.

So mixing all this into a running schedule, the shorter faster run could be the hilly bush tracks day. The average length run at race pace might be the rock running day, and for the ultimate in specificity the long run would be the day where we throw it all together.

Kayak Training

Kayaking is both exactly the same and vastly different from running or cycling. Because it is an endurance sport we train with the same principles in mind. However, the first things you'll notice about kayaking are: 1) you need to do two or three times more kayaking than running for the same fitness benefits; 2) kayaking doesn't need anywhere as much recovery as running and cycling. What this effectively means is that you should and can do as much kayaking, for as long and as hard as your sanity will allow.

This reasoning here is that because our arms are amongst the weakest arms in the body, the maximum heart rate we can attain while kayaking is approximately 20 beats lower than our maximum heart rate whereby we would fall over with exhaustion. What this means is that while we might be working at close to maximum in regard to kayaking, we are actually working at nowhere near our true maximum. This means that a kayaker can spend a lot more time training at close to their 'perceived' maximum pace/effort than a runner can. Ask Ian Ferguson - top kayakers train at race pace type efforts almost all the time.

There is more to kayaking than just hard training though. In kayaking, good technique accounts for up to 40% of your potential. It's to do with the efficiency of your paddle stroke, which effects not only boat speed but also how long you can hold that boat speed. Think of it mathematically - if you put in the training without any thought to technique you might only be operating at 60% of your potential. However, do 20% less training but work as much as you can on technique and you'll probably be operating at 80% of your potential.

The first step in developing good kayaking technique is finding out what it looks like. The second step is practising (the adaptive organism theory). Really though, kayaking technique needs an article of its own. But for the time being, in order of operation the basics are:

- 1) Reaching every stroke as far forward as possible.
- 2) Sinking the blade completely into the water.
- 3) Simultaneous pushing and pulling the paddle.
- 4) Keeping the immersed blade as close to the boat as possible.
- 5) Keeping your pulling arm as straight as possible.
- 6) Using your trunk as well as arms.
- 7) Keeping the pushing fist at eye level.
- 8) Pulling the blade up and out of the water when the fist dips below eyes level.
- 9) Once again reaching the stroke as far forward as possible.

So kayak training requires a lot of mileage at solid efforts with continual attention to technique. However, if all you do is solid paddling that's all you'll get good at. The Waimakariri is made up of long stretches of shallow water, some pretty good rapids, lots of swirling eddies, and there's always a head wind. At times you'll have to paddle hard to avoid whirl pools, at other times you'll have to balance your boat while you try to eat. So the specifics go beyond merely fitness..

The best way to prepare for these situations is to paddle them. Train in shallow water and head winds, and if you can't try an old bike tube around your kayak will provide similar resistance. Put some hard surging into some of

your sessions for both fitness and to prepare you for the same on race day. And train with food, not only to work out what you want to eat on race day but also to work out how you're going to eat it without falling in.

Of course, the best way to train for Coast to Coast would be to paddle a lot of rivers. But that's not always practical or possible. If you're short of good rivers head for the sea. A rough sea is just as good for your co-ordination, and because there's no following water it's actually harder training.

Cycle Training

With the bunch riding effect and no major hills, cycling is the least demanding element at Coast to Coast. Having said that it should not be entirely overlooked. Firstly, for the general endurance benefits. Secondly, so your run is not undermined by a body that is tired from cycling. Thirdly, because it takes a certain amount of practice to get used to riding alongside 100 others at 40+km/ph.

Cycling requires a little more training than running for the same fitness benefits. 90 minutes solid cycling is probably equivalent to 60 minutes easy running. Being an endurance sport though, the principles remain the same - you need some shorter, faster work; some average length work at race pace; some longer easier work; and you need to work in the specifics of the event.

Cycling at Coast to Coast revolves around bunch riding and cycling when tired. Bunch riding can be scary stuff. The pace surges up and down, you easily get a pedal tangled in someone else's spokes, or break too hard and have someone suddenly sharing your space on the road. These scenarios all tend to have a domino effect down the bunch that can see you sharing the road up close with several others. Help however is at hand. Just about every town has a weekend bunch ride where you can refine your skills. Usually it's a longish ride too, so not only do you get bunch-riding practise, you also have company for your long ride.

The last cycle at Coast is tough. You're at your tireddest, there's usually a head wind, and it's all too easy to find your rhythm getting slower and slower. The answer is resistance training and conditioning your body to ride hard when tired. That means riding as many hills as possible, and once a week doing the last 30-60 minutes of your ride as hard as you dare.

Schedules

Having broken down what we need to do, the final step is to combine it all into a training schedule that combines all of the above. Below are examples based on experience and desired input. They assume a reasonable base fitness whereby you have been involved in some sort of sporting activity every second day for the previous six months - going from cold turkey to Coast to Coast is not recommended.

Coast to Coast rookies and anyone with limited time or fitness background would slot into the "Beginners" schedule. The "Intermediate" schedule is suited to anyone with a background in endurance sports and would return 75-85% of potential while still leaving time for a life. Anyone not too concerned with a life outside of searching for their ultimate multisport potential might try the "Advanced" schedule.

Just because you're a Coast to Coast rookie doesn't necessarily mean you're a beginner. Someone from another sporting background might be able to go straight to the intermediate or even advanced programme, especially if they want to be competitive. If time allows, most people should be able to handle the intermediate program. But chose the schedule that best suits your current fitness, available time, and Coast to Coast goals.

Each schedule is based on a 16-week build up. Any given session provides a range as to how much you might do. Start at the bottom of that range, building to the top by week 12, then tapering off by reducing your volume by 20% a week over the last four weeks. The key is line up not only fit, but fit and fresh!

The advanced programme includes weekly cycle/run, run/kayak, and kayak/cycle sessions. Intermediate and beginners would also benefit from these every now and then, after all it's specific to what you've got to do on race day. A race of up to three hours every third or fourth week is perhaps the most specific training of all.

Likewise, the advanced programme includes a weekly cycle, run and kayak sessions of similar, if not longer, length to the Coast to Coast. For peace of mind, experience, fitness and specificity everyone should try this once or twice between weeks eight and 12, e.g: 3-4hr mountain run & 4-5hr kayak.

These schedules also apply to teams. Simply delete the discipline that doesn't apply and replace it with about two thirds as much of the disciplines that do, e.g: intermediate team runners might replace three kayaking sessions with a run and a cycle. Team kayakers shouldn't overlook running, because that 3km run to your bikes is fast and furious.

Lastly, remember the recovery factor. Every third or fourth week, take a few days off and cut sessions by 25-40%. Not only will your training progress faster, but it'll probably save your marriage too.

Sample Training Schedules

	Beginner 7-11hrs/wk	Intermediate 10-17hrs/wk	Advanced 18-30hrs/wk
Mon	Cycle: 60-90min (easy, hills)	Cycle: 60-90min (easy)	Cycle: 1.5-2hrs Kayak: 1-2hrs (easy, technique)
Tues	Run: 45-75min (steady, rocks)	Run: 45-75min (steady, hills) Kayak: 1-2hrs (steady)	Run: 1-1.5hrs (hilly, hard)
Wed	Kayak: 1-2hrs (easy, rough water)	Cycle: 60-90min (steady, hills)	Cycle/Run: 2hrs (half each) Kayak: 1hr (inc 10km TT)
Thur	Cycle: 1-2hrs (steady, hills)	Run: 45-90min (steady, rocks) Kayak 1-2hrs (steady)	Cycle: 1.5-2hrs (hilly, hard)
Fri	Day Off	Day Off	Run/Kayak: 2-3hrs (half each) (run includes strides & rock running) (kayak resistance/technique session)
Sat	Run: 1.25-2.5hrs (hills, rough)	Cycle: 1.5-2.5hrs (hills, bunch)	Cycle: 3-6hrs (steady)
Sun	Kayak: 1.5-3hrs(rough water)	Run: 1.5-3hrs (easy, hills, rough) Kayak: 2-3hrs (easy, rough water)	Run: 2-4hrs (Easy, hilly, rough) Kayak: 2-4hrs (easy, rough water)