

## **Rules for Rookies**

**By Michael Jacques**

**On the roads, trails and waterways of New Zealand we are witnessing resurgence; a new generation of recreational and not so recreational rookies are lining up for their first taste of multisport. If you're one of those rookies, then read on because the next few pages are devoted to you.**

Like anything in life, the first thing you would have discovered with multisport is that there are certain rules to live by. Not your normal sort of rules – indeed, one of the timeless attractions of our sport is that rules and rule makers are few and far between – but rules that when followed will help make your introduction to multisport all the more successful and enjoyable.

### **Walk Before You Run**

The most common mistake made by rookies is doing too much, too hard, too soon. Don't be one of the 70 percent of people who never get past their first month because their body can't keep up with their motivation. You need to understand that your body is an adaptive organism; when stressed – in this case by training – it will adapt to that stress and become better at handling it... but only if the stress is applied gradually.

On top of gradual increases in training, make your training specific as possible. If you're training for the Coast to Coast, road running won't prepare you for running over a rugged mountain pass. Likewise, while cycling by yourself helps you control your effort and develops good fitness, it won't give you the skills you need to ride in bunches at the Coast to Coast. And paddling the local estuary isn't getting you ready for a white water river.

In short, you have to walk before you run, run short before you run long, and run slow before you run fast. And when your body is ready, you then need to do as much as possible in a manner specific to what you'll face in your next race. This applies to all the multisporting disciplines, and for that matter, all forms of exercise.

### **Running**

Running is the hardest on your body. But it is also the discipline from which you'll get the best all round fitness. Running uses more muscles and a higher heart rate than any other sport except cross-country skiing. So when your running is going well the other disciplines tend to go well too.

If you're totally new to multisport, you need to respect running more than any of the other disciplines. For quick running gains without too much injury risk, try to run every second day, using your kayaking and cycling as the day off running.

The absolute rookie might have to start out by walking a minute and jogging a minute, but most beginners should be able to manage 15 to 20min of non-stop running. Then build up gradually by adding 5min every week. If you're the absolute beginner start off with the same 15 to 20min and try extending the run segment of your walk/jog regime distance by 2min every week until you're running 10min non-stop. Then start runs of 15-20min non-stop, adding 5min to your runs every week.

Once you can run 60min your fitness will make fast improvements, but you'll make even faster improvements and have better endurance for longer races if you adding one or two longer runs per week. By long we mean 50 percent longer than your normal runs. So if you are running 60min, your goal is to keep extending one or two runs by 5-15min per week until you get to long runs of 90min to two hours. If you are doing Speight's Coast to Coast, then keep extending one of those long runs until you reach 3hrs about two or three weeks before race day.

## **Cycling**

There's good news and bad news in regard to cycling. It's much easier on your body, but doesn't provide the same general fitness as running. You gain fitness much faster on a bike, but you have to spend almost twice the training time to get the same benefits as running.

With families and careers, most of us just don't have time to do the cycling we need to. The secret, however, is simple. Remember how running provides a superior aerobic fitness? Well if you make running your key fitness tool, you can get by on just enough cycling to attain the necessary muscular specifics and still do pretty well.

Most people adapt to cycling much faster than running. Almost everyone can ride for an hour or more without undue stress. Absolute beginners might try an hour on the flat; others might try 60 to 90min with a few hills thrown in. Hills produce fast fitness results because they work your heart rate and specific cycle muscles at the same time.

Provided you are running three times a week you'll get good cycling progression out of two rides a week. Stagger them so one is mid-week and one is at weekends, with the weekend ride being 50-100 percent longer than the mid-week ride.

Because cycling is easier on the body you can build up faster. Start at one hour and add 15min every week. If you can get your mid-week ride out to 90min and your weekend ride out to two to three hours, you'll be ready for almost anything.

## **Kayaking**

As well as fitness and white water skills, kayaking has a substantial technique element. Whereas running and cycling are perhaps 80-90 percent fitness and 10-20 percent technique, kayaking is probably 60 percent fitness and 40 percent technique.

Kayaking is also the most equipment intensive discipline. Regardless of fitness some boats will enable you to go far faster than other boats. In fact it is very possible for an inferior paddler in a faster boat to beat a superior paddler in a slower boat.

The reason here is water drag. The wider the boat the more drag it creates in the water, but the narrower the boat less stable it is and thus the more skill is involved in paddling it well. Top multisporters such as Richard Ussher paddle boats that most people would fall out of within half a dozen strokes. The top multisporters also use a paddle called a wing or propeller blade, that when used well can add about 5 percent to their speed.

Technical coaching can be a huge help with technique and progressing to a fast boat, but like anything kayaking is a case of practise making perfect. The more time you spend in a kayak the more likely you are to be able to progress technique, skills and fitness at the same time.

In general, two paddles a week will see you right in regard to a basic level of fitness. But if you have visions of moving beyond the beginner and intermediate level, then you'll need three paddles a week just to keep the skills honed to ensure you can stay upright.

Kayaking is like cycling in that it's easier on the body. Most people can potter around for an hour without undue stress. Start out with 45 to 60min twice a week, and then once you're happy at an hour introduce another paddle of 90min to 2 hours. If you can't fit in three sessions per week, build up your paddling to 90min to 2 hours by adding 15min a week.

## **Come Equipped**

The worst thing a rookie can do is kick off their motivation for multisport with ill-equipped gear. That's not to say that you should race out and buy the latest, greatest bike, kayak and running gear. In fact you're better off starting

out with a second hand bike and kayak because just about anyone who lasts longer than six months in this sport ends up upgrading gear because their skills or competitiveness improve.

So your first step in multisport shouldn't be training, it should be spending a few bucks on getting your bike serviced, or making sure the kayak is water tight and the seat comfortable, and maybe buying a new pair of running shoes. It needn't be expensive – a complete rookie could find a sound bike, boat and running shoes for as little as \$1000.

### **Running Shoes**

The secret to running shoes isn't what the shoe has to offer, it's the shape of your foot. Regardless of what's on the market, only buy a shoe that matches the curvature and characteristics of your foot strike

You can match the curvature of your foot by tracing it on cardboard then comparing it to the shape of the shoe. In regard to characteristics of foot strike: most people pronate, which is an inward roll on the foot as it rolls forward. But if the foot rolls inward too much it can cause misalignment of your entire stride right up through your ankle, Achilles tendon, knees and into your hip and spine. Multiplied by 600 strides per kilometre this misalignment can lead to injury problems.

To avoid these issues match the shoe to your foot shape and find a shoe with anti-pronation features. But don't get caught up in the comfort trap. Soft comfy shoes tend to be less stable and break down faster. Select a firm shoe, and when you try it for size use a thicker sock to allow for swelling during exercise. Once you've bought that shoe, take it out for a wet muddy run – it's the fastest way to break in your shoe and mould it even more to the shape of your foot.

### **Bikes**

Bike buying can be tough. If you're new consider a second hand bike so that buying up isn't such a financial loss. Or if you think you're going to be in the sport for a while just buy your ultimate bike and look after it like gold so it lasts a long time.

More than what bike you buy, however, the key to cycling is the bike fit. Good bike fits starts with frame and progresses to the correct foot placement on the pedals and continues up through crank length, seat height, seat setback. But to work all this out you first need to take a measurement in centimetres from your bare feet to your crutch.

Once you have that measurement multiply it by 0.663 – the result is your frame size. If you have longish body and arms then round the resulting calculation up to the nearest frame size.

Once you have the right frame size you start at the bottom and work up. Foot placement is best when the ball of your foot is over the pedal axle. This means adjusting the cleat on your cycle shoes.

Crank length depends on the length of your femur, but generally 172.5cm is good for anyone between 165cm and 185cm tall. Any shorter and think about 170cm, any taller and consider 175cm. Shorter women often benefit from 165mm cranks.

To find your seat height, start by attaching your seat to the seat post somewhere around the middle of the seat rails. Then multiply your inseam measurement by 1.09, with the result being your seat height measurement in centimetres. With the crank arm in line with your seat tube, apply this measurement from the centre of the pedal axle up the crank and seat tube to the top of your seat (use a level to get the top of seat correct).

This is your starting seat height, from which you adjust it slightly to suit. After that you simply select a handlebar stem that allows comfortable reach for both normal riding and aero riding. For anyone between 165cm and 185cm

tall this is usually 90-110mm stem length. Shorter people might go 80-90mm and taller people 110-130mm. Finally, the stem height is usually set approx 5-10cm below the seat height.

## **Kayaks**

New Zealand has been the world leader in kayak technology and there are almost a dozen manufacturers of specialist multisport kayaks. Buying new will typically cost \$2500 to \$4000, depending on the material and model you chose. Fibreglass is cheapest but heaviest, while Carbon/Kevlar is lightest, strongest and most expensive.

Generally the longer and narrower the kayak the faster it is, but also the less stable it is. The best tip you could take here is to find a boat that you can only just paddle without falling in, and then buy a boat that is slightly more stable than that! If you can then paddle that boat for 60secs with your eyes closed then you'll probably be sweet in almost any conditions.

However, your skills will improve so consider buying second hand first so the upgrading isn't too painful on the bank balance. If you are considering events such as the Coast to Coast then err for the longer kayaks because they handle downriver conditions better. For women, however, this probably isn't a great idea because anyone less than 65kg may struggle to control a long boat before the water tosses their lighter weight around more.

Outside of buying a boat to suit your skills, also check out the features such as the seat, strength of the rudder and the foot peddle set-up; these are crucial for comfort and reliability. A seat that can be moved to suit your perfectly is a useful. Some boats can also come with drink systems and bilge pumps installed.

## **Putting It All Together**

So you've been training and you reckon you're ready for the big debut. But are you: do you know the course, have you thought about what you're going to eat and drink, have you practised transitions, have you had your bike serviced, do you know how to change a puncture, have you practised eating and drinking during competition, are you happy riding on aerobars or in bunches, have you practised running on rough ground, kayaking in white water... these are things to consider if you're wanting to explore your new found passion to the fullest... but for now, just revel in your newfound fitness!