

COACH FRED

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How Fast Can I Get Fit?

Q: Well, I did it again. Despite good intentions I didn't ride nearly as much as I intended during the winter. But I'd like to get in shape for a metric century in a few weeks. Is it possible? What should I do between now and then? -- Karen O.

Coach Fred Matheny Replies: First, don't panic. Starting in mid February, you and everyone who had a less-than-productive winter can gain sufficient fitness for the spring's first big event.

Let's say May 1 is when you'd like to ride 60-75 miles. This gives you about 10 weeks to get ready.

Do it by dedicating one weekend day to a long ride. Then consistently increase the length of that ride about 10% each week. Your weekly mileage -- or time on the bike, if that's how you measure -- should increase by the same percentage.

Of course, it can be difficult to make perfect 10% improvements, so it's fine to vary the amount slightly depending on your mood, the route or other factors.

On 1 or 2 days during the week, include some intensity in the form of group rides, intervals, speedplay, hills -- whatever is fun to do without cooking yourself.

Why do I recommend intensity if you're not training to race? If you've been reading this newsletter, you know the reason. A moderate dose of intensity will boost your speed, power and ultimately your cruising speed, making long rides more fun. Would you rather struggle on those hills or spin up with strength to spare?

The good thing about this type of midweek training is that it doesn't require lots of time. Warm up, spend 30-45 minutes mixing in some intensity, then cool down as you spin home.

Important! Every 4th week, cut back your mileage and intensity by about 20%. This helps ensure that you don't overdo it. It helps you recover, assimilate gains and make better progress in the 3 weeks that follow.

By May you should be fine for a metric century. That 62-miler will serve as training for the following long event, and on and on through the season.