

Heavy Cyclists Can Climb!

As a heavier cyclist 5' 11", 171lbs., I've always found climbing to be somewhat of a limiter. With a body fat percentage in the neighborhood of 10%, losing a couple more pounds of body fat may or may not help. If you are genetically predisposed to a more muscular morphology, starving yourself to try and lose 10 or even 5 pounds more could actually hurt your performance on the bike.

Over the years though, instead of seeing my weight as a limiter I have learned to use it to my advantage and you can too.

Tip One: When climbing out of the saddle, get on top of the pedals and behind the bottom bracket when climbing. You must position your body so that the down stroke is almost effortless as you let gravity drive the weight of your body into the bike. Also, be mindful to drive the returning knee up to engage that strong hip-flexor group. You should feel the nose of the saddle gently brushing the inside of your thighs. This saves energy and tends to allow the heavier cyclist to level the playing field for power output.

Tip Two: As a heavier cyclist, you must NOT waste precious energy while climbing. This means you must learn to maintain an even tempo, cadence and pedal pressure with your legs while in the saddle. Increase your tempo beyond your aerobic threshold and it could be all over! Slide back slightly on your saddle and push forward and down then pull back with a melodic cadence. Don't feel you have to react to every jump or increase in tempo from other cyclists. Think of Jan Ullrich or Miguel Indurain as you practice YOUR tempo. Only get out of the saddle when absolutely necessary.

Tip Three: Developing increased oxygen utilization is one component to improving your climbing speed. Help develop it on and off the bike with various sub-threshold and threshold workout sessions on the bike or indoor trainer with higher cadence-higher resistance intervals.

[More on this in a future article]

Tip Four: Maximize your strength and power production by enhancing core stability and leg power off the bike as well as on. By including hill climb intervals into your mid to later season plan at least once to twice per week alternating with off the bike weight bearing work. You must spend time

building a stronger posterior chain system, [back extensors, hamstrings, glutes, transverse abdominus, external obliques and calves] from which drive your leg power and resist the opposing reactive forces produced by your legs.

Heavier cyclists can improve their climbing capacity. With dedicated planning and work, and a thorough understanding of how to overcome this limiter and you will be able to improve upon it.

Understand your limiters and work to overcome them!

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