

Slow Down to Increase Speed on Hills

Introduction

This is inspired by an article on the website www.cycling-inform.com that I read earlier this year. The point of the article is that improved climbing ability requires good technique first.

Basic Principles

Climbing ability is determined by several factors such as our build, our fitness and technique. Our build is largely a result of the genetic lottery for which we can blame our parents. Our fitness is the result of the time, commitment and intensity that we can put into our sport, also not always within our control.

Technique however is something we can work on. So often we are flat-out trying to "go hard" to get to the top of a hill and keep up with the group that we don't think about technique. The tendency especially when we are tired and struggling is to stomp down on the pedals.

The point of the article is that by slowing down we can think only about technique to improve our climbing (and cycling generally). A comparison could probably be made with swimming, where technique and good form is paramount and comes before speed. The following describes the drill that I practice.

The Drill

- It is best done alone or with only one other with a similar goal and fitness level.
- Find a moderate hill of about 0.5 to 1 km in length (say a gradient of 3-4% max). The Summit would be ideal but no steeper. The first hill on the Esplanade heading to Pt Vernon would be a good one initially, as would Boundary Road from the Elizabeth street end
- Warm up first. Get in the small chain ring and find a gear where you can rotate at a cadence of about 75 RPM at a moderate effort. You should be feeling the resistance through the pedals but not struggling.
- **Stay seated.** Focus on staying relaxed and making smooth well-rounded pedal strokes. In particular push the pedals across the top and pull back through the bottom of the stroke. Don't worry too much about pulling the pedal up, concentrating on even pressure through the full circle.
- Stay well back on the seat with your hands loosely on the tops of the bars. Try and maintain a relaxed composure. Keep your shoulders and hips still. If you find yourself rocking your shoulders then change down a gear.
- Think of this as a drill. Practice it whenever you get a chance **so that it becomes instinctive and feels natural**. Muscles develop a memory!

How to put it into practice

Practice it regularly (I make a conscious effort to practice the drill at least once a week for about twenty minutes or so). Forget speed and concentrate on technique. As you increase your cadence up to a more normal speed (say 90 RPM) check that you are maintaining good form.

On any ride when you feel yourself beginning to struggle, perhaps in a head wind or on a hill **concentrate on pedaling technique**. If you find that it is difficult to maintain good form then change down until you get your technique under control then increase your cadence and gearing slowly.