



14 Week 'Zwift Racers' Program

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Who Am I

I am a Level 2 British Cycling Coach with years of experience coaching youth's and juniors to learn to race. I am also a big user of ZWIFT and I organize races on ZWIFT. I also run the THE DARK COACH.COM blog. You can also find me sweeping on group rides like the excellent **The Herd** endurance ride.

Currently the information I offer is free of charge. However if you find my site and training program useful, please consider helping others by donating to Qhubeka.

Qhubeka is a global charity that moves people forward with bicycles in Africa. People earn bicycles through our programmes, improving their access to schools, clinics and jobs.

<https://qhubeka.org/>

If you download my program, please recommend my site THE DARK COACH.COM through Facebook or your social media platform.

Program Basics

This program is designed for moderately fit to very fit cyclists who use ZWIFT on a regular basis. It assumes that people using this program have some knowledge and experience of using ZWIFT, although I provide useful links to help you use ZWIFT.

The program is designed as a 14 week indoor program that can be used to improve your ability to race on ZWIFT or take part in harder group rides as higher average w/kg.

The basic elements of this program:

- A 14 Week Program:
 - Week 1 is designed to baseline your fitness and technique
 - Week 14 is designed to measure your performance over the 12 Week program.
 - Every fourth week or so you will recheck and baseline your fitness.
- There are 4 basic elements of the program:
 - High intensity training.

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- Strength training (off the bike).
 - Endurance training.
 - Practicing ZWIFT racing.
- Warm up, every high intensity session should start with a standard warm-up. You should also use this warm-up before you do the strength training (unless you do strength training immediately after another session).
 - Five or six days a week training:
 - You should aim to train for five or six days week, with at least one day of full rest, off the bike.
 - Two high intensity sessions.
 - Two strength sessions.
 - Two endurance sessions.
 - One ZWIFT race. You do not need to race on ZWIFT every week
 - Strength can be done the same day as any of the other sessions. You can do strength sessions immediately after any session (no need to warm-up again for the strength session).
 - Sessions can be done in any order, on any day you like. The order in which you do sessions each week is not important. However I would advise at least one-day between the high intensity sessions. I would not do high intensity session back-to-back on successive days.

A typical week might look like this

Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
High intensity (1)	Strength (1)	Strength (2)	Rest	High intensity (2)	Endurance (1)	Endurance (2)
		ZWIFT Race			Strength (2)	

However you can mix and match as you like, it does not really matter that much. If you feel tired in a week, you can drop one or two sessions. If you are going to drop one or two sessions would advise dropping the ZWIFT race and/or an endurance session. The HIT sessions will bring maximum benefit.

If you want to do less, drop one strength session and the shorter endurance session and race on ZWIFT every other week.

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High Intensity Sessions

We are going to work on two things in our high intensity sessions:

- Speed (leg speed).
- Strength and power.

These session will really help your ZWIFT riding. The ability to hold high leg speed on ZWIFT really helps you to hold a group and accelerate quickly if there is an attack in a race. Higher leg speed (90-100rpm) induces less fatigue in the legs when doing longer endurance rides.

Interval sessions are described as duration, intensity, and rest. Intervals are grouped into blocks, usually with longer rest periods. The format we will be using to describe interval sessions is as follows

4x1m@105%: 30sRBI: x2 :2mRBB

Read as: Four times one minute intervals with 30 seconds rest between the intervals. Repeat the block of intervals two times with two minutes rest between the blocks.

This means you are going to do two repeats of 1 minute intervals at 105% of your 20 min max effort, 30 seconds rest between the intervals. You are repeating the block of four intervals four times and you will rest 2 minutes between each block. We will talk about your 20 minute maximum effort later.

This interval set looks something like this:

Start Time (minutes)	Duration (minutes)	Intensity
0	1 minute	105%
1:00	30 secs	Very easy
1:30	1 minute	105%
2:30	30 secs	Very Easy
3:00	1 minute	105%
4:00	30 secs	Very Easy
4:30	1 minute	105%
5:30	2 minutes	Very Easy
7:30	1 minute	105%
8:30	30 secs	Very easy
9:00	1 minute	105%

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10:00	30 secs	Very Easy
10:30	1 minute	105%
11:30	30 secs	Very Easy
12:00	1 minute	105%
13:00	2 minutes	Very Easy
15:00	Finish	Warm down

1. Speed

In the speed session we will work with very short intervals, with minimal rest, with a high leg speed. By leg speed I mean high cadence or how quickly you turn the pedals. You should aim to do these intervals at as high a leg speed as possible without bouncing in saddle.

The intensity should be driven from your leg-speed not how hard a gear you are pushing. You should be breathing very hard, but not feeling like you are really pushing a hard gear.

For relatively untrained riders this could be as low as 90 rpm. For most riders 120 rpm should be achievable, for expert riders 200 rpm is not unheard of. A typical session will look like this:

- Twenty minute standard warmup.
- A block of four one minute intervals with 30 seconds rest between intervals. Intervals at highest possible cadence without bouncing. The intervals should be done using a moderately easy gear.
- Two minutes rest.
- Repeat the block of four one minute intervals three more times.
- Ten minute call down.

This session in notation form is:

4x1m@MRPM: 30sRBI: x4 :2mRBB

MRPM is Maximum RPM/leg speed/cadence

You can do these sessions on ZWIFT, but you get maximum benefit if you ride these on rollers. However only do these if you are an experienced and skilled roller rider. Do not try and learn to ride rollers and do these sessions at the same time, you will fall off.

On ZWIFT I would recommend doing these on a flat route with the trainer difficulty set to minimum to remove the impact of gradient. For those familiar with custom workouts, create a custom workout in free ride mode.

<https://zwift.com/news/12975-zwift-how-to-creating-a-custom-workout>

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2. Strength and power

In the strength session, you are aiming to generate intensity through muscular strength. These sessions should be done in a hard gear at a high intensity and lower cadence (80-90 RPM). Typically at 105% of your 20 minute maximum effort. A typical session will look like this

- Twenty minute standard warmup
- 4 minutes hard around 105% of your 20 minute max effort
- 2 minutes rest
- Repeat the 4 minutes hard effort three more times, with 2 minute rests in between
- This will be a total of 4 blocks of effort of four minute intervals with 2 minutes rest between intervals

The session notation form is

4x4m@105% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI:

Read as: Four times 4 minutes at 105% of maximum twenty minute power with 2 minutes rest between intervals. Cadence should be 80-90RPM.

Strength Session

Ok we are going to keep this relatively simple, and I am going to ask you to follow the British Cycling basic strength program:

<https://youtu.be/2mROpewU414>

If you do not have access to basic weights, try this as an alternative.

<https://youtu.be/zTPzazK0IOk>

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ZWIFT Racing

OK so we going to practice Zwift racing. You are going to enter some Zwift races in the right race category. Zwift races have categories A-E based on your FTP which is 95% of maximum power output for 20 minutes. We will talk about this a little later.

The categories in ZWIFT are as follows:

<https://zwift.com/news/12012-zwift-how-to-choose-your-cycling-race-category/>

A = 4.0 w/kg and above

B = 3.2-3.9 w/kg

C = 2.5-3.1 w/kg

D = 2.4 w/kg and below

So how do we find out what your category should be?

First find your FTP using the 20 minute test, I am going to describe this later. Then divide your FTP by your weight. With an FTP of 220 watts who weighs 74kg has a w/kg of $220/74 = 3.0$ w/kg. Which places the rider in ZWIFT category C.

ZWIFT racing is not just about pedaling really hard. There are some tricks and techniques you should practice:

1. All ZWIFT races start hard, be prepared to spring from the start and put in a really hard effort for the first two minutes. You can help yourself by spinning up just before the start so that you have a high power before the race actually starts.
2. You need to learn to put out just enough power to hold the draft in the bunch, this is a real art form. If you can avoid surges in power, unless there is an attack. Often all you need to do is hold the draft of the chasing group.
3. Avoid being on the front of group, but avoid being towards the back of a group in a really big bunch.
4. Learn to use powerups in the best place.
5. If you are going to attack learn the best place to attack:
 - a. Out of a corner.
 - b. Up a hill, or just after the crest of a hill.
 - c. On gravel sections when there is dust to hide your attack.

What I would like you to do is forget results to start with, and really focus on learning the craft of ZWIFT racing. A really good guide to ZWIFT racing from ZWIFTINSIDER is here:

<https://zwiftinsider.com/how-to-race/>

Endurance Rides

I cannot emphasize how important endurance rides are. Endurance rides do a few things for you:

- Promote recovery from your harder sessions.
- Develop the blood capillaries that deliver oxygenated blood to your muscles.
- Teach your body to burn fat as fuel.
- Increase the mitochondria, the parts of the cells that produce energy.

However endurance rides must be done at the right intensity. Most amateur riders ride far too hard during endurance rides. Riding harder than you should does not do much for the benefits listed above and increases fatigue. Riding hard during endurance rides means that you start your high intensity sessions more fatigued in your legs making the high intensity sessions much less effective than they should be.

Make your easy rides really easy and your hard interval sessions really hard.

You should do all of your Endurance rides in Zone 1 or Zone 2. I advocate mostly Zone 1, but other coaches advocate mostly Zone 2. My advice is mostly Zone 1.

Zone 1: is less than 55% of your 20 minute max power (or FTP)

Zone 2: is 56 to 75% of your 20 minute max power (or FTP)

If you do not have a power measurement (most people do in ZWIFT) then use your maximum Heart Rate (see link to guide below)

A guide to training zones is here:

<https://www.trainingpeaks.com/blog/power-training-levels/>

For endurance rides I would aim for:

One 60 minute ride on ZWIFT a week

One 90 minute to 120 minute ride on ZWIFT a week.

I would recommend joining one of the group ZWIFT rides with ride category of D or E. If you are lucky enough to have bigger watts/kg, try a category C ride. The endurance rides I recommend are **The Herd** Rides. They are well managed, low intensity and friendly rides with plenty of banter to keep you amused on longer ZWIFT rides. You can find them in ZWIFT events

<https://zwiftinsider.com/joining-group-ride-race-zwift/>

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Your 20 Minute Power (or FTP)

To follow this program, you need to have a baseline intensity power or heart rate. Also to race on ZWIFT you need to know your Race Category. Some of the training session will specify @105%, which means 105% of your twenty minute average power. More precisely I mean the maximum average power you can sustain for twenty minutes multiplied by 0.95. This is 95% of the average power you can hold for twenty minutes. 95% of your twenty minute power is a good proxy for your Functional Threshold Power or FTP.

1. What is FTP:

A really good explanation of FTP is here:

<https://www.trainingpeaks.com/blog/what-is-threshold-power/>

2. How do you find your FTP or 95% of your twenty minute power?

There are lots of ways to find this out. There are lots of FTP tests available within ZWIFT workouts. But I am going to give a really simple way of doing this:

- Warm up on ZWIFT using the 20 minutes warm up routine (see later in this guide)
- Restart ZWIFT to start a new session and choose a flat course. I recommend the London Classique Reverse course or, even better, the Fuego Flats course on Watopia for this test.
- Ride this course as hard as you can for 20 minutes. Make sure that you start off realistically, do not sprint hard at the start. You need to try and hold your power reasonably constant for twenty minutes. Do not overcook it in the first five minutes.
- After twenty minutes immediately end your session (exit ZWIFT) and record your average power. Your Power will be summarized at the end of the session. This power will be saved in your Zwift activities history, so you can always check it later.
- Restart ZWIFT and do a ten minute call down
- Take the power you recorded and multiply by 0.95 (95% of the power)
- This is you twenty minute power or FTP.
- Divide this number by your weight, in Kg, to find your w/kg and ZWIFT category.

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For Example:

I ride for twenty minutes at average power of 260 watts. Multiply this by 0.95 to get 247 watts. My Twenty Minute Power is 247. This is also an estimate of my FTP. I am 74 kg so $247/74$ is 3.3 w/kg, putting in me just in the B category in ZWIFT.

To use this data to set power in a session, my session calls for

4x4m@105% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI

I will do the 4 minutes intervals at 105% of 247 watts, which is 259 watts

3. FTP Testing on ZWIFT Workouts

Lots of alternative options for testing of your FTP in ZWIFT.

<https://www.bikeradar.com/advice/fitness-and-training/how-to-take-ftp-test-zwift/>

<https://zwiftinsider.com/adjust-your-ftp/>

4. How to do ZWIFT workouts

<https://zwift.com/news/17162-zwift-how-to-your-first-structured-workout>

Warmups

Use this warmup routine prior to every high intensity session, before an off-the-bike strength session, or before a ZWIFT race:

- 5 min light spinning
- 8 min progressive to Zone 5 – gradually increase the effort until reach maximum power output without sprinting
- 2 min easy – to recover from the above
- 2 min to include 3 x 6 second sprints to fully prime all the musculature involved in cycling
- 3 mins easy – to recover from the above before you start your interval session.

You must warm up before an interval session and warmups are really important for racing in ZWIFT.

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The Program

Now for the 14 week program. I will give you the program in three sections. Section 1 describes the overall program; Section 2 will outline a progressive set for the High Intensity Training (HIT); and Section 3 will describe the first week, test weeks and last week.

1. Overall Program

Week	HIT 1	HIT 2	ZWIFT Race	Strength	Endurance
1	Week 1 testing Week				
2	Speed	Strength and power	Optional	Two times a week	2 sessions a week up to 2 hours a session
3	Speed	Strength and power	Optional	Two times a week	2 sessions a week up to 2 hours a session
4	Speed	Strength and power	Optional	Two times a week	2 sessions a week up to 2 hours a session
5	Testing Week		No	One session in week	1 session a week up to 2 hours a session
6	Speed	Strength and power	Optional	Two times a week	2 sessions a week up to 2 hours a session
7	Speed	Strength and power	Optional	Two times a week	2 sessions a week up to 2 hours a session
8	Speed	Strength and power	Optional	Two times a week	2 sessions a week up to 2 hours a session

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9	Testing Week		No	One session in week	1 session a week up to 2 hours a session
10	Speed	Strength and power	Optional	Two times a week	2 sessions a week up to 2 hours a session
11	Speed	Strength and power	Optional	Two times a week	2 sessions a week up to 2 hours a session
12	Speed	Strength and power	Optional	Two times a week	2 sessions a week up to 2 hours a session
13	Speed	Strength and power	Optional	Two times a week	2 sessions a week up to 2 hours a session
14	Final week testing				

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2. High Interval Sessions

Week	HIT 1	HIT 2
1	Test Week	
2	4x1m@MRPM: 30sRBI: x2 :2mRBB	4x4m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI
3	4x1m@MRPM: 30sRBI: x3 :2mRBB	2x4m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI 2x6m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI
4	4x1m@MRPM: 30sRBI: x4: 2mRBB	1x4m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI 3x6m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI
5	Test Week	
6	4x1m@MRPM: 30sRBI: x4 :2mRBB	4x6m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI
7	4x1m@MRPM: 30sRBI: x4 :1m30s RBB	3x6m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI 1x8m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI
8	4x1m@MRPM: 30sRBI: x4 :1m RBB	2x6m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI 2x8m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI
9	Test Week	
10	6x1m@MRPM: 30sRBI: x2 :2m RBB	2x6m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI 2x8m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI
11	12x1m@MRPM: 30sRBI: x1	4x8m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI
12	8x1m@MRPM: 30sRBI: x2 :2m RBB	4x8m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI
13	16x1m@MRPM: 30sRBI: x1	4x8m@105%-115% 80-90RPM: 2mRBI
14	Test Week	

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3. Test Weeks

In Test Weeks, you will do two things, (1) your 20 minute power test, and (2) spin ups to find out fast you can your legs without bouncing in the saddle. These will be two separate sessions. Warm up before each session

- Session 1: Do your twenty minute FTP test according the protocols outlined earlier in the document
- Session 2: 5 minute intervals. Choose a moderately easy gear and gradually spin up your legs up to a maximum duration of 5 minutes. Gradually increase your spin until you start bouncing in the saddle. Once you bounce reduce your RPM/Cadence until you just stop spinning. Rest for 5 minutes and repeat the spin up again. Rest again for another 5 minutes and repeat the spin up again for the third and final time. Record the maximum cadence you can hold without bouncing

In Week one and Week fourteen (first and last week). I want you to do a benchmark time-trial. This will measure f you have improved week one to week fourteen.

- In Week one choose a course a course in ZWIFT that you like that will take you between 45 minutes to an hour to complete
- Ride the course as hard as you can and record your time
- You will repeat the course again in the last week and see if you have improved your time
- Use the same ZWIFT bike and wheels for both tests in Week One and Week Fourteen.

GOOD LUCK