

Ironman Bike Training--How About That Wind-Trainer?

I remember the first time I brought a wind-trainer home. It was meant as a bike training alternative when the weather was bad. For 95% of my rides I would load my bike on the back of my car and drive out to the countryside where there was a wide shoulder and less traffic. Besides, there was no way on earth I would ever attempt to ride in the city. Far too dangerous and not very productive anyway. What's the point when you have to stop every few blocks for a traffic light. As the years passed and the city grew, my favorite training routes became busier and busier. Almost every year a cyclist was getting killed or badly injured out on the highway. It seemed that every year that passed I was doing more and more training in my apartment, logging endless miles on my wind-trainer. Ultimately, something I never thought I would ever do, finally happened. I did all my training for an Ironman on my wind-trainer. First of all let me say that I am notorious for trying radical training methods. My theory is...how can you know how something works unless you try it. For instance, I wanted to see how extreme distance training would help my marathon time. So for several months I kept ramping up my distance until I peaked at around 150 miles a week. In order to do that I ran about 24 hours a week. I did 2 a day training. So often I would run 3 or 4 hours in the morning and then 1 or 2 hours in the evening. At one point I ran 25 days straight. Was it worth it? Well I went to Las Vegas and ran their marathon in 3:03. It was a pretty good time, but I honestly felt that I would break 3 hours. Would I do it again? No. I think it's risky and just asking for an injury and the reward just wasn't there. However, it was in my nature to try. Besides, one day I will be able to tell my grandchildren that I ran 600 miles in one month. Anyway, back to the wind-trainer. My whole point of the run story was to explain my thought process. I was willing to try this radical bike training and give it a test in an Ironman because I was curious if it would really be that different. I'll let you be the judge. I did "all" my training inside. 100% I used a program that slowly built up my distance to "five hours". Or about two and a half movies that I watched while I cycled. I must say that there were many, many advantages to training at home. 1) Saved a lot of gas money. 2) Could come home from work--get on the bike and start training right away. No time lost to loading up the bike and driving one way for 25 minutes and then back. 3) My bike stayed REAL clean. 4) No potholes. 5) No dogs. 6) No cars. 7) No sudden rainstorms. Or in my part of the world--snowstorms. 8) Great for transition training. Bike--jump off wind-trainer--put on running shoes--be running 60 seconds later. Faster than an Ironman race-day transition and great training for what it will feel like. 9) Ideal for interval training. You can gauge each interval exactly. Outside you're dealing with wind and uneven terrain, so each interval is different than the last. 10) You can get the same effect of climbing a big hill by doing low rpm's in a big gear. 11) Flat tire. Who cares? Sit on the couch and change it. 12) Nature calls? The bathroom's never far away. DISADVANTAGES? Sure. 1) If your bike is fancy, you don't get to show it off. 2) It can be boring (unless the movie is really good). 3) You don't learn the small things like drinking and eating while you ride. 4) Seriously, I believe the biggest downside to not getting road miles in is that your bike-handling skills will suffer. Would I suggest trying just biking on your wind-trainer? Well, when I did the race, I was only around 15 minutes slower than I usually was. So really, in the big scheme of things, it didn't make any difference. I would do it again. If you're living somewhere that is just not a good place for cyclists, then sure, don't obsess about it. Just get a good wind-trainer and build yourself a program and go for it. Ultimately, I don't really think it will make that much of a difference come race-day. The one thing I would suggest is maybe in the last month or so of training when you're starting your taper for the big day, get outside and brush up on your bike-handling skills. Six or eight rides should do it. They don't have to be real long. Thirty-forty kms. or so. That should get you ready. You might think this whole idea is crazy, but I promised myself when I first considered building a site for the "new" Ironman triathletes that I would say what I thought--and feel--not what you necessarily want to hear. So you can take it or leave it. I'm just saying.....don't give up on your Ironman dream because your area is not really made for cyclists. By trying it and risking an Ironman race on it, I know you can do it if you choose to, with really very little difference in the final result....

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