

NOT ABOUT MAURICE CHEVALIER

This issue of RaceCenter NW put the spotlight on women's' racing.

Particularly for cycling, some adaptations for women need to be noted for the best performance. The fitting of the bike is sometimes difficult and sometimes not. A major issue is the comfort of the saddle. One cannot take advantage of women's unique staying power in endurance events if the perch on the bicycle is excruciating (as in "stop the world, I want to get off!") Tops on the list of advice is: don't put up with it, do something about it. Shop for the best fitting saddle for you, one that will be comfortable after a three hour bike ride. Its best to assume that most saddles for women were designed by men to sell to women. Everyone needs to be able to pedal for extended periods in a streamlined position & the fit of the saddle is critical. One can even alter an existing mens saddle for comfort simply by pulling back the coverings and contouring the front of the saddle to fit. I have done this more than once & its usually quite simple with a leather covered saddle.

I can recall calling the USCF & talking with the then Women's National Team Coach, Sue Novarra Reber about women's saddles. Her answer to my query was that all her team members rode mens saddles and no one even brought the subject up about any discomfort. Perhaps the longer miles had conditioned the athletes to be comfortable on existing seats. The summary is: if it aint' broke, don't fix it, if it is broke, do fix it.

Hands are sometimes a special consideration with women. Frequent numb hands can be as dangerous as the chronic use syndromes with computer users. For the cyclist, numb hands can lead to serious nerve damage. The immediate usual cause is too much pressure on the heel of the hand. This extra pressure can be from a lack of padding, an extra long stem or top tube on the bike, and/or a saddle that is tipped down. This condition may need multiple remedies such as a new seat, stem, bars, or even a bike change. Older small frames were frequently made with top tubes which were too long. Shorter women with shorter upper body proportions don't fit these bikes unless an extra short stem is used which makes the handling poor. A setup that requires a 65cm stem length should be questioned. An answer can be in changing wheel size from 700c to 26" or even 24". Good handling custom 24" wheel frames are available.

Training for women is largely the same as men- but different & what is to follow is more anecdotal material from experience. Women appear to have a different perception of effort set and do not like the extra heat generated by high leg speeds. Many women cyclists are "stuck" with a mind set which says "if I need to go faster, I'll use a bigger gear". The problem is gaining the extra strength to push the "bigger gear". Former World Pursuit Champion Rebecca Twigg is just the opposite and made excellent use of her leg speed to win hundreds of races. In bike racing, a variety of leg speed is essential. Much can be said about the not flat time trial- the forces on the pedal will vary & the rider who is most efficient will do very well. A higher cadence is a freebie- add 5% to the cadence & the speed will go up 5%. Gearing for the best performance is an individual matter but its not necessarily as high as one would think. The speed for a 53x17 gear on 700c wheels which is an 84.2" gear at 100 RPM is 25MPH.

Heat & the perception of effort can hinder performance greatly. Its probably best to be sensitive about this issue & test it out. A couple of techniques is to make sure that the clothing will wick so that the body will be cooled & then wet down both the front & rear of the jersey & douse the hair. Up to 40% of cooling is in the head-- make use of those forced air vents in your helmet by wetting the head.

The classic cliché' is: If you want to go fast, you have to push a big gear FAST!. Long steady endurance riding will get you to the finish line but probably not on the podium. The ease with which women can handle "fat conversion" when glycogen stores are depleted may be why many

women focus on the endurance portion of training & not on strength or speed. Those slow big gear intervals are just as valuable for both sexes. Specific strength drills are the prescription for mastering the next level of gearing. Long endurance riding makes the muscles more efficient but can take away from strength. Repeated strength intervals at a slow cadence with a huge gear will build the muscle to go faster. These should be short sessions with each effort to failure.

Good luck on your next event!

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