

## Enduring Questions

### How does half-Ironman speed typically relate to Ironman speed?

I don't believe that half-Ironman speed directly translates to Ironman performance as Ironman relies on a completely different set of energy systems, tools and needs. It is an event that requires immense specificity in training, with plenty of focus given to training at or just above the intensity of race day. When athletes transition from half-Ironman distance to Ironman, I encourage and aim for them to maintain their natural speed that has been gained in short course training and racing. You should try not to lose your different "gears" of power or pace. I am always wary of athletes who solely focus on lower-intensity training, and are willing to give away the ability to generate the power and pace required for half-iron-distance racing. The loss of higher power and pace usually indicates accumulating fatigue and a lower performance potential.

### Should you run a marathon before doing an Ironman?

The demands of a standalone marathon bears little resemblance to a marathon following a 2.4-mile swim and 112 miles on the bike—the only similarity is distance covered. I always urge athletes to consider triathlon as one sport, not three individual sports. You have to train to be a triathlete, not a swimmer,



BY MATT DIXON



cyclist and runner. (If there were a single component of Ironman I would encourage athletes to do, it would be plenty of open-water swimming. Most neglect open-water training, then show up on race day anxious about the swim.)

A great reason to avoid a marathon is the extensive specific training that it requires to truly prepare for an effective 26.2 miles, coupled with the recovery needed to restore full health. It is simply not a wise use of your training preparation. Fear drives people to include a marathon, knowing that they "can do it," but to truly establish increased confidence in your preparation you need to have a structured and progressive training plan. The only time you might want to add a marathon is at the end of a season, when you can specifically train for it, but this is for people who really wish to compete in a standalone marathon. Don't expect it to translate to improved Ironman marathon performance.

### What's the best substitute for a long ride when traveling?

The first thing to realize is that there is no direct substitute for an endurance ride, or run for that matter. Therefore, the goal is to do what you can do, which

will help you progress to your goal. While a certain amount of endurance riding is needed, there is no need to try to do it on the road. Your goal is not to accumulate a certain number of long rides; it is to prepare to perform in your event. There are several ways to get there! The key is intensity.

While traveling, it is likely that you will have limited time, and training load is always an index of the volume (time) and the intensity, so if time is restricted, focus on intensity. For my athletes needing to travel, I prescribe short and very intense sessions. Do multiple intervals of 30 seconds to two minutes, with limited rest. You will be operating at a high percentage of max, and the workout will be painful but short. It is by no means a substitute for endurance, but a valuable training tool that accomplishes much in a short time. Once you return from travel and have recovered adequately (a part that many ignore), you can focus on returning to endurance-specific training. **i**

**Matt Dixon is an exercise physiologist, former professional triathlete, elite coach and the owner of the San Francisco-based coaching company Purplepatch Fitness.**