

BODY

NUTRITION + TRAINING + FUEL

Roller Class 101



Roller Class 101

By Rochelle Gilmore

Riding the rollers makes you pedal smoothly, improves your handling, core strength and reaction time. You can do almost any training session on rollers that you can do on a trainer, but with an extra bit of spice. Yet many riders still find the thought of them somewhat daunting. Commonwealth Games Gold medallist Rochelle Gilmore swears by rollers. Here she tells us how to get started and once you've mastered the art, some training plans and tricks to make you a black belt.

Riding the rollers is a vivid memory from my early childhood days. Even as a young BMX'er I was training on the rollers and it was absolutely one of my favorite training sessions! It simply makes my legs feel good, light and fast. Anyone can ride the rollers with a little practice so I'm about to attempt to teach you the ins and outs of this productive form of training.

The photos you are seeing here were all taken at the AIS earlier this year while giving Simon Hayes a rollers lesson. Simon had never ridden the rollers before, but after about 20 minutes he was riding with no support at all. The same will happen with you. You just need to persist and you'll get there.

At my first attempt to ride the rollers it took me a couple of hours of just playing around and persisting until I could actually ride unassisted for more than two minutes. As a youngster, I guess it was much easier learning than it would have been as an adult.

To improve my leg speed, I started training on the rollers with three five minute sessions

Position your bike so that the front wheel is on the top or slightly behind the top of the front roller. Don't be tempted to run a lower tyre pressure. This will make the handling sluggish so you should use the same pressure that you would use out on the road.

a week, before moving onto three 10 minute sessions a week, and finally progressing to consistent 30 minute sessions. As of today 30 minutes is still the most common duration for my roller sessions. And let me assure you that although riding the rollers requires a bit of skill and concentration, it can be much more fun than a workout on a wind trainer.

The best thing about riding the rollers is that you can get fit and achieve a lot in a much shorter time than you'd need on the road. Primarily this is due to not being able to free wheel, roll or use momentum. You are constantly required to keep pressure on the pedals. In addition, you are continuously using your core muscles to maintain balance.

Under normal circumstances, I equate a 30 minute recovery spin on the rollers to a one hour road ride. If it's raining on one of my scheduled endurance training days I will ride the rollers for up to three hours. That's a BIG day - I sleep well after that!

Once you feel comfortable on the rollers (normally after one month) it could be nice to watch the morning news whilst spinning the legs over before breakfast! In addition, I'd encourage you to do another 20-30 minute spin before dinner, as this could aid in the increase of your metabolism.

Now, if I can teach you how to progress to enduring 30 minute sessions on the rollers, you could potentially work up to doing two 30 minute sessions before and after work, let's say three times a week. You'll burn calories, lean up, work new muscles and feel fit in no time. Rollers are much more time efficient than doing two or three hours on the road for general fitness; especially if you are pushed for time due to a busy lifestyle. However, don't expect it to be easy at the beginning. If you give it a go for 5-10 minutes everyday you'll be ready for 15 minute sessions after a week of learning.

Let's Get Started!

Before starting your roller career, the following points are required to optimise your roller riding experience.

SET-UP Roller Length

Put your bike on the rollers and make sure they are the correct length for your bike. Looking from side on, it is recommended that the front wheel's axle sits

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a few centimetres behind the centre of the front roller. However, an experienced rider may have the axle directly over the centre of the roller, although this position could make it more difficult for you to balance and steer.

Roller Position

Place your rollers in between a narrow doorway and line them up so that when you're sitting on the bike, you can comfortably place one hand on the wall or doorframe. If you can't find a narrow doorway then try putting a benches on either side of you at hip level so you can place your hands down if you loose balance. You will crash when learning but the idea is to have support on either side of you. The doorway is a better option because later when you're riding two hands and lose balance you can keep your hands on the bars whilst continuing to pedal. It does however have the disadvantage of being further for your second hand to travel when you first progress to riding the rollers with two hands. However, this way you can begin with two hands on the bars by leaning and flicking your elbow on the doorframe in order to straighten up without letting go of the handlebars. It's also easier to do when you're home alone. The key is to keep pushing on the pedals, never take the pressure off the pedals. Then if you lose balance your front wheel and bike will naturally straighten up.

Gear Selection

It's easier to learn on a bigger gear than a smaller one. Try 53/17 to start with, but be sure to put your bike in the right gear before mounting the bike.

Mounting the Bike

Mounting the bike can be a tricky task, not only while still a beginner but also when you have 10 years experience! To assist with the daunting task of starting your roller riding career the following is a description of the way I'd best suggest you mount your bike on the rollers.

Stand on the right side of your bike. Move your bike to the far left of the rollers and stand inside or just outside the rollers. If your rollers have a grippy surface on the frame for mounting, you could also stand there.

Holding the right side of your handlebar (on the top) with your right hand, click your right foot into your right pedal when the crank is at the bottom of the revolution-perpendicular to the floor. Your left foot should be on the ground facing forward and your body should also be facing forward. The left side of your body should be leaning against your bike's seat tube and seat. Place



your left hand on the wall, doorframe or bench on the left side of the bike. If you're not confident doing all this, then use a step or ask someone to assist you.

Now you're ready to mount!

You're going to stand, step and push up by straightening your right leg. Firstly, hold your right hand tight, lean into your bike with your left ribs, hip and thigh. As you straighten your right leg your body should slide up along your seat tube and seat. Once your right leg is fully extended and you have your balance, swing your left leg over (behind) your saddle and then sit on the saddle. Now, keeping your left hand on the wall or bench, turn your pedals backwards so the left crank is at the bottom of its revolution. Clip your left foot in.

READY TO RIDE

Now we're going to start pedalling!

Pedalling backwards, lift your crank up to parallel with the floor ready to start. Keep your left hand on the wall and steer into the middle of the rollers as you start to push on the pedals. Be careful not to over steer and note that the steering is exaggerated on the rollers. There are two things that are very important whilst learning to ride the rollers for the first time:

1) Keep pressure on the pedals. Don't keep taking the pressure off as you get nervous. Pedal in circles with a good constant speed.

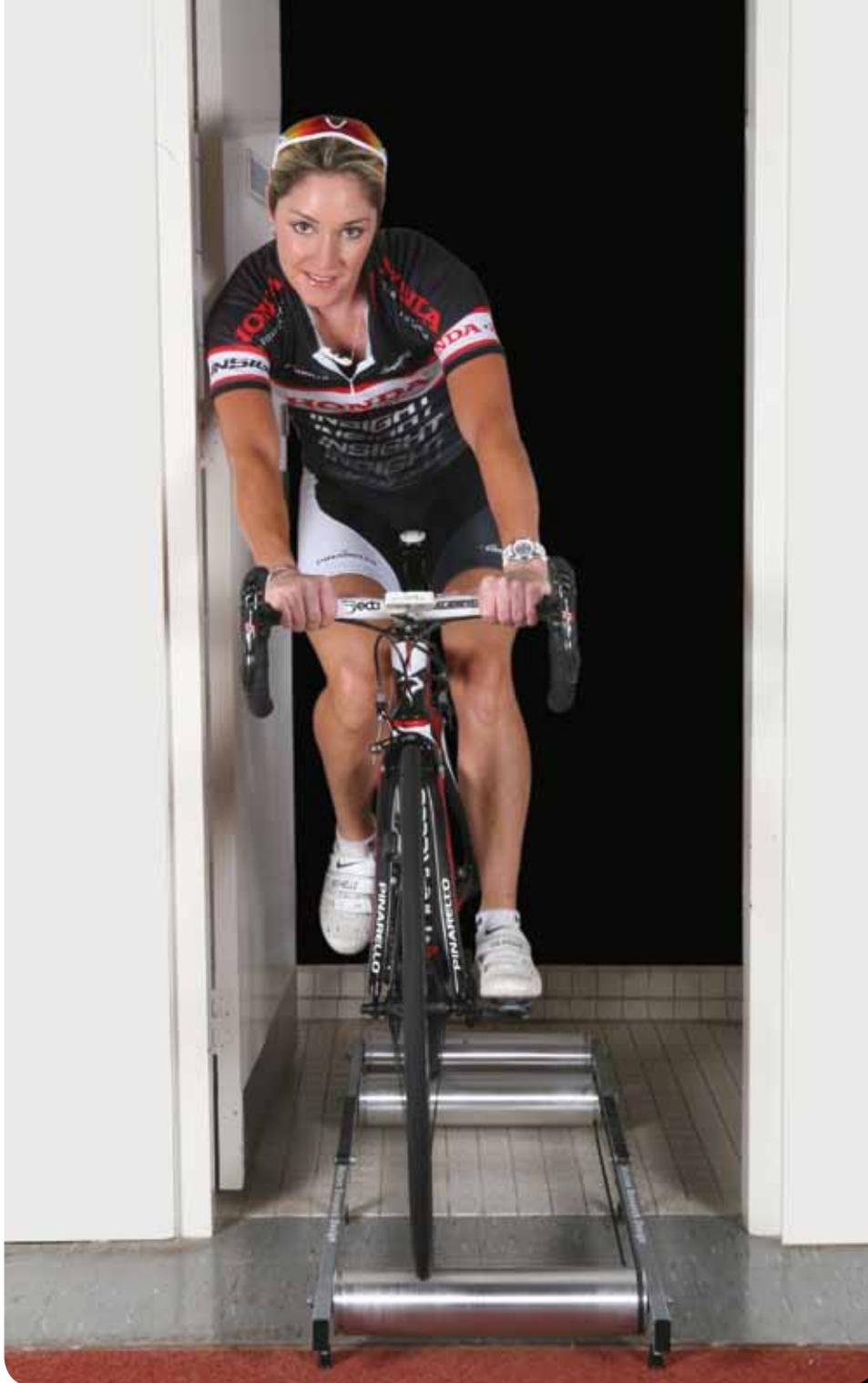
2) Do not look down at your front wheel. Look towards a spot on the floor about three metres in front of you. Keep your attention focused on that one position as this is one of the secrets to balance. You may want to put something interesting there, such as a picture, statue or even a clock.

Try pedalling for a few one minute intervals with one hand on the wall and then stop. Have a good minute or two rest before attempting to take your hand off the wall.

Ok, now you are ready to ride with two hands on top of the handlebars. There are two ways to achieve this; in a doorway, or next to a wall or bench.

My preferred option is a doorway. Here, you can start in a position with two hands on the bars. It's important to get the rollers in the right position. Move the rollers close to one side (the side you feel most comfortable leaning on - we'll go with the right side for this explanation). Make sure the doorframe or wall is in-line with your right elbow when you're sitting on the bike holding the top of the handlebars. It helps to have a wide grip.

Start with your right elbow touching the doorframe as you start to push on the pedals, remembering to look forward, not down. As you continue to push on the pedals let your hands relax on the bars and try not to over steer. Use a loose grip on the bars and just keep using your right elbow on



the wall until you can veer away from it and ride upright. If you find your elbow is stuck and touching the wall too often, then you just need to pedal a bit faster. This will make you naturally steer away from the wall but make sure to keep your eyes forward.

If you're learning next to a bench, it will be more difficult as you actually need to learn how to balance and steer with one hand (for a split second) before riding with two hands! Place your hand on the bench in front of you, close to your handlebars. Again, remember to look forward and keep pushing on the pedals. Starting from this position means you need to concentrate on holding your core strong and straight, not leaning or bending sideways from the waist. Slowly attempt to move your hand from the bench to the bars and keep pushing on the pedals. Do not try to steer with your left hand. The movement will come from the hips when pushing on the pedals. Again, a

Using a doorway is easier when learning than a bench because you can begin with both hands on the bars. Position yourself so that after mounting you can lean your shoulder or elbow onto the door frame. Begin to pedal and as you work up speed you can gradually move your body upright until you're comfortable riding with no support. At the beginning, you'll find that you get tired after five or 10 minutes pedalling. You'll know this is happening because you'll keep leaning on the support. When this happens don't be ashamed to take short breaks before starting again.

TIPS SUMMARY

- Look forward.
- Don't let the pressure off the pedals.
- Keep a wide grip.
- Relax your shoulders and hands when you grip.
- Steer from your core not your hands.
- Take some deep breaths and relax your body.



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wide grip on the bars will help.

All this is a very tiring process - to get the right hand from the bench to the bars, so make sure you take a good rest if it's getting frustrating. The concentration and contraction of deep core muscles will see you fatigue quickly. Once you can keep your hand on the bars for more than 10-15 seconds you'll really start to get a feeling for riding the rollers. And once you reach this point you'll find the progression is much faster.

Ok, so now you can ride with two hands and balance on the rollers. Congratulations!

Dismounting

Dismounting is similar to mounting with the difference being that you place your foot on the frame instead of the floor. Gradually roll to a stop and brace against a wall or bench. Unclip your opposite foot at the bottom of the pedal stroke and place it on the grippy section of the roller frame.

Gradually shift your weight onto this foot before unclipping the remaining foot and bringing it to the same side. Then, holding the handlebars step down from the rollers.

Progression

Once you can ride for more than a few minutes without holding onto anything you might find the position in the hoods a little more comfortable. Or at least stick with a very wide grip on the curve of the bars. Try taking your bottle out of your bidon cage and take a drink. Too easy? Try with your other hand.

Once you've mastered riding the rollers with two hands you might want to try riding with no hands on the bars? It can be useful to learn how to do this because when you start doing 30 minute sessions, it's nice to sit up (no hands) and relax your upper body. This requires a higher leg speed and the ability to steer and balance from the hips and core.

WORKOUTS

Now, let me share a few of my regular training sessions with you. I've only just the other day used this routine to warm up for a team time trial in Luxembourg!

PRE RACE SESSION

- Five minutes warm up at 80-90rpm in the 53/16 or 17.
- One minute at 115rpm in 53/23.
- Then every minute drop the gear one harder. So the next minute in the 53/21 etc until the 10th one minute is in the 53/12, staying always at 115rpm!

Obviously this routine will depend on the size of your cluster, but you get the idea.

- Five minute warm down at 75-80rpm in an easy gear.

SPRINT SESSION

Ten minutes dropping through the gears as above at 100rpm. First minute in the 23, in the small chain ring (39T), 10th minute in the 39/12 at 100rpm.

- At 10-12 minutes just ride easy and breathe deep.
- On the 12th minute: 1 x 6 second max sprint.
- On the 13th minute: 1 x 10 second max sprint.
- On the 14th minute: 1 x 15 second max sprint.
- Ride easy for two minutes and breathe deep.
- On the 16th minute: 1 x 6 second max sprint.
- On the 17th minute: 1 x 10 second max sprint.
- On the 18th minute: 1 x 15 second max sprint.
- Ride easy for two minutes and breathe deep.
- On the 20th minute: 1 x 6 second max sprint.
- On the 21st minute: 1 x 10 second max sprint.
- On the 22nd minute: 1 x 15 second max sprint.
- Ride easy and recover until you hit 30 minutes.

TRICKS AND STUNTS

At this point in my roller riding career, I have achieved the following 'roller riding tricks':

- Ride with no hands on the handlebars,
- Ride with no hands and only one leg/foot clipped in.
- Ride with the bike placed backwards on the rollers.
- Perform a track stand.
- Ride out of the seat.
- Hit 300rpm on the rollers (with short cranks).
- Ride/bunny hop off the rollers in motion.
- Put my body and bike completely through a tubular tyre whilst riding the rollers - without stopping or touching anything. (Gary Sutton taught me this party trick 10 years ago!).

My progression to achieve the above tricks occurred over a period of 15 years! They're a good way to keep yourself fresh with training, but they do take time so start small.

Hopefully you will find my tips useful and enjoy riding the rollers as much as I do! I wish you success with your health and fitness goals this winter and I look forward to seeing you Down Under when it warms up again!

- During this session my sprint cadences range from 170-200rpm.

GENERAL LEG SPEED SESSION

- 10 min warm up at 85- 90rpm.
- 5 min at 120rpm.
- 5 min at 80rpm recovery.
- 5 min at 120rpm.
- 5 min at 80rpm recovery.
- 5 min at 120rpm.
- 10 min at 80rpm recovery. 🚴

This is trickier than it looks. Riding the rollers backwards makes the bike twice as unstable.



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