

# NAMIBIA DESERT CHALLENGE

GENERAL CYCLING ADVICE





# BUYING AN INDOOR TRAINER

## Turbo

**What is it?** A turbo trainer is a metal frame that you bolt your bike to using a special rear QR skewer. A roller then presses against your rear tyre and, by using a fan, fluid or magnets, generates resistance for you to pedal against. The name comes from early fan units which produced comparable amount of noise to a turbocharged engine but thankfully modern ones are far quieter.

**Cost** £100-£1500+

**What to look for** Buy a model from a reputable and known cycling brand. There are cheaper products but, as you are going to be bolting your bike to it, you don't want it failing. Variable resistance operated from a handlebar mounted lever will increase the variety and improve the quality of your workouts. Spending more will usually get you a quieter turbo, improved smoothness and road like feel, especially at higher resistance levels, and more training feedback.

### Pros

- Wide price range to suit all budgets and it's possible to get a quality turbo towards the lower end.
- You're training on your actual bike so your position will be the same.
- They fold away for easy storage.
- You can generate high levels of resistance.
- More expensive models can provide large amounts of valuable training data.

### Cons

- They can chew up your tyre so having a turbo rear wheel with a turbo specific tyre is a good idea.
- Cheaper models can be noisy.
- Training on a turbo will not develop bike handling skills.
- They can be stressful on

your bike's frame if not setup carefully.

## Rollers

**What are they?** Drums mounted within a frame that you ride on. The two rear rollers, that your rear wheel drives, are connected to the front roller by a belt, so it is spinning too. Most sets of rollers don't offer variable resistance and training data is usually limited to your bike computer. However there are now sets appearing at the upper end of the price range with variable resistance.

**Cost** £150-£1300

**What to look for** Quality drums, smooth bearings and a sturdy frame are essential and should be guaranteed if you stick to established brands. Narrower drums can be initially intimidating to ride but make for a more compact unit. If you're planning on using the rollers for pre-race warm-ups or are short of space, an easy folding mechanism and compact stowed size is important. Some makes have parabolic drums that encourage your wheel towards the centre and can make learning to ride them easier.

### Pros

- Excellent for developing pedalling technique, balance and bike handling skills.
- Relatively cheap, £200 can buy you a very good set.
- You can ride your road bike on them so no position changes to worry about.
- No potential stress on frame and low tyre wear.
- Quick to get bike on and off.

### Cons

- No variable resistance on the majority of models makes lower cadence, "hill" and strength workouts difficult.
- Learning to ride them confidently will take some time.

## Static bike

**What is it?** Static bikes include basic home fitness models, classic gym bike, Spinning bikes with large fixed flywheels and top end cycling training specific models such as Wattbikes.

**Cost** £100-£2250

**What to look for** For maximum transferable fitness gains, you want a static bike that feels like and replicates the position of your road bike as closely. Both cheap home fitness brands and very expensive commercial gym models should be avoided as they won't give you anything near to a road like ride or position. Spinning style bikes can be good as the fixed flywheel can aid the development of a smooth and even pedalling technique. However, training feedback is minimal or non-existent and the resistance mechanisms can be fairly crude. Higher end cycling specific models will offer a wide range of positional adjustment, a realistic ride feel and accurate training data.

### Pros

- Always setup and ready to go.
- You can keep your road bike setup for the road.
- Less wear on your road bike.
- Higher end models provide excellent training feedback and data.

### Cons

- Worthwhile models are expensive.
- Big, heavy and, once installed, you can't fold them away.
- Your position on them may not exactly match your position on your road bike.
  - Won't benefit balance or bike handling skills.

## Spinning classes

**What are they?** Instructor led cycling group exercise

classes on fixed gear bikes with heavy flywheels. Music and the instructor should keep you motivated and, based on the instructor's cues and beat of the music, you adjust your bike's resistance and cadence accordingly.

Here are the thoughts of Phil Burt, lead physiotherapist with the Great Britain Cycling Team and consultant physiotherapist to Team Sky, and Martin Evans, head of Strength and Conditioning with the Great Britain Cycling Team, on the benefits of Spinning Classes and other Gym Classes.

**Cost** £5.00-£10.00 per class or inclusive in your gym membership

**What to look for** Look for a class that is frequented by other local cyclists and is ideally led by an instructor who is a cyclist too. Make sure that the bikes are well maintained and have SPD compatible clipless pedals. Most gyms won't allow you to swap pedals over, so it can be worth buying a cheap pair of cycling shoes with SPD's, if you don't use this system, if you will be spinning regularly.

The first time you go, take key measurements such as saddle height, reach etc from your road bike with you, try to replicate them on the spinning bike and note down these settings for future classes.

#### **Pros**

- If you've already got a gym membership it can be a cheap way to do your indoor training.
- Class structure can be extremely motivating.
- You don't have to take up space in your home with an indoor trainer.

#### **Cons**

- You may struggle to replicate your road riding position.
- You won't be able to perform your own specific workouts.
  - You'll have to travel to the gym.

# RIDING IN THE DARK

While the days are shorter, whether you are commuting or trying to fit in some training before or after work, it is likely that you will be riding in low light conditions or the dark. Make sure you stay visible and safe on your bike by following these top 10 tips.

## 1) THE LAW

If you are riding on public roads in the hours of darkness, you are legally obliged to have lights and reflectors. You need a white front light that, since 2005, can be flashing and a rear red light that is also allowed to flash. The front light should also have 110 degree visibility.

You are also obliged by the law to have a rear red reflector, in addition to the light, and it is also a requirement to have BS6102/2 or equivalent amber reflectors to the front and rear of each pedal, although many modern clipless pedals are unable to fit reflectors.

## 2) LIGHTS ON YOUR BIKE

Don't just comply with the minimum legal requirements. Especially regarding rear red lights, the more you can have the better. Your front light serves two purposes, to get you seen by on-coming traffic and, on unlit roads, to light up the road ahead. It can therefore make sense to opt for two front lights, one flashing to get you seen and another with a more powerful constant beam to see with. Check out this article for more advice on buying lights.

## 3) LIGHTS ON YOUR BODY

You don't have to stop with lights on your bike. If you are riding unlit lanes, take a tip from mountain bikers and try a helmet mounted light in addition to one on your bars. Being able to see where you are looking, not just where your bars are pointing is a revelation. Moving lights are especially visible so, with clip-on LED's, your ankles are a brilliant location. Just make sure that any rear facing lights are red and front facing are white.

## 4) DON'T DAZZLE

With LED technology now allowing the production of affordable bike lights that can easily produce 2000 lumens or more, dazzling oncoming traffic is a genuine concern. If you are using a powerful light, make sure it is angled sufficiently down towards the road and that, if you are able to do so safely, dip it to a lower power if there is oncoming traffic. If you are using a helmet mounted light be especially aware of this and avoid looking directly towards on-coming traffic. Angle your powerful light down at the road and have a less powerful flashing light to be seen by.

## 5) CLOTHING

In traffic, hi-viz and reflective clothing can make as much of a difference to rider visibility as lights do. Consider this when buying your winter cycling kit and, with modern reflective materials, don't think that reflective has to mean gaudy or unstylish. As with lights, reflective material on moving parts of your body is most effective. Look for tights and overshoes with reflective piping, decals or panels. Don't forget your hands as, unless these are visible, other road users won't be able to see your signals. Choose reflective gloves or opt for some reflective wrist bands.

## 6) SIDE VISIBILITY

You need to be visible from the side as well as from the front and back. Many bike lights do not meet the legal requirement of 110 degree visibility so it is important that you address this issue with additional lights if necessary. Again, movement equals visibility, so, spoke lights and reflectors and reflective overshoes are good ideas.

## **7) SAFETY IN NUMBERS AND ROAD POSITIONING**

A group of cyclists, especially if they are all following the advice in this article, is far more visible than a single rider. Commute as a group, encourage some friends to join your on training rides or see what rides your local club are offering.

In the dark or low light conditions, correct positioning in the road and not riding in the gutter are even more important than in daylight.

## **8) BACK-UPS**

It is always worth carrying some spare compact 'get you home' rear and front lights in case your main lights fail, you forgot to charge them fully or you are out for longer than you expected. You will probably end up never having to use them but it is reassuring to know they are in your saddlebag or jersey pocket if needed. If your lights are battery operated, always carry a spare set of batteries with you just in case.

## **9) MAINTENANCE**

Roadside repairs aren't fun in the daylight but, on a dark winter's night, they can be extremely difficult and potentially dangerous. Make sure you pull well off the road if you need to make a repair and leave your lights running. However, prevention is always better than cure, especially regarding punctures, so keep on top of servicing and maintaining your bike throughout the winter.

## **10) IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE DARK**

Although you are only legally obliged to use lights during the hours of darkness, it is good practice throughout the winter months to always run at least a flashing rear light and to try to always make yourself as visible as possible. Be aware at dusk and dawn that low winter sun can easily dazzle motorists and that heavy rain can also severely reduce visibility.

# ESSENTIAL KIT TO CARRY ON THE BIKE

The three rear pockets in your jersey and maybe a small saddlebag give you plenty of room to carry everything you need to fix punctures, sort out minor mechanicals, fuel your ride, stay warm and, in the event of an unfixable problem or an accident, the means to get home or to make sure your emergency contacts are informed as soon as possible. Don't leave home without these essentials.

## INNER TUBES AND PATCHES

You don't want to be trying to patch up an inner tube by the side of the road so always carry at least one spare tube that you can just swap in. You can patch the punctured tube up once you're warm and dry at home. Make sure that the valve length is correct for the rims you're riding and the tube is the correct width for your tyres. It's still a good idea to carry some self-adhesive patches as well though, just in case you have an especially puncture ridden ride. You also might want to put in some cleaned and folded up old toothpaste tube as this is great as a get you home solution for a badly gashed tyre.

## TYRE LEVERS

A pair of plastic tyre levers make getting a tight tyre off the rim to fix a flat far easier. Look for ones that are stiff, hook onto the spokes and that clip together. Avoid metal ones as they can easily damage your rims. Be careful if you use the levers to put the tyre back on as it's easy to damage your new inner tube. It's better to learn the correct technique of working the tyre bead back onto the rim and not have to resort to the levers though.

## PUMP/CO<sub>2</sub> CANNISTER

Mini-pumps might conveniently slip into your jersey pocket but they are often far from effective when it comes to pumping a road tyre up to the required pressure. Mini-pumps that also accommodate a CO<sub>2</sub> canister are compact, gives you instant inflation to rideable pressure, allow you to top up the tyre manually and, if you should use up all your canisters dealing with multiple punctures, you've still got the pump as a standby.

## MULTITOOL

A multitool should have a range of allen keys, screwdriver and torx heads that will allow you to adjust all of the important bolts on your bike. Your handlebars, stem and seatpost clamps are the most likely candidates for tweaking. A multi-tool should also have a chain tool on it in case you break your chain.

## QUICK RELEASE CHAIN LINK

Multitool chain tools are fine for removing links from broken chains but tend to be slightly hit or miss for rejoining them. An

quick release chain link provides an easy solution. Check you have the correct model for your make of chain and try the release mechanism at home first as they can be a little fiddly until you get the knack.

## MOBILE PHONE

For calling for help if you get lost or stuck and, more importantly, in the case of an accident, one of the first places emergency workers will look. It should be fully charged when you set out and protected from the elements. Have an I.C.E (in case of emergencies) number stored in the contacts and ensure that any security locks are switched off. Be aware if you're using the GPS on your phone, this will drain the battery very fast.

## CARD AND CASH

Not just for the café stop but for picking up spares from bike shops on route, for a can of coke to get you through that last 10 km or as a last resort option for getting you home. Most cabs won't stop to pick up a cyclist from the side of the road but a card allows you to get some hot food at a pub or café, book a large enough cab and wait in the warm and dry for it to arrive.

## ID

As well as carrying a card and your mobile phone, an ID bracelet or dog-tag will make it far easier for the emergency services to identify you and to get in touch with your family or friends if you're involved in an accident. As well as the names and numbers of your emergency contacts you should also include any important medical information such as allergies or known conditions.

## FOOD

Make sure you have enough food to fuel your ride or, if you're on a long ride or sportive where you'll need more food than you can carry, enough food to see you to your first planned refuelling stop or feed station with an hour's extra on top in case of problems. Even if you're just out for a short session, it's advisable to have an emergency gel in your pocket just in case you've misjudged the route, have a mechanical problem that takes a long time to fix or haven't taken in enough fuel before the ride.

## GILET/WATERPROOF

Modern gilets and jackets fold down easily small enough to fit in a jersey pocket and even on scorching summer days are still a good idea to carry. It's easy to get chilled when stopping to fix a flat or, on hilly or mountainous rides, on long descents. As well as carrying a lightweight jacket, try to learn to put it on and take it off while moving.

## MAP

In these times of pre-plotted GPS routes and turn-by-turn navigation prompts it's all too easy to ride blind with no real idea of where you are. Batteries can run out though and devices fail so it still pays to carry a paper map if you're in an area you don't know. Just rip out the relevant page from a road atlas, stick it in a zip-lock bag with your cash and card and it'll provide you with enough information to work out where you are and where to go.



**IN NAM**  
GRADUATES DESERT  
CHALLENGE **'17**