

Creating and running a Hill Climb Training Group – Let’s Climb Those Hills!

The following guide offers some advice to other cycling clubs as to how to start a Hill Climb Training Group. In our case, the specific goal for the training group was to get members to compete in the South Downs Hill Climb Series, which comprises eight adult events and one junior event held in September and October. However, you may have other ideas or need to focus on other hill climb events if you’re not based in the South East of England. Entries for cycling competitions have been dropping across the board for the last year or two, let’s try and reverse that process – Best of luck!

The first step is to find one or two club members who are experienced cyclists to run the training group. In our case there were two of us who had both competed in the South Downs Hill Climb Series for at least two seasons. Hill Climb experience is useful, but not essential.

The second step for a club starting a training group is to attract members to join the Hill Climb Training Group. We used a WhatsApp group for members so we could share ride details, training tips, questions and feedback. Feel free to use the following document to build your group:

***** start of example document *****

Join Our Hill Climb Training Group – Let’s Climb Those Hills!

Are you ready to take your cycling to new heights? Join our Hill Climb Training Group and prepare to compete in the thrilling **Le Col South Downs Hill Climb Series!** This series comprises 8 exciting adult events and one junior event held in September and October, and we're here to make your journey into the world of hill climbing both fun and fulfilling.

What We Offer:

20 week or 12 week training plan - This should take you through to the first Hill Climb event!

- **Comprehensive Training** - Learn essential techniques, whether in or out of the saddle, and master your gearing and pacing.
- **Zone 2 & High-Intensity Training:** Balance endurance with high-intensity workouts to optimize your performance.
- **Ride to Power & Heart Rate:** Understand how to use power meters and heart rate monitors to enhance your training.
- **Strength Training:** Build the strength needed for those tough climbs.
- **Training Tips & Best Practices:** Share and receive training tips, and access links to the best hill climb training videos.
- **Event Recce & Baselineing:** Familiarize yourself with event climbs and benchmark your progress against previous events.
- **Practice Events:** Participate in practice events to get a feel for what to expect on race day.

Monthly Meetups:

We will meet once a month for a group ride. As ever we’ll have a stop including a discussion over coffee. This is a great opportunity to connect with fellow cyclists, share experiences, and get motivated!

Stay Connected:

Our group will be organized via WhatsApp, where we will distribute ride details, training tips, and hints and progress using the training plans. Stay in the loop and never miss an update!

Why Join?

- **Expert Guidance:** Benefit from the knowledge and experience of seasoned hill climbers.
- **Community Support:** Be part of a supportive and enthusiastic cycling community.
- **Achieve Your Goals:** Train effectively and compete with confidence in the **Le Col South Downs Hill Climb Series.**

Don't miss out on this fantastic opportunity to elevate your cycling skills and achieve your hill climbing goals. Join us today and start your journey to the top!

For more information and to sign up, contact [Your Contact Information].

Let's Climb Those Hills together!

***** end of example document *****

The way the training group is run will depend upon the membership which is likely related to the type of club you're in. Our cycling club is more social than racing based, so we were looking for a reasonably gentle and 'fun' introduction. If your group is full of racers, then it will be more performance oriented.

Topics for the group, as per the flyer above, should include technique (in or out of the saddle) gearing, pacing, zone 2 training combined with high intensity training, riding to power, riding to heart rate, strength training, sharing of training tips and links to best practice hill climb training videos, recce of event climbs, baselining against previous hill climb events. It will also be useful to cover the logistics of hill climb events, warm up, on the start line, the countdown and how to enter a hill climb event on the CTT or BC website. Feedback and discussion on the training plans are also very useful.

To help you along the way we have the following on our website: <https://hillclimb.southdowns.cc>

12 and 20 week training plans

Strength Training

Hill Climbing key factors

Useful links – contains a lot of general information about hill climbing

The Le Col South Downs Hill Climb Series – Probably the best hill climb series in the World!

So, how to get started. I've put together a breakdown on the monthly rides below:

Month 1

Zone 2 ride to the coffee stop, discussion followed by zone 2 to the base of a steep local climb

Focus on staying in zone 2, needs a LOT of discipline

Group repeats up first part of climb (it has a flat section in the middle) stopping at a safe pull in

Exercise on pacing – lead the group up using a power meter:

Create steady pace, increment power eg 1st rpt @ 180 watts, 2nd @ 200, then 220, 240 and 260

Check form up hills, in saddle and out of saddle, check gearing and cadence (spin to win)

Some riders were too static out of the saddle, not pulling up on the bars

Is gearing of the bike acceptable – one lady had a racing block on the rear wheel!

Use the results to baseline the group for future rpts and against previous competition results – use

the results from previous competitions available on the CTT web site

Fartlek ride on return to the start of the ride as a bit of fun up the hills

Suggested each rider to use a local climb for hill repeats, looking for performance increases

Month 2

Zone 2 ride to the same local climb, climbed the whole thing at a steady 200w

Backup the other side @ 180 watts as it was longer, another check on pacing

Out of the saddle for 30 seconds every other minute – check form

Fartlek training back to base

Ride was zone 2 to start, followed by more intensity

Best of both worlds with a long zone 2 ride with the last part riding at a higher intensity

Month 3

Hilly group ride created by one of the team in their local area

maintain steady pacing up all of the hills, did Brantridge Lane (a SDHCS event) at end of the ride

Every man for himself effort as a test of race pace – baseline results vs previous event results. If on

Strava it's useful to compare power estimates or readings.

Month 4+

Rides were of a similar nature with more reces, hilly rides and hill repeats

Members also shared specific rides they were doing on platforms like Zwift

The closer we were to the event, the higher the intensity of the rides!

Organise practice event with starter etc

There was much group discussion about the competitions. I always turn up with a spare pair of wheels just in case and try and get to the event with 90 minutes to go. I do a warm up, loosely based on the British Cycling warm up which I aim to finish with about 10 minutes to go. I carry a musette for the clothing etc I don't need, which I leave at the start. I do use a Garmin, a heart rate monitor and a power meter, with the Garmin set to 3 second power and average power plus elapsed time and heart rate. I turn the Garmin on during the countdown on the start line and then with 2 seconds to go hit the start button. I then get up to speed quickly and then try and maintain my target power. I normally have a point on the hill which I have timed from previous rides to check I'm making some sort of progress and within 150m of the end, it's all guns blazing.

Within the training group we use a WhatsApp group to communicate. This generally covers rides, any training tips and videos and any feedback or questions from anyone.

This year we also have the 12 week and 20 week training plans which can be used by members of your training group. Encourage members to share information on their progress.

So, how did it all work out for the group in the South Downs Hill Climb Series?

Surprisingly well. By the time the first event arrived group members were faster, knew what to expect and how to pace themselves. The baselining gave group members comfort that they weren't a mile off the expected pace.

We had a number of podium finishes which were always features in Cycling Weekly results – very nice! The series results are an aggregation of the individual results for each event. We were delighted to have one of our ladies win the “Queen of the Downs” (senior ladies) and another win the “Duchess of the Downs” (veteran ladies). All in all, it was a great result as one of the ladies hadn't ever hill climbed before, although she is a runner/triathlete so well used to competition.

Please see below some feedback from the Queen and the Duchess!

Hayley, the Queen of the Downs (Senior Lady)

When I first started cycling, I used to despise hills, but in the last few years I've grown to quite like them! Not always in the minutes spent climbing them, but it is always a great feeling when you reach the top.

Being part of Sussex Nomads for a number of years, I've taken part in the Ditchling Beacon climb quite a few times, but not done the other events in the series. This year I couldn't commit to all of the events, but did the Beacon plus the Steyning Bostal and Titch Hill climbs. My results in those 3 climbs were enough to make me 'Queen of the Downs' (winner of the Senior women's category) so I will definitely be back to defend my crown in all of the events next year!

It was a great experience being part of the hill climb training group (especially when we'd done the hills and stopped for ice cream or cake!). Having that focus, friendly peer pressure, and motivation to do hill repeats definitely made a difference. It was also very helpful to be able to practise on some of the hills to really get familiar with them.

Graham shared some useful training videos in our whatsapp group that gave us some more ideas and inspiration. We also discussed tips and techniques for the climbs, like pacing, getting out of the saddle, and monitoring power.

Coffee stops included chats about different training modalities such as zone 2, intervals, and the benefits of strength training. All of this meant we made some great progress in our fitness and climbing abilities, while still also just enjoying being out riding as a group.

I was tasked with creating one of our training routes and, being very lucky to live close to the Ashdown forest, utilised some of the many hills (and lovely views) in that area. And of course it had to include a stop at one the best ice cream places around - great fuel for climbing!

This year my dad - a very experienced and fast cyclist, but not usually a hill climber - took part in the whole series. He loved it, particularly because of the camaraderie and friendliness amongst the participants. I found the same in the 3 events I attended - everyone is so encouraging and supportive. Regardless of your ability, they're cheering you on and wanting you to do well.

It's always inspiring to meet other women doing these kind of events and that was another plus from this year. My fellow Nomad Sally, also part of the hill climb training group, was crowned Duchess in her first series. There was a range of experience among the women involved but everyone was lovely, and we all felt that there are so many women out there who would really enjoy

doing this series. It can seem daunting, but I promise you you'll be supported, and I bet you'll have a great time.

There was also a selection of excellent cakes at the final climb of Ditchling Beacon - worth attending for those alone. A big thank you to everyone involved in organising and running the event, and particularly Graham for setting up the hill climb training group too. I'll be doing the whole series next year and it would be brilliant to see more women joining the fun. I can highly recommend it :)

Sally, the Duchess of the Downs (Veteran Lady)

When I joined the Nomads about a year ago, I had only just started wearing cleats! I was keen to ride for longer distances and to improve my cycling for triathlons. I really enjoy racing on the flats, but found hills a bit more challenging (who doesn't?). So, when Graham suggested we start a group of ladies to train for the hill climb series, I was really interested to learn his secrets and improve my uphill performances.

Our first foray was repeats up Steyning Bostal, increasing the levels of effort each time. I didn't make a promising start. I fell off before I'd even started (think I was a bit nervous) then got left behind by the others who were much stronger than me at hills. But I was still pleased – and I quite liked the peer pressure... iron sharpens iron and all that!

Over the coming weeks, we did a lot of hilly routes – including a few from the South Downs Hill Climb Series so I knew what I was in for. We talked a lot about tactics like starting in a low gear and not haring off too fast. Graham also gave me some helpful lessons in how to get up out the saddle which I wasn't doing very well at the time. He also sent video links of other people doing hill climbs which were really interesting.

I think it was good to do the hills two or three times wherever possible, it somehow made the hills less scary to become familiar with them. Even on the race days, I got there about an hour early and did the hill at least once before racing it.

It was great to meet the other women who raced. Some of them were formidable opponents, but there was a great camaraderie between us, and I got a lot of tips! I did get a bit nervous to start with – but I ended up really enjoying pushing myself. I managed to complete all the races and was cock-a-hoop to be made the Duchess whilst Hayley, my Nomad co-trainee was crowned Queen!

I'll be coming back for more – and hope more ladies will join in the fun!

Thanks to Graham for all his effort and drive (and he and Hayley for the hill routes via ice cream stops and cafes)!

I hope that all makes sense.

Graham

Sussex Nomads Hill Climb Committee