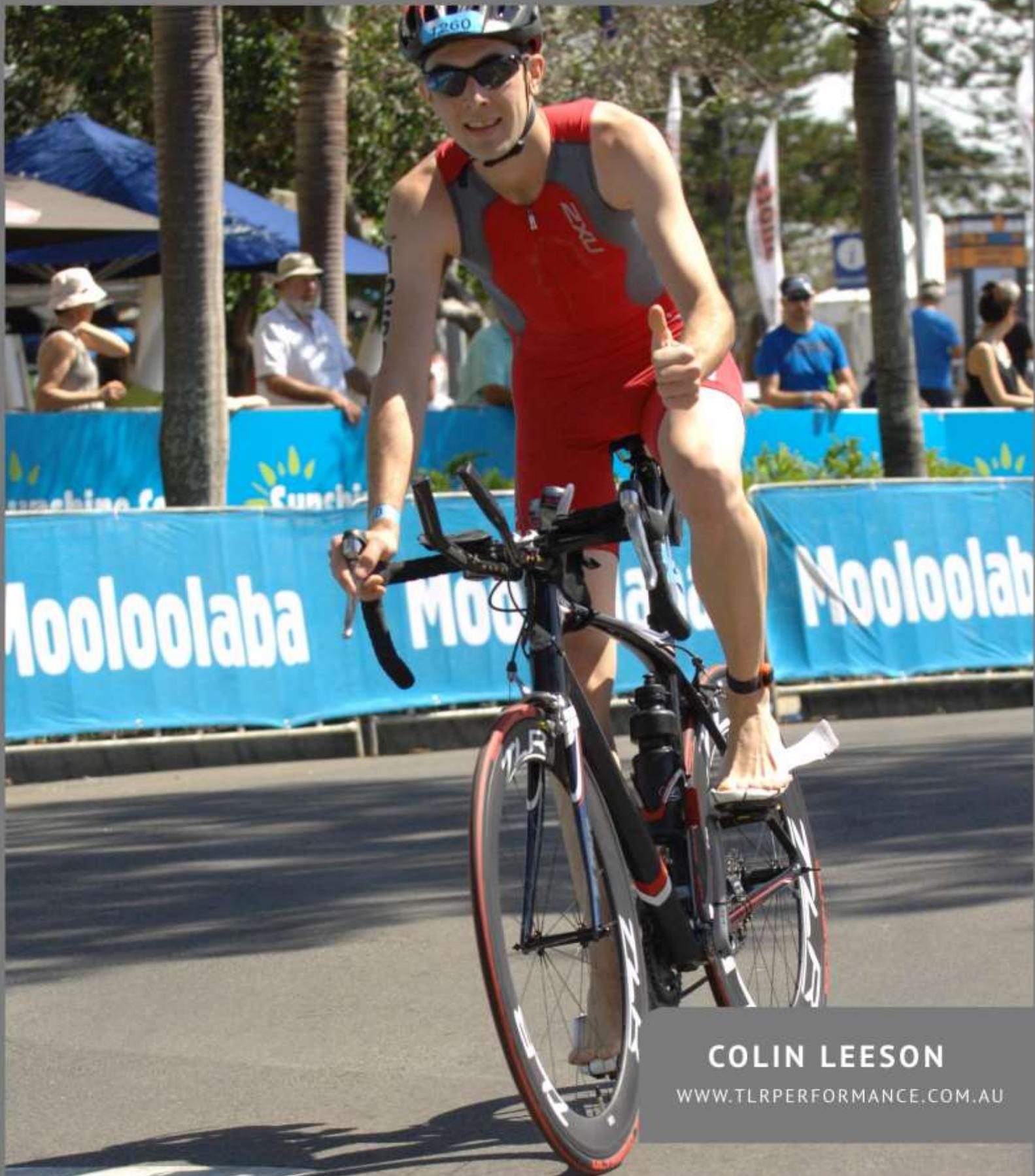


STARTING OUT IN TRIATHLONS

THE RIDE



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About the Author

With 30 years' experience in cycling and triathlon, Colin Leeson is a leading authority in affordable, quality performance components for the cycling and triathlon industry.

Colin is the owner and manager of the brand **TLR Performance** which supplies a broad range of Cycling, Running and Triathlon products. He has a passion for sport and loves competing in triathlons and sharing his knowledge with others.

Introduction

Triathlon is a unique sport combining the three disciplines of Swimming, Cycling and Running. Triathlons come in a variety of sizes and difficulties ranging from introductory events for first timers, through the sprint distance events and up to the ultimate endurance event the "Ironman Triathlon".

Many people come to the sport of Triathlon having previously focused on one of the three sports. In my case this was both cycling and running where, as a teenager I was a very competitive runner and keen recreational cyclist. It wasn't until I was in my mid 20's that triathlons started to become more well-known and after being invited to come watch a friend at this Australian event called "Noosa Triathlon" I decided to form a team and have a go for myself. Well I went in the event and was immediately hooked and have been doing triathlons ever since.

Starting the TLR Performance brand gave me the fantastic opportunity to contribute to, and make a living out of a sport that I love.

In the "**Starting out in Triathlons**" series of eBooks I will share my experiences and take you through the basics of triathlon and cover topics which will help you understand how a triathlon event works, the equipment you will need including where best to spend your money, some of the Gotcha's you may come across, training programs and a multitude of tips.

I hope you get some real value from this series and hope to see you in a triathlon event somewhere, sometime.

Colin Leeson

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The Triathlon Bike Leg

You have now finished the swim leg or what I call the “unfortunate leg you have to do before the fun stuff” and you are ready for the bike. Your transition was set up ready before the race and you are back at it ready to go with the ride leg and are excited to get on with it.

In this eBook we will focus on the triathlon bike leg and cover how to prepare for the ride, what to expect during the race and talk about some ways of improving your time in this leg.

Check out the other eBooks in the “Starting out in Triathlons” series to get a more in-depth description on other specific topics.

Preparation

Preparation for the triathlon bike leg is quite a large subject with several areas which include:

- Choice of bike
- Accessories to have on your bike
- The way to set up the bike and bike gear in transition
- Location in transition

We will cover these topics in moderate detail in this eBook. If you want additional information on equipment types and suggestions for a cost effective progression with your equipment refer to the “Starting out in Triathlons – Equipment” eBook.

Bike

Let’s get straight into the “big one” and talk bikes!

Bikes come in many styles for many purposes. These include kids’ bikes, BMX bikes, mountain bikes, commuters, hybrids, road bikes, time trial bikes and track bikes etc. Beginners in Triathlons do the bike leg on all types of bikes and I have seen some weird and wonderful bikes in triathlon events over the years so don’t let not having the best bike available stop you from having a go.

Typically though, the bikes you will see in a triathlon are either a **road bike** or a **Time Trial (or TT) bike**. The TT bike is the best bike for a triathlon as it is designed to have very low wind resistance and is perfect

for a cyclist riding solo which is what you have to do in a non-drafting cycling event like age group triathlon. TT bikes are expensive though and are not suitable for everyday use.

This is my current road bike.

You can see it is a pretty standard looking racing bike with the exception of a set of TLR C50 (50mm) carbon rims. This type of bike is ideal for most types of bike racing or for commuting and is great on hills.



This is my TT bike.

You can see straight away that it is a different bike altogether. It has a much more aerodynamic frame allowing it to slice through the air easier. It has a more upright seat position compared with the pedals and the handlebars are very different.



The difference in the handle bars is due to the “aero bars” which are the bars projecting forward in the middle of the handlebar. These aero bars allow the rider to lean down on the armrests and have the hands out front on these bars in a very low and aerodynamic position. The gear levers on the end of the aero bars allow the rider to stay in the aerodynamic position for maximum time.

As overcoming wind resistance contributes to something like 80% of the effort required to ride a bike, the more streamlined you are as a cyclist, the faster you will be on the bike.

For the new triathlete there is a compromise option available though, and this is to add some aftermarket parts to the standard road bike to make it more suitable for the triathlon Time Trial type ride.

In the before and after pictures to the right, TLR customer Craig's road bike has been modified for triathlon use.

In the before picture you can see Craig has added a set of aero bars to the bike to allow him to ride in an aero position. He has also added some behind seat drink cages which have less wind resistance than the frame mounted cages.

In the after picture he has added some superlight carbon wheels to give even better performance.



There is a lot of research and theory on what parts give the most benefits on a ride. Current research says the items that give the biggest improvement are proper cycling shoes with clip pedals, aero bars for an aero position, carbon wheels which slice through the air and roll well and an aerodynamic helmet.

In the “Starting out in Triathlons – Equipment” eBook I will share more experiences with options for bikes and upgrades.

Transition setup

Bikes are “hung” on the transition racks. Sometimes it is dictated which end of the bike needs to be hung on the bars but when I have a choice my preference is to hang the bike by the seat.

In some events bike racking occurs on the day before the race so the bike is left overnight. In this case be sure to take your bike pump (or borrow one) to inflate your tyres to the maximum psi on race morning.

In the overnight racking scenario make sure to take your fluids and any nutrition you might have for the bike leg on race morning and set them up before the race.

Nutrition is more important in longer events and can be mounted to the bike in a couple of ways: If you look closely on my TT bike on page 5 you can see a Gel bottle mounted to the top tube under the seat for easy access. Some triathletes tape gel packets to the top tube and tear them off one at a time.

You should have your helmet and sunglasses ready to be put on as quickly as possible.

In the picture to the right you can see I have my helmet upside down facing me with the straps laid over the edge. Inside the helmet I have the sunglasses also facing me.

The process for me is to grab the sunnies and put them straight on then roll the helmet straight on and fasten the clip. These are two smooth straight movements without thought required.



Bike Shoes

Cycling shoes deserve a section of their own.

Elite triathletes leave their shoes connected to the bike and run to the mount line at the start of the ride then begin riding before slipping their feet into their shoes. This saves some time but requires practice.

In the last few years I have been seeing people set their bikes / shoes like in the picture to the right.

Notice the rubber bands connecting the back of the shoes to the bike frame? These hold the shoe in place until the rider is on the bike then they snap and fall away with, hopefully for the athlete, at least one foot in a shoe.



My thoughts are mixed on this subject. I know the triathletes who are putting their feet in the shoes while riding are doing so as they move forward while the person who puts the shoes on in transition are stationary. I generally still do mine in transition and run to the mount line in the shoes. What I have found

is I blast past many other triathletes over the first few 100 metres who are still trying to do their shoes up. I have also seen over the years quite a few people fall off their bikes at the beginning while attempting to fasten their shoes ...including professional triathletes at the world championships.

This leads me to think it is not too different which method you use in the long run. The one comment I have with doing your shoes in transition is to have them ready as well. Note the shoes in my transition setup on the previous page. They have the tongues pulled up and the straps laid back and untangled leaving the shoes open for quick access and ready for quick tightening.

Try both methods for yourself and see what works best for you.

Regardless of the method you choose to put your shoes on, I do highly recommend learning to slip your feet out of the shoes as you complete the ride but we will talk about that soon.

Location in Transition

Choosing your location in transition has a lot to do with the method you choose to put your shoes on.

Transition areas are designed to be even for everybody so depending where you rack your bike you could have a long run with the bike at the start of the ride or the end of the ride (I.e. closer to the ride exit = shorter run at the start, closer to the bike entrance = shorter run with the bike at the end of the ride)

In my case, where I choose to put my cycle shoes on in transition and later to slip my feet out at the end of the ride, I want to be as close as possible to the ride exit to have the shortest run possible in my bike shoes. This leaves me with a longer run at the end but by then I am in bare feet which is easier to run. Getting a good position like this requires registering and getting into transition as early as possible.

It's time to get on the bike course!!!

You have completed the swim and made it through transition and now it's time to get out on the bike course. The ride is a good time to catch your breath a little after the swim and before the run. While on the bike make sure you get some fluids in to your body (water and electrolyte drink) and if it is a longer event some calories like Gels.

Rules

There are several rules in triathlon about the bike leg and they exist firstly for the safety of riders and secondly to make the event an even race for all. In the pre-race briefing and race notes the organisers will list these rules and talk about how they will be enforced. The main rules to be aware of are:

1. No Drafting.

Drafting (or slipstreaming) is riding close behind another rider taking advantage of the hole they make in the air. A substantial advantage can be gained by drafting off another rider. For all but the professional “Draft Legal” categories, triathlon is an individual sport so drafting gives one athlete an advantage over another and so drafting is illegal.

There are a number of rules around drafting but the main points are if you are following another rider you have to be at least 12 metres behind them or be in the process of overtaking them. If you are overtaking you have a set amount of time to pass the other rider, then that other rider is responsible for dropping back to at least 12 metres behind you.

2. Passing on the Left. (In Australia)

It is illegal to pass on the left of another bike for safety reason. Consequently riders are firmly asked to move to the left if not overtaking.

3. Penalty Box.

If athletes are identified to have broken one of the above rules they will be given a 4 min time penalty. The race officials will call the penalty to the rider from a motorcycle. The time penalty is served by stopping at the Penalty Box where an official will use a stopwatch to measure the time penalty and they will release you when the time has passed.

4. Mount Lines.

At the transition entrance there is a “Mount line” and a “Dismount line”. As you start the ride you have to run with your bike PAST the “mount line” before you get on the bike and as you finish the ride you have to get off the bike BEFORE the “dismount line”.

Riding Techniques

We have talked about different bikes and the benefits of an aero position while riding. It goes without saying then that staying in this position for as much time as possible will help your ride. I find after a while that my back becomes a little tired and sore so I sit up and use the normal handlebars for a moment to give it a stretch.



You may hear that typically triathletes “push a larger gear” this means they aren’t spinning the pedals as fast as a road race cyclist would. The term used for spinning the pedals is cadence. A road cyclist might typically have a cadence of 90+ rpm where a triathlete will often ride at a cadence of between 75 & 90.

The reason for the slower cadence is because a triathlete has the run to follow the ride and the lower cadence leaves more in their legs for the run.

Nutrition

The bike leg of a triathlon is a great opportunity for a triathlete to replenish calories and fluids already burned, and to accumulate some for the run. In my training for Ironman events, my coach Warwick referred to the bike leg as the “rolling smorgasbord” where you consume as many calories as the body can handle. Obviously the need for consuming calories in a 12 hour Ironman event becomes much more important, but paying attention in this area can make a difference in even the sprint distance triathlons.

Nutrition is a massive subject by itself and my experience in using a nutrition plan is covered in the eBook “Starting out in Triathlons – Nutrition and Recovery”.

For the bike leg you have just started though, as soon as you are rolling get some fluid into you and keep having a small drink every 5-10 mins.

A 400m swim in a sprint triathlon will be less than 10 or 15 mins and the bike ride will likely be less than a half an hour. In this length event I usually aim to have an energy product about 10 mins into the ride and another just before the run to take you through the run to the finish. There is little point having one in a short run as it won’t have time to enter the bloodstream before you are finished.

For longer events I work on a 10 min drink and 20 min food cycle which is covered in detail in the Nutrition and Recovery book.

Stretching Before the Run

Changing from the ride to the run is more difficult than you may expect because your legs are working differently in each discipline. In the ride the legs are working in a slightly more compressed fashion and in the run they stretch out as you stride. A good way of beginning this transition is to stretch your legs out at the end of the ride. In the last kilometre or two while still rolling I give my legs a few stretches by dropping the heel and stretching the leg out straight for a few moments each. This makes a big difference as you start to run.

Removing Feet from Shoes

Earlier in the book we were looking at the way to put shoes on at the start of the ride. At the time I suggested it is really worth learning to remove feet from shoes while riding for the end of the ride. This action can save you a lot of time and is very easy to do.

Start this process during the last 400 – 600 m of the ride, depending on how comfortable and quick you are at the process. All you do is unclip the straps on your shoes, slip the foot out and then sit it back on top of the shoe.

With Velcro closing road or triathlon shoes this is easy. However if you have a road shoe with a ratchet tightener this is a little harder but not at all impossible.

Note. Be cautious of other riders doing the same thing towards the finish as people may wobble around a little more than normal.



Once you have mastered removing your feet you can ride towards the “dismount line” and swing one leg over the bike and have it in front of the leg still on the shoe so you are rolling almost “standing” on one side of the bike. Then when you slow to an easy running pace just step off and start running into transition. Remember to make sure to do this **BEFORE** the dismount line.

This action also takes some practice and often when I work with people learning this I find some firm grass to practice on in case they fall.

Run to Transition

After you have dismounted the bike follow the chute into transition and make your way to your rack remembering the path you took when you did a walkthrough in preparation before the race. Once back at your transition area remember to rack your bike **BEFORE** unclipping your helmet then complete the very quick change of putting on hat, race number and running shoes.

Then it's out the run chute past the cheering crowds and on to the run course.

Read more advanced information about the run leg in the eBook “Starting out in Triathlons – The Run”.