



CYCLING DOWNHILL

HOW BIKING REVOLUTIONIZED ONE MAN'S WORKOUT



BY MICHAEL A. MILLER

Remember that twice-opened multi-vitamin bottle left deserted on the countertop, or that dog-eared diet book that only resulted in wasted ingredients? While the thought might count for botched date nights and forgotten birthday gifts, good intentions don't Sherpa your workout strategy all the way from wishful thinking to rock-solid abs—instead it's perseverance and forming healthy habits. And Chris Pfund believes he's found the key to actually following through.



"I was in the jungle in Guatemala, right where all the pyramids are in Tikal. I had 50 bucks in my hand, and I was going to ride some kid's tricycle if I had to," recalled Pfund, owner of Montauk Bikes and three-decade triathlon racer. He hadn't gone for his ride yet that day, and he was getting nervous.

Instead of trudging home defeated that muggy day in Peru, he strapped rocks to his shoes, flung himself on his back, and spun his legs for 30 minutes, then hoisted himself to his feet for a 30-minute run. "Based on how sore I was the next day, that was certainly something that I would have to count," said Pfund. He was determined not to break his six-and-a-half-year streak of riding a bicycle.

Pfund was 50 years old when the idea of riding his bike every day first flitted across his neurons. Soon, 100 days of riding had passed, then another 100, and that's when he knew he was onto something. "I realized, probably 200 days into it, that if I stopped for any reason, there would be a host of other reasons. I decided I was going to finish up the year, a full 365 days." That one decision snowballed into an extraordinary international journey on two wheels.

Precarious cliff edges, 3,000-year-old Peruvian staircases, and Bali rice paddies became common backdrops for Pfund and his wife to exercise. Whether exploring civil-war-ravaged Guatemala or careening down Copper Canyon, riding a bike

puts Pfund on the scene instead of spectating from behind the window of a rental car. “Oh my goodness, that’s one of the beauties of it...we still go to some of the touristy places, the must-go-to spots or what have you, but the difference is that we’re riding from point A to point B and we’re usually riding through areas that you wouldn’t get to see otherwise.” If this seems unrealistic to puzzle into your workday—it is—but Pfund also does a large amount of riding around his home in the Hamptons in order to check the bicycle box every day.

Pfund rides to work, to the 7-11, and to the grocery store, rain or shine, averaging around 45 minutes to an hour per day. The weather and destination are nonissues, because Pfund knows throwing a leg over the saddle is a nonnegotiable part of his day, like



MAKE IT COUNT

When not spiraling down a volcano-side village or making mountains look like molehills, Pfund can be found peddling for practicality, like when he bikes to the grocery store. Here’s how he makes the reward worth the effort.

→ **CUT YOUR OPTIONS.** If you’re going to the store, it’s easy to say “Oh, I’ll just jump in my car.” But Pfund suggests you can retrain your inner voice to say “Oh, I’ll just jump on my bike,” and that will help form healthy exercise habits.

→ **LOAD UP.** Find a backpack that works for you or a cargo trailer that hitches and unhitches easily from your bike. If there’s one thing Pfund loves, it’s passing up heavily-gear’d road bikers in his street clothes while towing a heavy trailer full of food.

→ **KEEP IT HANDY.** Your bike should always be easily accessible. If you have to unhook it from your garage ceiling before each ride, those rides will be less likely to occur.

brushing his teeth or getting dressed. Snow, ice, and other wintry concoctions submit to the studs on his snow tires. Basically, “it doesn’t matter unless it’s downpouring because then you just can’t see,” he said. On those days, you’ll find him training indoors on his CompuTrainer, a cycling simulator that lets Pfund watch his digital self in 3D as he races real Iron Man courses against computerized competitors or ghosts of his past performances. If he’s travelling, he “just make[s] sure [he] can find a gym with something [he] can pedal.”

TRIATHLONS AND TRIBULATIONS

It’s easy to imagine that competing in three sports would mean never running out of fresh and varied workouts, but for Pfund it meant never running out of excuses. “It’s not really that easy. You wake up and you have your plan, you decide what you’re going to do for the day, and then life gets in the way,” he said. When he awarded himself too much slack, he’d find himself looking back, stressing over calories left unburnt: “Oh my gosh, I haven’t ridden my bike in a week,” or “I haven’t run in 4 or 5 days,” he’d groan.

What Pfund suffered is called decision fatigue. When one study examined the likelihood of Israeli prisoners to be granted parole, it was not the severity of their crimes that

influenced the outcome—it was the time of day they were brought before the judge. As the day grew long, the judges were likelier to deny parole. Their minds were melted by the bombardment of previous decisions, and they chose the path of least resistance.

Unlike the Israeli judges, Pfund chose not to let the distractions of life get in his way anymore. In simplifying his workout, he dramatically reduced the number of decisions his working memory had to process as well as the likelihood of shrugging exercise off until later (or worse, never). Instead, there were just two prerequisites for success: to mount his bike, and to ride it.

Of course, avoiding decision fatigue doesn’t mean perpetually hoisting the same barbell or slogging around the same cycling course day in and day out. Pfund prefers the plateaus of Moab to the exercise plateaus that stanch personal improvement. So while biking is his main source of activity, Pfund plays a wild card once in a while to keep his muscles from growing complacent. He likes shadowing his son’s professional football workouts, which vary from jumping up half-flights of stairs to sprinting while tied to a heavy rope, and attends physical therapy to help recuperate. What’s the wildest card in Pfund’s deck? Walking through his

backyard, jumping into the pond, and swimming a half mile to his bike shop where he'll dry off and start his work day.

BREAKING THE CHAIN

Pfund admits to missing one day in his career of daily riding. That fateful slip of the mind transpired six long years ago, when the multi-business owner was simply too busy. As a sound designer, he had a half-dozen shows to work that weekend, and to top it off, the skies opened up and peppered Pfund with a torrent of soggy excuses. Rain was the last thing he needed, and he reasoned he would "just wait until later in the day." The next morning, Pfund awoke and ruminated on yesterday's ride, only to be engulfed by panic. "Oh my god!" he exclaimed. "I haven't done it." This experience served as proof that he simply forgot to do it, and rain or shine, excuses don't hold water in the winner's circle. But Pfund's moment of "absentmindedness" was actually a great relief. His streak was officially broken, meaning he was no longer building pressure—just quads.

"It's been really easy because when I wake up in the morning I know I'm going to eat breakfast, I know I'm going to eat lunch, I'll eat dinner, and I'm going to ride my bike. That's just the way it's going to work," said Pfund. He professed that no longer worrying about swimming or lifting weights competitively allowed him to focus on riding as part of his daily routine. Although he hasn't given up on his other sports, running a few times per week and swimming occasionally, riding became habitual—and that made it one of the easiest things he's ever done. Pfund advises minimizing the number of exercises you try to cram into your life, because, as evidenced by that multivitamin bottle still staring back at you, life can fight back. 🍀



CITY SLICKER

Cycling around town comes with a unique set of risks that are mutually exclusive from the likes of Guatemalan warriors and nature's whim. Urban cyclists face a beast far worse—inattentive drivers. While some countries like France are cycling-conscious, many American drivers seem to think they own the road. "I think the most important thing is just to be predictable," cautioned Pfund. "If you were riding on the wrong side of the road and you got a car that's going to make a right-hand turn, he's not looking for you coming up. He's looking the way traffic is supposed to flow, and cars already don't want to see you." So keep your eyes peeled and your helmet buckled, and follow these road safety tips when you're on two wheels this summer.

GO WITH THE FLOW. Ride on the right, in the same direction as other vehicles.

BE LAWFUL. A bicycle is a vehicle, and as its driver, you assume the same rights and responsibilities as other drivers. That includes obeying all traffic signs, signals, and lane markings.

YIELD WHEN APPROPRIATE. Cars don't own the road, but neither do you. Make sure you yield to pedestrians and cars who have the right of way.

BE PREDICTABLE. Save your erratic, jerky movements for the dance floor. Ride straight and smoothly, and signal all moves to other road users.

STAY ALERT. You'll not only need to see but also hear your surroundings for the quickest reaction times when danger strikes. Perk up and keep your senses sharp.

LOOK FIRST. Before turning, make sure to look for an opening and signal your intent while checking for traffic the whole time.

WATCH FOR PARKED CARS. A door to the face or a somersault over someone's hood only look cool when performed by Daniel Craig's stunt double. Don't try these moves in real life.



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