

TECH TALK

SOUND OFF

It's not about the bike *fit*, it's how you *sit* on the bike!

TEXT BY JORDAN BLANCO |
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KORUP VISION

As an amateur triathlete, one of the post-race emails I dread most is the one from the on-course photographer. I open the email wondering which embarrassing race moment they captured this time: the one-eyed scowl as I attempt to tear off my wetsuit while running out of the water, the mid snort-rocket face contortion while clearing my sinuses on the bike, or better still, the run shot where both my feet appear planted in cement. When I believed I had been running with perfect, Miranda-Catfear-esque floating form.

Though I may have browsing through those post-race candids, New Zealand cycling coach, Paul Buick, considers it an essential part of doing his job. As a bicycle fitter, coach and all round cycling guru to professional and amateur athletes alike, Buick finds tremendous value in reviewing race photos. "In the first 30 miles of an Ironman race you see a large majority of the field in relatively good positions on their bike." But what astounds Buick's reviewing athlete photos during the final 30 miles of the same race, noticing a large number of them appear to have changed their position on the bike. He sees athletes with hands choked back on the aero bars, backs arched, pelvis tilted backwards, and sitting further forward on the saddle.

He goes on to say, "These athletes don't stop at the halfway point and adjust their saddle height or move their bars, it's just that they are sitting on their bike differently!" Even professional athletes are guilty of fidgeting around on the bike during a race, as recent Ironman Western Australia

Champion, Sarah Piampiano, confesses: "Before working with Paul [Buick], I always rode on the nose of my saddle, and had an extremely closed arm position. I also moved around a lot as I was never completely comfortable in any one position!"

You've spent hundreds or even thousands of dollars getting the perfect aero bike with all the best equipment, but all that could be wasted if you can't comfortably sit on the bike for the duration of a race. Finding the right position on the bike for a triathlete should start with an awareness of how you interact with the bike at the three points of contact: saddle, aero bars, pedals.

Buick always starts his bike fits by helping athletes select an appropriate saddle. However, he underscores that when testing the saddle, you also have to

The key for Piampiano has been to find that sweet spot where she is not moving or adjusting much on the bike..

keep in mind the "saddle – bicycle short – athlete combination". As Buick points out, "switching from a thicker chamois in a training bib short to a thin chamois in a triathlon race kit can have the effect of lowering the seat height of the bike by several millimeters!" He's astonished that so few people take this in account when dialing in the bike position for training and racing.

Expert: PAUL BUICK

Paul Buick is a cycling coach and technical advisor for Purplepatch fitness, and works alongside Matt Dixon to assist in the development in the skills and technical development of the purplepatch professional team, as well as a large number of amateur purplepatch athletes. He has acted as technical advisor and assistant coach to athletes such as Meredith Kessler, Tim Reed, Jesse Thomas, Sarah Piampiano and many others. www.purplepatchfitness.com



TECH TALK

SOUND OFF

© Jordan Blum



TO ILLUSTRATE: Professional rider Sarah Camero, firstly "Hands choked back on the aero bars, back hunched, pelvis rotated backwards" and secondly, "Fingers wrapped around bar end shifters, flat back, hips rotated forwards".



Moving around on your saddle or pulling back on your aero bars can quickly distort a biomechanically efficient position as your body compensates accordingly.

The next step for athletes is to be aware of where they sit on the saddle and whether they are hunching around during long rides, moving forwards or backwards on the saddle. While your bike fit should be established to be biomechanically efficient, if you cannot maintain the bike position with good cycling form for the duration of the ride then that efficiency is compromised. Buick notes that there are several great bike-fitting tools and protocols on the market these days but that, at the end of the day, there's an element of individuality.

Piampiano agrees. "What Paul has taught me is that just like a training plan or nutritional plan, no two people are alike. Everyone's position is going to be different." The key for Piampiano has been to find that sweet spot where the is not moving or adjusting much on the bike. She also finds that the position that is consistently comfortable is where she ultimately generates the most power.

When it comes to the front end of the bike, Buick recommends that your forearms rest on the arm pads of the aero extensions with your fingers wrapped around the aero shifters. "Start by getting your bike fit in the ball park and then test what works from there," advises Buick.

"Your body needs to be in sync and skeletal angles somewhere around 90 degrees or slightly more open typically create a good load bearing structure in the aero bars."

Moving around on your saddle or pulling back on your aero bars can quickly distort a biomechanically efficient position as your body compensates accordingly:


"Choking back on the aero bars usually creates a narrower angle between the upper arm and the torso – less than 90 degrees – so the body adjusts by arching the back," says Buick. However, he points out that arching the back also tends to tilt the pelvis backwards, which can add stress that interferes with digestion and breathing, as well as adding tension that could be carried into the run.

So far, we've talked about two of the three points of contact – saddle and bars – but what about the pedals? Buick encourages athletes to pay attention to their foot angle. In particular, he advises athletes to "avoid dropping the heel in the aero position since with the pelvis tilted forward, a lower heel will increase hamstring tension."

Buick approves of triathletes including road bike rides consistently throughout the season to help with bike position

awareness as well as improved postural fitness. He explains, "You add skeletal support when you ride in your aero bars but because you don't have that support on the road bike, the different position can help develop your postural fitness." If you don't have a road bike, you can simulate a road bike position on your triathlon bike by riding in the base bars.

"Athletes should take advantage of riding in their base bars as much as possible in urban environments; it's not only safer but practicing good base bar posture will also strengthen your lower back and relieve tension in your neck," Buick adds. "Only when you get in an environment conducive to aero position protocol should you drop to your aero bars." When riding in aero position, Buick likes to see athletes with their head down and eyes forward, looking through the top of the eye rather than cocking the head upwards which not only puts pressure on the neck, but also is an inferior aerodynamic position.

As Piampiano affirms, "The key is comfort. We all want to be as aerodynamic as possible, but if you are not comfortable, you will end up moving around on the saddle and give up any aerodynamic gains you may have gained from the position." She recommends finding a bike fitter like Buick who encourages you to ride outside and test the position. "Riding on the trainer without road movement and dynamics doesn't give a true sense of fit... the best way to test how the position feels is to ride out on open roads." 

TECH TALK

SAVE/SPEND/SPLURGE

Product:
Pedals

Save

PRODUCT BRAND

Keo Easy Pedals
The Look Keo Easy is a simple and reliable pedal system designed for anyone getting out in cycling or wanting a cheaper option to begin with. They will secure your feet in well and will help improve your performance and pedalling technique.

www.lookcycling.com



\$62

\$69



SHIMANO RS40 SPD-SL
Excellent Value SPD-SL compatible road bike pedals for a secure interface with your cycling shoes. Supplied with 6 float cleats and sporting a wide profile, Shimano PD-RS40 are the perfect introduction to performance road cycling pedals.

www.shimano.com.au

Spend



\$232

TIME RSX Carbon Road Pedals
Time's road pedal range is a good choice for riders who require rotational and angular float and lateral movement. It's ideal for road, time trial or triathlon use.

www.timesport.it

\$206



SHIMANO Ultegra 6800 SPD-SL
The short carbon fibre body construction offers low weight, is super stiff and offers efficient power transfer. The PD-6800 features newly refined technologies as the flagship Dura Ace pedals with the PD-6800 only weighing 89 more.

www.shimano-uk-estylodge.com

Splurge



\$430

LOOK
LOOK Blade2 Carbon Pro Team Edition TI
The Look Blade 2 is the result of a long process undertaken by Look engineers to optimise all the innovative concepts that were developed for the Keo Blade carbon. The Look Blade 2 is a more reassuring, more stable, lighter and a more powerful pedal.

www.lookcycling.com



\$1033

SPEEDPLAY
Zero Titanium Hexagram Pedals
The Hexagram zero shares the same race-proven, tried-and-true technical benefits of Speedplay's lightweight zero pedal, but has been completely re-engineered for weight reduction and totally hot-rodded to maximize performance.

www.speedplay.com