



INTRODUCTION TO KERMIS RACING

Introduction

Belgian Kermis Races (also called Kermesse) are an exciting and fast-paced form of bike racing. They typically consist of a short, multi-lap circuit course with tight corners, town centre obstacles, fast straightaways, rough or cobbled roads and intense competition. In order to succeed in Belgian Kermis racing, cyclists must possess a combination of speed, endurance, and tactical skill.

Training

Proper training preparation is key to achieving success in these demanding events. In this first section we will discuss some essential training strategies for cyclists looking to excel in Kermis racing.

Build Endurance

Kermis races can be physically demanding, often lasting for just 45-90 minutes at very high intensity. To prepare for this level of exertion, cyclists need to build their endurance through a combination of long, steady rides and interval training. Long, steady rides at a moderate pace will help to build your aerobic base and improve your endurance, while interval training will help to improve your speed and power.

Interval training involves alternating periods of high-intensity effort with periods of rest or low-intensity recovery. For Kermis racing, interval training should focus on short, intense efforts with short recovery periods (also known as micro intervals). These efforts should mimic the demands of Kermis racing, with explosive accelerations, high-intensity sprints and rapid changes in pace.

Improve Sprinting Ability

In Kermis racing, a strong finishing sprint is essential to success. To improve your sprinting ability, you should incorporate sprint intervals into your training regimen.

Sprint intervals involve sprinting all-out for short periods of time, followed by a period of rest or low-intensity recovery. These intervals should be relatively short, typically lasting between 10 and 30 seconds.

To maximize the benefits of sprint training, you should focus on explosive power and technique. Practice explosive power by starting your sprints from a standing position or a slow roll, and focus on maintaining a smooth, efficient pedal stroke. It's also important to work on your technique, including your body position, breathing, and pacing.



Practice Cornering

Cornering is a critical skill for Kermis racing, and something that many visiting riders struggle with. To improve your cornering ability, you should practice riding through tight turns at high speeds. This can be done on a closed circuit or on the road, but always prioritize safety and be mindful of traffic and other hazards.

To improve your cornering technique, focus on your body position and line selection. Lean your bike into the turn while keeping your body upright and try to take the smoothest possible line through the turn. Be sure to brake before entering the turn, and accelerate smoothly as you exit.

Train as a Team

Kermis racing is often a team sport, with riders working together to support each other and achieve a common goal. To prepare for Kermis racing, it's important to train with your team and develop a sense of teamwork and communication.

Team training can include practicing drafting and paceline riding, where riders take turns leading the group to conserve energy and maintain speed. It can also involve discussing team tactics, such as setting up lead-outs for sprinters or working together to break away from the peloton.

Develop Mental Toughness

Kermis racing is not just physically demanding, but mentally challenging as well. Races can be intense and highly competitive, and riders must be able to stay focused and mentally tough in order to succeed.

To develop mental toughness, practice visualization and positive self-talk. Visualize yourself succeeding in the race, including executing your tactics and crossing the finish line in first place. Use positive self-talk to reinforce your confidence and focus, and stay focused on your goals throughout the race.

Strategy

Know the course: The first and most crucial step in developing a winning strategy for a Kermis race is to understand the course. Kermis races often have tight turns, narrow roads, and obstacles that require quick reflexes and agility. Knowing the layout of the course beforehand can help you plan your moves and anticipate any obstacles that may come your way. Be sure to ride the circuit before each race.

Focus on your strengths: Focus on your strengths. If you are a sprinter, focus on conserving your energy during the early stages of the race and position yourself well for the final sprint.



Make the breakaway: Be very aware of gaps opening between riders. Once a gap grows to more than 3-4 bike lengths, the effort required to close increases significantly and can result in you missing a breakaway.

Work as a team: Kermis racing is a team sport, and working together can give you a significant advantage. If you are racing with a team, communicate with your teammates before the start and work together to achieve your goals. Riding together can help you to maintain position or to close a gap, and if one of your teammates makes a move, you can support them by blocking your competitors.

Tactics

Attacks: Attacks are a common tactic in Kermis racing and typically start in the very first lap of racing. This can be a shock to international riders who come from countries where a more defensive style of riding is typical. Be prepared to ride on the limit for the first 35-40 minutes, after which the pace often slows before attacks begin again in the final 2-3 laps.

Positioning: Positioning is crucial in Kermis racing. It is essential to be in the right position at the right time to make a move or respond to a move. Always position yourself near the front of the pack (front 10-15 riders) to avoid crashes and stay out of trouble.

Racing in a breakaway: Once in a breakaway be careful not to work too hard – only ever work as hard as the least hard working rider if the break goes early. Be sure to arrange for time-gaps to be communicated from your support crew beside the road. As the gap grows there is less of a need to work hard, especially in the final laps. If in a smaller breakaway group, be conscious about your tactics in the later stages of the race – will you close the gaps to attacking riders or leave it to other riders to do so?

Cornering: Cornering is a critical skill in Kermis racing and is often an area in which international riders are less skilled due to racing in countries with wider roads and fewer corners. Take the corners as smoothly and efficiently as possible and avoid unnecessary braking. This will help you maintain your speed and conserve energy. Poor cornering can result in you losing position, and once you are at the back of the peloton then the risk of getting dropped increases significantly.

Sprinting: Sprinting is often the deciding factor in Kermis racing. To win a sprint, position yourself well before the final stretch (front 3-7 riders) and conserve your energy until the final push. Be sure to study the final 500 metres of the course to choose the best sprint line.