BEGINNER CLIMBING TIPS

Some people hate climbing, some people love it. I used to hate it but have learned (and trained) to love it. Or some aspects of it anyway.

There are a few different types of climbs:

1. The short "**power climbs** ": These can be fairly steep (10-12%) and suit strong and heavy guys.
2. The **long and gradual climbs** : These are about 6% and don't necessarily separate the pure climbers from the guys like me. They aren't easy yet they aren't hard enough to really split up a group. During these climbs you still go fast enough to benefit from drafting and the forces of gravity aren't large enough to penalize the heavier riders.
3. The long and **steep climbs**: Where the pure climbers tend to shine.

If you're here looking for tips on climbing, then you probably don't fit into the category #3. I won't even touch on how to keep up in these types of climbs. Let's be clear – genetic ability, proper training, and optimum power to weight ratio (6-7 watts/kg) will determine if you are a true climber. For example, Lance Armstrong can generate almost 500 watts over a 40 minute period and he's less than 70kg!

What you can do:

If you want to improve your climbing (#1 & #2 types of climbs), the most effective way improve is by simply doing more hills. That's it! Get off the flat stuff and choose hilly rides two or three times a week. Mediocre climbers often head for the flat roads.

- **Spin those legs at a higher cadence.** Swallow your pride and get a 27 tooth cassette if you're having problems pushing the 23 up those climbs at over 80rpm. Your knees will thank you for it and you'll climb faster than if you're pushing big gears.

- Mark off intermediate goals. It can be a long way to the top of a 10km climb. It can be mentally excruciating. Break the climb off into smaller goals and tell yourself that you'll maintain your pace until the next turn. Once you're there, set another goal. Just as using a high cadence breaks the effort of pedalling into smaller chunks, mentally breaking down the climb makes it more manageable.

- Weight – For example, if a 75kg rider loses 4kg while maintaining the same power output, then he/she will save 2 minutes on a 3km climb. Need I say more? If you want to be a better climber, reduce your weight as much as possible so that you're not losing power.

- Position – This is very individual. On average, when you stand up during a climb you use much more energy as well as slow down (because you usually reduce your cadence). Smaller riders can often stand with less penalty because they have less weight to support. That's why a guy like Armstrong will climb while standing more than a guy like Ulrich. Also, keep a relaxed upper body. You see most of the best climbers with their arms and shoulders relaxed while their hands are loosely gripped on the tops of their handle bars. Muscle tension in these areas expend energy that's better spent on turning the pedals.

- Breathing – You might say that I'm digging deep for things to say when I bring up breathing. But consider this analogy. If you're doing 5 chin-ups where little effort is required, you won't need to focus on technique. However, if you're trying to do 20 then it's a different story. You need focus and technique to minimize your energy and maximize your effort. When cycling and especially climbing, focus on breathing. It's the key to self-monitoring your effort and developing your maximum potential. Breathing is so important that it deserves a write-up on its own.

- Training – This also deserves a blog entirely all of its own but good climbing obviously requires specific training for specific elements of fitness. The first and most important training advice is to get out and hit the hills. I wish there were an easier way.