

Fitter and Faster: Ep 14 - Indoor Cycling

Emma-Kate: Welcome to Fitter and Faster. My name is Emma-Kate Lidbury, your host and managing editor here at *Triathlete Magazine*. Each month on Fitter and Faster, we tackle one triathlon training topic in-depth. Giving you everything you need to know. This month with winter training in full effect, and many of us stuck inside, we're talking all things indoor cycling. What are the pros and cons of indoor riding? How can it help your training and how has indoor riding changed in recent years? After we've covered some of the basics, we'll be joined later in the episode by pro athlete and Ironman champion Meredith Kessler, who's been crushing it on Zwift racing scene lately. We'll get her insights from an athlete's perspective about making the most of your training indoors, her preferred setup, and her tips for Zwift racing. Plus we'll have our senior editor and resident gear guru Chris Foster joining us to get you set up with all the gear you need from smart trainers to fans to rolling tables and plenty more.

All of that after this short break...

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OK, so riding inside! it's something that until fairly recently, we only did because of adverse weather or because you needed to squeeze in a workout after a long day at the office, but the rise of programs like Zwift and Rouvy and the huge tech advances in indoor trainers has us looking at indoor riding in a whole new light.

It's no longer something you just suffer through in mind-numbing boredom. Well, I guess it might be. You can now log on to a group ride with athletes from all over the world and race them in bunch sprints or hill climbs. You can recon a course you are planning to race in real life, and get to know every corner and turn... You can work on boosting your FTP, or functional threshold power, in super short workouts that you can knock out in under 60 minutes. It's literally a whole new world.

Riding indoors also allows you to focus on your training in a way that you can't always do when you're riding outside and there's traffic or stop signs or other road safety concerns. You can go all out on the trainer, knowing that the worst that's going to happen is you might fall off it through sheer exhaustion and collapse in a sweaty heap on your garage floor.

Now back in November, coaches Joe Friel and Jim Rotberg joined us for episode 11 of Fitter and Faster, where we talked in-depth about indoor riding. The two of them co-authored the book *Ride Inside: a guide to getting the most out of indoor cycling, smart trainers apps and more*. Back then we asked Joe what role he thought indoor riding plays in a tri training program.

Joe Friel: Yeah, there's lots of ways. It can be a part of the training program, the most basic way people think of it as is as a way to, as a form of avoidance, avoiding bad weather, avoiding early sundowns after work, avoiding traffic, that sort of thing. That's the sort of thing we all think about or have thought about historically when it comes to indoor training, but the world has turned, we're now moving toward it becoming a way of training, which has as much viability as any other form of training. So definitely we're seeing gigantic change right now in the

way we think about indoor training. And so it's becoming an integral part of many athletes training programs.

You can, for example, if you live someplace where there are no hills and you really want to do some hill type work, it gives you some opportunities to do that. Or if you live someplace like I live where there is no flat and you'd like to be able to ride a flat terrain for change, that is one of the options you have.

There also is things you can do indoors, like turning on a flat terrain, as opposed to going out and trying to back off on 10% grades. It's just not possible for that case. So it's opened up lots of opportunities for people to do things. But at the same time, there's lots of stuff I'm sure we'll get into later on which the athlete must be aware of.

Emma-Kate: And Jim had some interesting insights into how the trainer can really help newcomers to the sport.

Jim Rutberg: One of the things that we talked about, that Joe and I talked about early on, was the idea that, especially for newer athletes, the best thing a coach can do for an athlete who's new to the sport or new to coaching is getting them to be more consistent.

If we can get somebody to train, to complete more of the workouts that are prescribed or just add workouts to the year, every month, more every year they're going to get better, and indoor cycling opportunities have really given people a chance to increase their monthly and annual training workload because of the convenience, because they're able to train at all hours of day and night, weather conditions, things like that.

Emma-Kate: Jim also gave us a rundown of the four different ways you can ride inside...

Jim Rutberg: There are a couple of, there are four different ways you can really train indoors. You can train off-grid. Which is a trainer that's not connected to anything, which is the old trainers, rollers, fluid trainers, things like that.

Being alone in your basement. As Joe mentioned, some people, for a lot of people that is the economical way to do it, and the only way to do it. And the positive side, even if you have other alternatives, is that it's simple. You don't have to worry about connections. You don't have to worry about the internet connection. You can get on and go and you have to use internal motivation. For all of the training, you have to be able to be motivated to do the work.

The next step is connected using the apps, using a smart trainer or some combination thereof. Or just the head unit on your own bike and structured workouts, things along those lines.

Advantages are you don't often have to remember the workout anymore because it's programmed in which can be very helpful for complicated workouts. These systems often have erg mode, which the, so the trainer is controlling. The resistance can be very good for maintaining consistent power.

You know, from a coaching perspective this gives us very nice looking power files. And then it's the entertainment. You can be on something like Zwift, or you can be on RGT or Rouvy. Any of these other ones you can ride in the Swiss Alps. You can recon a course that you're going to use, things like that.

And then the next step up from that is interactive, which adds the social component as an accountability component, because you can meet up for group rides, which especially with COVID and everything, the accountability component of getting people to train. Some people are very motivated to train.

Other people really need that "I'm going to meet somebody at the coffee shop" kind of thing to get them on the bike. The interactive apps help with that. And then of course there's the, as you mentioned, that the e-racing in competition.

And then the downside to the interactive apps, I think Joe would agree, is the people can spend too much time racing, e-racing, group riding, and lose some of the specific training focus from that.

And then the last way, which has been taken away from us, is the together. So that's the indoor classes, the group led sessions, things along those lines. The biggest benefit there is you have hands-on coaching.

There's an instructor at the front of the room. There's somebody watching you on the bike. There's somebody who can kinda direct what you're doing and how you're doing it. There's obviously the social component to it. And the downside to the together training classes often is that there's a lack of progression.

So because everybody is coming in for a one-off class, it can be hard. But it's not necessarily building on itself the way a training plan would be. So those are how we looked at the different ways that you could train indoors. And each of them having some pros and cons and not necessarily being altogether, one being better than the other, they all have their place within indoor cycling.

Emma-Kate: Of course. What about the limitations of indoor riding, especially for triathletes, Joe expands on that here.

Joe Friel: Yeah. Head to head racing and virtual racing are really not exactly the same thing. They're quite similar, but you're not the same thing. One of the biggest things for triathletes, one of the most important things that a triathlete has to be aware of when they're riding indoors, whether it's in a virtual race, or if they're just doing a hard race-like workout, is that you must be aero.

You don't have to do it indoors. You can sit in the position you want to on the bike. I'm sure someday the way this is changing trainers and apps will know what your body position is and it'll slow you down. But if you sit up in triathlon, trying to ride sitting outside, it'll actually cause you to slow down.

We're not there yet. That's going to happen. Everything else is coming around, which is amazing. So that'll happen. So for right now, anyway, the athlete has to be very aware that they're churning for triathlon and in triathlon you don't sit up so you can increase your power output.

You have to be in the aero position to decrease your drag. And so if you're not abiding by that very basic norm of triathlon, then you're really kind of wasting your time by doing that type of training or racing because you're learning bad habits. It's just a skill you must have as a triathlete. You must have an aerodynamic position on the bike.

Otherwise, there's going to be tremendous slowing down taking place. So that's a starting point is you have to be aware of the differences between the two. And that for a triathlete is one of the major differences between the two. Beyond that, there's little things like when you're in a head-to-head race, you kinda get a sense from seeing the person ahead of you how they're feeling.

You can tell what their...how it's going for them by looking at their body position or the breathing rate. And as you get closer you become more aware of the sounds that they're making and all that sort of stuff. And that doesn't exist indoors right now. Again, probably will eventually, but for right now, you're really stuck with looking at this avatar on the screen.

And this person is not really giving you all the signs that a real person gives you when they're racing, you don't know if they're at their limit, or if they got lots of room left to go yet. That's just something you don't know. And unfortunately that's just part of the way indoor racing is.

So there are just lots of things out there that are different, unique about racing indoors versus racing outdoors. Someday I suspect we'll have racing indoors and it'll be the parallel to racing outdoors. Because that's definitely the direction we're going, but there will always be people who are more comfortable racing outdoors, and there'll be people who work more, racing indoors.

So there's going to be this divergence in the sport I think to some extent in terms of the types of races people enjoy doing. So we're adding as a category to the sport. Which is just now blooming, just now started, but in a few years we'll see what's happened with all this and I suspect that's the direction we're going.

Emma-Kate: Of course, both Joe and Jim agreed that riding inside not only helps from a road safety point of view, but also if you're really trying to hit some high intensity work...

Joe Friel: As a coach, I'm often worried about my athletes. I give them very hard workouts to do on the road, and I know there's going to be traffic and there's going to be intersections they have to go through and some people are very safety conscious, and I've discovered many athletes who are not, they just, they kinda keep the fingers crossed and hope it's not going to happen to them today. And for the most part, it doesn't, but riding indoors takes... it gives you that option of doing the workout that it could be very difficult to do where you live.

I know, where I live, if I want to go find a flat course to do time trial type work on, I've got to ride my bike something like about 15 miles to get there. 15 miles there 15 miles back, I've already got 30 miles in and I've decided I still got to do whatever the workout was once I got there.

And many people have that problem with it, people contact me and say, hey, you told me to do these, to do some hills about how you know, I live in Florida, there's

no hills here, so what do I do? And, so it's just so many options that indoor training gives us in terms of that sort of thing.

It's a great, it's a great tool.

Jim Rutberg: The other component of that is the intensity factor. With somebody who's doing a really high intensity interval session—we see it from the track athletes sometimes, they can empty the tank to the point where they're really almost falling off the bike or their heads are dropping or they're pushing all the way through the end of the interval and that's not necessarily safe to do on the road.

You have to reserve some level of energy to stay upright, stay out of traffic, keep yourself safe. Indoors you don't have to reserve that, that energy. You can literally put it all out and fall off the bike. I mean that's not hopefully what you're doing, but you can really empty the tank on some of the hardest workouts.

Emma-Kate: Okay. After this short break, we'll be joined by Ironman champion Meredith Kessler to give us the athlete's perspective on riding indoors...

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Meredith Kessler, thanks so much for joining us on Fitter and Faster today, we are excited to talk to you about all things indoor riding... you are somebody who's probably put a few million miles on your trainer, right?

Meredith Kessler: You know it, you've got to, Emma-Kate! You've got to.

Emma-Kate: So long before Zwift was even a thing... I know you've been crushing it on the Zwift scene lately...but when it comes to indoor riding, long before we had avatars and Zwift and all those things, you were somebody who was putting a lot of time in indoor on the trainer indoors.

Talk to us a little bit about why that was and what appeals to you about it and how it served you.

Meredith Kessler: Sure. Thanks for asking! Yeah. So even before the days of Zwift, because I've been on Zwift actually since its genesis, but even before that, I remember I was working in San Francisco, I worked at an investment bank and I knew I was only going to have these like certain pockets of time to get any cycling training. And it needed to be before going into the office and all that. And I found what was then called Endurance in San Francisco. It was a cycling studio with about 20 compu-trainers at the time in a little room and you had an instructor leading it and fast forward, I became one of those instructors and taught there for 10 years. But my point is, it's just quality over quantity. You could get so much work done within an hour and a half class before you headed to the office and at the time, that's when I met my former coach there and he was leading the classes at the time. It just kinda took off from there and I realized, wow, how much I got out of those training sessions.

And honestly, that was literally in like 2000 ... 2002. So I have been a promiscuous indoor cycling cyclist now for many years, but I just wanted to say that also our brand is balanced and it, and I don't say that lightly, like anyone can just throw

that around. But for me, especially, at 42 years old and having done, like having a lot of cycling miles on my legs, I have to be very cognizant of time spent training, also time spent on the bike.

Even before the Zwift rage, which I love I, I truly felt that I would, me being on a bike for eight hours, just isn't going to happen. I want to make time for family and friends. I'm not saying it's bad. You need to go, it's not like I don't go and need to ride for training, ride five hours outside! I'm not saying that. I'm just saying for your rides that you want focus and efficiency and control and quality, I do those Indoor. And, since I moved from California to Ohio, especially in the dead of winter, I'm doing 100% of my cycling indoor. It's getting unsafe outside as well, and it kinda gives benefits just to keep it simple, keep it balanced, keep it controlled and stay inside and Zwift, by the way, allowed it to be a lot more fun than back in the compu-training days.

Emma-Kate: Yeah. I used to just sit on the, sit in the garage, looking at the walls and yeah... You stole my next question, cause I was going to ask you what percentage of your training is currently indoors and what's outdoors, but it's 100% indoors right now.

Meredith Kessler: It is. Because obviously there's no, I'm not going anywhere for a training camp or anything like that. And I probably wouldn't, even if we weren't in a pandemic. I do 100% of my race riding right now indoor. And I would say in the summer when the weather gets better, I'm still at 80%.

So if that tells you anything, I just feel like it parlays out onto the real race course. And don't get me wrong I need to have bike control and, trust me, normally, right now you can be in New Zealand with Paul Buick and he'd be like devastated by my outdoor riding ability because I've spent all winter indoors and he would like... we'd have five very intense days on the bike. Not in terms of like hard watts or power, just like getting used to bike handling, so I am rusty when I come out of it, but then, muscle memory, it comes back and it just works for my family life. And being a mom right now, too, I want to make sure that, I'm lucky I can do this downstairs while Mac is napping upstairs. And so it just allows that, that balance. And I really enjoy it! If I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't do it, but I genuinely enjoy it.

Emma-Kate: Yeah. And that's so important, especially when you're trying to make sure that you're logged the consistent miles day in, day out.

For a lot of age-groupers too, balancing around family, balancing around work, it's very easy just to be able to dive on a bike that's downstairs in the basement or out in the garage and boom, you're away. But yeah, you mentioned that the handling and the obviously bike control, bike handling, descending, cornering, there's things that you just can't do on a bike indoors that you actually have to do outdoors and you obviously have to do when you're racing. So what would be your...not everybody is lucky enough to have a bike coach, like a Paul Buick over in New Zealand...so what would be your takeaways or your tips for people who maybe do spend all winter riding indoors, and then they have to learn, almost learn how to control or handle a bike again, when they go outdoors.

Meredith Kessler: Absolutely. So I would honestly suggest what I'm going to be doing as I am in a race in March 12th. I'll get there a couple of days before, but not

that many days before, to practice. If I were just going out in the spring and it's going to be my first outdoor ride and say arbitrarily three... it'll probably be like three or four months since I'd been outside. Don't worry about any time, any pace. I would like 100% focus on your handling skills.

As you're riding, think about, are my knees in check, are my arms relaxed? Is my saddle too high or too low? Since I haven't been on this bad boy in three to four months out here, I think about four right, and then honestly, I will do this even having done the sport for so long, I will go to a local high school parking lot and I will just start doing 100 turns around the parking lot to try to turn and look ...OK, I'm not a gravel racer. I'm not an Xterra racer. I'm not any of that. I choose courses, to be honest, that aren't going to be that technical because I'm not a technical rider and I never happened, but I still need to learn how to get out of transition and not, I don't want to, affect anyone else's race by not being very fine tuned on those little technical things.

So I will go to a parking lot and I have been known to set cones up and literally just ride around them, so I remember how to turn and handle OK. Weight on my left foot, if I'm turning left and you know, just focus on those things. I would go on a bike path too, where you're not worried about outside for a little bit, like your first few rides.

If you have access to bike path, it just makes it easy. So you're not worrying about like traffic lights or too many cars or whatnot. And you can really focus on that form and technique in that capacity.

Emma-Kate: That's actually super fun to do too. Like when I was coached by Judy Devons, she would get a bunch of us in a high school parking lot and throw down a bunch of cones and we'd have to be doing like figure eights around and pick them up, put them back down, and it's actually harder than it looks, especially on the tri bike. It's harder than it seems, but that is something though. That's a good tip. That's definitely something that I've forgotten that we used to do that, but I think that's a good tip for people who are looking to, just to...I think just get used to being at home on a bike again, outdoors.

So I know that you'd like to call your pain...a lot of people have different names for their setups and their pain caves...but you, the Meredith Kessler pain cave is called the She Shed. Correct?

Meredith Kessler: And you know what? It is only because I saw it on like some commercial. Some insurance commercial this woman on the commercial was ...something burned down on the commercial. She's like, my She Shed! And I was like, that is so funny. That sounds like what my little room is, it's my She Shed, and yeah, so since I saw that, I don't know, maybe a year ago or whatever, I've been like, Hey Aaron, I'm going down to my She Shed, I'll be back in a bit. Yeah. So yeah, my She Shed is my office too, right? It's where it all happens.

Emma-Kate: It's where the magic happens. So talk us through your shed. What is in your shed? Obviously starting with all the indoor, all the stuff that helps you ride indoors.

What have you got there?

Meredith Kessler: When you walk in, let me tell you, first of all, we lived in California, as you remember for 20 years, and then we moved to Ohio. There's a lot more space in Ohio than California if you own a home. We rented for 20 years and this is the first time in our life...

So we were 40 at the time that we've owned a home, right? Literally, this is just a special story, cause I hugged the owner, a former owner of our house at the closing of our house because he was, he's 70 years old, but he was a football player in college. He played for Iowa and he put a lot of heart and soul in... It was like this house was meant to be ours. He put a lot of heart and soul into the downstairs area. He finished everything and you walk down the stairs and if you'd go to the left, you go into like the living room and there's a kitchen and everything just so nice for your downstairs, especially with the three-year-old and the dead of winter, he has space to run, but then you go right, and then there's this... There's this little room, that's a gym or my She Shed. And it has like the gym flooring on it. Like literally, I was like, this was meant to be like my She Shed and it has a player on it because he was like, and my husband's a baseball, basketball, football kind of guy., and he played all those sports in growing up. So there's a big, like decal of a football player on the wall, like a baseball player, a basketball player. But then my dad got me a swim bike runner. So we have that in here on the walls.

And then I have my treadmill set up, which the treadmill has then this Apple TV that Zwift so kindly sent me in front of it. We can talk about that. That's where I'm running in game on Zwift. And then I have my Saris H3 Smart trainer and that has my bike on it with the little, like we all need those stands right in front of you that has a holder for your cell phone because that's where I use my Zwift companion app.

And you need that app for power ups and then it also has another screen, like an Apple TV screen that I'm watching myself in game. Of course you need a fan. You need all your towels. You need a couple of pairs of shoes. And let me tell you what you need the most... good internet. Because if you don't have internet, you're totally... it's game over, literally.

And who gets in trouble if our internet drops? I yell at my husband. It's always his fault, EK!

Just kidding. I'm just kidding, but no, you need good internet. So of course, before races and stuff, I have like the pod of the internet right outside the room. So the She Shed is very important because it's just like my little nook and you have to have all your nutrition and your hydration and a lot goes into e-racing, which we'll talk about, but I also have to have an area where you can put like a camera because a lot of the times you're on camera for these e-racing things.

It's been very interesting, like you're preparing for a race literally. So we can talk about that, but that's in summary, what's in, in my She Shed here also looking over at it. Cause I'm in it right now, talking to you, but it has some weights, a roller for this old bod and a bunch of yoga mats and all that good stuff.

So that's what we have.

Emma-Kate: This sounds very well equipped. I'm impressed. But, so to recap there, so obviously a smart trainer, a rolling table or some way of setting up all the things that you need to have set out in front of you, obviously all your fuel, your food, drink, a fan, obviously very good internet if you're going to be doing any kind of racing over the internet. And what else did I miss that? What .. oh towels?

Meredith Kessler: Towels, extra batteries for your heart rate monitor because, you got to have everything like we have to have a second data, your Garmin. We have to have a lot of that. So I have all that.

Always some extra batteries, extra nutrition. My lip gloss because that's important, e-racing makes your lips very dry. You need to have some form of chapstick and my AirPods! Gotta have those cause you gotta have the beats in your ear for all this.

Emma-Kate: Absolutely. So there, obviously, so you've obviously been racing on Zwift for many years and you've been doing extremely well on the Zwift scene lately. And as we've seen lately, it's obviously been like a replacement to real life racing. Virtual racing has been one of very few ways that pros have still been able to make some money. So... Talk to us about the Zwift racing scene and how that works. And you obviously mentioned a few things there, like power ups and things that are quite specific to, being in game, which people who maybe aren't familiar with Zwift don't know necessarily what that means.

So tell us tell us all about Zwift as if we know nothing about it.

Meredith Kessler: First of all, Zwift is such an amazing platform to try to get fit and thrive. Especially, whether you're in a pandemic or not, but it has provided us all this resource. That's pretty amazing. If you really think about it, you're literally on a platform, a cycling platform.

I come in my She Shed, I plug in my smart trainer. I turn on this TV. I go on my Zwift companion app. I'm linked in. I press what course I want to do. And here, there, I am riding with people from all over the world. Some days there are 40,000 people riding with me across the world.

For literally it's unbelievable that you can do that, then takes it up a notch in that oh, you know what, there's a couple of things you can do on there. You can create your own workout. You can put your smart trainer on what's called Erg mode, which means it goes to the watts you want to do so you can do that if you'd like.

And I do that sometimes based on what cycling workouts Kato gives me. And then maybe I have some thing where I have a 20 minute interval I need to do. OK. I'm going to go to the event screen of Zwift, and I'm going to jump in this crit that I think will take me, 20 minutes. It's the best thing ever, because then I'm stimulated, I'm like engaged. I'm riding with people all over the world in this race. It's really cool to think about.

But then I want to make sure I say it was Zwift in general and was certainly with Zwift racing...Here's the deal. You either drink the Zwift Kool-Aid or you don't. I guzzle it. OK. So I guzzle it because it provides me this resource to be able to get in quality, efficient, amazing training, and get fit for what we need to do in real life. And I really believe that work parlays into in real life racing that you do in the trainer in here and on Zwift or whatnot. So Zwift takes it that way, and now what

they've done is they take it to what's called what we've said, e-racing and where you're...

For example, I'm in a couple of different leagues because I drank the Kool-Aid. So I'm on, what's called *I Race Like a Girl*, Angela Nath created this team years ago and we have this, like this team. We do a bunch of cycling races. We're in... we're in leagues that go on Monday.

Now here's what's interesting. Those are with a lot of cyclists, even though our team, a lot of us are triathletes. We're racing against true cyclists who don't ...pro cyclist, just cyclists. Honestly, there are some girls that literally they've never even ridden outside in their life. They are like literally Peloton people that turned to this.

They're good. I'm like, God, they're so good. So my point is they have, I race with them a lot. And then when I get with the triathletes, because here's the deal with the cyclists, it's awesome. That's their craft, right? They don't have those swimming and running and such on their legs and the triathletes we do cause we're all on the same playing field.

So I love getting my butt kicked by these cyclists, it makes it a little bit easier, not easier by any stretch, but a little more manageable when you're with triathletes, because you're entering the same playing field that they are, meaning you all swim, bike, and run a ton. It's not just cycling only. So my point is Zwift has done these leagues with cyclists that I do with Race Like a Girl, every Thursday we do what's called a team time trial. So I'm doing races that I would never do in real life because I would never, you will never see me in a crit, EK, unless I am in game, because I'm too afraid. I don't have those handling skills. But also just, having that camaraderie with the team and everything is pretty rad. And Amanda Wendorff and Angela, they have created this and they do all this admin. It's like a true team and we really look forward to it every Thursday. And we have a great group of girls that rotate in and out of that.

And then we have a premier league series. That's usually once a week for eight weeks at a time. And we get paid for that! Meaning if you get in the top five, your team, based on that you will get a payment and you can split it up between the team or just put it in a team bank or whatever. So that's kinda cool.

Then Zwift created a Z Pro tri series, and this has been amazing, right? I think this was our third one. The first one was like one race, all biking, just one race. It was maybe 40 minutes. Let's say arbitrarily it was probably four of those races. And then series two was three bike races. Maybe there's been four series doesn't matter three little bike races that were maybe 15 to 20 minutes each, and you have maybe 10 minutes recovery in between each. Then this last series..is bike run bike. So you bike a non drafting, and then we'll get into power-ups you, your first race is a time trial, meaning you're, there's no drafting enables. And by the way, they neutralize in Zwift for this, all of our equipment.

So it can be sponsor related or whatever you want it. No equipment is going to be better than another, whereas in our other leagues you want the best equipment you want the disc wheel. You want a certain, even if it's not your sponsor, let's say

if you, if it's not in your sponsor contract to do this, but this is the faster bike you go with the faster bike, whatever.

OK. So this serious, you do a TT climb, it's probably anywhere from 15 to 20 minutes. No drafting is enabled. It's pretty much just go all out up the hill for however long it is. OK. So that's the race one. You go and then it's stressful, right? Because there's so much, you have to make sure the trainer's on, you're set up .. your camera's on you.

Cause Matt Lieto and Sarah True are the commentators on this broadcast, which is amazing. They talk for two hours straight about all of us racing. It's so awesome of them. And it's a lot of effort to do that, especially with e-racing, where people are looking at your avatar and then listening to them, and then they might flash in you on your actual, in your actual She Shed or man cave, whatever you want to call it, doing the racing. And they put your watts up and your heart rate and all that good stuff.

But race one. And then you have to hustle and get on your treadmill and make sure everything's in sync with your treadmill. And if you have a pod on your foot to sync and just Zwift... I have, what's called NPE run, which means it's allowed because the Zwift pod wasn't accurate enough.

So they wanted us to do this route, which is great. So it just, it goes by the speed of my belt, which is more accurate than a foot pod. So you set that up and then you run 5K pretty much as fast as you can to get however many points you think you can get for the paces given. For example, last week they upped the pace to basically you needed to go under 5:30 pace to get the most amount of points.

And before it was under 5:40 pace. That 10 seconds a mile makes a huge difference. But I remember I was like, I got to go for it because these runners are going to go for it and you need the most amount of points. So you did the TT hill climb race, you had about 10-12 minutes to get on your treadmill, get ready for 5K run, which obviously, as I said, is points. Triathletes, Jackie Herring, like racing and they didn't want to risk injury. Can't you manage to Lionel Sanders going up to 19 miles per hour on this? And I would say it to his face, I'm just saying he's so good and so intense. Go as fast as he can, but we don't want people flying off their treadmill. That's why they did it based on the pace.

Then we have about 10 more minutes and we get on, we go back off. I know I changed clothes, the different spandex, new socks, and just take a gel. And then we go into a crit that's anywhere from 14 to 16 minutes, where we're doing six laps or something. And within that lap, there is what's called an intermediate sprint and it's anywhere from 15 to 25 seconds, something like that. And basically you get points each lap in that intermediate sprints. And the thing is just like an outdoor race, you need to do your due diligence. Like you, you need to know where that sprint is and either go for it or don't if that's not your strategy, but you need to know the course, just like you need to know it in real life.

You need to know those little intricate details. And just like I study the course, I study what I need to do. I practice it. We have this luxury on Zwift to be able to practice courses and stuff and do the recon, do the due diligence. So anyway, we do that crit and that's just savage. You're just like, it's so much fun.

You're having camaraderie with, with the other ladies that are in there and we're all in the pen before and it's like dead silent. And I know Mel McQuaid and I were trying to talk to people, but I get it, it's nervous, like it's nervous energy. You're like, this is so savage for 15 minutes and, everything ends, I always have to say this will too, but you're like, Oh my gosh, this is going to be so hard for 15 minutes. I love it. I relish in it. It's so hard yet so good. You know what I mean?

Emma-Kate: Yeah. And that's very much like the real thing too, like that nervous energy before the gun goes and all those feelings, all those nerves, all that anxiety, all those feelings pre-race and then having to go boom, execute.

Oh my God. What about the things that are very different to real life racing because you've got the power ups. You are in a video game and there are times where you can, you have to be smart about the game version of it. You have to, in order to maximize your strategy as a racer, you have to not just race your bike, but make sure that you're doing the right thing in game. So tell us a little bit about that because that's something that, for people who haven't been on Zwift, they probably haven't got much console. Obviously, most people played Super Mario. But it's like...

Meredith Kessler: Super Mario meets Pac-Man too. You're just trying to think squirrel trying to get a nut, but no. One thing that is different is like in real life racing, you can't always see what's going on either ahead of you or behind you, or, you don't unless someone's out there giving you splits or whatever, but like in, in game, you're literally, you can see who you're with. You can see who might be 10 seconds ahead of you or five seconds behind you. You can see what's going on at all times. You know what I mean? That's cool. But what's different is... for example Skye Moench. She's at whatever altitude out in Utah, that's extremely hard. So what I'm saying is not everyone is on the same course, they're on the same course in game, but they're out of their own home. So some people like, honestly, EK, if you did it out in Boulder, it's harder. Like when Kate joins the TT races, I'm like Kate you're crushing it.

Kate is a strength coach out in Boulder at Rally, and she's also my cycling coach and dear friend. She's on the Thursday TTs with me and you're doing this at altitude and doing the same as everyone else. That's very impressive. So like Skye, for example, and I'm sure there's others I don't even realize they're in altitude, but that's a factor.

What else is a factor is you have to take, and this is what I always say, you have to take e-racing with a grain of salt. Now in our races that we do, especially these platinum leagues, you do weigh ins, you have to weigh yourself, right? You have to video the weigh-in, put it on YouTube, send the link.

You have to have two sets of data. So I have my data that my smart trainer is providing in Zwift in game, and then I have separate data, completely separate that's not linked to my trainer. It's from my pedals, going to my Garmin and unfortunately, but fortunately, so I liked that aspect, because let me tell you I'm 130 pounds, if I put that I'm 110 pounds in game, I'm going to climb a lot faster up that hill...

Emma-Kate: That was something that was super controversial when like, when Zwift racing took off in the early stages of pandemic. I think it feels, correct me if I'm wrong, but it feels like it's a little bit more in control now, but it was something that had to get nailed down.

Cause that was an obvious ... some results that were like, Whoa, really?

Meredith Kessler: So much better now. Like beyond words, because you do need to provide the weigh-ins and the second data that's huge, and Zwift has done a great job of creating Zwift power website where you have to download those things and such, and honestly, your peers know if like your watts per kg are way higher than like anyone else's, there's sometimes like a little red flag, but I will say it's gotten so much better. But you still regardless, need to take it with a grain of salt because it's not in real life racing, everyone's on different trainers and different equipment and different, everything's just different.

It's just cool to be able to try to train together. And honestly, I may do well in game. I could get out there in Miami and it'd be absolutely horrible. Like right now, I think I could run this pace and I can do these watts. And hopefully that's still the case when I go race in real life. But I've talked to Matt Leado about this before, sometimes too with a treadmill and gradients, I just put it on a pace and I'm like, it makes me go that fast and I hang on outside. That's not always easy to do. I don't have it. I don't have, I don't press a button on my legs and say, please 5:25 pace. But on the treadmill I can do it. I can put that pace in. So it's much different.

Emma-Kate: Yeah.

Yeah, that's the case. We earlier in the show we heard from Joe Friel and Jim Rotberg authors of the book *Ride inside*. And they were both, Jim was talking especially about how he thinks in the future we'll have professional athletes who make a living in e-racing and that's their thing.

And you can take them outside and they might not. You know, the talent in that fitness and the strategy that they know for indoor racing, and successfully indoor racing, just simply doesn't translate. And obviously you can have athletes that do both and you can have athletes that will always just be racing outside, but the future of e-sports, especially since the pandemic, is pretty bright.

Meredith Kessler: It is really bright. They've just created a movie star league that's called that ...where they'll be getting given free Canyon bikes. And there's leagues that I don't even know of that exist that get paid and like cycling teams get paid to e-race.

So that's pretty cool.

Emma-Kate: Yeah, it's very cool. It's an interesting future. It's not maybe one that we thought we'd see. So to wrap up, MBK, we've got a couple of questions from our audience which we're going to throw at you. So are you ready?

Meredith Kessler: I'm ready. Let's do it.

Emma-Kate: Bike maintenance, your favorite topic I know. So this question is what bike maintenance should I be doing specific to indoor riding to keep my drive trucks, sorry, drive, train and components in good shape?

Meredith Kessler: Love it. And EK, you would say that because maintenance is... yes my least favorite. It's I ride tubulars, I'm like, give me the pit stop and the CO2.

Oh my gosh. You've been with me many times where I'm like, really, Paul, can you help me? But really in all seriousness, you do have to like, make sure, I was saying to you earlier, that I was starting a race the other day and my pedal came off. Make sure your bolts are tight still because you're still moving around on the bike.

Your saddle... Check your saddle and make sure it's tight. Check your pedals, make sure they're tight. My drive train. I will say I do take my bike off the trainer at least maybe every six weeks just to run through the gears. I often... I probably change the chain every I'd say three months, because they can get beat up! I oil it by the way before every important race, especially Wednesday, I will oil it and make sure every gear is working. Because if you don't have the gears you need in game, it's really not going to work. Like you can't not have your hardest gear in game, especially in a crit. So those are the main things I'm ... obviously to make sure your Di2 is charged.

You should have that and make sure your gears work, because typically you don't go into the small chain room that much, but you still, in case you feel like you need to, make sure that you can switch between everything. And yeah, that's the main maintenance tips that I have just like you would do in real life.

Just check those bolts, check the Di2 to make sure you can gear. And everything else should shimmy into place okay.

Emma-Kate: And still important to pump the tires too, right?

Meredith Kessler: Thank you! I had said that, yes. The other day I looked down and I'm like, man, I feel really low. Even though in my back, I don't have a wheel on it.

Obviously, not my back wheel, but my front wheel was completely deflated and it does, especially if we're going, my knees were aching and like my back and I'm like, that's an inch lower, that can't be. So I pumped my tire. Thank you for reminding me, that's 100% right.

Emma-Kate: I feel like indoor riding can be pretty brutal on your bike and bike components and just bike maintenance is probably as important as it is riding outdoors a lot, I think.

Meredith Kessler: I also want to say though, that I am currently on my road bike. Because with these leagues, you have to do a test on what trainer and what bike you're using.

So for the next six months, I'm not changing that because it's too dramatic. But I also have that SARIS platform and put it on there, it's so hard because it's supposed to like, it moves underneath the trainer. So that's been really cool to try to ...

see there's so many components and little gadgets, you can get to try to make yourself better.

Emma-Kate: Yeah. The Wahoo stuff, like what's the gadget you put in, you can go, it helps you descend or...

Meredith Kessler: Oh, yeah. I know what you mean. And Zwift is introducing a new steering. You can steer on your bike. I haven't done it yet.

Emma-Kate: So that leads us nicely to this next question. What supplementary workouts would help compensate for the lack of outdoor riding?

Meredith Kessler: I love this question. Here's why. One thing Zwift has done is they have the Zwift Academy. And I go on there, so when you log in you just go to workouts and they have all these workouts already in place.

For example, when I wanted to learn how to try to become a sprinter, let me express to you in these crits I'm doing, I never need to go all out for 20 seconds in Iron, an racing. Ever.

Emma-Kate: Absolutely opposite of anything you've ever done.

Meredith Kessler: Surely. The point is when I want to supplement, compensate for the lack of outdoor riding, I do enjoy the workouts.

And like Zwift Academy, they'll label it for you. So endurance riding, or here, learn about sprinting or learn about threshold, and they'll do the workouts for you. And they talk to you via, like someone, they talk to you the whole time. It'll put your smart trainer to an Erg workout, even.

So the watts will just go based on your FTP. And what I'm saying to you is it's so easy because you're learning something too. So then you're learning how to be a smart rider when you go outside. So that's how I would help compensate for that lack of outdoor riding. It's just put yourself in those types of workouts that are easy.

It's in there already. One. Two, throw yourself in a race. OK. Throw yourself in one that's maybe, I don't know, only five miles at first and then slowly build up and you'll see how much fitness is gained when you're racing other people. Even if it is virtual just, throw your hat in the ring.

That's what I say. And it really works wonders when you go outside.

Emma-Kate: I've I thought I'd use up my indoor riding tokens way back when I used to, when I used to ride in the garage in the UK and, oh my God, it was just like the most miserable thing. You just literally be watching rain come down and riding away.

And Zwift just completely transformed my view on indoor riding. I really enjoy it. I didn't think I'd ever say that about indoor riding. But yeah, I am a convert like many of us over the last year or so...

Meredith Kessler: So happy to hear, because now it's you look forward to going to your garage.

It's not like watching paint dry anymore. It's you're having fun with others all over the world. So that's good.

Emma-Kate: Which is what we need right now. *[MBK: We do. We do.]* MBK, thank you so much for joining us. We really appreciate your time and expertise and candid insights as always. You're a rockstar.

Thank you.

Meredith Kessler: You got it, EK. Anytime. Thanks for having me.

Emma-Kate: We chat with senior editor and gear guru Chris Foster next. Who's going to give us his insights on all the gear you need when training and racing indoors.

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So we're joined now by Chris Foster. Chris is our resident gear guru, the geek in the house. Chris welcome.

Chris Foster: Geek is derogatory. How dare you?

Emma-Kate: Okay. You prefer guru. Is that correct?

Chris Foster: I appreciate it. Thank you.

Emma-Kate: Awesome. A fair few things about the the indoor training world. Obviously it's a world that's full of equipment and having the right equipment and gear makes your experience significantly better or worse.

And you're going to kick off by talking us through some of the, or the three major types of trainer that you typically ride indoors.

Chris Foster: Yeah. Back in the day, back in the day, like the 90s... people just had a few trainers, there were a couple of brands.

They did magnetic resistance. They did air resistance, they were super loud. Then came along fluid trainers. But those were all what we call like dumb trainers trainers, that don't hook up to the internet, that don't sense power, that don't do cadence... things like that. Now there's like a whole lot more, there's more than just dumb trainers.

There's more than just smart trainers. There's like the first thing that, some cyclists like to brag about this is like a big badge of honor. Are rollers. *[Yes.]* And if you don't know what rollers are, you probably shouldn't be riding them. That's probably the best way you put it.

So basically a traditional set of rollers require some amount of skill to stay on. Like literally you can fall off a set of rollers. You need balance. You need to have a smooth pedal stroke. If you don't have a smooth pedal stroke, you feel it. If you don't have good balance, you feel it, because you hit the ground.

There are triathletes who can ride on rollers even in the aerobars, but they can't usually do it very long. It's not super productive. Traditional rollers don't provide resistance. They just kind of spin both your wheels at the same time. There are a

few rollers that do resistance and even a few smart rollers...we'll get into what smart means in a second.

But there's this kind of old school, like badge of honor, like you can do them, you're awesome, and if you can't, you're a newbie, whatever. But really, for a lot of triathletes, they're not a particularly useful tool. And some people will argue with me about that, if it's a good thing to have a set of rollers, if it's like your third or second indoor training platform or whatever.

Emma-Kate: Yeah, I think back in the day they were a good way to mimic the real road riding experience. Because you obviously, you have to engage your core in a way that you don't when you just sat on a trainer on a regular trainer or an old school trainer.

Chris Foster: Rollers are awesome because you can get comfortable, you can move around and move your upper body, you feel good in there.

But yeah. Now, there are advancements like smart rollers, rollers with resistance. They even have shaped rollers that kind of puts you in this little pocket in the middle. So you have less of a chance of rolling off, but really, their usefulness for triathletes is... Does minimal aside from bragging rights.

Emma-Kate: And so many more exciting things out there now.

Chris Foster: And then there's trainers like I said before, dumb trainers, they're just basic trainers that provide some sort of resistance. You don't plug them into the wall, you don't plug them into a computer.

These are your trainers that are really good for like, a brick workout. You bring them to the track. You had your heart rate zones, or you could even use a power meter on your bike, in conjunction with a dumb trainer. Cause now you've got power, right? If you've already got power on your bike, dumb trainer's probably fine for a lot of situations.

Yeah, those are just workouts. You're not going to be able to do Zwift. You're not going to be able...you can, but not with the same great experience that a lot of people like...but they're cheaper, they're simpler, and they don't require power. So this is the thing you bring to the track. That's what I always tell people.

Emma-Kate: I've used them on the pool deck too. Something that you see quite often here, especially obviously in the summer. Everybody lining up there on the pool deck with their trainers. Do a quick swim, swim bike brick.

Chris Foster: Yeah. That dumb trainer. Perfect for that, like the lighter, simple, you can get them wet. Doesn't matter. Whatever. So they definitely have their place. They're not obsolete. I don't think...some people say they're obsolete now, but they have plenty of purpose, especially for triathletes.

Emma-Kate: And especially if you're on a budget and you don't want to spend a ton of cash on a smart trainer.

Chris Foster: Totally. I know a lot of triathletes will bring bring a dumb trainer to to transition for warm-up. If you got a bike course that's closed or it's going to be

dark, it's not gonna be safe. You're worried about flatting or something like that. People will bring a dumb trainer, warm up on that.

That's awesome. I think that's great. Great use for dumb trainer. And then finally, smart trainers are like what everyone's talking about, like you're getting your power, you're getting your cadence. Well power is being transmitted, but also received in a way from whatever you're using, so it's a two-way street using Bluetooth, ANT+ or even Wahoo has a new hardwired one. You're putting out an amount of power, your guy on the screen or your lady on the screen is speeding up or slowing down, on something like Zwift. You hit a hill and this is all very basic stuff, but there are probably listeners out there who have no idea what I'm talking about, you hit a hill and the resistance goes up; you go downhill, the resistance goes down. So that's the smart trainer in a nutshell. The kind of downside of a smart trainer is, they're more expensive. I think they started about \$400. The sweet spot is that \$700 to \$1000.

We've got this brand new one from Italy that we'll be reviewing soon. It's \$2,200 and it's just the smart trainer. We're not even talking about smart bike, like a Peloton or Wahoo has one. It's just the trainer, but it's supposed to be like whisper silent. But ... *[EK: Which brand is this?]*

Oh my gosh. It's magnetic something. I can't remember off the top of my head. It was a small Italian brand and one of our reviewers approached me with it. It sounds crazy. It sounds like very Italian, like everything is diminished, like it's the quiet, it's beautiful...

Emma-Kate: For that price tag, you would hope so.

Chris Foster: I think you get it. I think they even say something like, oh, you rent this trainer ... like you might not buy it, you get like a lease on it or something, like a car, I don't know. But we'll be checking that out in the next month. But that's definitely the highest end of the smart trainers. So those are the three basics. And we'll talk about it a little bit, within each category, there are different kinds too.

Emma-Kate: Right. Earlier in the show we spoke to Meredith Kessler and she gave us the rundown of her pain cave or her She Shed as she calls it.

Yeah, it's very funny. And obviously having a pain cave, or having a great setup at home, is such a great way to make sure that you train consistently and you save a ton of time. It's very efficient way of training. Tell us a little bit about your thoughts on pain caves and setups and that kind of thing.

Chris Foster: There's all sorts of different kinds of trainers. Just like I was saying outside of smart, dumb, and rollers, and each one kind of has its use. Like for instance, you train all winter. You have a dedicated space. You're not taking your bike on and off the trainer a lot. You may even have a dedicated trainer bike.

You're probably looking at something like a wheel off trainer or direct drive is what some of them are known as. What that looks like is it's basically like a hub with the cassette built into the trainer. You remove your rear wheel and you mount your rear dropouts and derailleur right onto this thing as if it was a wheel.

The upsides of these things are, you get that direct connection, perfect power transfer or near perfect power transfer. You get more accuracy. It's more stable, generally a better kind of ride experience. You don't have to be checking your tires all the time. You can calibrate it less.

In fact, a lot of them have automatic calibration now. So they're quieter. They're a lot quieter too. I almost forgot to mention. So those are great. But you need to have a cassette on there. Do you want to swap your cassette on and off your wheel all the time? It's definitely not as easy as just clamping the wheel on.

And we'll talk about that in a second. So if you're riding once a week or once every two weeks or once a month on a trainer, the wheel off is probably not ideal. Because it's just, they're expensive. They start around, like \$700, I think they have some at \$700 now, most are around \$1000.

I know Meredith mentioned the Saris H3, that's a great example of kind of that mid-price \$1000 wheel off trainer. Another big favorite is the Wahoo Kickr, super popular. That one runs around \$1200. The new version of... the thing I like about that one is the new version has this little kind of side to side rocking action, which like, when I tell you like a trainer rocks, you're like, it sounds like you set up your trainer wrong, like you generally don't want it moving while you're riding on it.

But I've tried this one. It's cool. It's a very controlled rocking. It uses these little kind of buffers. And we'll talk a little bit more about kind of motion on your trainer in a second, but I found it makes for a more comfortable ride. Now, like I said, that one's around \$1200. We like, in terms of budget, wheel off trainers, the Tacx Flux S is good.

That one's around \$750. But like I said that's, you have a space for it. You're on it a lot. Maybe you do almost all of your riding inside, you're just addicted to Zwift. You want accuracy at all costs. The other side of these wheel off trainers is they're not as easy to store.

Some of them, it's not really a slide under your bed situation.

Emma-Kate: Yeah, it can be pretty heavy or cumbersome.

Chris Foster: Super heavy. And awkward to carry, off balance, kind of thing. Like you're not, you're probably not bringing that anywhere, even if you could plug it in and even if it was a good idea. You're probably not bringing that to the pool, right?

Aside from the damage you might do to it, it's just too much,

Emma-Kate: So if you're somebody who's looking just to hop on and off the trainer and put it, we'll be able to store it away and you're not riding, like Meredith was saying, she's riding a 100% of the time indoors at the moment.

If you're just somebody who's hopping on and off, want to be able to store it away, easily jump on and off it pretty easily. Then the wheel on trainer is a far better solution, right?

Chris Foster: Absolutely. The wheel on. And that comes in, I guess I should have said the wheel off generally is just a smart trainer.

The wheel on has both smart and dumb flavors. Traditionally, those, it's going to be way easier, clamp your bike on, that is something you could bring for a brick. That's something you're riding once a week, maybe for your key workout, even if it's not a brick, you've got to hit X power for X time. You don't want to worry about stop signs, don't want to worry about lights. You just really want to dial in that precise workout, but you're not riding it every day. Because wheel on trainer you have to check your tire pressure fairly often, because it's that interface between the tire and this little kind of drum.

Whereas before, on the wheel off, you're dealing with chained cassette, like it's as much transfer as you're getting, when you're riding a bike, this kind of adds this layer, this rubber layer, this air layer. So it requires more calibration. It's not generally as accurate, though they say it is. It's got a much smaller footprint. Definitely slides under a bed.

Most of them, I would say 99% of wheel on trainers, are much louder. So if you're in an apartment situation with someone underneath you, yeah.

Emma-Kate: You're not going to be popular with your neighbors.

Chris Foster: No, they're gonna want to kill you or, you're trying to do it while the kids are sleeping.

It's, they're pretty loud, think of a really loud fan. And some are better than others but really they're substantially louder than a wheel off. So if sound is an issue, wheel off is another good way to go. Even if none of the other criteria applies to you. For the wheel on, I like the Tacx Flow for a smart trainer, I think it's about \$370, super, super portable.

It's one of the more portable wheel on smart trainers that we've found, folds down really nicely, it's light weight. It's kinda got a nice look to it. It's not as utilitarian. But then for a dumb trainer that's wheel on and is utilitarian, we liked the, just that basic \$300 Saris Fluid 2.

Emma-Kate: Yeah. So that's perfect for somebody who's maybe just starting out, wants something pretty basic. Or something you're just going to need help...

Chris Foster: You're going to throw in the back of your car or you're going to take it to the track and then drop it on the track now, it's like a tool, but it's good. It's a solid trainer. It'll last, almost forever. Like those things are really solid bomb proof yeah. So those are the two big, types.

Emma-Kate: I had a Tacx Flow for many years and put thousands of miles indoor miles on it. When I used to ride in the UK through the winter, so yeah, I can definitely speak to those.

They are bomb-proof those things. Probably has a very earlier iteration I'm sure. So yeah, I guess really the the trainer is the big decision, the big investment and the the centerpiece of your indoor riding setup. But there are obviously lots of other things you need to think about and that can help make your ride more enjoyable when you're training indoors.

Talk us through some of those, some of the basics when it comes to building out your pain cave, it's not just the trainer.

Chris Foster: Or your she shed, right? Once you've got the trainer nailed down, because that's going to take some research, like I said, there's lots of factors, is it sound, is it accuracy? Is it wheel on wheel off? Once you get those things nailed down, I know you guys touched on some of the other essentials that you need to build up that cave. But I've got a few of the things that are my favorite, that we've tested and we've done reviews on and stuff. Number one for me, a good fan. If you have ever tried to do a trainer workout, like for whatever reason, without a fan it's not even like uncomfortable, it's... just feels abusive.

Emma-Kate: And from a training and physiology point of view, you're really not maximizing your workout, unless you're training for a hot and humid race and you're purposely doing that. And that's the objective.

Chris Foster: Yeah. You're not getting any adaptation there because your core temperature is so high that you're not, you're not hitting your power numbers, your heart rate's sky high right off the bat. So yeah, it's just a matter of just blowing yourself out for no reason.

So anyway, a good fan. Super important. I know Wahoo has a fan that adjusts, it's a wind speed based on how fast you're going. I've used it. You just end up leaving it on high the whole time. Again, unless you're trying to train for something and you do want some sort of variation to simulate that.

I just want it high the whole time. And it didn't put out like a crazy amount of air I thought. So I like... Something like this, cheap, not super cheap, but there's a \$70 fan you can find on Amazon it's called Lasko, a big 20-inch fan. Just pushes out a ton of wind.

I know Ryobi has some cool portable fans that kind of uses that same battery pack you could find in a lot of their power tools. Those are really cool. Like again, if you're on the track, if you're at the pool, you don't have to plug it into anything. And they actually do put out a pretty good amount of air.

So I've liked those. They're a little more expensive and you have to subscribe to the whole Ryobi tool world. But I like those. Aside from that, you need something like a good stand. Yeah, it's one of those things like, ah, I'm not going to get a stand. I'm just going to set up my trainer and just do whatever. And then within 20 minutes into your ride, you're like, 'oh, I'm trying to reach down on the ground and fall off my trainer. I'm getting up, stopping, unclipping, all that.' So just suck it up, buy a fan. I'm sorry, not buy a fan—buy a fan also, but buy a stand.

Emma-Kate: Especially as we talked about with Meredith and we'll touch on it, if you're going to get into racing indoors, then obviously you've got to have everything within arm's reach. But even if you're just training, not just training, but for training sessions, making sure that you've got everything within arm's reach is super critical.

Chris Foster: Think about it, like if you were outside training and you're riding, you're doing a long ride with friends and you're like, 'Oh, hold on, I got to get some

water.' You stopped your bike, you unclipped, you get off your bike, you bend down, like it's a huge handbrake...

Emma-Kate: It's the equivalent of your back pockets in your jersey, or where you're stashing your stuff.

It's that kind of equivalent, right? For the indoor world.

Chris Foster: Yeah. And you don't want to do that indoors, because then it makes your back all hot and stuff like that. Yeah, you gotta get the stand, get a big stand. I know Wahoo makes a great one for \$250, it's not nothing, but it's not wild in terms of costs. You can find other stands that are less cycling specific hardware, like a rolling tool stand. A lot of people use that. It's gonna be way cheaper. They're even some kind of generic ones online that are \$100 something like that.

Emma-Kate: There are some athletes that like to make their own too.

I saw, what was I watching, oh, Cody Beals, one of his YouTube videos that he launched last week, he had his own homemade cycling stand.

Chris Foster: That's super cool. I love that. Yeah, few little cutouts for your water bottles and I'm sure all sorts of cool stuff, but that's awesome.

So yeah. DIY your cycling stands.

Emma-Kate: Yes. I love that. And then one of the things that we talked about earlier with Meredith was the importance of music and having good tunes if you're, especially if you're going to do long rides on the trainer. So you mentioned, you were talking about waterproof headphones, which I hadn't even thought of.

Chris Foster: It's huge. So like we talked about with the wheel off trainer, that's loud. Wheel on is like gale force. So if you're trying to watch a movie or watch TV or music or whatever, you gotta get above that. So if you're listening without headphones, you're just destroying anyone within like a block.

Emma-Kate: Not gonna be popular with the family or your neighbors.

Chris Foster: You got to get headphones. They do have a lot of great, they effectively have to be waterproof because, you know how much you sweat when you're on an indoor trainer, even if you've got a great fan, you're just dumped.

I don't think you need to go as far as like a submersible pair. I don't think that would be the worst thing, but I tried out the the JBL Flash Xs. And I love those for indoor training. They had pitched them as this pair of headphones that you could wear while cycling or running outdoors, which I am not a fan of by the way...yeah, separate podcast conversation, but I need to know what's going on around me.

Emma-Kate: For sure. That's a sense that I personally do not like being deprived of when I'm outside.

Chris Foster: So uncomfortable. Like it's horrifying to me. So anyway, they pitched these headphones as you can hit a button and it starts to allow some of the sound inside in from the outside. *[Very cool!]*

Yeah, it was cool. I was like, yeah, that's an awesome idea. I love that. So like when you start to get, when you're on the trails, you're OK, but then, when you get into a city area, you can hit the button. And it was like the reverse version of noise canceling headphones, they have a microphone on the outside and they take in the like ambient sounds and then they reverse it and phase it to you. So if someone's screaming at you, that sound is being phased. Like it's, I don't know, it's geeky...all right, here we go. Fine. Fine. Fine. All right. I showed my true colors. Once I get into phasing sound, I think I call myself out on it.

But so anyway, these JBLs, they do kind of the reverse. They use a microphone on the outside and they amplify the sound that comes on. So I tested them for a while outside because I'm like this is going to be the thing that changes my argument about wearing headphones while running or riding, and the problem was it didn't amplify it enough. And what it did amplify generally was wind. So

Emma-Kate: Oh no, I couldn't do that. That would be game over.

Chris Foster: Yeah. It was like, this is the worst. Not only can I not hear the cars around me, but I'm just getting...no, it was so bad. So OK, turn that off.

And now I'm back to not hearing anything at all. So I'm like, wow, this is not the greatest thing. And maybe they fixed it or worked on it, I don't know, but I was not in love with it for that. And I wrote a review on the website, but for indoor riding...

Emma-Kate: For this, it could be...

Chris Foster: Perfect. [Yeah.] Because then it's you're hearing everything, the music, the TV, movie, whatever.

But if someone comes in and is 'Hey,' you get that because there's no wind. And it also did the noise canceling thing. So if you didn't want to hear the trainer, it did have an isolation mode. Which you would never use outside but you could obviously use indoors.

I loved them like that...The sound quality was amazing. I think that whole isolation and outdoor/outside-in thing was perfect for training.

Emma-Kate: So then also on the topic of the noise canceling and minimizing sound, and often, obviously keeping your neighbors and family on the right side of you and your training ideas, a good rubber mat to prevent floor damage and to reduce the vibration from the trainer into the floor, right?

Chris Foster: Yeah absolutely. A good floor mat is super important, because you got to think you're going to be outputting just like this toxic salty sweat that just corrodes everything. That's another thing you should get...something to cover your bike if you're doing it enough. If you're not wiping it down, every single ride, like this is an every single ride situation for sure, you'll come to the end of the winter season with a locked headset, with all sorts of stuff. And we've written stories on how to care for your indoor training gear...

That's a whole other topic, but it's just getting something to cover that. But aside from covering that, you got to cover the ground because you're going to make these big stinky pools. They're going to rot whatever you got below, but also, if you

get a thick enough rubber mat, you're going to prevent a lot of that sound, that vibration sound that will travel, not just through, if you have neighbors below, but to everyone in the whole house.

I know Saris has a good one for \$80. Again, I think there are cheaper ones. Some people, a lot of people, will try to use a yoga mat. But I've found ... *[that's not going to cut it!]* that's one of those things, you're like, 'Oh shoot. I just got a new trainer. What do I have around the house? Oh, I'll use the yoga mat,' but you're going to chew up the yoga mat. You're going to ruin it basically. And it's not thick enough. Like you need rubber.

Emma-Kate: Yeah. And I guess it comes back to, again, if this is something you're gonna be doing a lot and you're going to be consistently riding indoors, then it is worth investing in this gear.

Cause it lasts and you make the whole experience a whole lot more comfortable and better for everybody. Not just you.

Chris Foster: It's not just about you triathletes. Remember that? Ooh, hard truths from the gear geek.

Emma-Kate: Yes. Yeah, we've rebranded you during the course of this podcast. There you go. So there are like the standout essentials that you want for training indoors. But I know as the gear geek, you like looking at more of the cool gadgets too, so take us down that little rabbit hole.

Chris Foster: With so many people riding inside now, of course companies are like, how can we make more things? How can we make people spend more money? There's some cool stuff out there.

Most trainers nowadays, come with a riser block. I'm sure people who, back in the day, you used a phone book, like they don't even make phone books anymore. Like now the phone book is like an inch thick. It's not gonna do you any good.

Emma-Kate: I'm not even sure I'd know where to find a phone book these days, but ...

Chris Foster: Aw, poor phone company.

But so most of them come with riser blocks now. Which is essential, it keeps your front wheel in place. It keeps it the same level. But I know Wahoo, who seems to be like the kings of almost superfluous accessories, they, I know you guys talked about this a little bit before and you couldn't quite come up with the name, but it was the Wahoo Climb, this wild gadget that you can... You hook your front fork onto, take off your front wheel and it raises and lowers your front end as you go up and down virtual hills.

Emma-Kate: Yeah, I've tested it a couple of times. It's actually, it's pretty cool. It took a little while to get used to, it's not something you would use, it's not something that was familiar. Somebody who's just ridden a lot of miles with a wheel on trainer back in the day, having the front of the bike going up and down was super weird to start with, but actually very cool. Especially when you're, if you're like riding in Zwift and you're in game,.

Chris Foster: And you use different muscles, like once the front end goes up here, you're stabilizing slightly different core if you're sprinting and definitely more realistic. It's, yeah, it's super cool, but it's also \$600.

Emma-Kate: Yeah. Yeah. So this is if you're really looking to dot the I's and cross the T's in your pain cave type thing.

Chris Foster: For sure an accessory that is for someone who has got either a bike that's dedicated to indoor cycling or you're in for months and months, because, you're probably using that with the direct drive trainer. So you're looking at taking off both wheels. And, calibrating this thing, hooking it up, all that stuff.

It's not too hard to hook up I guess, but it's still it's not something you're gonna want to do once a week. Nobody's gonna do that.

In the more like budget, front wheel toys... Elite just came out with this it's a steering block, which seems weird, but it lets you steer in certain situations in Zwift. So you can kinda, you can get in and out of people's drafts, you can hug corners closer, so it'll get you through on a better line. It's only \$65, it only works in Zwift and we've found that not that many races allow it, so really make sure before you buy that one that you're conscious of where... if you do 10 races a season in Zwift and one of them allows the steering option, it's probably not worth it. So it's a neat idea. It just connects with I think it was ANT+ and Bluetooth. It did actually hook up really quickly and easily. It's \$65, even if you don't use it a ton, it's a riser block. That's kinda the first thing that's the first almost superfluous gadget, like I said.

Emma-Kate: And there's some others that make here maybe simulate the real road riding experience a little bit more, like the the Saris MP1, right?

Chris Foster: Yeah. So the MP1, I think Meredith talked about that real quick. But it's like a piece of furniture. Like it's beautiful. It's like wood finished. But just like a piece of furniture, is awkward to move. It's a platform that you...

Emma-Kate: ...put your bike on, right?

Chris Foster: Yeah. You put your, you strap your trainer onto it. It's compatible with all trainers regardless of wheel on, wheel off, whatever. And then you strap your front wheel to it. And the whole thing will, it'll rock left and right with a pretty good amount of play, but it also slides forward and backward.

Which is a weird sensation. It doesn't rock forward and backward. I think some people think that it does, but it slides. So you can kinda, you can feel the bike moving underneath you, if you're sprinting, you're pushing it underneath you. It's supposed to help with your core engagement, better workout.

But for me, I don't know, it probably was a better workout, but I found it to be way more comfortable than just a stationary trainer, because that's the thing that kills your underparts is just you're shifting around on a seat, and when you're outside the bike shifts with you, but when you're on a trainer indoors, I think it's just a pillar, like you're just shifting around on this, post and it can really drive into you after a while.

Emma-Kate: I really enjoyed riding on it. We used to have one in the old office here in Boulder. And it was out in the warehouse. It was so huge. It was always out in the warehouse. And I really enjoyed just being able to get up out of the saddle and the feel of bike moving underneath me in a similar-ish kind of way that you would if you're getting up out of the saddle and riding on the road, you're not going sprinting for signs or whatever.

So that was cool. And it's nice to have that ability or capacity to move around and have the bike moving underneath you. But you say it makes it way more comfortable and helps replicate some of that real road riding that you don't always get a whole lot in indoor riding.

Chris Foster: Yeah, absolutely. And for triathletes, even if we're not standing and sprinting a ton, you're sitting in your aero bars, you need to engage your core for that, so you can feel comfortable. You've seen people who, this isn't going to be a fix it for that, but you've seen people who try to come out of their aerobars to get a drink. And the bike is sailing like left and right, they're like a danger out there on the course, and dialing in some of that core while you're indoors is a good way to... It's not as good as riding outdoors, but if that's what you've got. And it's \$1,200. So again, that's probably like the 10th thing you'll end up buying for your pain cave but it is super cool.

The only other thing you can do... There's two other options for that kind of movement. I mentioned it a little bit before, but Wahoo's brand new Kickr has some kind of little bit of play in these little rubber bumpers that they put in the feet. And actually you can buy those bumpers as an accessory.

I think it's like under \$100 and you can attach it to your older model of Kickr. That one, I didn't find it did a lot for standing and sprinting stuff, because it's just not quite enough play to make that happen, but that one's definitely more of a comfort situation. Like it was a little bit more comfortable.

And then the final one is actually, it's been around for a while and a lot of people I think are coming back to, this is a Kurt Kinetics rock and roll trainer... I think they have a wheel off version now, too, but the wheel on version has been around for a while.

The whole rear end just sways. It does this weird swaying thing. And some people don't like it, because it is a little too dynamic for some people. And I don't think it really does the... it's not as much of a comfort situation as it is way more of a workout, core stabilizer kind of thing.

But those have been popular for a long time and I went to their website the other day and they're sold out, just like everyone. So I think people are starting to see, if you're spending enough time inside, you want to get on something that's dynamic. You want to replicate the road, you want to work your core.

think they start at \$400 for for the current rock and roll. So those are like the most interesting little kind of weird things that you can find for an indoor cave...

Emma-Kate: Yeah. There's so much stuff out there now. Obviously since the pandemic and throughout the pandemic, when everybody's been mostly riding

indoors a lot more and Zwift and all the online platforms have taken off so much more, all this stuff is sometimes hard to find and obviously incredibly popular.

And it's one of the markets, or segments of the market, that's really done well in recent months or recently or over the last year.

Chris Foster: Yeah. There's so much fun stuff to make riding... Riding inside used to be just such a chore and now yeah, all the gear just like always helps

Emma-Kate: All the gear. So what's the longest, indulge us, Chris, what's the longest ride you've done indoors. And what equipment would you have been using for that?

Chris Foster: Oh my gosh..See I [*Put you on the spot now*] I know I'm not a huge fan of riding indoors. I live in L.A. I'm sure back in the day I did a three-hour ride, but I was never a long-course person.

I think I would have been riding...can't remember, it would have been a Saris actually. And it was probably Saris Fluid 2. It was before smart trainers were even around. I've tested all the smart trainers that we've talked about. But for my longest one, it was probably a Fluid 2, and it probably didn't have a very good setup. This was before I knew anything about gear. I'm sure I suffered in the sun.

Emma-Kate: The days before smart trainers.

Chris Foster: Or the days before smart Chris, just dumb, Chris.

Emma-Kate: On that note, we will say thank you very much for joining us and thanks for all your insights and yeah, we appreciate it. Awesome. Cheers. Cheers.

Okay. That's a wrap on this episode of Fitter and Faster. Thank you for joining us and thank you for listening. If you haven't already, please subscribe to Triathlete's Fitter and Faster wherever you listen to your podcasts.

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