

Brick Workouts: They're not just for triathletes anymore!

Funny name, serious tool for any endurance athlete

When I first entered the world of multisport, years ago, I had never heard the term “brick” workout. At that time, not many outside of the tri and du movements had either. The word sounded funny to me, especially in the context of training language. At best, it sounded like a heavy, clunking, mass laden chore akin to carrying a boulder up a mountain for all eternity. After getting exposed to them, however, I began to see how much benefit could be obtained from these things. They can be very effective and provide important variety in your weekly training regimen whether you are a triathlete or not. They're also my favorite workout because they can be downright fun if you use your imagination when creating them. Here's a list of some variations on the standard Bike/Run brick that you may not know or just haven't thought about:

-The Swim/Run brick – This workout is best done with access to open water like a lake or the beach, but can be done at a pool if entry and exit are convenient. The swim/run brick is a good workout in a neuromuscular and physiological sense, because it helps with the adaptation of blood flow and pooling between the horizontal and vertical orientations. In other words, it helps cut down the feeling of lightheadedness and “dead” legs you feel when running directly from a swim. It can also be used to add cardiovascular duration to a swim or run workout while cutting down on the muscle recovery “costs” by dividing the workload over the whole body.

-The Swim/Bike brick – A variation on the above theme. This workout can help with increasing exercise duration and adding variety while minimizing recovery stress. Of course, it's great for decreasing the time it takes to “find your bike legs” in multisport training too.

-The Run/Run brick – Here's an interesting one: the run/run brick. This workout is a great tool for distance runners, but we can all benefit from the concept. It involves running outside on the road or trail and inside on a treadmill! The switch provides many ingenious advantages. When heat and humidity are at extremes (like now), the indoor portion of the brick can make it possible to get that 1-3 hour run in without calling in the paramedics! The indoor part of the brick allows for cooling down and re-hydrating while the outdoor portion is more race specific and helps cope with the boredom and drudgery often associated with long stints on the hamster wheel. Another important training tool here, regardless of outside conditions, is pacing. Running an hour or two out on the road, then coming inside to the treadmill can help with making sure you can maintain your goal pace even when fatigue starts to set in.

-The Bike/Run multi set brick - This brick is similar to the Bike/Run brick but with multiple, shorter durations of each. This workout is great because it

combines the physiological and neuromuscular benefits of the brick with lots of transition practice. Transitions are probably the most often overlooked and under practiced discipline with many multisporters.

-The Track brick – Called a track brick, this bike/run brick is done at a local track or other area where a set distance can be measured. This is a very good workout that combines race-like intensity and the neuromuscular benefits of the Bike/Run multi set brick while making it easy to measure progress throughout the year. It also makes it easy to transition quickly from run to bike and concentrate on maintaining proper form at high workloads without the added distractions of cars, animals, or traffic signals on the road. The workout involves setting your bike up on a trainer next to a track or neighborhood loop and doing multiple sets at a higher intensity approaching or touching anaerobic threshold heart rates. This is excellent for short, intense race prep work.

Above are examples of some of the more common brick workouts we give our athletes, but the possibilities are endless. The adventure racers in the house might do a paddle/run or paddle/bike brick. Or, in the winter, there's the cross country ski/snowshoe run brick if you need something to do between downhill runs. For some of the non-athletic spouses out there, there's the talk on the phone/go shopping brick or the remote control finger push/12 oz. curl brick that's popular during football season. Let your creativity be your guide. Almost any combination of events can be combined to form an effective, fun workout that will give the 'ole training doldrums the boot...or maybe that's the wrecking ball! In any case, have fun with it; you've just expanded your workout library exponentially!