

Do you need both a road bike and triathlon bike?

By Mikael Hanson of Enhance Sports

<i>Set of Profile clip-on 'Jammer' triathlon bars</i>	<i>\$79.95</i>
<i>Set of hex wrenches</i>	<i>\$9.95</i>
<i>Roll of electrical tape</i>	<i>\$1.99</i>

Not having to tell your wife you are laying out \$5000 for a second bike for only triathlons

Priceless!

With the Tour de France now in the books, I can't help but wonder how many men (and women) across the country stared at their television in awe of the new crop of aero time trial bikes used by the professional peloton. American David Zabriskie won the opening stage aboard a sleek Cervelo P3 carbon bike (the latest offering from this very popular Canadian bike company). Not to be out done in the speed arena, Lance and the Discovery train won the ensuing team time trial with help of the new Trek TTX rig (who returned to the basics after trying a major over-haul of their TT bike in 2004). The Basque team of Euskadi unveiled Orbea's new Ordu (meaning 'time' in Basque), while Quick Step used the Tour to showcase the new all carbon Time RXR. Add to the list the new Look KG 496 ridden by Credit Agricole and the Giant TCR ridden by Jan Ullrich and team Telecom, and you have a shopping list of top of the line aero-bikes that would make any triathlete smile like they just won the Lotto (which might be a necessary requirement to afford one of these machines)!

However, while the triathlon bike options are endless, we are now faced with the age old question – "should I get a second bike for only triathlon use?" Well, as my own bike collection consists of one road bike and now two triathlon/time trial bikes (hey – one is for sale), I may not be the right person to ask this potentially life altering question. The simple answer is if you have the means and an understanding spouse (like I do), then by all means, get the second triathlon bike. But, do most of us need a second triathlon bike? Perhaps not.

The dream bike for almost every triathlete I meet is one consisting of an all carbon fiber Tri-frame, with an aggressive 78 degree seat angle, aero tubes, deep aero wheels, integrated seat-post, blade-like carbon fork, rear wheel cut-out, and a full carbon aero bar set-up. This Ferrari of bikes comes in many flavors. Kuota, Cervelo, Guru, Look, Giant, Issac Joule – all make full carbon fiber tri bikes that will set you back over \$2000 for the frame alone (with a full bike easily tipping the scales at \$5000+)! Will such a machine make you go faster? If you think it will, sure why not. Does all of this super-sleek, aero componentry cut drag and thus reduce time? Sure, a few seconds here and there. Are they a substitute for good old fashion training? No.

As for individual performance, I know several top amateur triathletes who actually win races riding a simple road bike equipped with clip-on triathlon bars, proving it is more about the motor, than the machine. Ask Boston native and former all-american swimmer, Jean-Paul Gowdy, who rides a near 20lb Lemond Tourmalet road bike with clip on bars and won the 2005 Mighty Montauk triathlon (where the transition area was like a virtual triathlon bike expo).



If you currently own a nice road bike (I am not referring to a Schwinn Varsity here), there are many modifications that can be made to convert your current ride to something a bit more 'Triathlon Specific'. The most basic and something most of you have likely already done, is add a set of clip-on triathlon bars. The options for clip-on bars are vast, but one type that seems to be gaining in popularity, is the smaller 'jammer' style tri bars (photo to left) made popular by the professional triathletes who are forced to use something less obtrusive for draft legal racing. Ever try riding in a pack of cyclist while on your tri bars? Not advisable. Nor is the need for aero-bars for the first time triathlete (plenty of time to worry about that position after you finish your first triathlon).

After adding clip-on bars, it is usually advisable to adjust your seat to a more 'forward' position, which will help you get over the aero bars and more comfortably hold that aero riding position (which can save you precious seconds over just riding in the drops). Some simple tape marks on the seat rails (photo to the right) can help you remember your 'road' and 'triathlon' positioning.



What other improvements can you make short of buying a whole new bike? Well the largest improvement in aerodynamics (drag) and time savings can be found in the wheels. According to HED (www.hedcycling.com), switching from a set of normal 32-spoke wheels to a set of aero wheels with a lower spoke count can save you as much as 3 minutes. The time savings begins at about 60 seconds for a set of modestly deep aero wheels (35 to 40mm deep), like the HED Jet 40, American class 38, or Zipp 303. Going with an even deeper rim (50-60mm deep), like found on the Easton Temptest, HED Alps, HED Jet 60, American Classic 58 or Zipp 404 can save you as much as 2 to 3 minutes over conventional wheels. As for the cost, a set of HED Jet 40s will run you about \$700 (without tires or cassette), HED Alps will set you back about \$1000, and if you decide to go even more aero and select the HED 3-spoke (most aero dynamic wheel short of a solid disc wheel), that will hurt the wallet to the tune of about \$1200. Not to leave out the other manufacturers, but by comparison, a set of the American classic carbon wheels will set you back about \$1200 (but boy are they light), while the Zipp 303s and 404s run over \$1500, and the Easton Temptest – well let's not go there right now.

Outside of the wheels, another area one can look to make aero and efficiency improvements is with the pedals. If you are using the antiquated quill and toe-clip setup, think about changing to clip-less pedals (Look, Time, and Speedplay all offer clip-less). Clip-less pedals are not only more aero-dynamic than the bulky toe-strap over the shoes combo, but they will also save you a good deal of weight and contrary to popular belief, they are not the difficult to use.

So do you need a second triathlon bike? Hey, don't we all! But before you abandon your family's vacation plans in favor of a second, more tri-specific bike, do yourself (and your family) a favor and spruce up your current ride. The money you save might be enough to take everyone to Disney World (or at the very least help pay for a few more entry fees)!



Mikael a Level 1 certified USA Triathlon coach, a Level 1 certified USA Cycling coach, a certified Schwinn indoor cycling instructor and will soon be completing his USA Track and Field certification. The ultimate multi-sport junkie, Mikael competes in numerous cross-country ski races, bike races, running events, and duathlons/triathlons during the calendar year, with a focus on the sprint and Olympic distance triathlons (Ironman racing is a tad too long for my knees!). He recently founded Enhance Sports, a multi-sport coaching and racing company based in New York City. Visit them on the web at www.Enhancesports.com or by e-mail at enhancesports@aol.com.