

Backroad Gravel

Event preamble

Well done on signing up for the 60, 100 or 160km event! Whether your goal is to finish strong, beat your mates, or simply enjoy the ride, this guide will help you prepare with purpose. It promises to be an epic day out amongst the bright yellow or green canola and wheat fields that cover the rolling hills of the Chapman Valley.

60km Event

Perfect for those dipping their toes into gravel riding or chasing a rewarding day out, the 60km event blends adventure with accessibility. You'll still be able to bath in the post-ride endorphins, but with time to enjoy the journey too! Ideally aiming for **5-8hrs riding/week**.

100km Fields of Gold

Step beyond the ordinary with a ride that tests your legs and rewards your spirit. From epic climbs to private farmland trails, the Fields of Gold serves up everything that makes gravel great — grit, grind, and glorious views. Ideally aiming for **7-9hrs riding/week**.

160km Big Canola

This is the one that legends are made of — 160km of raw, beautiful, punishing terrain that'll test your resolve and fill your soul. Conquer Ward's Wall on tired legs, and you'll know what it means to go all in. Ideally aiming for **10-12hrs riding/week**.

Who am I?

My name is Scott Bowden. I am 30 years old and from Hobart, Tasmania. I have 23 years of bike racing experience after starting in BMX. I found my way into cross country mountain biking and road racing when I was 13, and started taking the sport more serious when I was 16. I spent every year from 2013 - 2022 racing internationally on the MTB and road before calling time on racing my bike full time. I now work as a cycling coach (AusCycling Development Coach - Road & Track certification) with the Tasmanian Institute of Sport working to help develop the next generation of cyclists coming out of Tassie. I have represented Australia at the World XCO MTB Championships on three occasions, won 2x U23 National XCO titles, an U23 XCO Oceania title, raced the Tour Down Under with Team UniSA, Cadel's Evans Great Ocean Road Race twice with the national team, raced for Australia's number 1 Continental road cycling team Team Bridgelane from 2017 - 2020 & French DN1 team Bourg Ain Cyclisme from 2021-2022. In 2016 I represented Australia at the 2016 Rio Olympics for mountain biking and also ended up doing the road race. I have just finished a Bachelor of Paramedicine at uni and continue to race domestically in Australia representing Giant Bikes Australia / Shimano, predominately in gravel and mountain biking. I am now motivated to pass on my learnings from training, race preparation and execution to others.

General gravel training and preparation philosophy

Gravel racing is about **endurance, resistance to fatigue, and smart pacing**. The fitter and more prepared you are, the more you'll enjoy your event. More training often equals more fitness, HOWEVER, you are only as good as the training you can actually recover from and absorb. Recovery is super important to let the form soak in and is where the fitness gains happen.

Training tips for Backroads Gravel

1. **Adapt the program to your life**

This guide is built for riders balancing full-time work with training. Feel free to swap workouts around or shorten sessions to suit your weekly schedule — flexibility is key to staying on track. Don't be a slave to the program and listen to your body. Remember, you're only as good as the training you can absorb! Stress on the body is however required to create adaptation which is what getting better is all about.

2. **Consistency over perfection**

You don't need to follow every workout perfectly, but maintaining regular riding throughout the season will have the biggest impact on your performance. Aim to ride frequently, even if the rides are shorter.

3. **Time-based rides, not distance-based**

Workouts are structured around time rather than distance to help you better fit them into your routine. This keeps the focus on effort and progression, not just how far you go — distance is one of the least important training metrics as how far you go can be influenced by so many variables such as the terrain where you live and the weather conditions.

4. **Train smart: focus on endurance, prioritise frequency and long rides**

If you have more training time, use it to increase low-intensity volume — not intensity. Stick to the 80/20 principle: 80% of your riding should be at a steady, conversational pace, and 20% at a higher intensity. If time is tight, prioritize key sessions with efforts and the weekly long ride. Riding more often (even shorter sessions) supports better fitness gains than occasional long rides. That said, aim to include one longer ride each week that mimics your expected race duration.

Being an endurance event — the main thing about getting around in the best fashion possible is endurance. Aiming to build up to completing the anticipated duration of the event, or close to, in training prior. This will allow you to head into the event with a lot more confidence.

5. **Stay positive and enjoy the process**

Following a plan is already a step toward success. Enjoy the journey, trust the process, and have fun out there.

6. **Don't do it alone!**

Try to rope friends and family into training with you, or use this as an excuse to try and incorporate more group rides into your schedule. A happy cyclist is a fast cyclist! Find ways to make training fun and enjoyable for yourself. It's easier to push yourself when you're enjoying it!

Key Principles

- **Specificity:** You're training for an endurance event. Your long rides should gradually build up toward the estimated event duration. This will allow you to head into the event with a lot more confidence and go part way to reducing the pre-race anxiety, so you have more mental bandwidth to focus on getting the most out of yourself on the day of the event. Also, try to accumulate close to the elevation gain of your chosen distance on your longer rides too — if possible.

- **Pacing:** The golden rule for the first 20min of a long race: *"If you think you're going too hard, you definitely are. If you think you're going about right, you're probably still going too hard. If you think you're going too easy, you're probably just about right."* After this you should have settled into your rhythm and found a group of riders of similar level to ride with.
- **Nutrition:** For rides longer than 1 hour, practice carbohydrate fuelling. As a rough guide aim for **40-60g carbs/hr** – the ideal amount is specific to you and is dependent on the amount of power you are producing, so don't blindly copy what someone else is doing! Start with 30g carbs/h in training and increase by 10g carbs/hr until you find the sweet spot for you. High input, high output! Consuming carbs during a ride is just like putting fuel in your car! And you wouldn't drive your car on empty. It is important to start this early to train your gut to tolerate carbs to prevent stomach issues on race day.

If you're interested in some further reading around race day fuelling:

Effects of 120 vs. 60 and 90 g/h Carbohydrate Intake during a Trail Marathon on Neuromuscular Function and High Intensity Run Capacity Recovery: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32679728/>

Taking carbohydrate recommendations with a grain of salt:

<https://www.mysportscience.com/post/carbohydrate-recommendations-relative-to-body-weight>

Bike Familiarity

Train on the bike you'll race with, so you are used to the position and handling. Lock in your tyre choice early. Tubeless setup is highly recommended, and you may even consider running tyre inserts which help reduce the incidence of pinch flats and improve ride feel on rough terrain. Regardless of whether your goal for the event is to beat your time from last year, race your mates, or finish, paying attention to your tyre pressure in the lead up is a worthwhile detail to pay attention to which will increase your efficiency on the bike and your enjoyment. Running your tyre pressure too high is uncomfortable, inefficient and you will be bouncing around like a bull rider. Use tyre pressure calculators to maximise your efficiency and improve your ride experience:

- <https://silca.cc/pages/pro-tire-pressure-calculator>
- <https://axs.sram.com/guides/tire/pressure>

Equipment Prep

Carry what you need to be self-sufficient. This is what I carry:

- 2-3x CO2 cannisters + chuck (and/or a hand pump)
- TPU tube (ensuring correct size matched to your tyres + valve length long enough for your rims). These are inexpensive, take up very little room and are extremely lightweight.
- 2 tyre levers
- Chain quick link
- Multitool w/ chain breaker
- Tyre plugs (bacon strips or Stans No Tubes DARTS)
- Bottles and/or hydration pack
- Nutrition (gels, bars)

Warm-Up

A 20-30min warm-up helps mentally and physically prime you for race effort. On race day, keep it easy and do some short efforts to open up the legs.

Tapering

The week before the event, reduce volume and intensity to let the form soak in. Trust the process and use the time to reflect on all your hard work. Let the body and mind freshen up so you are ready to dig deep on race day and have the best time possible! As the pre-race nerves creep in, now is also a good time to reflect on all the hard work you have put in!

Race Day Advice

- Allow plenty of time to get to the event, warm up, run to the loo etc. You'll likely experience some race day nerves (it's a good thing! It means you care!!), but be organised so you don't add unnecessary stress.
- Don't try anything new!
- Stick to your practiced pacing and nutrition plan.
- Enjoy the ride!

12-Week Training Overview

Given the program below is designed to help prepare for the 60, 100 & 160km distances please adjust the ride time as your current fitness and time availability allows. Aim to complete the prescribed efforts/intervals and adjust the total ride time to suit. I would encourage you to use some kind of way to check track of your training, Strava would be the simplest way to do this. Pay particular attention to how many hours of training you complete each week and refer back to the rough suggestions for the weekly volume (found on page 1). You may also need to do a rep or two less of the intervals if you don't have time to fit them into your ride. Prior to completing any intervals, the idea is to warm up for 20-30min, complete the prescribed session, then warm down for 20-30min. For more volume, if feeling good and you have the time, feel free to extend these rides – extending the time ridden at endurance/Z2 pace before or after the efforts. Ensure that you account for this in terms of your consumption of carbs on the bike.

The sessions provided are bread and butter work outs designed to build your engine and functional threshold power. The longer rides are aimed at increasing your endurance, efficiency and fatigue resistance. No one session will make you miraculously fitter – progression in fitness is about good honest work, day in day out, week in week out, month in month out – hence the reason to start preparing now! Feel free to replace the harder work outs with bunch rides on the road if you have access to them as the training load should be similar.

May - Base Building

- Focus: Rebuilding fitness and time on the bike
- Build consistency with 3-5 rides/week
- Decide upon race setup

June - Fitness Progression

- Introduce intensity and longer rides
- Test nutrition strategy on longer sessions

July - Event Specificity

- Increase terrain-specific sessions
- Simulate race day pacing, nutrition, and bike setup on weekend long ride
- Get your bike serviced

August - Taper & Race Week

- Sharpen and recover
- 7-10 days out: Begin reducing volume
- Day before: Short pre-race spin + carb load!
- **Race Day:** Have fun and ride smart!

Final Tips

- Make it social: training with friends helps motivation
- Prioritise fun: happy riders go faster
- Reflect: be proud of every step forward

Enjoy your time on the Backroads!

Training Zones

There are three main ways of training to specific zones which can be measured by power (if you have a power meter), heart rate (if you have a heart rate monitor) or perceived exertion. Personally, I don't like to train to heart rate zones because there are too many variables that can affect your heart rate on any given day. For the purpose of this program, I will use Rate of Perceived Exertion – which is based on a scale of 1 – 10. If you have a power meter and know your Functional Threshold Power, then please feel free to go by your power zones.

Zone	Description	Perceived Exertion	Power Zones	Heart Rate Zones
Zone 1	Active Recovery	<3 – barely any effort – like a walk on the bike	<55%	<68%
Zone 2	Endurance	4 – 5 – comfortable pace, can hold a conversation	55 – 75%	69 – 83%
Zone 3	Tempo	6 – 7 – noticeable effort, breathing deeper, talking is getting a bit harder	76 – 90%	84 – 94%
Zone 4	Threshold	8 – beginning to push, challenging pace, breathing heavy	91 – 105%	95 – 105%
Zone 5	VO2 Max	9 – hard-very hard, difficult to maintain, conversation not possible, muscles burning	106 – 120%	106 – 110%
Zone 6	Anaerobic/Neuromuscular	10 - more or less maximal, all-out effort, conversation not possible, frothing at the nostrils	>120%	>111%

12 Week Backroads Gravel Training Program

MAY							
DATES & MAIN FOCUS	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
12/5 - 18/5						<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (2hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1.5hrs)
19/5 - 25/5	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (2.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1.5hrs)
26/5 - 1/6	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>TEMPO</u> 20-30min warm up, 3x 10min Z3 w/6min recovery completed on flat to undulating terrain (think – keep the chain tight during these efforts) or a climb. (1.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> + Hills (2.5-3hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1.5hrs)

JUNE							
DATES & MAIN FOCUS	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
2/6 - 8/6	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>TEMPO</u> 20-30min warm up, 3x 12min Z3 w/6min recovery completed on flat to undulating terrain (think – keep the chain tight during these efforts) or a climb. (1.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>THRESHOLD</u> 20-30min warm up, 4x 5min Z4 w/5min recovery – ideally completed on a climb (1.5hrs)	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Predominately Z2, with some low end Z3 efforts on the climbs (3hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1.5hrs)
9/6 - 15/6	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>TEMPO</u> 20-30min warm up, 3x	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>THRESHOLD</u> 20-30min warm up,	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 (3-3.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1.5hrs)

		15min Z3 w/10min recovery completed on flat to undulating terrain (think – keep the chain tight during these efforts) or a climb. (1.5hrs)		4x 6min Z4 w/6min recovery – ideally completed on a climb (1.5hrs)			
16/6 - 22/6	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>TEMPO</u> 20-30min warm up, 3x 15min Z3 w/6min recovery completed on flat to undulating terrain (think – keep the chain tight during these efforts) or a climb. (1.5-2hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>THRESHOLD</u> 20-30min warm up, 4x 8min Z4 w/6min recovery – ideally completed on a climb (1.5hrs)	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 – long gravel ride (3.5-4hrs)	<u>RECOVERY</u> Easy spin (1hr)
23/6 - 29/6	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>TEMPO</u> 20-30min warm up, 3x 15min Z3 w/5min recovery completed on flat to undulating terrain (think – keep the chain tight during these efforts) or a climb. (1.5-2hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Predominately Z2, with some low end Z3 efforts on the climbs (3hrs)	Optional Ride or Rest

JULY

DATES & MAIN FOCUS	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
30/6 - 6/7	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>THRESHOLD</u> 20-30min warm up, 4x 8min Z4 w/6min recovery – ideally completed on a climb (1.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>VO2</u> 20-30min warm up, 4x 5min Z5 w/5min recovery. Aim to keep each 5min effort consistent – not all out on the first, low on the last. (1.5hrs)	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 (3-3.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 (2-2.5hrs)
7/7 - 13/7	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>THRESHOLD</u> 20-30min warm up, 4x 8min Z4 w/5min recovery – ideally completed on a climb (1.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>VO2</u> 20-30min warm up, 5x 4min Z5 w/4min recovery. Aim to keep each 4min effort consistent – not all out on the first, low on the last. (1.5hrs)	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 (3-3.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 (3-3.5hrs)
14/7 - 20/7	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>OVER UNDERS</u> 20-30min warm up, 4x 8min completed as 30sec full gas, 30sec Z1/Z2 w/6min recovery (1.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>VO2</u> 20-30min warm up, 5x 4min Z5 w/3min recovery. Aim to keep each 4min effort consistent – not all out on the first, low on the last. (1.5hrs)	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 – long gravel ride (4-4.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 (2-2.5hrs)
21/7 - 27/7	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>TEMPO</u> 20-30min warm up, 2x 20min Z3 w/10min recovery completed on flat to undulating terrain (think – keep the chain tight during these efforts) or a climb. (1.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 – long gravel ride (4.5-5hrs)	Optional Ride or Rest

28/7 - 3/8	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>MIX UP SESSION</u> Include 1x 12min Tempo, 1x 6min threshold, 2x 1min VO2 Throughout the ride with at least 5min between each effort. Rest of ride Z2. (1.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE w/Sprints</u> Z2 Ride + include 5x 10sec max sprints on uninterrupted sections of road spaced throughout the ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 (2-2.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 (2-2.5hrs)
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AUGUST							
DATES & MAIN FOCUS	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
4/8 - 10/8 RACE WEEK	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>ENDURANCE</u> Z2 Ride (1-1.5hrs)	<u>REST DAY</u>	<u>PRE-RACE</u> Get out for an easy spin. Ideally with some friends. Familiarise yourself with the start/finish area. Have your post ride nutrition/snack organised before your ride. (1hr)	<u>RACE DAY</u> Goodluck – remember to pace yourself, stick to your nutrition & hydration plan! Have fun out there!!!	