

## **How to Climb Smarter Not Harder:**

*Discover the right form to climb faster on your next ride.*

**By Sean Coffey**

**HEAD:** Up and looking forward. When you drop your head, it's harder to breathe.

**ABS:** Push out your abs as if you're posing for a Men's Health cover. Crouching and bending at the abs saps energy because it puts excess stress on your back muscles to hold you up. Weak abs mean balance problems, especially on climbs. The cure: sit-ups and reverse-curl sit-ups.

**HIPS:** Align over the bottom bracket to be in the best position to let gravity drop your weight down onto the pedals.

**KNEES:** Keep your knees close to the down tube to maximize your quad's power on downstrokes. If your knees poke out past your shoulders, you're wasting power.

**HANDS:** Put your hands on the hoods when you climb out of the saddle. The only time you should climb in the drops is for brief attacks--you go faster but your weight is forward, which burns energy and makes breathing harder.

**UPSTROKE:** Pull your leg up and wrap it over the top of the stroke. Imagine you're running and bringing your leg around for the next step. When you're out of the saddle, the unevenness of your pedal stroke is accentuated. Pulling up gives you balance and power throughout the stroke.

**BACK:** Keep it flat. A flat back enables the lower back muscles, the quads and the flexors (the muscles on the outside of the hips) to work together more efficiently. Consciously relax any muscles--such as those around the neck and shoulders--that don't contribute to the downward push.

**CHEST:** Keep it upright and open, as if you're walking up stairs. This keeps your diaphragm from being constricted, which means more comfort and more energy. To maximize the benefit of working with gravity--letting your body weight move the pedals rather than relying solely on muscle--keep your chest even with or slightly behind the point where the stem clamps the bar.

**ARMS:** Bend to around 60-70 degrees. Push down with the arm that's opposite whichever foot is doing the downstroke.

**BUTT:** You get more power--and a more efficient transfer--from your butt muscles when they're not bent. Your butt muscles should feel like you're standing and getting up out of a chair, not bending and about to sit. If you feel bent, stand more upright.

### **THE BEST ROCKING TECHNIQUE**

**USE GRAVITY:** Align your sternum, knee, femur and ball of the foot on a downstroke. This allows you to put more weight on the pedal, using gravity to supply much of your pedal force. If your upper body stays centered over the top tube, instead of slightly swaying from side to side, you're not taking advantage of your chance to let weight and gravity drive the pedals. Keep your chest up when you move over each pedal.

**LEAN:** When you lean your bike, you decrease how high you have to bring your knees. If you keep the bike perpendicular to the ground during a steep climb, you have to raise your knees way up, like you're high-stepping.

**SHIFT WEIGHT:** When your foot bottoms out, shift your weight to the opposite pedal. The center of your weight should stay over the bottom bracket. Any weight you put behind the bottom bracket puts more stress on the legs. If you're supporting your weight with the bar, you're too far forward.

**PULL BAR ON STEEP STUFF:** For climbs with a 10-20% grade, you'll climb better by pulling up on the bar with the arm that's on the same side as the downstroke leg (as opposed to pushing down with the opposite arm). As soon as your leg starts the downward motion, pull with the same arm. This is why some climbers bob as they ascend.

### **3 TIPS FOR SEATED CLIMBS**

**SIT FORWARD:** For more power, slide to the front third of your saddle.

**GRIP:** Put your hands about a thumb's length from the stem on either side. Put the heel of your hand on the bar. Open your hands with your fingers spread out, then put your weight on the bar and wrap your fingers around loosely.

**RELAX:** Especially when you're sitting, tension can cause neck pain and headaches because you're cutting off circulation and possibly pinching nerves. Relax by stretching fingers, then arms, shoulder and neck.