

Indoor Cycling

Descriptions and Definitions by Chris Kostman

• Hand Positions •

The hand positions utilized in an indoor cycling class are absolutely central to the whole experience. They have been carefully selected very specifically for the following four reasons:

- 1) For safety and proper posture
- 2) For visual communication to the students
- 3) To provide the best full-body workout
- 4) To replicate road cycling experiences

First Position / Center

The hands rest lightly on the center of bars, just touching one another. Spine is straight, shoulders are relaxed, elbows are bent towards the earth. This is used on a seated flat road with light resistance, as during the warm up, cool down, and recovery portions of the ride.

Second Position / Wide

The hands rest lightly on, or grip, the straight part of bars, as on a mountain bike. Spine is straight, shoulders are relaxed, elbows are bent deeper towards the earth when seated. This is used for seated climbing, standing tall, seated and standing accelerations, and jumps. Wrists are always relaxed and supple with little flexion. As always, there is no weight on the hands.

Third Position / Extended

The hands rest lightly on, or grip, the far ends of bars. This is used for climbing out of the saddle with heavy resistance only. Spine is straight, shoulders are relaxed, elbows are dropped towards the earth, and the entire upper body is parallel to the ground. Again, there is no weight on the hands. Never ride in this position while seated in the saddle; doing so forces the rider to overextend the back and precludes the cultivation of the back and abs while riding. Note: Do not use "Hand Position #2 1/2" (hands just forward of the forward bend in the handlebars.) Hands only go forward of this bend when on the ends of the handlebars for climbing out of the saddle.

Do not use "under-handed" hand positions in any of the three hand positions. Palms should never be face-up or face-out while on the handlebars. Never instruct riders to lean on, or press against, the handlebars.

• Core Movements and Positions •

Seated Flat Road

- *Light resistance*

- *Hands in first position*

This is the warm up, cool down, and recovery position. Weight is on the saddle and feet, with the hands resting lightly on the handlebars. Spine is straight, shoulders are relaxed, elbows are bent towards the earth. There is no tension anywhere in the body. All classes begin and end with several minutes in this position. Beginners and others are encouraged to return to this position if they "can't keep up" with the class. There is no shame in riding a flat road.

Seated Climbing

- *Moderate to heavy resistance*

- *Hands in second position*

This is probably the most powerful, physiologically challenging, and deeply rewarding position in which to ride indoors. Weight is on the saddle and feet, with the hands gripping and pulling on the handlebars. Butt is slid a bit further back on the saddle in order to further cultivate the use of glute and hamstring muscles. Spine is exceptionally straight, pelvis rotated forward, elbows bent more deeply with forearms parallel to the earth. Lower abs are tucked in so as to push the butt down and back into the saddle. Arms, back, and shoulders are utilized to pull on the handlebars to assist the lower body in keeping the pedals constantly rotating in a smooth, regular cadence. Do not allow the legs to bog down and degenerate into a push-push style of "leg press" riding. Cadence is in time with the music, usually on the half count (about 70 rpm). If riders are getting out of saddle to apply body weight to the pedals during a long seated climb, then they are using too much resistance and probably have a rounded back, relaxed abs, and a bogged down cadence. They should be encouraged to stay with the seated position and keep their momentum up by using somewhat less resistance.

Climbing Out Of The Saddle

- *Moderate to heavy resistance*

- *Hands in third position*

This is mistakenly believed to be the most beneficial and challenging riding position. Weight is entirely on the saddle and feet, with no weight whatsoever on the handlebars. As resistance increases, the handlebars can be pulled against in order to create leverage for the lower body and to aid in timing and rhythm. Spine is exceptionally straight, pelvis rotated forward, elbows bent moderately, with the upper body parallel to the earth. Shoulders and neck are relaxed entirely, with the shoulder blades dropped comfortably toward the earth. Importantly, the lower abs are tucked in to support the lower back. Arms, back, and shoulders are utilized

to pull on the handlebars to assist the lower body in keeping the pedals constantly rotating in a smooth, regular cadence. Do not allow the legs to bog down and degenerate into a push-push style of "leg press" riding. Cadence is in time with the music, usually on the half count (about 70 rpm). If a rider comes out of this position while climbing and switches to a standing tall position, this is probably because that rider has developed a sore back from riding with a rounded back and relaxed abs. Instruct them on proper technique and posture and they will find comfort and power in this forward-flexed position.

Standing Tall

- *Moderate resistance*

- *Hands in second position*

This is one of the most misunderstood positions in indoor cycling. However, riding with awareness and intensity in the standing tall position provides a rich front-of-the-leg complement to climbing out of the saddle with its back-of-the-leg focus. As well, standing tall directly transfers strength, skill, coordination, and agility to outdoor, bipedal activities such as running, hiking, skating, skiing, and snowshoeing. Finally, done with fast legspeed and a super upright and balanced posture, standing tall provides one of the most profound and physiologically and energetically rewarding experiences in indoor cycling. Weight is entirely on the feet, with the body lifted off the saddle and hands used only for balance and safety. Many riders find that they need to raise their handlebars a few settings for this riding style. (Be certain that they don't pull the handlebars completely out of the bike in so doing.) Ride as tall as absolutely possible, really straightening the spine, tucking in the pelvis and abs, and loading all weight onto the quads. Ride most of the time with the upper body relaxed and moving slightly in tandem with the lower body, while occasionally isolating the upper body and riding with the focus and movement exclusively in the lower body for an intense challenge. Cadence is usually tied into the beat of the music: riding on the beat, half count, double time, etc., allowing cadences such as about 70, 140, and others. Remember: no weight on the hands, no leaning forward, and no tension in the upper body.

Jumps

- *Moderate resistance*

- *Hands in second position*

In outdoor cycling, riders lift out of the saddle for brief periods of time when negotiating steep hairpin turns on alpine roads or to accelerate up to a faster speed. By using gravity and body weight, more pressure can be applied to the pedals in order to provide a burst of speed under constant tension or in order to keep up constant speed when tension increases. This is called jumping.

Indoors, we do a similar movement for shorter durations of time, perhaps for two, four, eight, or sixteen beats of the music. The purpose is an intensified cardiovascular challenge mixed with a unique kinesthetic and physiologic demand. The many benefits include heightened coordination, explosive strength, and postural awareness. Hands stay in second position and the upper body remains relaxed as the body weight is lifted up from the saddle into a standing tall position, then returned to the saddle. Weight is entirely on the feet when standing, then primarily relocated to the saddle while in the seated phase of the movement. Do not just bounce up and down and do not do the movement so quickly that proper technique and posture are impaired. Hands remain lightly on the handlebars for balance and safety, but the handlebars are not pulled against during the movement. Remember: only perfect practice makes perfect.

Seated Accelerations

- *Light, moderate, or heavy resistance*
- *Hands in second position*

Accelerating the pedals is a challenging addition to many of the core movements in indoor cycling. Cardiovascular fortitude, anaerobic threshold, and explosive strength are all furthered during short duration acceleration. Care must be taken to keep the upper body, especially the neck and shoulders, relaxed while accelerating. As always, the spine must remain flat. As well, lower abs must be held in snugly to push the butt into the saddle and keep the pedaling form smooth and free from bounciness. All accelerations and decelerations must be smooth and fluid, not jerky and abrupt, in order to not have a negative or deleterious effect on the connective tissues around the knees and ankles. Smooth, circular pedaling form, with the knees kept straight in line over the toes, is crucial. Control at all times is absolutely paramount, as are quick reflexes, should anything go wrong with the bike. This is an advanced move for seasoned riders. Do not allow new riders to participate in this movement; instead they can push the same speed with more resistance. Most importantly, there is NO accelerating with no resistance; without resistance, riders can lose control of the flywheel, which is an incredibly dangerous circumstance.

Accelerations Out Of The Saddle

- *Moderate or heavy resistance*
- *Hands in second or third position, depending on resistance*

This advanced move can be performed while standing tall or while climbing out of the saddle. Use the same form and posture as in those movements, but with extra attention to safety and control. This is normally performed in synch with the beat and tempo of the music, for eight, sixteen, or thirty-two counts, for example. With the

hands in third position, resistance must remain constant and heavy; this is accelerating on a mountain and it must be done with no weight on the hands. With the hands in second position while standing tall, resistance must be at least moderate and the weight must stay entirely on the pedals. There is no leaning on the handlebars or otherwise allowing the weight to fall forward. Never remove all of the resistance while accelerating. Remember: there is no coasting on these bikes, so riders must only accelerate to the degree that they can stay in control.

• General Comments •

Warm up and cool down is critical. Riders must be properly warmed up (at least one or two songs in the saddle with little or no resistance) before challenging themselves with mountains, standing tall, accelerations, and other aggressive movements. Likewise, riders must cool down (at least one song in the saddle with little or no resistance) before stretching and then leaving the room. After class, always lead several minutes of appropriate stretching both on and off the bike. Importantly, never stretch on the bike except with both feet securely in the pedals.

This is not a math class. In indoor cycling, the music *is* the road. Let riders develop and heighten their instinct and intuition by allowing them to get into the music and let themselves go. Speak only in a useful and helpful manner and avoid numerical instructions as much as possible. Remember: thought and intuition are not one in the same.

Keep safety first and foremost. Ask yourself the following when considering any possible new movement, riding technique, or stretch on the bike: "What if someone's pedal or chain broke while they were doing this?" If the answer is something painful and injurious, DON'T DO IT!

Pedal in circles. Imagine yourself scraping mud off your foot. This is the small, natural flexion of the ankle while pedaling. The foot stays close to parallel to the ground almost always while pedaling. Never instruct riders to point their feet down as this puts unnecessary strain on the Achilles' tendon, shin, and knee. Ankles remain soft and relaxed while pedaling. Knees move in straight lines up and down above the toes, like pistons.

Think postural integrity. You want your riders to leave your class with a strengthened and lengthened spine after your 45 minutes together. This is achieved with careful attention paid to a straight spine, pelvis rotated forward, snug abs, and a relaxed upper body. We make a very intense imprint on our psyche and physique during class, so seize the opportunity to make that a very positive, long-lasting imprint!