



## Indoor Cycle Instructor PROfile

# JRA *Just Riding Along*

Created by **John Macgowan, Instructor ICI/PRO**  
Training Type: **Endurance / Base Training**  
Working HR Zones: Base of **Zone 3 to the middle of Zone 3**  
Total Class Length: **60, 90 or 120 minutes**

### Profile Description

This profile is called **JRA – Just Riding Along**. The title comes from my unique description of the feeling of your **Aerobic Threshold** and how to best describe that feeling to your class. Not to be confused with your **Anaerobic Threshold (AT)**, your **Aerobic Threshold** is the intensity you find yourself when you are out enjoying a nice day on your bike, Just Riding Along ☺

**Aerobic Threshold** tends to be ~ 10% below an athlete's **Anaerobic Threshold (AT)** or ~ 75% of actual Max HR.

*Here is another example of why I advocate a standardized method of describing Heart Rate Training Zones.* The HR Zones we use at Life Time Fitness has this as the base of Zone 3, as does Heart Zones. Other Zone systems have it a little different. This is what many call your Fat Burning Zone and it falls smack in the middle of the Aerobic Development Zone (2) and Aerobic Endurance Zone (3). This Zone is the perfect intensity for base building, especially during winter training.

For a long time I struggled with how to best communicate this Zone to my students who may not be wearing a Heart Rate Monitor or those who were, but haven't had a Metabolic Assessment or Threshold Field Test that would identify their individual Threshold HR.

JRA (**Aerobic Threshold**) is above the intensity where your body is feeling "Hey, I should be working harder and below the intensity that requires a focused effort. I like to tell my class that they should be above **Chatty** (Zone 2) and yet below **Focused**, the effort where they need to remain focused to maintain it (middle of Zone 3). I tend to be a stickler for people talking in my class, which can be all too common during endurance rides. Gentle reminders throughout the class to stay above **Chatty** tends to get the point across.

I like to talk about being out riding my bike in the country, enjoying the day, talking to the cows I pass. It's easy to fall into a kind of hypnotic state while you are JRA. *Many cyclists tell me they completely understand what I'm describing and have experienced it themselves.*

*So find yourself riding along a smooth, flat section of road. You may have a little wind at you back and you are making good time, as you enjoy the sights and smells of the country. "Hello there Mrs. Cow," you call out as if one will respond. All that aerobic activity has your brain working at maximum effectiveness and thoughts and ideas fill*

*your head. Suddenly you realize you can't remember the last 20 minutes or so... that's JRA.*

### **Objective and Intensity**

JRA is an endurance interval class with the focus on aerobic development – Base Building. The class is based on multiple intervals in the middle of Zone 3 **Focused** with recoveries at the base of Zone 3 **JRA**.

### **Music Selection**

I like to use music that communicates a cadence of 80 – 90 RPM and yet I don't insist that people follow the music. I love to use some of the 90 minute music mixes from [www.cadencerevolution.com](http://www.cadencerevolution.com) because my class likes them and I don't have as much time to create playlists as I would like. You do need to be a member to get the 90 min mixes (it's only \$5.00 a month) and a number of them are designed as a companion to Epic Planet DVDs. [My favorite is Epic Tucson](#) – Mt. Lemmon because it's just one long climb ☺

### **Introduction and Initial Warm-up (10 Minutes)**

I am normally riding along with my class, contrasted with being up in front facing them. I'm part of the group and frequently tell them that I'm riding with them, doing exactly what I'm asking them to do. I tend to speak very little during class and remind them that as endurance athletes they alone are responsible their success in my class. You may want to try this; for years I have taught my endurance classes without any reduction in load, instead challenging my students to continuously add small amounts of load throughout the class. Recoveries come from a slight decrease in cadence, not from removing load.

*I remind everyone; your time is short (regardless of the actual class length) and your warm-up should not be a passive event. I explain that beyond warming the body, what we are trying to accomplish is transitioning from a resting state to becoming aerobic. I will ask; is anyone here is a runner? You know that uncomfortable, maybe icky, feeling you get when you start out? The feeling that you know will go away, once you push through it? That relief you feel, even though you are still working, is your body becoming aerobic. With it comes a greater capacity for work. I want everyone to gently push themselves to the point of discomfort and hold it. When you feel your body adapting and with it some comfort, that is your signal to add another gear.*

Over the next 10 minutes we repeat this process of adding load, feeling the additional stress, waiting for our bodies to adapt, feeling the comfort and then we do it again. The process should have everyone warm, into Zone 3 and ready to work.

Once we are ready to work I like to offer a challenge to my class; *I came here today believing each of you is capable of successfully completing the exercises I have planned. I see all of you as self-motivated endurance athletes. And then I pause. It will be up to each of you, individually, to prove me wrong.*

### Class Format

Extended length intervals, moving between **JRA** and **Focused** efforts with the aerobic work twice as long as the more intense interval.

The number and length of each interval will depend on how much time you have and also on your class makeup. My 90 minute classes tend to be primarily cyclists so I like to use a 10 minutes at JRA / 5 minutes **Focused** interval cycle.

I begin with establishing **JRA**. I ask them to find a comfortable cadence (how fast depends on the type of cycle – see below) and move your intensity up to the point where you are above feeling comfortable having a conversation.

Then we move to **Focused**

You may describe a setting where we are riding together in a well-organized pace line. The comfort of JRA ends when the rider at the front pulls left and you take on the full force of the wind. With your left hand, give yourself a big twist so you can feel the additional work needed to maintain a consistent speed. It's common for our Heart Rate to peak before falling slightly and plateauing. We want to overshoot slightly so we don't end up short.

Alternatively you can suggest that each of us is out **JRA** when from seemingly nowhere, a rider passes you on the left, snapping you back to reality. "Who was that?" you think. Next you're pushing yourself to **Focused** through increased pedal speed as you give chase.

I love to use mouth closed - nose breathing as a method of helping my students learn to work from their feeling of the effort, even if they have a monitor.

- Zone 2 **Chatty** = easy breathing through just your nose.
- Base of Zone 3 **JRA** = 4-5-maybe 6 breaths in and out through your nose before feeling the need to open your mouth.
- Middle of Zone 3 **Focused** = 1 breath in and then it's mouth breathing

Multiple times during the class I ask everyone to Self Check.

- Are you where you're supposed to be?
- Riding smooth? (using smooth pedals, with no discernable push down)
- Riding solid? (smooth pedals = minimal upper body movement)
- Riding strong? (good posture – flat back – relaxed upper body – communicating strength)

This class isn't for everyone and don't be offended if someone who's been doing pushups on the bike decides to leave early. Those wanting to stay will appreciate a minimal amount of direction using very clear and direct cueing.

Enjoy!

### Bonus Section

#### Are you aware of this?

How you cue the addition of intensity is very important in an endurance class. and its different dependent on the type of Indoor Cycle you're riding.

- With any Indoor Cycle that uses friction to create the resistance I suggest adding resistance to cadence. Class is pedaling ~ 90 RPM and then add load to reach intended intensity.
- If you are riding a Keiser M3 or Schwinn AC with magnetic resistance you can add resistance to cadence *or you can do the exact opposite*, adding cadence to resistance. *You've never heard that before, have you?* It's why I see magnetic resistance as being superior.

#### Here's why:

My biggest struggle (besides getting people to be quiet) is how to best communicate load in class. If you have been paying attention in class you have noticed that when you slow your pedals they get heavier. We have all seen the person who was supposed to be accelerating out of a climb start bouncing like they have no resistance at all. This happens because as your student pedals faster, the added centrifugal force overcomes the fixed amount of friction, making it easier and easier to pedal, until it's like they have no load at all. Not Good ☹ This is an Endurance Class. We want them to endure it! The solution is to establish leg speed and then adjust load to regulate the work they are doing.

Indoor cycles with magnetic resistance (M3 and AC) work very differently. As the speed of the flywheel increases the *Eddy Currents* that create the load increase as well. So these Indoor Cycles actually get harder to pedal as cadence increases, just like a real bicycle. So with these types of cycles cue your students to set there load at a slower RPM and then simply increase cadence to add intensity. *Note: I've taken over a dozen classes on these bikes and have never heard the Instructor mention this. You will be the first in your club.*