

Cycling is the new fishing

Training like a tour player also involves copying the top pros' off-course habits.

BY RAMSAY McMASTER, WITH ROHAN CLARKE



Even if only casually, more tour pros are turning to cycling.

A generation ago it was common for top professional golfers to hop on a boat and escape from the rigours of tour life. Greg Norman, Bob Stanton, Craig Parry and Robert Allenby all used to go fishing to

get away from golf. So, too, did Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus.

But today's younger generation of players are almost in perpetual motion. They want to be outdoors and want to do something more active. A bunch of Aussies – Aaron Baddeley, Geoff Ogilvy, Brett Rumford, Michael Sim and Scott Strange – have taken up cycling. (Camilo Villegas is also an ardent cyclist). Usually they ride together for up to two hours (between 40 and 80 kilometres). Baddeley, Ogilvy and Sim cycle around their American hometowns, while Rumford, Strange and Sim like to ride around Perth.

There's a camaraderie that develops between the boys as they compete against each other in a different environment. A lot of mental strength can be obtained on a bike, like when trying to ride uphill, sprint under fatigue or race against an opponent.

Cycling can build up the legs for golf (especially the quads). Speed work enables them to improve their cardio and activates the fast-twitch muscle fibres. Cycling also gets them outdoors again after travelling long distances on airplanes. And they begin to 'feel' like elite athletes by pushing themselves to the limit. That gives them confidence to know they're fitter than the guy next to them on the range.

Activities like cycling fall into what I call Room 1 of the '4 Rooms of Golf Training'. It's general as opposed to golf-specific fitness. This form of cross training compounds their basic fitness levels, putting 'credit' in the bank for when they're on tour and the focus shifts towards playing golf.

GOLFERS UNDER REPAIR (GUR)

Over the Christmas break I took the opportunity to play at Sorrento Golf Club on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula. One of my playing companions was a 60-year-old member in the building profession with his own business. He was complaining about a bad back and didn't know whether he was going to finish the round with us.

I gave him the following 30-second exercise and he really felt it loosened off. I made him do the drill before every tee shot. Eighteen times. I said, "I want you to be better at the end of the round than at the start." He wasn't worried about looking silly – since he was in agony that morning and golfers will do just about anything to keep playing. So it was very satisfying to see him finish with a birdie on the 18th. He couldn't play at the start of the round, but actually handed in a card and won a ball!

MESSAGE

FROM THE TOP

"The road to success is always under construction." – Pete Cowen, leading coach of world No.1 Lee Westwood (left) and major winners Graeme McDowell and Louis Oosthuizen.

CYCLING POINTERS

- Ensure the bike is measured to your body shape so you're not cramped or leaning over the handlebars
- Drive the legs and get up out of the saddle as much as possible
- Be very careful on roads and try to use bike lanes
- Never use iPods so that you're aware of the surrounding traffic
- Always wear a helmet and never go out at night
- Break up the journey by stopping to stretch your hips and back

CHANGE THE RANGE

A 30-second quick fix for golfers with stiff backs

Many club golfers over the age of 50 complain about stiffness in their backs as they lose suppleness with age. They tend to be stuck with inflexion-type postures and have little ability to co-ordinate their body movements. So I like to give them an exercise to open up the body. It's a cross-pattern drill, using the right arm in tandem with the left leg. It also focuses the mind and helps with co-ordination. This drill can be done in 30 seconds, first thing in the morning when you wake up and on the golf course before every tee shot. It really counterbalances the flexed posture associated with prolonged sitting and leaning over the club.

Stand in an upright posture. Lift your right arm to shoulder height with the elbow at 90 degrees and palm facing forward in a 'Stop' position. Lift your left knee to waist height, bending the leg so it forms a 90-degree angle. Slowly swing it around to the left so the knee is pointing outward from your left hip. Maintain balance by pushing backwards with your right arm and left leg. Hold for 15 seconds. Repeat the exercise on the other side with the opposite limbs.

