



SPRINT



TRAINING

You don't have to be a pro to conquer a life-changing race. Here, complete with course intel and expert advice, our cheat sheet to prepping for and completing some of Colorado's most awe-inspiring events.

BY RHEA MAZE AND ANDRA COBERLY

PHOTOGRAPH BY YANN ROPARS



FOR WENDY MADER, the reward of finishing an athletic endurance event—whether it’s running 5 kilometers or biking 100 miles—is the sense of accomplishment that comes with completing something you’ve never done or thought was possible, and the lifestyle change that brings.

Mader, a personal trainer and health, fitness, and sport coach with t2coaching in Fort Collins, has completed more than 200 triathlons and was the top female finisher at the Ironman in Kona, Hawaii in 2008. “It’s a personality thing,” Mader says. “Some of us are wired to love to train for our mental and physical wellbeing.”

Um, what about the rest of us who are more along the lines of sort-of wired? Good news: Knowing what to expect, being mentally ready, and training accordingly can get you across most finish lines.

But that’s not the real win. Simply preparing for an athletic endurance event requires motivation, focus, and discipline to follow a training schedule, eat right,

take care of your body, and stick with a set goal—a process that can profoundly change your life.

“It’s important to create goals and an individualized plan of action based on your fitness level and experience,” Mader says. “And to incorporate your training into your current lifestyle without letting it control you.”

As Colorado legend Ken Chlouber, founder of the Leadville Trail 100-mile race, says: “You’re better than you think you are—you can do more than you think you can.” We agree. But we still wanted to stack the deck in your favor. Here’s the inside scoop on prepping for and nailing (or maybe just surviving) some of Colorado’s most iconic events.

APR 18

HALF THE DISTANCE, ALL THE PAIN THE HORSETOOTH HALF MARATHON

DESCRIPTION: In its 43rd year, the Horsetooth Half has become an iconic local running race. It’s a challenging half marathon that attracts locals and international athletes, elite runners and first-timers alike.

ROUTE: The course is like a checklist of epitomic Northern Colorado locales: from Hughes Stadium to the shores of Horsetooth Reservoir to the banks of the Poudre River and then on to New Belgium Brewery.

THE CRED: As competitors learn, this race starts out with a kick. Monster Mountain takes runners up 500 feet within the first two miles. However, the race is actually more downhill than up.

THE EXPERT: Paul Petersen broke the long-held record for the Horsetooth Half in 2013 and won it again in 2015. “The Horsetooth Half is the hardest half marathon I have ever run,” Petersen says. “The large hills during the first four miles of the race set it apart from any other race, and it requires a completely unique strategy to race.” But, he adds, “to counter the difficulty, it is one of the more beautiful courses I’ve done.”

HOW TO CONQUER: Start slow. “The first two miles feature about 500



The Horsetooth Half bounds out of the start with a 500-foot climb up Monster Mountain. Insiders warn not to start too hard—your legs will be toast for the rest of the race.

tend to be speedier on this course) that draws thousands of elite athletes to Fort Collins each year.

ROUTE: The Colorado Marathon has a truly spectacular course, beginning at Steven's Gulch in Poudre Canyon a couple miles past the Mishawaka. Runners make their way down the picturesque canyon, past Vern's, onto the Poudre Trail and into downtown, where they are showered with cheers from crowds of other racers, family, friends and reveling onlookers on Linden Street.

THE CRED: The fact that it's a favorite Boston Marathon qualifier — remember that whole "fast" thing? — makes it a must for competitive marathoners.

THE EXPERT: Ryan Donovan, last year's Colorado Marathon winner, has run this marathon five years. "The first 17 miles of the race are beautiful! There are few things that can beat running down the Poudre Canyon early in the morning as the sun comes up over the horizon to the east," he says.

HOW TO CONQUER: Control your pacing. "While the downhill course does have the potential to be fast, it also poses some unique challenges for those who are unprepared and undisciplined," Donovan says. "For me, the most difficult part of the race is generally between Miles 17 and 20. This stretch is relatively open and includes the largest hill. If you weren't disciplined during the first 16 miles, your quads will feel the effects of running downhill at this point."

TRAINING TIPS: Train on hills. "This will help build the necessary leg strength to handle the downhill section of the race," Donovan says.

MID RACE HEAD'S UP: Bagel's Hill at Mile 19 may be your downfall if you haven't paced yourself during the downhill portion of the race.

POST-RACE VICTORY LAP: Because the race ends in downtown Fort Collins, you have your pick of restaurants for a post-race celebratory meal, but don't stray too far from the finish line. "My favorite thing to do after finishing is to hang out downtown and cheer on other runners," Donovan says. "Each and every finisher has worked his or her butt off to get to that point, and I get a lot of enjoyment in witnessing that in others." ftcollinsmarathon.com —A.C.

feet of vertical climb, and there's one more big hill near Mile 4," Petersen says. "If you start too hard, your legs will be toasted for the rest of the race. The key is to keep it nice and relaxed until the summit of Dam Hill (Mile 4)." If you get to Mile 7 with some spunk in your legs, you can finish strong.

TRAINING TIPS: Train on the course several times before the race. Because the race's uphill and downhill are brutal on the legs, Petersen says, runners should do a few training sessions to get the body to adjust and handle the pounding. "The mental aspect is important too," he says. "If you know the course well, the hills won't be a surprise."

MID RACE HEAD'S UP: Enjoy the views during Miles 7 and 8 along Bingham Hill Road. "Just a lot of nice vistas and pastoral scenes in that section," Petersen says.

POST-RACE VICTORY LAP: The race ends at New Belgium Brewery and the after-party is hosted by New Belgium, so that gives you an idea of how runners celebrate. Along with plenty of beer, there's food and live music. horsetooth-half.com —A.C.

MAY 1

THE PRIDE OF FORT COLLINS THE COLORADO MARATHON

DESCRIPTION: The Colorado Marathon—also half marathon, 10K and 5K—is a "fast" marathon (for non-marathoners, that means runners' times



The Copper Triangle takes riders over Fremont, Tennessee and Vail (right) passes, all topping out over 10,000 feet. The secret? Train high whenever possible.



**COMPLETE WITH
STUNNING SCENERY,**

**thin air, big climbs, and fast descents, the Copper Triangle
epitomizes what it means to live in the Colorado Rockies.**

MAY 14

STEEPS AND FLOWERS QUAD ROCK 50

This seriously local 50-mile trail running event in the hills west of Fort Collins is sponsored by Gnar Runners, an organization founded by resident bad-asses Nick Clark and Pete Stevenson (who have logged thousands of miles trail running around Fort Collins).

ROUTE: Soldier Canyon Picnic Area serves as the start and finish of this 50-mile single-track loop through the scenic and diverse trail systems of Lory State Park and Horsetooth Mountain Park.

THE CRED: A gnar factor of 11,575 feet in vertical elevation gain. Runners can also opt for the 25-mile course, which comes with an elevation gain of 5,500 feet.

THE EXPERT: Karen Smidt is a three-time finisher of the Quad Rock 50 and set the course record for women in 2012. “Quad Rock is on a familiar, easily accessible trail system that sees a lot of traffic throughout the year, so it attracts a lot of participants,” Smidt says. “The time flies by when you have so many other runners to talk to.”

HOW TO CONQUER: It’s all about pacing, timing, and fueling. “Pace yourself and time your ascents so that you feel fresh for the big ones,” Smidt says. “It’s also key to fuel and conserve enough so that you feel awesome for the last big push up to Arthur’s Rock and can scream down to the finish line.”

TRAINING TIPS: Smidt recommends taking advantage of the many training runs that Clark and Stevenson organize. “Those runs, coupled with a weekly run up Towers Road, are a great way to start training for the climbs and picking the brains of experienced racers.”

MID RACE HEADS-UP: Revel in the moment. “With the views, camaraderie, and festive atmosphere, this event takes running to the next level,”



Smidt says. “It’s less about beating someone and more about the next smile, the next flower, and the next breathtaking vista you’ll see around the corner.”

POST-RACE VICTORY LAP: Hang out with new friends you met on the course over a plate of barbecue and enjoy live tunes at the race after party. Psych each other up to consider trying the new Never Summer 100k, a high-altitude trail running event through the wild and rugged terrain of the Never Summer and Medicine Bow mountains. gnarrunners.com —R.M.

JULY

9-10

A HEART ATTACK ON WHEELS TRIPLE BYPASS

DESCRIPTION: This one- or two-day road ride takes thousands of cyclists over three massive Colorado mountain passes for an epic journey with glorious views and intense climbs.

ROUTE: The two-day out-and-back Double Triple Bypass covers 240



PHOTOGRAPHS (LEFT & CENTER) BY DAVID BUDD, COURTESY COPPER TRIANGLE

miles of scenic mountain terrain: From Evergreen to Avon and back again, conquering Juniper/Squaw, Loveland and Vail passes—twice. For beginners, opt to ride just Saturday or Sunday for a still-impressive 120-mile trek with 10,000-feet of climbing. Organizers close Loveland Pass to vehicles both days, so riders have plenty of room.

THE CRED: The Triple Bypass is not a race, it's a ride. That means it's not timed, and there is no winner (In fact, there is no official start time. You can begin the ride any time between 5am and 7am). You'll find that it's more about camaraderie than competition. Still, the ride tops out at nearly 12,000 feet, so it's not for the meek or weak. They don't call it the Triple Bypass for nothing.

THE EXPERT: Jenny Anderson, race organizer. Anderson calls the Triple Bypass "a bucket list ride" for Colorado athletes. "The Triple Bypass is a great way to see the Colorado Rockies. It's a really scenic route, and it's really well supported with five aid stations each way," she says.

HOW TO CONQUER: A steady pace is your key to finishing this ride; on both uphill and downhill, maintain a consistent effort. Be prepared for the elements. Chances are you will get both hot and cold (and potentially wet) during the ride, so have a jacket, knee and arm warmers and a hat on hand. Lastly, hydrate, hydrate, hydrate (and hydrate more).

TRAINING TIPS: Even if you're an experienced Front Range cyclist, altitude will be a factor. Flatlanders beware! In the weeks and months prior to the Triple Bypass, add in high elevation rides at least once a week to prepare your body for the altitude.

MID RACE HEAD'S UP: Half way through the ride, cyclists will face

Loveland Pass, which tops out at 11,990 feet. Get yourself some sustenance at the aid station at Loveland Basin and then make the final ascent up the tough yet classic high alpine climb.

POST RACE VICTORY: What are the two things you want—nay, need—after riding 120 miles? Free beer and food. The post-race feast is complimentary for riders, so dig in and fuel up for Sunday's ride. Looking for some entertainment? The Bravo! Vail Music Festival runs throughout the summer with performances by renowned orchestras. triplebypass.org —R.M.

JULY 24

MUD ON THE TIRES 40 IN THE FORT

With a reputation for being brutally challenging, this rough and rocky 40-mile mountain bike race through Lory State Park, organized by the fun-loving Overland Mountain Bike Club, never fails to challenge—and delight—every level of rider.

ROUTE: The course starts at the South Eltuck Bay trailhead and riders cross the finish line at Soldier Canyon Corral Center, but not before they've completed over 8,000 feet of climbing.

THE CRED: Steep climbs, fast switchbacks, and technical surprises around every corner keep riders' legs and brains working overtime—and earn finishers distinct bragging rights.

Some gain, some pain: Riders in the Copper Triangle (left and center) tackle three 10,000-foot-plus peaks, while racers in the 40 in the Fort (below) ride two 20-mile laps totaling 5,000 feet in elevation gain.





THE EXPERT: Two-time women’s first-place winner Marie Walsh wants people to know that while that this race is tough, it’s not impossible. “Whenever I’d start to get sulky, I used the scenic environment as a pick-me-up,” Walsh says. “Paying attention to the views helped keep me pushing those pedals.”

HOW TO CONQUER: While this race is all about the climb, there’s no shame in dismounting to walk your bike through some of the more technical sections to save precious time and energy.

TRAINING TIPS: “Ride the course as much as you can,” Walsh says. “If you live out of town, practice on trails with steep grades and rocky climbs and descents.” Also bear in mind that this event occurs during the dog days of summer. “I load up with an electrolyte drink and usually drink more than three liters during the race,” Walsh says. “It’s a good idea to practice eating and drinking exactly the way you plan to on race day.”

MID RACE HEADS-UP: Two words: bacon angels. As riders ascend Towers Road (aka “Bacon Hill”) costumed spectators, often tutu-clad, appear bearing calorie-laden gifts and much-needed encouragement. “You slowly struggle your way to the top of this impossibly steep climb, gasping for breath,” Walsh says. “And as you reach the top, the magical bacon angels appear and attempt to stuff your face with slices of bacon (and sometimes marshmallows, donuts, donut-bacon sandwiches, etc.)”

POST-RACE VICTORY LAP: Finishers party in true Fort Collins fashion with a cold craft beer, good food, and live music at the post-event festivities. “Then, you’ll want to hydrate, soak in Epsom salts, and go straight to bed,” Walsh says. overlandmtb.com —R.M.

AUG. 6

CLASSIC COLORADO COPPER TRIANGLE

In Colorado, not much tops a long bike ride through the mountains on a beautiful summer day. Entrance fees for this 78-mile road ride that conquers three mountain passes benefit the Davis Phinney Foundation, which

helps improve the lives of people living with Parkinson’s disease. To date, the event has raised more than a million dollars for the cause.

ROUTE: The circuit starts and finishes at Copper Mountain Resort’s Burning Stones Plaza and takes cyclists up and over Fremont, Tennessee, and Vail passes for a total elevation gain of 6,000 feet.

THE CRED: Complete with stunning scenery, thin air, big climbs, and fast descents, this classic alpine road ride epitomizes what it means to live in the Colorado Rockies.

THE EXPERT: Peter Downing, a three-time finisher, recommends registering early. “This ride is popular, and capped—plan ahead so you don’t get shut out.”

HOW TO CONQUER: “If you’re not used to riding at high altitude, do what you can to get used to it,” Downing says. “All three passes are well over 10,000 feet (Fremont is 11,318 feet).” It’s also important to come prepared for finicky mountain weather. “Afternoon thunderstorms can be pretty brutal,

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREG DELMAN; COURTESY LEADVILLE



Leadville's "race against the sky" has runners starting in pre-dawn dark to complete a 100-mile course between 9,200 and 12,600 feet. Not an ultra runner? Leadville's race series offers another 100-miler for mountain bikers (above).

AUG 20

TRUE GRIT LEADVILLE TRAIL 100-MILE RUN

Known as "The Race against the Sky," or the LT100, this iconic annual 100-mile ultramarathon began in 1983 and is the hallmark of Leadville's acclaimed summer race series, which attracts elite athletes from all over the world.

ROUTE: The race starts and finishes at the corner of 6th and Harrison in downtown Leadville. It's 50 miles out and 50 miles back over extreme mountain terrain, with elevations ranging between 9,200 and 12,600 feet.


THE CRED: Last year, less than half of the runners who set out to conquer this course finished it within the 30-hour time limit—enough said.

THE EXPERT: Jonathan Zeif, who has finished the 100-mile run 11 times and the 100-mile bike 10 times, likes to spend time in Leadville before the race getting acclimated and soaking up its small town charm.

HOW TO CONQUER: Zeif recommends finding a good training partner, ideally someone who is training for the same or a similar event. "That will help make the training fun and keep you motivated when long training sessions become difficult," he says.

TRAINING TIPS: "Consistency is king," Zeif says. "Pay attention to how your body is responding to the training and cut back when necessary. The most important thing to avoid is having to miss training days due to illness or injury—it's better to show up at the starting line a bit undertrained than to not even be able to start because you've overtrained and become injured."

MID RACE HEADS-UP: The LT100 starts in the dark at 4 a.m. and the first 13 miles around Turquoise Lake are technical, requiring extra care. "And make sure you have a good lighting system ready to run the trails to the finish at night," Zeif says.

POST RACE VICTORY LAP: Leadville, the highest incorporated city in the U.S., is paradise for outdoor enthusiasts and elite athletes. From town, you can be at the base of some of the highest peaks in the nation in 10 minutes or less. After your adventures, refuel at the Grill Bar and Café, a local favorite for authentic Mexican food. leadvillerraceseries.com —R.M. 

and very cold, at 10,000 feet," Downing says. At altitude, the sun's burning power can sneak up on you too.

TRAINING TIPS: Hit up some good hills. Copper Triangle regulars like to train on Lookout Mountain, Squaw Pass, Mount Evans Scenic Byway (the highest paved road in North America), and Deer Creek Canyon.

MID RACE HEADS-UP: "Coming off Tennessee Pass, you roll into one of the most spectacular valleys in the state and pass historic Camp Hale on your right," Downing says. This is the site where the 10th Mountain Division trained for alpine combat, including WWII veteran Pete Siebert, who went on to co-found Vail Mountain ski area.

POST-RACE VICTORY LAP: You won't want to miss the "Alpine Celebration" after party, complete with a cycling expo, music, lunch, and prize drawings. And you may as well make a weekend out of it as there's no shortage of fun to be had in Colorado's mountains in summer. coppertriangle.com —R.M.