

The 10hr Week IRONMAN PLAN



A lot of people are deterred from doing Ironman because they don't think they have the time to train. Although a 15- to 20-hour training schedule is ideal to maximise your Ironman potential, you can accomplish a lot of the basic Ironman fitness in a 10-hour week if you utilise your time wisely. This plan will allow you to start the race with confidence and finish the race strong.

By Lance Watson

About the programme

My goal was to prepare a time-efficient, effective training plan that guides you through your final seven weeks of Ironman training. It is capped at 10 hours and four days per week. This schedule is targeted at the athlete looking for an 11–14-hour finishing time, ideally with experience racing a half-Ironman. Note: Because your race is only seven weeks away, you should be confident swimming more than 2000 metres. You should have completed two or three 90-plus minute runs and two or three 3.5- to 4.5-hour non-stop rides in the few weeks prior.

The schedule consists of five weeks of training progression and two weeks of taper. Midweek sessions emphasise quality, with a goal of increasing your efficiency at higher speeds to help increase your economy at Ironman pace. You will, of course, still need to do some key longer sessions on Saturday or Sunday to build endurance.

The training is based on heart rate, with training times spent in either an aerobic (easy/medium) or threshold (hard sustained effort) zone. Prior to starting, you will need to spend time calculating your heart rate zones, as outlined at the top of page 68.

Weekly structure

Workouts should be performed in the order listed. Many are back-to-back sessions to practise running off the bike, to create longer sustained training efforts, and for time efficiency.

Swimming is kept simple for time efficiency, and there are two key objectives: building endurance and increasing speed. The endurance swim includes a pull buoy with an option to use swim paddles to build strength and simulate the body position when wearing a wetsuit.

As for cycling and running, weeks one and four emphasise running threshold and bike endurance on the weekend. Weeks two and five emphasise cycling threshold and run endurance on the weekend. This is why the weekend long run is placed before the ride, so you are able to run on fresher legs. Week three has lower-intensity training from Monday to Friday, allowing for some recovery, and sets you up for an opportunity to practise a longer run off of a longer bike on the weekend. This is a great time to practice your Ironman race nutrition (see right). The long sessions are also excellent opportunities to practise your mental focus and attitude for race day.

About the taper

A common misunderstanding about the Ironman taper is that you do a mountain of work prior to race week, and then you shut it all down and rest. Studies show that it is better to gradually decrease activity and also re-stimulate the body muscularly and cardiovascularly to maintain efficient sport-specific movement and prompt your body to absorb and store glycogen (fuel) and keep blood plasma levels up.

The taper programme starts with three to four days of aerobic recovery sessions and days off, followed by shorter training sessions at threshold, and shorter aerobic base work the weekend before your Ironman. The week of Ironman follows a similar pattern, with further reduced sessions. You should gradually feel more rested, while staying sharp. Stay mentally engaged with your training, and avoid feeling like you are hanging on for the taper. Once you start racing, the weeks of training click in, the cobwebs shake off and your fitness will shine through!

IRONMAN NUTRITION ESSENTIALS:

Practising your nutrition is just as important as your physical training. You have many good opportunities to do so in this program on the long rides and runs. Write down your plan and analyse the contents for calories, fluids and sodium levels. Eat correctly on the bike and you'll set yourself up for a good marathon. If you plan to race with the nutrition products on the course, train with them too.

TAKE THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES INTO ACCOUNT:

1 For the first 15 minutes of the bike, drink water and take in minimal calories, mainly in the form of sports drink. Let your body adjust to cycling, and allow your heart rate to drop. Eat when you have settled into a good cycling rhythm. Follow the plan you've trained with all season—don't do anything new on race day.

2 From 15 minutes after the bike start to 30 minutes prior to the bike finish:

a. Eat 250–400 calories (carbohydrates) per hour. Large or muscular athletes tend to need more calories.

- Gel: 100–120 cal
- Bar: 200–240 cal
- Sport drink: 100 cal

b. Drink 1–1.5 litres of fluid per hour. This is two small bottles (600ml) to two large bottles (700ml) per hour, depending on climate and your perspiration rate. (Simple calculation: Weigh yourself pre- and post-ride during training. Every kilogramme lost is one small water bottle of fluid deficit, and this will negatively impact your marathon.)

c. A simple plan would be to take in a gel every 30 min (~200 cal per hour) and a bottle of sports drink per hour (100 cal per hour). Sip water with the gel. Depending on the product, you will need to take up to 200ml of water per gel.

d. The products you use should also provide sodium: 500–750mg (for example, PowerBar Energy Gel has 200mg sodium; PowerBar Ironman Perform has 190mg sodium).

e. If the products on the course do not supply the recommended amount of electrolyte, consider additional supplements such as salt tabs.

3 Twenty to 30 minutes prior to the bike finish, reduce your calorie intake and only consume sports drink or water. This allows your stomach to empty while still allowing your gut to absorb the food and fluid ingested earlier on the bike. You will be able to start the run in a relatively comfortable state. Once you start the run you can consume calories again according to your run nutrition plan.

4 Follow a similar plan for the run, but reduce calorie intake by approximately one-third. Keep up your sodium intake and hydration. Many athletes prefer gels or liquid calories over solids on the run.

You should note that your calorie intake and heart rate are inversely related. As you start to exercise, blood is diverted from your stomach to your working muscles and skin to create sweat and help cool you. As your heart rate rises, you are less able to digest the calories you take in. Therefore your race-day nutrition plan is intimately bound to your racing heart rate. Make sure you show up to the race knowing your heart rate intensity zones and having practised eating at those heart rates! The most common mistake is to consume too much at a high heart rate. If your heart rate is up, adjust your calorie intake downward. Also, do what you've been doing in training—again, don't try anything new on race day.

Share your training with me

Cut out this plan, tack it to the fridge, and check off your sessions as you complete them. Share your experience by e-mailing me at watsonsworkouts@competitorgroup.com. If it's epic, inspirational or amusing I might share your story with other readers of *Triathlete Europe*!

HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR LACTATE THRESHOLD

Understanding lactate threshold (LT) training is critical to improvement. Your LT determines how long and how hard you can exert near-maximum effort. There's a point when the body begins to produce lactate at rates that are too fast for it to metabolise—this is the LT.

To determine your LT, do field tests

on the bike and the run on separate days, when your legs feel rested. After a warm-up of 15 minutes (run) to 30 minutes (bike), do a 30-minute time trial on flat terrain where you can hold your hardest uninterrupted effort for that duration (a bike trainer is ideal for the bike test and the track is a good option for the run).

Pace the time trial as evenly as possible. To determine your LT heart rate, hit the lap button on your heart rate monitor 10 minutes into the time trial. The average heart rate for the final 20 minutes is your LT heart rate.

This chart will help you understand the various zones.

ZONE	% OF LACTATE THRESHOLD	BREATHING AND PERCEPTION
1	<80% of LT	Gentle rhythmic breathing. Pace is easy and relaxed. The intensity is a jog or very easy run or very easy bike spin.
2	80–87% of LT	Breathing rate and pace increase slightly. Slightly deeper breathing, although still comfortable. Running and cycling pace remains comfortable and conversation is possible.
3	88–93% of LT	Breathing a little harder, pace is moderate. A stronger cycling or running rhythm, this is "feel good" fast. It is slightly more difficult to hold conversation.
4	94–100% of LT	Starting to breathe very hard, pace is fast and beginning to get uncomfortable, approaching all-out 30-minute bike or run pace. This pace should be challenging to maintain.
5	>100% of LT	Breathing is deep and forceful. Pace is all-out sustainable for one to five minutes. Mental focus required, moderately uncomfortable and conversation undesirable.

Coaching Abbreviations / Terminology

WU = warm-up | **MS** = main set | **CD** = cool-down | **X'** = X minutes, i.e. 3' | **X"** = X seconds, i.e. 30" | **Zn** = zone (heart rate or perceived effort), i.e. Zn 1 = Zone 1 | **(brackets)** = time indication for rest in between intervals or tasks, i.e. 4 x 3' (2') | **RPM** = cadence (repetitions per minute) | **HR** = heart rate | **P-ups** = pick-ups. Short accelerations at 75–85% of your maximum sprint speed | **Alt** = alternate | **PE** = perceived exertion

WEEK 1 SWIM: 1:30:00 BIKE: 6:15:00 RUN: 2:15:00 TOTAL: 10:00:00

MON	SWIM: Strength and endurance, 45 mins. MS: 3x12' (3'): #1 is freestyle, starting easy and building effort. #2–3 are with pull buoy at a strong, steady effort. Option to use swim paddles. Note the distance covered for each interval. Monday swims could also be done in the open water in your wetsuit.
TUE	BIKE: Threshold (LT), 1 hour. Bike trainer or flat road. WU: 15' with 4–5 x 30" P-ups. MS: 45' building as 15' Zn 3, 25' Zn 4, 5' Zn 5. RUN: Off the bike, 30 mins. MS: 20' in Zn 3. CD: 10' easy, Zn 1.
WED	Day Off: Stretch
THU	SWIM: Threshold (LT), 45 mins. WU: 300 alt 50 freestyle, 25 drill. MS: 10–15 x 100 (15") swim your best average pace for the set. CD: 100 freestyle, 100 non-freestyle. RUN: Hills, 1 hour. Treadmill or road. WU: 10' easy. 4 strides. MS: 7–10 x 2' Zn 3 at 5% grade (2.5–3.5' jog downhill or jog easy on the treadmill). Repeat the same hill for each interval if training outdoors. CD: to 60' in Zn 1. PERFORMANCE POINTER: The treadmill is a good tool for hill running as it spares your legs the pounding of running back down the hill between intervals.
FRI	Day Off: Stretch BIKE: Endurance, 5 hours, 15 mins. After a long warm-up, include in your ride 60'–45'–30'–15' in Zn 3 (all w/15' Zn 1–2). If possible, choose a terrain that simulates your Ironman. Note: This workout can also be done on Sunday.
SAT	PERFORMANCE POINTER: Zn 3 in cycle training is a slightly higher average heart rate than you will race your Ironman at. The work in Zn 3 helps to build your power output over longer durations. RUN: Off the bike, 45 mins. Zn 2, Ironman race pace.
SUN	Day Off: Stretch

WEEK 2 SWIM: 1:30:00 BIKE: 5:40:00 RUN: 2:50:00 TOTAL: 10:00:00

MON	SWIM: Strength and endurance, 45 mins. MS: 3x14' (1'): #1 is freestyle, starting easy and building effort. #2–3 are with pull buoy at a strong, steady effort. Option to use swim paddles. Note the distance covered for each interval. BIKE: Threshold (LT), 1 hour. Bike trainer or flat road. WU: 15' with 4–5 x 30" P-ups. MS: 3 x 10' (5') build all on Zn 4–5. After interval #3, run off the bike.
TUE	PERFORMANCE POINTER: If you are having a hard time elevating your HR, try increasing your cadence by 5RPM. RUN: Off the bike, 30 mins. MS: 20' in Zn 3. CD: 10' easy, Zn 1.
WED	Day Off: Stretch BIKE: Hills, 1 hour, 10 mins. WU: 20' incl. 6x30" (30") P-ups. MS: Hill intervals: 5–7 x 3' (3' recovery down the hill), Zn 4–5. On a moderate graded hill at 5–8%, repeat the same stretch of hill for each interval. CD: to 70' in Zn 1, then run off the bike.
THU	PERFORMANCE POINTER: Don't be afraid to make these hills burn a little. By developing lactic acid and training above LT, you will build your anaerobic capacity. This is helpful in Ironman for cresting hills and passing people. It will hurt less on race day if it hurts today! RUN: Off the bike, 20 mins. Flat, Zn 2. SWIM: Threshold, 45 mins. WU: 300 alt 50 freestyle, 25 drill. MS: 6–8 x 200 (25") swim your best average pace for the set. CD: 100 freestyle, 100 non-freestyle.
FRI	Day Off: Stretch RUN: Endurance, 2 hours. If possible, choose a terrain that simulates your race. 15' Zn 1, 60' Zn 2, 30' Zn 3, 15' Zn 2–1.
SAT	PERFORMANCE POINTER: Building HR long runs can feel like an Ironman marathon—you may not find your pace increases much but your legs gradually get more fatigued. Practice maintaining good run economy as your legs tire. BIKE: 3.5 hours. Ride immediately following the run. Zn 1–2, flat to rolling terrain. PERFORMANCE POINTER: Biking immediately following your run creates an additional base ride as well as a 5.5-hour endurance session, great for Ironman.
SUN	Day Off: Stretch

WEEK 3 SWIM: 1:30:00 BIKE: 6:00:00 RUN: 2:30:00 TOTAL: 10:00:00

MON	SWIM: Strength and endurance, 45 mins. MS: 4x10' (1.5'): #1 is freestyle, starting easy and building effort. #2–4 are with pull buoy at a strong, steady effort. Option to use swim paddles. Note the distance covered for each interval.
TUE	BIKE: Recovery, 1.5 hours. Flat, Zn 1. Easy effort, 85–95RPM.
WED	Day Off: Stretch
THU	RUN: Aerobic base maintenance, 1 hour. 15' Zn 1, 45' Zn 2. SWIM: Threshold, 45 mins. WU: 300 alt 50 freestyle, 25 drill. MS: 8–12 x 150 (25") swim your best average pace for the set. CD: 100 freestyle, 100 non-freestyle.
FRI	Day Off: Stretch BIKE: 4.5 hours. Ride as 75' Zn 1, 90' Zn 2, 90' Zn 3, 15' Zn 1. If possible, choose a terrain that simulates your race course. RUN: Off the bike, 1.5 hours. Zn 2, Ironman race pace.
SAT	PERFORMANCE POINTER: This is a perfect day to practise your Ironman nutrition regimen. Try to rise early as on race day, and test your pre-race breakfast. Note: Bike-to-run workout SHOULD be performed on Saturday, if possible, to allow for more recovery prior to next week's training.
SUN	Day Off: Stretch

WEEK 4 SWIM: 1:25:00 BIKE: 7:00:00 RUN: 1:35:00 TOTAL: 10:00:00

MON	SWIM: Strength and endurance, 45 mins. WU: 3' of easy freestyle. MS: 2x20' (2'): #1 is freestyle, starting easy and building effort. #2 is with pull buoy at a strong, steady effort. Option to use swim paddles. Note the distance covered for each interval.
TUE	BIKE: Threshold, 1 hour. Bike trainer or flat road. WU: 15' with 4–5 x 30" P-ups. MS: 45' in Zn 4–5. RUN: Off the bike, 30 mins. MS: 20' in Zn 3 rise to Zn 4. CD: 10' easy, Zn 1.
WED	Day Off: Stretch
THU	SWIM: Threshold, 40 mins. WU: 300 alt 50 freestyle, 25 drill. MS: 8–12 x 100 (25") swim your best average pace for the set. CD: 100 freestyle, 100 non-freestyle. RUN: Hills, 50 mins. WU: 10' easy. 4 strides. MS: 15x1' Zn 4 at 5% grade (1' jog downhill or easy on the treadmill). CD: to 50' in Zn 1.
FRI	Day Off: Stretch
SAT	BIKE: 6 hours. After a long warm-up, include in your ride 4x45' in Zn 3 (all w/15' Zn 1–2). If possible, choose a terrain that simulates your race course. RUN: Off the bike, 15 mins. Zn 2, Ironman race pace.
SUN	Day Off: Stretch

WEEK 5 SWIM: 1:30:00 BIKE: 5:10:00 RUN: 3:20:00 TOTAL: 10:00:00

MON **SWIM:** Strength and endurance, 45 mins. **MS:** 45'. The first 5' should be smooth and easy, then gradually build effort for the duration. The last 15' should be a very strong effort. Use a pull buoy (no paddles) at a strong, steady effort. Note the distance covered vs. past weeks.

BIKE: Threshold, 1 hour. Bike trainer or flat road. **WU:** 15' with 4-5 x 30" P-ups. **MS:** 6x5' (2.5') all at Zn 4-5. After interval #3, run off the bike. **RUN:** Threshold, 30 mins. **MS:** 20' in Zn 4. **CD:** 10' easy, Zn 1.

TUE **PERFORMANCE POINTER:** Check your cadence running off the bike, and make sure you are at 90+ strides per minute (counting one leg). On race day your leg muscles will be fatigued on the marathon, and stride length will shorten. Being disciplined about maintaining a higher cadence when tired will improve performance dramatically.

WED **Day Off:** Stretch

BIKE: Hills, 1 hour, 10 mins. **WU:** 20' incl. 6x30" (30") P-ups. **MS:** Hill intervals: 8-10 x 2' (2' recover down the hill), Zn 4-5. On a moderate graded hill at 5-8%, repeat the same stretch of hill for each interval. **CD:** to 70', then run off the bike. **RUN:** Off the bike, 20 mins. Zn 2. **SWIM:** Threshold, 45 mins. **WU:** 300 alt 50 freestyle, 25 drill. **MS:** 4-6 x 200 (35") swim your best average pace for the set. **CD:** 100 freestyle, 100 non-freestyle.

FRI **Day Off:** Stretch

SAT **RUN:** Long run, 2.5 hours. Run on terrain that simulates your race course. 15' Zn 1, 75' Zn 2, 45' Zn 3, 15' Zn 2-1. **BIKE:** 3 hours. Ride immediately following the run. Zn 1-2, flat to rolling terrain.

SUN **Day Off:** Stretch

WEEK 6 (START 2-WEEK TAPER) SWIM: 45:00 BIKE: 4:20:00 RUN: 55:00 TOTAL: 6:00:00

MON **SWIM:** Recovery, 45 mins. 12-16 x 100 alternate freestyle, drill, non-freestyle and kick by 100. All easy effort.

TUE **BIKE:** Recovery ride, 1.5 hours. Flat, Zn 1. Easy effort.

WED **Day Off:** Stretch

BIKE: Hills, 50 mins. **WU:** 20' incl. 6 x 30" (30") P-ups. **MS:** Hill intervals: 4-5 x 2' (2' recover down the hill), Zn 3-4. On a moderate graded hill at 5-8%, repeat the same stretch of hill for each interval. **CD:** to 50'.

THU **PERFORMANCE POINTER:** Avoid the temptation to test yourself in the taper sessions, though you will be feeling fitter and fresher. Adhere to the listed duration and heart rate indications. Save your big effort for race day.

RUN: Off the bike, 15 mins. 10' in Zn 4, 5' in Zn 2-1. Flat terrain.

FRI **Day Off:** Stretch

SAT **BIKE:** Aerobic base maintenance, 2 hours. Ride as 45' Zn 1, 75' Zn 2. If possible, choose a terrain that simulates your race course. **RUN:** Off the bike, 40 mins. Zn 2, Ironman race pace.

SUN **Day Off:** Stretch

WEEK 7 SWIM: 40:00 BIKE: 1:50:00 RUN: 30:00 TOTAL: 3:00:00

MON **SWIM:** Threshold maintenance, 30 mins. **WU:** 300 alt 50 freestyle, 25 drill. **MS:** 6-8 x 100 (25") swim your best average pace for the set. **CD:** 100 freestyle, 100 non-freestyle.

TUE **BIKE:** Recovery, 45 mins. Flat, Zn 1. Easy effort.

WED **Day Off:** Stretch

BIKE: Threshold (LT) maintenance, 45 mins. **WU:** 20' incl. 6x30" (30") P-ups. **MS:** Intervals: 3-4 x 2' (2'), Zn 3-4. Flat. **CD:** to 45'. **RUN:** Threshold (LT) maintenance, 20 mins. 10' Zn 1-2, 5' Zn 3-4, 5' Zn 2-1. Flat terrain.

FRI **Day Off:** Stretch

SWIM: 10 mins. An easy swim on the race course with an efficient stroke. Focus on being relaxed.

SAT **PERFORMANCE POINTER:** Practise sighting on the course, noting helpful landmarks. Inspect the start area and water exit, plus the flow of the run to the transition zone.

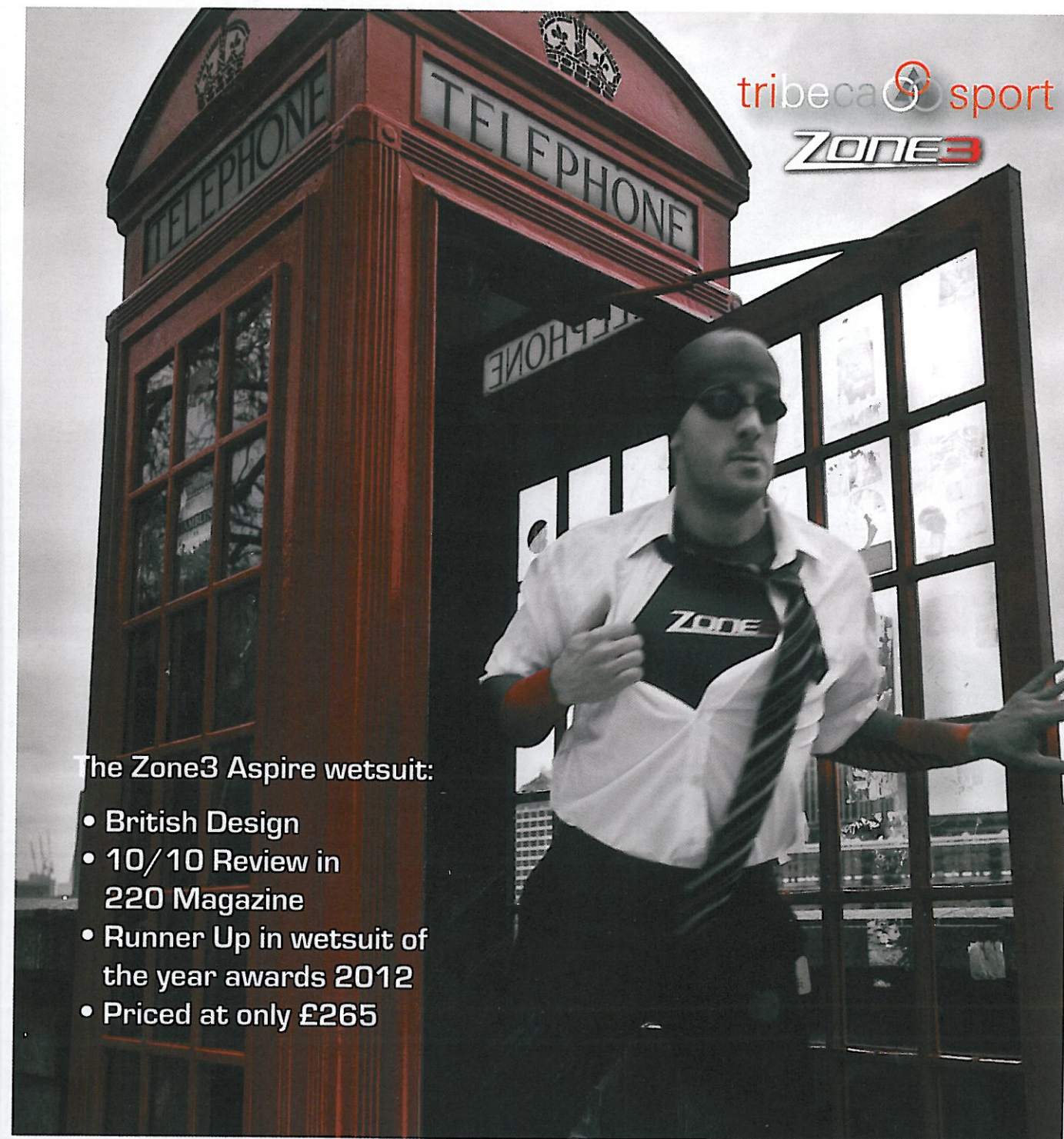
BIKE: 20 mins. Mostly Zn 1-2, but include 2x2' (2') to goal race pace and no faster! This will loosen up your legs. **RUN:** 10 mins. Optional warm-up jog (Zn 1) and light stretch.

SUN **Race:** Ironman Race Day! **WU:** 45' prior to race start: Jog for 5-7', followed by a light stretch. 20' prior to race start: Swim for 5' with 2-4 x 25 (or 20 strokes) P-ups.

PERFORMANCE POINTER: Warming up on race day loosens your muscles and calms your nerves. Enjoy the day!



LifeSport head coach Lance Watson has coached a number of Olympians, Ironman and age-group champions. Visit Lifesportcoaching.com.



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