CYCLOPEDIA

Knowhow

Making sense of commonly misunderstood subjects

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Indoor cycling

What do I need for virtual cycling with Zwift?

You must be able to see the device running Zwift but not drip sweat on it

Left: Dave Barter

With the coronavirus and social distancing likely to limit our activities for some time, many of us – especially at-risk individuals – will be looking for alternatives to riding outdoors to keep fit. Zwift is one such. It's a virtual world in which cyclists can congregate and continue riding – indoors.

Think of it as a huge online game where all you need to play is a bike, a static trainer, and an internet connection. Instead of mashing away at game controllers you simply pedal and the system does the rest.

In order to get started, you need a way of connecting your bike to the Zwift virtual world. The simplest is to use a basic turbo trainer (or rollers) and add a speed sensor to your bike that can transmit information via Bluetooth or Ant+. Zwift uses this sensor to estimate the power you are outputting and translates this into forward progress in the virtual world. A power meter will give a more accurate picture but is more expensive. Neither option will provide feedback from the virtual world. Pedalling will feel the same on the flat or uphill; it's up to you to increase the effort.

A smart trainer will significantly enhance your experience. These devices are able to vary the resistance you feel based upon feedback from the virtual world. As you climb, the resistance gets harder; descending it backs off. It gives the impression of riding a real hill.

Smart trainers fall into two camps: traditional turbo trainer wheel-on units; and direct-drive trainers, where you remove your rear wheel and mount the bicycle using a cassette attached to the unit. Direct drive provides a smoother riding experience and a better simulation of the real world, but comes at a cost: units start from £400-500.

Once your bike is ready, you'll need a phone, tablet or computer with an internet connection. You may also need a Bluetooth or Ant+ USB dongle to pair your trainer or speed sensor to.

Zwift provides plenty of information on getting started at zwift.com/uk/get-zwifting. ●

What rides can I do?

Zwift provides a number of virtual worlds. Watopia is a fictitious set of islands with a multitude of routes from flat to a simulation of the famous Alp D'Huez climb. This world is continuously available to ride. Six other 'worlds' – London, for example – are available on a weekly rotation. These provide a semi-realistic experience; London lets you do circuits of Westminster.

You can simply ride round one of these worlds at your own pace, chatting to other riders (by text). Or you can follow a structured training plan and ride to a schedule and pace dictated by Zwift. Finally, there are regular group rides and races if that's your kind of thing. With no geographical restrictions, you'll find yourself mixed in with riders from across the world.

Zwift equipment options

Getting started can cost less than £50 (speed sensor plus subscription).

Speed sensor
Wahoo RPM, £29, *uk.wahoofitness.com*

Direct-drive smart trainer
Elite Direto £450-550 *elite-it.com/en*

Wheel-on smart trainer
Tacx Vortex Smart, £249, *tacx.com*

Zwift subscription
£12.99 per month, *zwift.com*

Tablet mount
Minoura iPad and tablet handlebar mount, £29.99, *zyrofisher.co.uk*

Too much information?
For a guide to 'analogue' turbo training, visit **cyclinguk.org/article/top-tips-using-turbo-trainer**