

HOW TO TACKLE GFNY



**BY LIDIA FLUHME
PRESIDENT OF GFNY**



LIDIA FLUHME
CO-FOUNDER GRAN FONDO
NEW YORK

Sport is not just a test of physical strength or endurance, but also of mental fortitude and strategy. I've been a competitive athlete since the age of 12 but even now I love the feeling of toeing the line and getting the opportunity to test and prove myself.

And racing is the ultimate test. Great results are not achieved on race day. They are truly earned in the weeks and months of preparation before the day itself. My athletic goal is to be the best athlete I can be, given the other things happening in my professional and personal life.

HOW TO TACKLE A GRAN FONDO

I've done over 100 endurance races (I stopped counting after 80 a few years ago). I've had some good races and some bad ones. After each race, I thought back to the things that I executed well and evaluated the things that needed improvement. I've made every mistake possible: undertraining, under eating, over eating, mechanical issues, starting out too fast, starting out too slow, having a cold, having food poisoning, being injured, not rested enough, too rested. Each disappointing race taught me what I need to work on to improve my results.

Below I outline some hard-learned lessons and principles that have guided me in performing my best over the past 10 years of endurance sport racing.

1. RACE YOUR WAY INTO SHAPE

Similar to acing a test, no matter how gifted you are, you still have to open a book and read it to know the topic. In sport, you need to get out there to train to build your base, work on your speed and improve bike handling. I'm a huge believer of racing your way into shape. Each spring we're a bit rusty after taking some time off during the winter and the spring is a great way to sign up for some smaller, shorter races to get the speed and endurance back in the legs.

2. HAVE TRAINING PARTNERS WHO ARE BETTER THAN YOU

A person who is new to endurance sport definitely needs guidance in form of a training program, heart rate monitor and friends who are experienced athletes who can give nutrition and bike skills advice to learn more about the sport. As your experience grows, you should find riders who push you to your limits and broaden your athletic pursuits. Whether it's the Tuesday night group workout or a new type of race or distance, you will become a better athlete for getting out of your comfort zone.

I've learned from my husband how to read peloton dynamics (like sprinting out of a curve), staying on a wheel, the importance of being at the front of a peloton, descending, knowing how to sprint to close a gap and to always have a wind jacket with me. I'm grateful to Uli for taking me to Italy to race a Gran Fondo. It's simultaneously the biggest challenge and the most fun I've ever had on a bike.

3. PROPER NUTRITION

On race morning, I fuel up on long-lasting energy like oatmeal and banana. I skip coffee because it makes me have to pee a lot, and I don't want to be too dependent on toilets on race morning (I've never been at a race that had rows of toilets right next to my start corral and they had no lines). The start of a race provides me enough adrenaline to carry me through the initial 30-40 minutes.



4

Experiment with your sports nutrition during your training. Figure out how often you need to eat, what you need to eat and how much. Figure out what your stomach can tolerate and what your taste buds enjoy. Not eating will make you bonk, and eating too much will weigh you down and draw blood from your legs to your stomach to digest the food. Focus on eating small amounts at frequent intervals to keep your fuel stores even throughout the day. If you begin to daydream about food (like a juicy hamburger or a plateful of pasta or a huge pizza slice with your favorite toppings) it means you are very close to bonking, so eat that banana or PowerGel immediately.

I generally start a Gran Fondo with a banana, a PowerBar and 2 PowerGels. I skip the early aid stations to save time. My first stop is when my bike bottle is empty, and I take a bit of time to also replenish my pockets with a PowerBar and a banana from the station to get me through until my bottle is empty again. I stop 3-5 times per Gran Fondo, depending how long the course is and how hilly it is. At races like GF Sportful, GF Fausto Coppi and GF Straduale (each 120+ miles with 15,000+ ft of elevation), I stop 5 times.

4. LADIES, IT'S GOOD TO HAVE A LOCOMOTIVE

For a woman, the best-case sce-





Those are very different things. As you approach an aid station, your locomotive will ask you if you have everything you need or if you need to stop to refill. Your locomotive is probably an all-around better

cyclist than you, which also means he descends better. If you feel confident, get on the wheel and let him determine your path of descent. If not, he will turn and see that you can't keep up and he will wait for you so he can pull you once you reach the bottom of the descent.

5. MAKE THE BEST OF WHO IS AROUND YOU

You don't need to do a Gran Fondo with your training partners or clubmates. You can train with them, go to the race with them, say good luck before getting into your respective start corrals, and agree

on a location where to meet up at the finish to exchange your individual stories from the race. If someone gets a mechanical, or isn't feeling great, or is feeling super strong, you all should just ride at your own pace and do your best. There is no point in having three people to wait around for one, or vice versa. A Gran Fondo provides you the luxury to always have people of your ability around you. Use them to make your own perfect race.

When Uli and I race in Italy, we give a kiss goodbye at the start line and don't see each other again until I cross the finish line and neither of us knows any people we're riding with. But we're both challenged by riding with people that are at our respective ability levels.

6. ENJOY EVERY MOMENT

Very often I ride my bike and I enjoy the scenery or have happy thoughts, and that can be a beautiful thing. But a race is different: roads are patrolled and having thousands more people out there on the same road gives a sense of safety in numbers. You can get this kind of freedom only at an event.

I love racing because it allows me to push my limits that I rarely test in training. I feel a sense of freedom and excitement to go as hard as I can and see how long I can hold on.

7. RIDE YOUR OWN RACE

A Gran Fondo can be translated to "Great Challenge" or "Personal Challenge". Just like runners have marathons, cyclists have Gran Fondos.

A Gran Fondo is a mass participation bike race of at least 80 and maximum 150 miles that provides individual chip timing and closed roads or police moderated traffic in order for riders not to have to stop at lights or stop signs.

In a marathon, there are never groups of 5 or 10 people from the same club running together. People all run at a different pace. Even if the pace is just 5 seconds per mile different, that still ends up being more than 2 minutes difference at the end of a marathon (over 105 miles, that difference is close to 9 minutes). You don't see a marathon runner stopping every mile to wait for a friend. And you will not see a cyclist do that at a true Gran Fondo either.

8. TRAIN YOUR MIND

Prepare mentally for the tough moments. What are you doing when your body and mind tell you to stop instead of riding up yet another hill? For me, it's important to always be aware that if you pull over and stop, it means that your mind quit.

I always check the results after a race to see how much faster the 2 or 3 girls ahead of me were. Could I have done anything differently? Could I have shaved off 1 or 2 minutes somewhere? Did I consistently ride as hard as I could? Do I feel any regrets? Am I proud of my result? Because that's the essence of "do your best". I feel the greatest satisfaction when crossing the finish line and knowing that at all times I was giving my best, and that I never gave up.



nario is to have a male clubmate or friend, who rides exclusively for her. There are plenty of guys out there in the middle of the pack, who have no chance for or interest in any kind of glorious result, but it makes them proud and happy to help you have a great race. In an Italian Gran Fondo, you don't even need to know anyone. I've had guys become my locomotives at various points during most races. The difference between a guy you're just riding behind and your locomotive is that the locomotive pushes you to your max, but when he hears that you are getting dropped, he turns to check, then slows down and waits for you. The locomotive guy is really there to help you. A leader in the group just happens to be a guy who is pulling the group.

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