

Thinking Outside the Gym: Meet ElliptiGO

BY MATT FITZGERALD

The first time I saw an ElliptiGO was on the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon race course last year. I was on the back of a flatbed truck covering the elite women's race. Right behind us, and ahead of the runners, was a woman on what looked like a mobile elliptical trainer, and she was keeping spectators out of the way and running general interference. My first thought was: *Why didn't anyone think of that sooner?*

Actually, as I later learned from the husband of the woman I saw riding that machine, ElliptiGO "Chief Enthusiast" Bryce Whiting, someone had thought of the idea of an outdoor elliptical trainer before. That someone was Larry Miller, the very man who invented the original elliptical

trainer back in the early 1990s. But Miller couldn't get anyone to bite on his new idea, so his patent lapsed.

In 2005, an injured triathlete named Bryan Pate came up with the same idea independently. He hooked up with a fellow triathlete and mechanical engineer, Brent Teal, to develop a prototype. Four years later, and with an exclusive license from Miller, the ElliptiGO—the first elliptical bike—hit the market.

I got a chance to take a quick spin on an ElliptiGO at the Tri-Expo held in San Diego in January. My expressed enthusiasm for the experience inspired Whiting to invite me to the company's headquarters, located just north of



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San Diego, for a real workout on the machine.

You have to try one for yourself to really know what it's like, but if you've ever ridden a regular bike, gone for a run and used a regular elliptical trainer, you have some idea because the ElliptiGO experience is like a hybrid of these three activities. The non-seated, fixed-stride-length pedaling motion (there are actually three stride length settings, but the stride length does not vary dynamically on the go as in running) will be familiar to any past user of an indoor elliptical trainer. But the speed (Whiting and I easily cruised at 20 mph on the flats), the gears (the ElliptiGO has eight speeds) and the cornering are all bike. Yet the workout itself is more run-like. During my ride with Whiting, I felt the same sort of ventilatory strain that I do when running.

Because it is weight-bearing (although non-impact) and creates more drag, riding an ElliptiGO is inherently more physiologically intense than riding a bike. And because it is 10 times more enjoyable than plodding along on a regular elliptical trainer, one is motivated to push harder on the ElliptiGO, making it more intense in effect than its indoor equivalent. Also, while you can simulate hill climbing on

an elliptical trainer, you can actually climb hills—at bike speeds, almost—on an ElliptiGO. When Bryce and I made it to the top of the famous Torrey Pines climb off the Pacific Coast Highway, I felt more worked over than I ever have on an indoor machine. It's really a hell of a workout.

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What is the purpose of an ElliptiGO? One could use it for just about anything one would use a regular bike for—and I mean anything. Brent Teal finished the 129-mile Death Ride in California, featuring more than 15,000 feet of climbing, ahead of more than half of the cyclists in the field last year. But for the triathlete the ElliptiGO is probably best used as an alternative to running. After all, that's

exactly what the triathlete who conceived it had in mind for it.

Many triathletes use indoor elliptical trainers to maintain their running fitness when an injury prevents them from running, and some also replace a bit of the running they might otherwise do with some elliptical training to reduce the pounding their legs are subjected to and thereby reduce injury risk without sacrificing fitness. The ElliptiGO can be used in exactly the same ways, but I believe its benefits are likely to be even greater because, as an outdoor activity, it is both more specific to running and more fun and motivating.

Among the small numbers who are already familiar with this new product, two knocks against it are commonly voiced. The first is price: It retails for \$2,199. Triathletes are notoriously big spenders, though, so many of us won't bat an eye at that. The other knock is that one stands out and perhaps looks a little goofy on an ElliptiGO (at least until everybody has one). The typical compression socks-wearing triathlete won't have a problem with that, either. We just might be the perfect market for these things. ▽

For more information, visit Elliptigo.com.



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