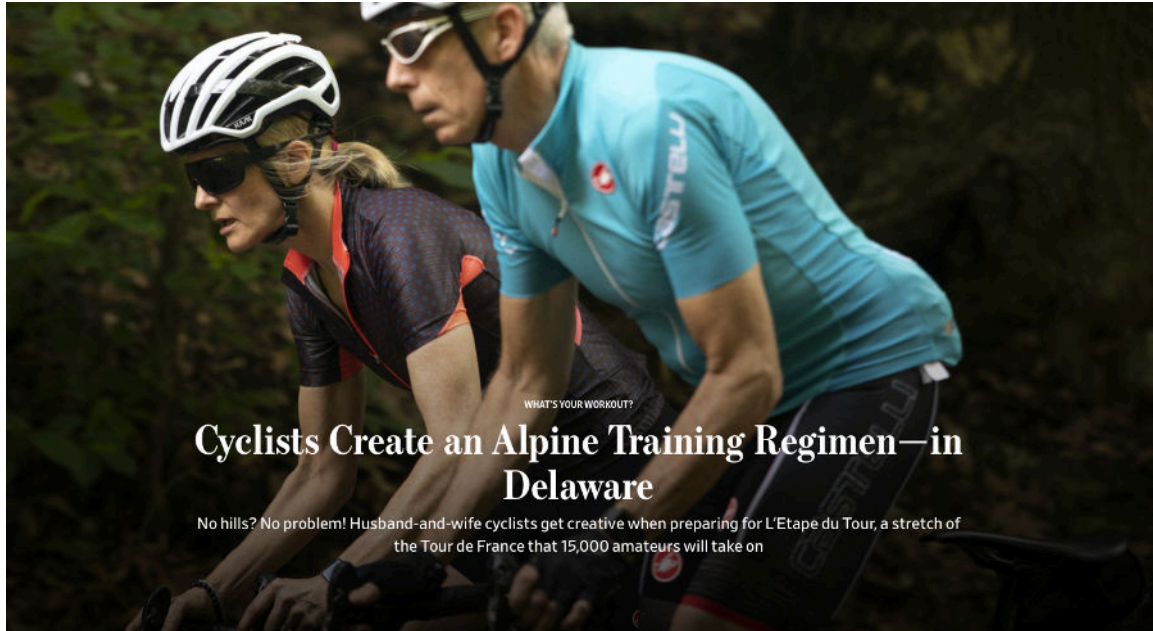


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WHAT'S YOUR WORKOUT?

Cyclists Create an Alpine Training Regimen—in Delaware

No hills? No problem! Husband-and-wife cyclists get creative when preparing for L'Etape du Tour, a stretch of the Tour de France that 15,000 amateurs will take on

Laurie Grimmelsman and her husband, John Breakey, train near their home in Delaware for L'Etape du Tour. RYAN COLLIER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

By *Jen Murphy*

18 COMMENTS

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Laurie Grimmelsman never imagined she would be riding in the tracks of Chris Froome and other Tour de France greats. But on July 8, Ms. Grimmelsman, 56, and her husband, John Breakey, 61, joined thousands of cycling enthusiasts who are crazy enough to want to test their grit on a stage of the Tour de France.

The 28th edition of L'Etape du Tour takes amateur riders along the same route as stage 10 of the 2018 Tour de France. Among the estimated 15,000 participants in this year's L'Etape du Tour, 6% are women. The amateurs hit the road nine days before the professionals cycle the same route on July 17. Not for the faint of heart, the ride spans 105 miles from Annecy to Le Grand-Bornand in the French Alps with more than 13,000 feet of climbing.

"We were motivated by the challenge, but also the opportunity to travel to France, eat good food, drink good wine and watch some of the Tour," says Ms. Grimmelsman, an interior designer in Wilmington, Del.

She met her husband, who is head of the graphic-design program at Delaware College of Art and Design, on a bike ride 35 years ago. He had been racing since the 1970s. She was a novice. "I was sporty so I liked trying to keep up," she says. "He was very patient with me lagging behind for years but now we're very compatible cycling partners."

Ms. Grimmelsman says she is the better climber and her husband is the better descender. "I may be faster because of my power to weight [ratio] going up but he will most likely catch me on way down," she says, referring to her strength compared to her weight. The higher your power-to-weight ratio, the faster you will go. On flat sections between climbs they work together and draft, where the rider in front blocks the wind, creating an air pocket that pulls the back rider along so they can use less energy.

Mr. Breakey says he feels lucky that his partner in life can double as his training partner. "We're a great team," he says. "We pride ourselves at being able to ride elbow to elbow. I'm sure at times we tax each other's patience but we also motivate each other at the right moments."

L'Etape du Tour is the couple's biggest cycling challenge to date. "We've been training and see ourselves as viable competitors," she says. "If one of us has an issue like cramping, the other must absolutely go on. But the goal is that we cross the finish together."

The Workout

The couple started to build their endurance with long rides in November, then switched to a three-month training program issued by L'Etape du Tour that focused on endurance, intensity and hill workouts. "Before this we did junk miles," Ms. Grimmelsman says. "We rode four to six times a week but we were never concerned with intensity."

The biggest challenge was figuring out how to train for the steep climbs of the Alps in flat Delaware, she says. The solution: repeats up a 1-kilometer stretch of road with a 15% grade. On Tuesday nights the couple would do 10 to 12 back-to-back climbs.

On Thursday nights the couple trained for intensity. "We needed to get used to riding with an elevated heart rate for a sustained period of time," Ms. Grimmelsman says. After a 30-minute warmup, the couple rode six minutes at an all-out effort, then recovered six minutes, eight minutes full-effort, recovered eight minutes, and then a final six-minute, all-out effort followed by a six-minute recovery ride and a 30-minute cool down.

She hopes the intense workouts pay off during the last climb, which is 97 miles into the 105-mile event. "Our legs will be very fatigued," she says. Mr. Breakey says training for mental toughness was just as crucial. "It's amazing what one comment from her, like a heartfelt 'good job!' does for my mental state after going anaerobic for several minutes," he says.

On weekends, the couple go on four to five-hour-long rides. Three days a week Ms. Grimmelsman attends Vinyasa yoga classes. "I find it helps me remember to breathe evenly on the intense climbs," she says. The couple arrived in France a week before the event to get accustomed to the altitude and scout the course.

The Diet

When Ms. Grimmelsman was diagnosed with colorectal cancer in 2003 she became much more conscious of her diet. "I am a bread lover," she says. "I made a big effort to eat more whole grains and vegetables." Now cancer-free, she allows herself a croissant with butter and jam and a cappuccino in the morning. Lunch might be avocado toast or an organic, frozen burrito. She prefers to cook dinner rather than eat out. In the summer, she and her husband grill chicken or salmon to accompany a vegetable dish and a salad. During the day she'll graze on nuts, fruit, or yogurt. In the evening she indulges in two squares of dark chocolate. "When I'm riding a lot I feel less guilty," she says.

The Gear & Cost

Ms. Grimmelsman's 2012 Specialized S-Works carbon-fiber road bike has Mavic wheels and cost about \$9,500. She spent about \$350 on her Sidi Genius 7 bike shoes. Her Castelli bib shorts cost around \$250 a pair and she spends between \$100 and \$175 for her Machines for Freedom jerseys. She wears a Kask Protone helmet, which costs around \$300. The couple use the Wahoo Power Meter app for their Wahoo Kickr trainer (retail \$1,200) in combination with Global Cycling Network training videos. She pays \$100 a month for unlimited classes at Yoga U in Wilmington, Del. The couple booked their trip with Custom Getaways and each paid a \$200 entry fee for the race.

The Playlist

"We listen to music on the trainer to keep us motivated through the pain," she says. Their current playlist includes "Milk and Cookies" by Melanie Martinez, "Back to You" by Louis Tomlinson, and songs by Bonobo, Coldplay and Lady Gaga.

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Training on Your Terrain

Unlike the pros, few recreational athletes have the luxury of traveling to train in conditions that simulate event-day terrain. Here, experts weigh in on making the best of what you have at home when preparing for a run, ride, or climb.

→ **Cycling:** "If you live in a flat area, the wind can be your mountain," says Arien Coppock, a former pro cyclist and designer of the climbing-heavy Challenge Tours offered by Somerville, Mass.-based DuVine Cycling + Adventure Co. "Ride straight into it for 30 minutes at a time and switch to a heavier gear every five minutes." Founder Andy Levine says two minutes of effort even on a small hill are better than nothing. "Get in big gear—a gear that makes it hard to pedal—and repeat the hill five to 10 times," he says.

Running: If you're training for a hilly marathon or a trail race in the mountains and live in an area with no hills, you have to get creative, says Ewen North, head coach of Revolution Running in Colorado. Running on a treadmill set to a gradient of the hills on your race course is one solution. "If you live in an urban area," he says, "find long flights of stairs or even bridges and overpasses that may offer a short incline and run repeats of these at a fairly hard effort." He also suggests weight exercises such as squats, lunges, leg extensions and calf raises to develop the muscles required for going uphill.

Climbing: Adrian Ballinger, a big mountain climber and CEO of Alpenglow Expeditions in Olympic Valley, Calif., is familiar with the struggle of training in a flat location. For a couple of years, he lived in Miami, where he would run stadium stairs. When he visits New York City, he runs stairwells in skyscrapers while carrying a backpack weighted with water. He takes the elevator down to save his knees. The stair climber in the gym is another option. "Altitude is one of those things you can't cheat," he says. "If you aren't able to acclimatize before your adventure, remember to go slow at first, listen to your body, and hydrate well."