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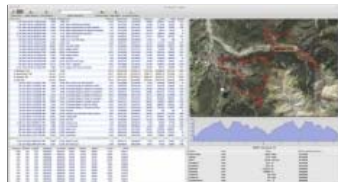
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Cycling training logs for the Macintosh

By Drew Geer

Posted Jan. 5, 2009



Mac training diaries: The Ascent main window

Photo: screen shot

Editor's Note: Drew Geer is an endurance mountain bike racer who has been using a computer training log since 1998 and has hand-written training logs going back to 1972. He's been an Apple Mac user since 1984. Geer paid retail for each of the products he reviewed in this article.

Article Extras
Photos

Winter is here and it is time to get some good base training in. It is also time to review your training data from last season and make plans for 2009, which brings up the issue of training logs. If you have not kept a training log, it is certainly time to do so. Even if you just ride for fun and fitness it is extremely worthwhile to know what you have done in the past.

There has been great training log software for Windows OS computers for years with WKO+ (www.cyclingpeakssoftware.com) and others, but despite the growth of the Apple Macintosh market, the training log software has lagged behind. Fortunately, there are several strong products for Mac users.

Web-based solutions

There are web-based options that any computer can use, though automatic download of data from your cycle computer typically requires additional interfaces that may or may not exist. These also require a subscription fee.

Put Windows on your Mac

Mac computers can also run Windows programs, (using Bootcamp or Parallels), though if you do not already do this for other reasons, the cost of purchasing Windows and the hassle of setting this up may not be worthwhile.

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Spreadsheets

Many athletes simply use a spreadsheet, which provides good flexibility but less in the way of features and ease of use.

Native Mac software

This review shows you the native Macintosh software that will provide you a great training log.

You want your training log to be able to:

- track all your workouts
- summarize your data in easy to view formats
- search your data for specific activities, equipment events, etc.

You may also want to:

- have several users on the same computer
- share your data with your coach or friends

You will want whatever software you choose to be compatible with your cycling computer.

Ascent

Web site: www.montebellosoftware.com

Retail price: (version 1.9.7) \$40.00

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Ascent was developed to connect the Garmin GPS based cycle computers to the Macintosh and this has been done in elegant style. Ascent is a full featured training log that will download all your data from Garmin units — time, distance, heart rate, GPS map data, power and more. The maps and profiles it produces are spectacular and enable you to easily pick any segment of a ride to analyze. You can export your maps to Google Earth to share with your ride partners.



Mac training diaries: A map detail window. The colors indicate heart zones.

Photo: screen shot

The main interface has all your training data in calendar or list form. There is a map window, a profile window, activity data summary & lap splits. The entire interface is customizable. The training data window summarizes all your data by week, month and year, providing you with quick totals of you data. You can manually enter data for any different sport where you did not have a cycle computer.

The map and profile is the most useful part of this program. You can select the path on the map to be colored to your own heart rate zones, power zones, altitude, speed or cadence. This allows you to quickly look at a map and see where you were in the “red zone.” On the profile you can select any segment of the ride and analyze that piece. This allows you to do intervals without stopping and staring your cycle computer. You can just do the intervals and separate them later on the computer.

The search feature allows you to search all your data for any criteria you wish. You may want to know how many rides over 4 hours you did in 2008. You may want to know the total miles you rode on a specific bike. This software was developed with the Garmin computers in mind. It interfaces perfectly and remembers which activities have already been downloaded. Because your Garmin stores many days of activity you do not need to download every day. Ascent cannot upload files to the Garmin.



Mac training diaries: An example of an Ascent profile

Photo: screen shot

Backing up your data is very important. It would be very distressing to lose the entire year of training data. Ascent automatically backs up your data and you can select a different hard drive for even more safety. It will automatically back up to the web if you have an Apple MobileMe account. The files are easy to locate so you can manually manage them if you wish.

Multiple users: Ascent will allow you to have many different logs on a single computer. This allows two riders to use the same program on a single computer. You may wish to keep a second log for one rider that contains a subset of your data — just races for example. There is a catch to this. Although you can have multiple user logs, you can only set the rider profile — heart rate, weight and power zones — for a single user. To get around this you, need to use a different computer or set up your Mac with a second user account.

Pros: Beautiful maps and profiles, manual entry and editing of data, select piece of rides for interval analysis, great backup of data. You can download your Powertap, iBike, Quark or SRM power data if you use a Garmin 705 to collect it.

Cons: No summary by activity. Ascent supports only Garmin devices for download, though it does import files from Polar as well. There is no print function.

Ascent has many more feature than I can review here. It is a stable and very elegant program. If you use a Garmin GPS, Ascent is certainly the program you will want to use. You may want to consider this as your primary training log even if you do not use a Garmin device.

iSMARTtrain

Web site: www.ismarttrain.com

Retail price: (version 3.0) \$49.95

iSMARTtrain was developed primarily to connect Polar heart rate monitors to the Macintosh. A recent update now adds support for Powertap, Ergomo, Garmin and SRM devices. The main interface window is very attractive and intuitive. You can choose from a list view or a calendar view. In the calendar view, each week has a running summary of your workout totals. You can set the color for every activity so you can easily see at a glance which days are cycling, mountainbiking, cyclocross, running or any activities you choose. You set up your own custom sports. You can also set up custom routes — very useful if you frequently ride the same loop. This program is very useful for a multi-sport athlete.



Mac training diaries: The iSmartrain main window.

Photo: screen shot

The summary function is one of the best features. You can easily see your data split by sport and totaled over each week, month and year. There is a powerful search feature that allows you to select out rides with specific features — how many rides were over 6 hours for example. You can track how much time you spend on each bike or any specific equipment you designate.

iSMART downloads directly from cycle computers and Polar watches. It does not remember which activities you have already downloaded so you need to manually select them. While it downloads the Garmin training data — speed, distance, and heart rate — it does not produce maps or profiles of the ride. The heart rate and power graphs are limited to summaries and you are not able to select just a piece of the ride for analysis. The graphs are not very customizable and do not necessarily display the data you want in the format you want. The most recent upgrade to version 3 hid the backup file in your user library. While this is not too problematic, you must know where it is in order to manually back up your data.

Pros: Simple interface, handles multiple sports well, handles multiple users, great summary of activities, connects with multiple devices

Cons: Print function does not work well, heart rate graphs are quirky, limited data detail for power & GPS data, occasional bug & crash, backup file is manual & you have to look for it.

iSMART is a good program if you do not use any cyclometer that interfaces with a computer. It is a good program to use if you are a Polar user and an option for Powertap, Egomo and SRM users. Though less detailed than Ascent, it is very simple to work with and is a good choice for an easy-to-use training log.

PowerAgent

Web site: www.saris.com **Retail price:** Free.

PowerAgent is the free program to interface your Powertap with your computer. It will only work with a Powertap and provides the most powerful power analysis tools for this device. PowerAgent is not a full function training log unless you do every workout with your Powertap. It does not allow manual entry of a workout. Though you may want to use PowerAgent for your power analysis, you will want to use Ascent or iSMART as well.



Mac training diaries: The Powertap's multi-rider window.

Photo: screen shot

PowerAgent's focus is of course on power. You are able to view ride summaries of time spent in each power and heart rate zone. You can view the raw power data on an easy-to-use graph and select out sections of intervals. You are able to select multiple rides and view summary data over those rides — for example, peak and average power in May vs. August.

PowerAgent shows its roots of being moved to Mac from the Windows platform. The windows can be a bit strange and it takes some practice to customize the screens (but it is possible). Multiple users are handled very well. There is no backup feature. This flaw is compounded by the fact that you are not actually able to find your training log file at all on your computer, as it is a hidden file. Backing up your data requires some advanced computer skills: you need to go into the UNIX program environment and view your hidden files to be able to copy them. Cyclops provides instruction on their Web site, but only the tech savvy will venture into this.

Pros: Best Macintosh interface with Powertap, detail power and multi-ride analysis, multiple users, free.

Cons: not a full featured training log, terrible backup.

Garmin Training Center

Web site: www.garmin.com **Retail price:** (version 2.1.6) Free.

Garmin Training Center is a free program to interface Garmin devices with your Macintosh. It is the only program that lets you send workouts or routes to your Garmin.

It is not a full featured training log program as it lack the ability to manually input workouts. It will automatically download from your Garmin as soon as it is connected to your computer. You can view an overview map and a graph of heart rate, speed, cadence, elevation or pace. The map view is crude, showing only roads and no satellite overview. This is not useful at all for any off-road activities.

Training Center does not support multiple users. You can only set heart rate zones for a single user. Every ride that is downloaded is kept in a single location, though you can set up different folders and sort out individual users' rides. To backup your files you need to export each workout.

Training Center is more of a tool you may keep on your computer to upload files to your Garmin unit rather than actually using it as a training log.

Pros: upload workouts and routes to your Garmin, free

Cons: not a full-featured training log, cannot manually input data, limited map views, no multi-user support

The Bottom Line:

Which program you choose will depend on what type of cycle computer you use. If you use a Garmin,

Ascent is the hands down choice. This is also a great choice for a general training log if you only use manual entry. If you use Polar you may also consider iSMART. The recently added support of Ergomo, Powertap and SRM makes iSMART a good choice if you use these power meters. iSMART is also a good choice for a manual input training log as it is attractive and intuitive.

You will want to keep PowerAgent if you are a Powertap user and do not use a Garmin 705 to collect your power data. As this is not a full function training log you should use either Ascent or iSMART in addition to PowerAgent.

Garmin users may want to keep Garmin Training center to upload routes to the Garmin.

	Ascent	iSMARTtrain	PowerAgent	Garmin Training Center
Full training log	Yes	Yes	No	No
Manual input	Yes	Yes	No	No
Devices supported	Garmin Powertap, SRM, iBike & Quark though a Garmin 705	Ergomo, Garmin, Polar, Powertap, SRM	Powertap	Garmin
Summary	Yes; but limited	Yes	No	No
Search	Yes Yes No No			
Maps	Fantastic	No	No	yes
Backup	automatic	manual	No	manual
Multiple Users	Yes – limited	Yes	Yes	No
Import files	Garmin & Polar files	Garmin, Polar, Powertap, SRM, Suunto	Powertap	Garmin
Export Files	Yes- multiple formats	Yes – multiple formats	CycleOps format only	Garmin format only
Email	Ascent file format (need ascent to view this)	No	No	No

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