

The Boston Marathon Ride

Created by Dixie Douville
Total Class Length: 60 minutes

Profile Concept:

For many marathon runners, the ultimate goal is to run fast enough qualify for the Boston Marathon. I am privileged to have run it eight times (out of the twenty-three marathons I have run). Since I went to college just north of Boston, I had been a spectator at the race many times. My first Boston marathon was in 1995 and is when I set my PR. I am fortunate to have shared this race experience with many of my running friends. Being a New Englander, there is nothing like running 26.2 miles through the Boston suburbs and finishing at the Prudential Center, one of Boston's iconic modern landmarks.



In the spring of 1997, my family was living outside of Chicago and one of my indoor cycling students (we'll call her Lori) had qualified for Boston. As a way to celebrate Lori's accomplishment and give her a powerful—and what turned out to be a very emotional—send-off the week before the race, I developed a profile based upon the course. I filled it with the intensity and the rich history of the Boston Marathon. At the end of the class, there were tears, laurel wreath crowns fashioned from the local craft store, and one of my medals around Lori's neck (I did ask for it back*). The response was so overwhelming, it became a signature profile for me and my students ask for it annually.

As I approach my seventeenth season of this ride, I have changed a few things, including some of the songs, but one thing that has not changed is my passion for the sport, the race, and the Boston experience. Take your students to the Boston Marathon and give them a sense of one of the greatest races in the world!

**Since then, I have bought medals from the Oriental Trading Company or the Dollar Store.*

Objective and Intensity

The ride concept is developed from the course map of the Boston Marathon. There are several sources available for you to become familiar with the course. Begin by going to the Boston Athletic Association site: www.baa.org. The course has a varied terrain with several hills in succession in the middle of the 26.2-mile course, including the famed "Heartbreak Hill." Built on a model for endurance, this ride will be in Zone 3 in the front end, in the lower limits of Zone 4 in the middle, and will end with a strong Zone 4 effort at the finish. Perceived exertion will range

from 7 in the front end to 9 at the finish. The ride will challenge the rider to begin by pacing their effort, knowing that the increased demand of hills and a final effort in the homestretch is ahead. Going out too fast will lead to “hitting the wall,” something that marathoners know all too well if they don’t manage the miles correctly. In coaching the ride, I take plenty of artistic license in an effort to convey the emotion, energy, and mindset that the runners experience. Descriptions of locations, spectators, and the history of the marathon create an experience for the riders of what it is like to be on the course and to share in the excitement that embraces Boston on “Patriots’ Day,” the third Monday of every April.

The Warm-up

Song #1: Tryouts, Jerry Goldsmith, Rudy (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack), 4:28

As you begin your warm-up:

Light resistance on the wheel, everyone, and get ready...It’s Patriots’ Day in Massachusetts and that means only one thing to Bostonians...it is Marathon Day! On the third Monday of April, the state of Massachusetts takes a holiday and celebrates the spirit of the Revolution by hosting the oldest marathon race in the country. First run in April 1897, the Boston Marathon has been cited as the inspiration for those that followed. Joan Benoit won in 1983 with world-record time, and her performance was followed by the gold medal in the first woman’s marathon in 1984. This event is truly historical.

Your ride today will be a test of endurance and heart. You will test your ability by managing your energy level for the long haul. The 26.2-mile marathon course for the average runner takes roughly 4 hours. Stronger competitors can go “sub four,” and the elite runners average around 2 hours and 10 minutes. So imagine that effort compressed into 1 hour. I am going to lead you over the entire course mile by mile. The first few miles will be steady and fast. As we approach the middle miles, we will simulate the hills of the Boston suburbs in Newton and Wellesley. Once we finish the hills, we bring up the intensity to make our way to the finish-line sprint!

Monitor your effort with a combination of heart rate and RPE, remembering that making it to the finish is dependent upon your ability to pace yourself to move quickly and efficiently without blowing up!

Imagine now as we warm up that you have been training for the past few months for THIS day. You have logged hundreds of miles, countless early morning hill repeats, track workouts that nearly made you throw up, and too many power gels to think about.

Your day has finally arrived. The cruel reality of the marathon is that the training volume means you cannot do the event but once every six or more months. So it all has to come together in one day. You have to come to the starting line healthy; the weather needs to cooperate and the running gods need to be with you.

The race begins in Hopkinton, miles outside of Boston. As you boarded the buses in the Boston Commons in the early hours this morning and drove for 45 minutes to the start, it occurred to you that you have to run all the way back!

Hopkinton is a quintessential New England town with clapboard houses, narrow streets, and a large green in the middle of town. The atmosphere is like a huge block party! The townspeople take hosting the starting line very seriously. The town has 17,000 residents and the runners triple the population for one morning each year.

You head to your starting pen, which is assigned by pace. Fastest runners in the first pen and slower runners to the back. The race goes off in waves, so it may be that the race will start for the elite women at 9:32 am and the elite men will go off at 10:00 am, while the final wave goes off at 11:15. This means the elite women will be in the last few miles by the time the last wave goes off!

As you wait in your pen, you take your last few sips of water before you hit the course...the rest of the day will be spent going for a long run with tens of thousands of your running buddies...

Guide riders through the warm-up, adding resistance in small increments while reminding them to maintain their leg speed.

Song #2: Born to Run, Bruce Springsteen, Born to Run, 4:29

Hold the standing flat for 2 minutes to elevate the heart rate and complete the warm-up.

Add enough resistance to support you as you stand. As the gun goes off for your wave, you will be walking because it is too crowded to run yet. Keep some distance between you and your competitors—the last thing you want to happen is that you turn an ankle in the crowd.

Then have the riders drop enough resistance to allow them to increase their cadence and have them descend to the saddle in one smooth motion.

Settle in for the trip into Boston! Steady speed, moderate resistance. The beginning of the course out of Hopkinton and into Ashland is a gentle downhill. Get your legs under you and take a deep breath...your plan is coming together and you are running the Boston Marathon. As you say good-bye to Hopkinton, the television helicopters are hovering above.

Song #3: We're Alive (feat. Jennifer Brown), Paul Van Dyke, The Best of Paul Van Dyke, 4:20

Standing Flat: 1 minute

Finally, you have room to move and get settled in your pace. Stand up and stretch the legs; imagine you have spotted some "room to run" and work your way through the pack to claim your real estate.

After 1 minute, have the riders drop enough resistance to allow them to increase their cadence and have them descend to the saddle in one smooth motion.

Have the riders connect with the rhythm of their breath cycle and cadence. Doing this will help them with efficiency. Remember that efficiency is essential in running a marathon. The pace of this song is very easy to grab on to and will drive the cadence for the riders at roughly 96–100 rpm. During this section intensity will be the middle to upper limits of Zone 3. The key is to balance cadence and resistance to achieve the desired intensity.

Song #4: Don't Look Back, Boston, Boston: Greatest Hits, 5:57

The next 8.5 minutes are a seated flat at the same consistent intensity (continue through song 5).

You are making your way through the Boston suburbs (and listening to a song by Boston), where the crowds have all come out to support the runners. There is some joker that stole an "Entering Brookline" sign many years ago and posts it outside his house at mile 3...Brookline is after the hills...it is a cruel joke.

You run past the bar in Framingham with the band that performs on the roof overlooking the railroad tracks as you head toward Natick, where the families and hundreds of kids line the course looking for high fives from the runners. Keep your pace and keep moving forward. Maintain a steady heart rate.

Song #5: Gotta Get Through This, Daniel Bedingfield, Fired Up! Vol. 2, 2:42

As a coach, you may notice riders getting restless. Encourage them to focus on the extended effort and challenge them to stay centered.

Stay steady; take saddle relief if needed by getting out of the saddle for 15–30 seconds as needed.

You are in mile 11. The hills will be here soon, so pace your effort and take stock of your body from head to toe...how are you feeling? Take a couple of deep breaths and with each exhale, release any tension you may feel. Sink into the saddle and let it support the weight of your body. Soften the shoulders feel any tension slide off of your back and acknowledge the strength in your legs. Your training is paying off.

The next section of the race tests the pack.

Song #6: Be Aggressive, Jock Jams Cheerleaders, ESPN Presents: Jock Jams Vol. 4, 0:33

It's mile 12 by this stage in the race; you are entering Wellesley, where the students from Wellesley College line the edge of the campus; you can hear them screaming from a quarter mile away. They will send you right into the hills!

Song #7: Gonna Fly Now (Theme from Rocky), Bill Conti, Rocky (30th Anniversary Edition), 2:48

At the start of this song, increase resistance for a 2-minute standing climb, then return back to the saddle to continue the climb.

The intensity here starts to rise and coaching this section becomes more dynamic. The excitement and urgent tone of your voice will match the intensity of the physical efforts. The length of this seated climb is 5 minutes long.

As you leave Wellesley, you will pass the half-marathon mark. You have descended on more of the course than you have ascended at this point. That will change soon, when between mile 15 and 16 you begin to encounter the Newton Hills!

Contrary to popular belief, “Heartbreak Hill” is not the only hill on the course, nor is it the biggest hill...we have a few to climb before we arrive there! So turn up the resistance, settle back in the saddle, and feel the hills hit your legs. Cadence will slow down, and you are getting ready to crush this section of the course!

You take the iconic turn at the Newton Wellesley firehouse at mile 17 and look up for a steep climb.

Song #8: Don't Stop Believing, Journey, Journey: Greatest Hits, 4:09

Remain in the seated climb. Stay on the hills and add additional resistance to raise intensity. Have riders add resistance every minute for the next 4 minutes, encouraging them to maintain their cadence.

The fatigue of the hills may be catching up with you. You are in the single-digit miles to the finish, but there is still a lot of work to do.

At minute 3 of song:

Up ahead you see the statue of two men running. One is Johnny Kelley as a young man, and other is Johnny Kelley as an older man; he won the Boston Marathon twice and was 61 times a finisher. The “Forever Young” statue signifies the approaching Heartbreak Hill.

Heartbreak Hill earned its name back in the 1930s when Johnny Kelley and Tarzan Brown, two famous runners at the time, were racing. As the story goes, early in the race, Johnny Kelly broke away from Tarzan Brown, saying, “See you at the finish,” as he passed him. At mile 20 on the hill leading to the end of the hilliest section of the course, Tarzan Brown passed Johnny Kelley, saying, “I’ll see YOU at the finish,” and went on to win the race. The next day in the Boston papers, the headline read, “Tarzan Brown wins on Kelley’s Heartbreak Hill.”

Song #9: Ain’t No Mountain High Enough, Whoopi Goldberg, Sister Act II Soundtrack, 3:03

Turn the resistance up and lead the riders to the standing climb.

Here we go! Turn up the resistance, come out of the saddle, and let’s take it to the top of the hills! We finish when we arrive at the Boston College campus and then head into the city!

Song #10: Titans Spirit, Trevor Rabin, Remember the Titans Soundtrack, 7:28

The next 12 minutes will bring you into the finish line. The rise and fall of the songs give you opportunity to settle everyone back to a steady Zone 3/Zone 4 effort as they move anxiously toward the finish.

Mile 21 brings you to a downhill slope, and for the first time today, you “feel” the finish.

At mile 22, find a steady pace. Reconnect to your breath and rhythm. The emotional surge of cresting Heartbreak has been met by the feeling that your reserves are almost drained. The end is near, but each step is an effort. Take a quick inventory. Your legs may feel the fatigue of the hills, but your heart and head are pulling you closer to the finish line on Boylston Street. This is a tough place to be mentally—many runners find the wall in these miles. Stay fixated on the finish...run, walk, or crawl, you are going to make it.

You go past the MIT frats and can see the Citgo sign above Fenway Park. There is always a home Red Sox game on Patriots’ Day and the crowds are letting out of the park, flooding Kenmore Square as your spirit is waning. Reflect on all that you have done to get here. You are emotional as you approach the final 2 miles of the race. Whatever you have left in your tank is about to be spent!

Song #11: Riverdance, Bill Whalen, Riverdance, 5:45

At 2:00, standing climb:

Mile 25 brings a small hill on an overpass. Add some resistance to the wheel and take this climb with me.

At 3:00, sit back down:

Back in the saddle for a seated flat at a RPE of a BIG 8! This is Zone 4. Go hard—the final turn is coming!!

4:00: Standing climb up the final hill:

You see the final turn onto Hereford Street. You have been running all afternoon with the sun on your back; you turn and climb Hereford and are shaded from the sun. Here you can see the top of the street where the sunlight is shining and the crowds are roaring on Boylston Street!

5:00:

Turn on to Boylston Street and look ahead to the blue and gold finish banner...you’re going to make it! You look at your watch and see that you are on track for a PR...pick up your pace...it’s a race to the finish!!

Have the riders sprint to the finish and shut it down when the song ends. When the sprint ends, everyone's hands go up as they "cross the finish line with style"!

Recovery

Song #12: Ode to Joy, Chapman College Choir, Sister Act Soundtrack, 1:33

While they are beginning to recover:

For the first time in the past several hours, your legs stop running. Walking feels awkward, but you don't care...you are sharing the finish celebration with a few thousand of your new best friends. Your face is streaked with salt; you look exhausted and elated at the same time.

Then comes the medal...as the volunteers place it around your neck and congratulate you, you say, "Thank you," and appreciate the power of what you have accomplished.

Song #13: Sweet Caroline, Neil Diamond, All Time Greatest Hits, 3:20

Red Sox fans (better known as the "Red Sox Nation") know that this song is the anthem at Fenway Park. Continue to cool down with light resistance while your legs and lungs recover.

Cool-Down

Song #14: Chariots of Fire, Boston Pops

Song #15: Worlds Greatest, R. Kelly

Cool down/Stretch/Celebrate

Hand out wreaths, fist bumps, high fives, and medals if you are truly making this ride a special event.

After the actual race, my running friends and I meet at a bar for some wine and stories followed by a big dinner at our favorite restaurant in town to celebrate.

The Boston Marathon Playlist

This is the playlist I used for 2014. Many of the songs are older, but they speak to the theme and match the effort and emotion of the ride. I will often insert Whitney Houston's version of the "Star Spangled Banner" as the second song to simulate the beginning of the race. It is not a song most would use for indoor cycling, but this is a bit "off the grid" in terms of the format of a ride, so if you are feeling it, add it in! All music can be found on iTunes or Amazon.

Boston Marathon ▶ ⌂
15 songs, 1 hour 2 minutes

▲ ✓	Name	Time	Artist	Album
1	✓ Summon the Heroes [First Recor...	6:17	Boston Pops Orch...	Summon the Heroes
2	✓ Born to Run	4:30	Bruce Springsteen	title
3	✓ We are Alive	5:43	Paul van Dyk	Spinning #6
4	✓ Don't Look Back	5:57	Boston	Boston: Greatest Hits
5	✓ Gotta Get Through This [D'N'D R...	2:42	Daniel Bedingfield	Fired Up!, Vol. 2
6	✓ Be Aggressive	0:33	The Jock Jams Ch...	ESPN Presents: Jo...
7	✓ Theme from Rocky	2:49	Bill Conti	Billboard Hits of th...
8	✓ Don't Stop Believin'	4:09	Journey	Journey: Greatest...
9	✓ Ain't No Mountain High Enough	3:03	Whoopi Goldberg /...	Sister Act 2: Back i...
10	✓ Titans Spirit	7:28	Trevor Rabin	Remember the Titans
11	✓ Riverdance	5:45	Bill Whalen	Riverdance
12	✓ Ode to Joy	1:33	Chapman College...	Sister Act 2
13	✓ Sweet Caroline	3:22	Neil Diamond	The Neil Diamond...
14	✓ Chariots of Fire (Theme)	3:38	Boston Pops Orch...	Summon the Heroes
15	✓ World's Greatest	3:57	R. Kelly	All Soundtrack