

# Peak Performance

## America's Best Adventure Workout

The ultimate fitness plan for the off-road athlete, from the adventure sports capital of Jackson Hole

BY CHRISTOPHER McDOUGALL

**T**he agent of my destruction waits at the bottom of the hill. All master sergeant—looking with a shaved head, he stands at the ready by a disturbingly fun house-ish implement called a Bosu, apparently made by gluing half a big blue rubber ball to a plastic board. The funny thing is, instead of stealing more rest by pussyfooting my way down the mountain, I find myself picking up the pace toward the next torture Eric Orton has in store for me. Orton Rule No. 4 — Keep 'Em Keen By Keeping 'Em Guessing — has cast its spell on me.

Orton is the go-to conditioning guru in what is probably the most adventure sports—happy town in America. Though his specialty is training elite jocks over the rivers, cliffs, and mountains of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, for uberendurance events, he recently began applying his unique brand of cross-training to average recreational lowlanders like myself. He realized you don't have to be a triathlete in the Tétons to benefit from the Jackson experience: Even if you just want to do your favorite adventure sports better and without injury, and you've got a hill and a few pieces of cheap



portable gym equipment, Orton can bring Jackson Hole to you.

In addition to a Bosu, some Orton trail workouts involve dumbbells or a mountain bike fixed to a stationary

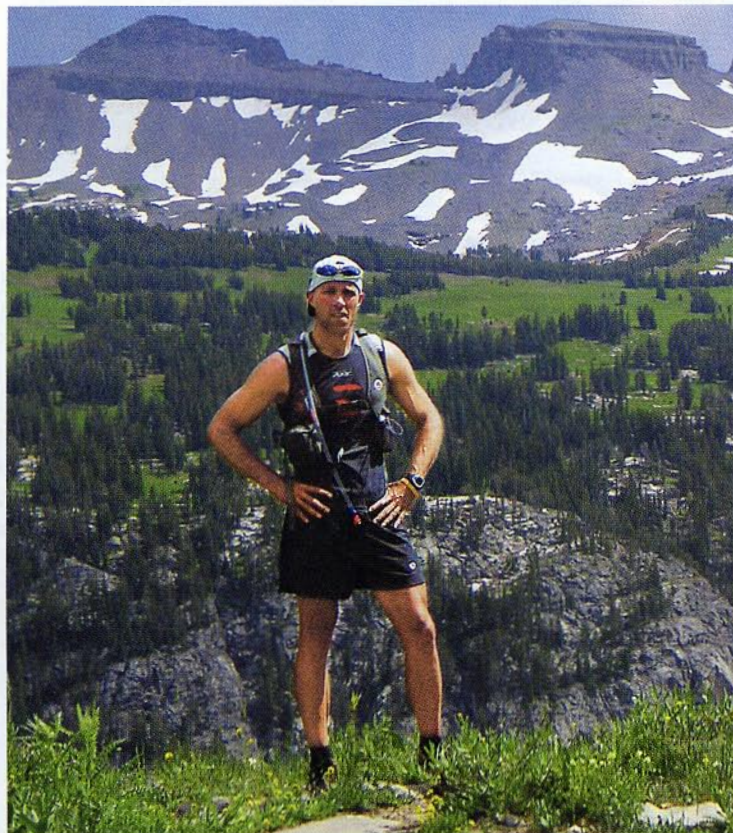
trainer. Today he's proving he can beat me up pretty good with just the Bosu and a hill. In fact, this time he just uses the hill. "You right- or left-footed?" he asks.

"Right?" I guess, not sure I've ever checked.

"Then start this on your left." He faces up the steep, muddy slope and gets into a squat with hands high, like a corner-back's. Then he leaps diagonally to his right, landing on his right foot while touching his right foot with his left hand. He

freezes a sec, then bounds back the other way, touching his left foot with his right hand. As he picks up momentum he looks like a speed skater in an inclined sprint.

Few trainers have a better spot from which to observe the human all-terrain machine than Orton. Former fitness director for the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, and trainer of some 30 different top Ironman, Boston Marathon, and Ultra Distance Triathlon competitors over the years, he moved to Jackson in 2003 to up the ante and vary the stakes. "Athletes in every discipline move here," Orton says. "Snake River has some of the best kayaking in the



**ACTION JACKSON** Adventure trainer Eric Orton surveys his gym.

country, Snow King Mountain is networked with trails, the Tetons have long, awesome climbs and hikes. You can paddle, run, ski, and bike in the same day, and make it to dinner by six."

One benefit of cramming so many diverse athletes into a small town is that you get some beneficial hybrids. (Orton Rule No. 3: The Sport You Don't Do Is the One You Need.) An ace mountain biker befriends a 5.10-rated rock climber, and discovers he's a decent free soloist himself. Those vertical scrambles with his new bud pay off with better core strength and saddle maneuverability. And because both cross-train with Orton, their trainer gets to glean a few new secrets that

can also tune up a Class V kayaker — and a certain journalist/aspiring trail-runner/occasional mountain biker from the wilds of Philadelphia.

**H**is rules, Orton explains the next morning as we head out for a run, aren't granite-carved commandments, just principles he's come up with to create order out of the chaos of preparing athletes for about eight different sports at once. At the center of every Orton program is the tiered system of aerobic, strength, and flexibility drills you see on the next page, with a strong emphasis on the adventure athlete's best friend: the core. The tricky part involves figuring out which sport-specific tweaks are called for (see "The Orton

Edge," opposite), and, of course, getting some of the maniacs Orton trains to throttle it back enough. "Some of these guys, all they want to do is go hard, hard, hard," he says, shaking his head. "Then they wonder about diminishing returns."

Me, I've got a slightly different problem: I hate speed work. So Orton sets out to cure my sprint phobia with Rule No. 2: If You Hate It, Mutate It. "Let's focus on something you *do* like," Orton says. "Something offbeat."

It sounds a little happy-place to me, but what the hell. "Okay. I really like, uh...sawing timber."

That's all he needs to hear. "Right," he diagnoses. "So here's how we're going to make intervals more like sawing wood: Starting now, I want you to accelerate until you've exhaled 30 times. Go fast, but don't focus on the speed. Just focus on those breaths going in and out like a saw going across wood."

I start at the easy pace we used for our warm-up, then let 'er rip...and, surprisingly, enjoy it. Instead of dreading how many more sprints I've got to do, I'm wondering how fast the last one was and whether I can beat it the next time.

Once I've finished 20 minutes of these special "McDougall intervals," Orton and I relax and talk about fantasy races. I've always wanted to try one of the wild trail ultramarathons that are run with the Tarahumara Indians near Mexico's Copper Canyon, but I thought there was no way I could get in that kind of shape, especially training at sea level. But, see, that's because I haven't understood the first, and most important, Orton rule: You're Way Tougher Than You Think. "You want to race the Tarahumara?" he presses. "No problem. Here's what you do...."

## Orton's Rules of Adventure-Sport Training

### Rule No. 1

**You're Way Tougher Than You Think.** "The brain tends to be overprotective of the body," says Orton.

### Rule No. 2

**If You Hate It, Mutate It.** The way to tackle a workout you hate is to turn it into something you like. Hate intervals? Focus on counting breaths, which can make sprints feel like a steady-state run.

### Rule No. 3

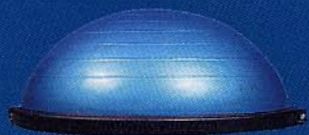
**The Sport You Don't Do Is the One You Need.** The benefits from kayaking, climbing, and snowshoeing are unimaginable till you try them.

### Rule No. 4

**Keep 'Em Keen By Keeping 'Em Guessing.** Novelty is the best motivation. Freshen up your own routine frequently.

To contact Eric Orton, go to [erodynamic.com](http://erodynamic.com).

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# The MJ Adventure Workout

**T**hese one-hour workouts are based on the cross-training plan Eric Orton uses to get his top adventure athletes ready for the season. Though meant for a real hill, they adapt easily to hill settings on

a treadmill or bike. For extra credit, do all crunches, push-ups, and lunges on a Bosu. If doing this outdoors, you may want a stationary trainer for your bike. Otherwise, plot your ride so you're in place for the next drill.



**Key to Cardio Training Zones:** **1 Very easy:** for warm-up. **2 Comfortable:** able to hold a conversation. **3 Moderate:** breathing becomes slightly labored. **4 Comfortably hard:** breathing labored but not heavy. **5a Hard:** breathing heavy but not gasping for air. **5b Very hard:** an effort that can be maintained for only 6 to 8 minutes.

## WEEKS 1 & 2: PREP/ENDURANCE

### Monday

10-minute jog in Zone 1

20-minute run in Zone 2

Do two circuits of the following:

- > 15 jump squats (just squat and jump forward)
- > 20 push-ups
- > 15 lunges (do 15 with one leg, then with the other)

3 sets of 12 "Teton crunches" (like normal sit-ups, but with legs bent and shins parallel to the ground)

3 sets of 10 single-leg Teton crunches with rotation (start like Teton crunch, but with one foot on ground; as you come up, touch your raised knee with your opposite elbow; switch legs to complete set)

3 sets of 12 regular sit-ups

### Wednesday

10-minute bike ride in Zone 1

30-minute bike ride in Zone 2, with 4 evenly spaced 1-minute bursts in Zone 4

3 sets of 10 squats with overhead dumbbell press (start with 8-lb dumbbells at shoulder height, squat down, then, as you straighten up, press weights above your head; reverse motion on the way down)

2 sets of 5 single-leg decline push-ups (with one foot up on a low bench or rock, and other foot in the air)

3 sets of 15 push-ups

3 sets of 15 Teton crunches

### Friday

15-minute jog in Zone 1

Complete the following circuit twice with just the prescribed rest after each run or exercise:

- > 20-second hill run in Zone 4 (walk back down)
- > 12 single-leg body-weight squats (12 squats with one leg raised and extended in front of you, then 12 with the other leg extended; 1-minute rest)
- > 2 20-second hill runs in Zone 4 (walk back down)
- > 10 uphill skating bounds (the "speed-skater" drill described on page 138; walk back down)
- > 3 20-second hill runs in Zone 4 (walk back down)
- > 10 jump squats (1-minute rest)

Finish workout with 10-minute run in Zone 2

## WEEKS 3 & 4: BUILD UP

### Monday

10-minute jog in Zone 1

Do three circuits of the following:

- > 5-minute run in Zone 4
- > 3 1-minute hill runs in Zone 4 (walk back to starting point after each)
- > 2-minute run in Zone 2

Complete the following circuit twice:

- > 15 jump squats
- > 20 push-ups
- > 15 lunges each leg

3 sets of 12 V-sit extensions (starting in seated V position, with knees bent and feet off the ground, extend legs and lower torso, and then return to V for one rep)

3 sets of 15 Teton crunches

### Wednesday

10-minute bike ride in Zone 1

20-minute bike ride in Zone 2

2 5-minute bike rides in Zone 4

3 sets of 15 squats with overhead dumbbell press

3 sets of 10 V-sits with overhead dumbbell press (start in the V-sit position, with a pair of 8-lb dumbbells at your shoulders; without extending your legs or lowering your torso, press dumbbells above your head and return them to your shoulders for one rep)

2 sets of as many continuous push-ups as you can do

3 sets of 15 Teton crunches

### Friday

15-minute jog in Zone 1

Do the following circuit, rest for 5 minutes, then repeat:

- > 45-second hill run in Zone 4 (jog back to start)
- > 8 single-leg body-weight squats
- > 30-second hill run in Zone 5a (jog back to start)
- > 10 single-leg body-weight squats
- > 15-second hill run in Zone 5b (jog back to start)
- > 12 single-leg body-weight squats

3 sets of 12 single-leg Teton crunches with rotation

3 sets of 12 V-sit extensions

3 sets of 20 Teton crunches

## THE ORTON EDGE

A dozen drills to put you over the top in your sport. (Do 12 reps unless otherwise indicated.)



### RUNNING

- > Stand on one leg on Bosu. Perform one-legged squat and finger tap the perimeter of Bosu in as many directions as possible. Alternate hands and legs.
- > Do hill sprints carrying a pair of dumbbells.
- > Do repeats in which you bound up a hill on one leg. Bound for distance, not height.



### PADDLING

- > Get in V-sit position on Bosu, hold weights together, and do row or paddle motion.
- > Start in push-up position with one hand in center of Bosu and other on ground. As you push up, rotate and raise ground arm to sky.
- > Start in push-up position, with feet on Bosu, and do one-arm dumbbell rows.



### BIKING

- > Start with one foot on Bosu, one on ground. Squat and jump, exploding off Bosu leg and landing so opposite leg is on Bosu.
- > Position a fitness ball against wall. Hold a straight bar across ball and do incline push-ups.
- > Do push-ups with each hand resting on a medicine ball of a different size.



### HIKING

- > Holding dumbbells at your sides, squat down, then up. Then, in same motion, curl weights to shoulders and do a press.
- > Holding dumbbells in both hands, do a lunge. During movement, raise weights laterally.
- > Load pack to anticipated weight. Perform hill or stair repeats faster than at hiking pace.