

#32 Tapering — How to Arrive at Race Day Fresh and Sharp*Peaking for Competition — Getting the Volume and Timing Right*

Tapering is the controlled reduction of training volume in the weeks before a target race, while **maintaining or slightly increasing intensity**. Done correctly, the horse arrives on race day with full physiological adaptation achieved, all accumulated fatigue cleared, and muscles primed and fresh. **The taper is where the preparation pays off.**

The two most common tapering mistakes are opposite errors. **Too short a taper** leaves accumulated fatigue — the horse is fit but tired. **Too long a taper** allows detraining — the horse is fresh but fitness has begun declining. Generally: **sprinters** may need 2–3 weeks; **distance horses** may need only 10–14 days. Individual response must be measured and recorded.

KEY POINTS

- Taper = **reduce volume, maintain intensity** — not reduce everything
- Too short: horse arrives tired. Too long: horse loses fitness. **Both are common mistakes.**
- Sprinters typically need a longer taper (2–3 weeks) than distance horses (10–14 days)
- Taper response varies between individuals — **track it across seasons** for each horse
- The taper does not build new fitness — it **uncovers the fitness already built** by removing fatigue

THE SUPERCOMPENSATION LINK

Tapering is supercompensation at the macro scale. The last hard training block is the stimulus. The taper is the recovery phase. **Race day is the performance peak** — the supercompensation window. Get the timing right and the horse arrives at peak capacity on the day it matters.

WHAT TO MAINTAIN DURING TAPER

Maintain **short, sharp, race-pace efforts** (shorter than a full gallop, but at race intensity). This keeps the neuromuscular system primed and prevents the 'flat' feeling that comes from total low-intensity work in the taper week. **Sharp but not deep.**

STABLE QUESTION

"For your last target race — how long before the race did you make the last hard training session, and did the horse arrive fresh and sharp or a little flat? Was that taper long enough?"

TRAINER TAKEAWAY

Every hard week of training builds one layer of the structure. The taper is what **reveals that structure without the fatigue covering it**. A perfectly tapered horse does not feel like it has been resting — it feels like a machine that has been sharpened. The horse gets faster in the last two weeks *because* you backed off. Trust the process.

CONNECTS TO →

Week 2 #18: Supercompensation is the mechanism tapering exploits. | **Monday #27:** Detraining starts quickly — the taper must be precise to avoid it. | **Wednesday #20:** The taper is the final mesocycle in the macrocycle structure.

#20 Training Cycles — The Three Levels of Every Good Programme

Thinking in Days, Weeks, and Seasons — All at the Same Time

Every professional training programme operates across three time scales simultaneously. **Microcycle (typically 1 week)**: the daily training schedule. **Mesocycle (2–7 weeks)**: a block with a single primary goal — aerobic base, anaerobic capacity, speed sharpening. Each mesocycle ends with a lighter recovery week. **Macrocycle (3–6 months)**: the full season — multiple mesocycles building toward one or two performance peaks.

Most professional programmes run **two macrocycles per year**, each ending at a target carnival or race goal. Every individual session must fit within its mesocycle goal, which must fit the macrocycle objective. **No session should exist without a purpose that connects upward to the season goal.**

KEY POINTS

- **Microcycle** = 1 week — daily plan (hard/recovery/track balance)
- **Mesocycle** = 2–7 weeks — one training block with one primary goal
- **Macrocycle** = 3–6 months — full preparation toward a peak
- Every session must fit its mesocycle goal — **no session should exist without a purpose**
- Two macrocycles per year allows two true peaks — more than that usually means no true peak

THE NESTING PRINCIPLE

Each level serves the one above it. A Monday speed session **exists within a mesocycle** targeting anaerobic power, which **exists within a macrocycle** targeting a spring carnival peak. If you cannot describe why a session fits the mesocycle goal, that session may not belong this week.

THE RECOVERY WEEK RULE

Every mesocycle should end with a lighter week — **reduced volume, maintained quality**. This week allows supercompensation to complete before the next block begins. Most amateur programmes omit this week and plateau by week 6.

STABLE QUESTION

"Can you describe your current mesocycle — its goal, its start date, its planned end date, and what mesocycle comes next? If not, the programme may be working at microcycle level only — and missing the bigger picture."

TRAINER TAKEAWAY

Training cycles are not complicated when you write them down. **One page. Three columns: macro → meso → micro**. Map the season end goal, work backwards to design each mesocycle block, then fill in the microcycle week by week. When you have that map, every session has context.

CONNECTS TO →

Week 2 #31: Periodisation is the principle — training cycles are the structure that makes it practical. | **Wednesday #32:** Tapering is the final mesocycle — the taper block — within the macrocycle.