

How to Get Back to the Track

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By Molly Hurford

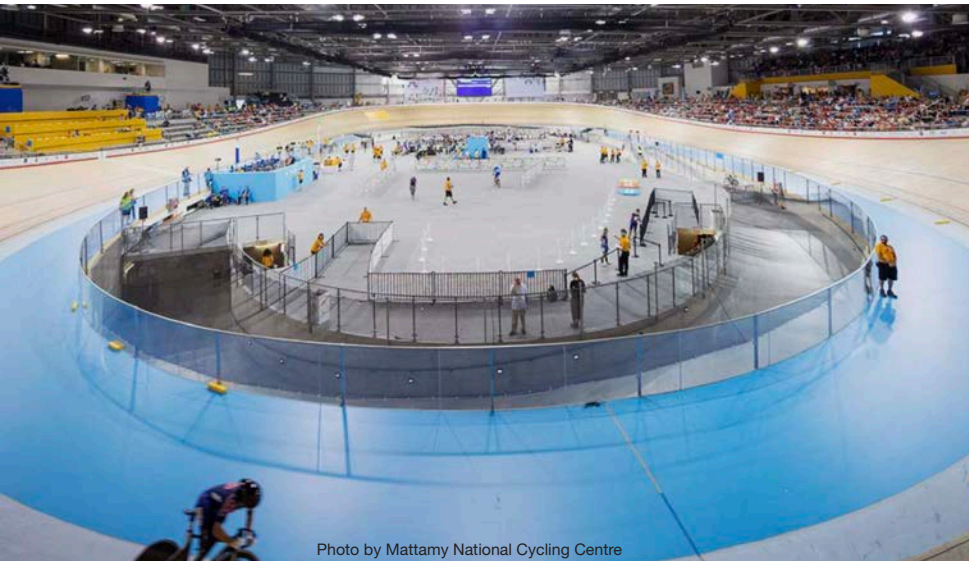


Photo by Mattamy National Cycling Centre

As you may have heard, the Mattamy National Cycling Centre's velodrome in Milton, Ontario, is finally back to nearly full swing, with dozens of races and open sessions now on the calendar. Whether you've been to the track in the past or not, we wanted to break down what you can expect from the track's triumphant return, and how you can get on the track for fun, training, or racing.

Hours/Schedule

Track time is split in the velodrome: There are a plethora of user groups, ranging from Olympians training with Cycling Canada to the National Cycling Institute Milton (NCIM) to the Ontario Cycling Association's high-performance training, not to mention racing. So before you head to the track just because you notice it has open hours, check to see what's actually going on, and whether or not drop-ins are allowed. Most weekdays offer drop-in options, but the hours and numbers of spots available are limited.

What to Expect at the Track

Showing proof of vaccine. There are some exceptions for who can be at the track without a COVID-19 vaccine, but because the rules are changing frequently if you are unvaccinated, it's best to call ahead to check whether or not you'll be able to use the track. For most riders and spectators, though, expect to need to show proof of vaccination to be allowed to use the track facilities, as per Ontario's COVID 19 reopening protocols.

Be prepared to mask up. We know no one loves wearing their masks these days, but that's the situation. While you don't need to wear your mask while riding, expect to wear it most of the time you're in the building and plan accordingly.

Be courteous. As always, be courteous to other riders, track officials, and people who work at the velodrome.

Getting Back on the Track

For many of us, it's been years since we've set foot in (or rubber on) an indoor track. Because of that, provincial coach David Jack reminds new and returning users to take it easy on those first few laps around the velodrome.

Make sure you remember how to use a fixed gear bike, especially if it's been a while since you've ridden one. It's also worth checking that your pedals and headset are tightened adequately, and that your tires are at the correct PSI. Do a few practice laps at the bottom of the track at a slow pace, or on a set of rollers, to make sure everything is working.

Remember low is slow: On the track, the faster paced groups will ride closer to the top of the velodrome during drop in sessions, while the slower groups will stick closer to the bottom of the track. If you're slowing down to stop, make sure as you descend down the track, you're checking over your shoulder to avoid cutting off other riders as you make your way to the bottom and eventually get stopped.

Warm up. As coach David Jack reminds all riders—from youth to masters level—it's incredibly important to take a few minutes to warm up on the trainer or rollers before hopping onto the velodrome. It keeps you and other riders safe, and helps you get the most from your race or workout.

Getting Started on the Track

If you've never ridden on the track before, or you're feeling a little rusty, consider signing up for the adult Try the Track classes that are going on regularly now that the track has reopened. Bike rentals are even included in the cost! You can find sign up information here: www.clients.mindbodyonline.com/ASP/main_enroll.asp. (There are also youth Try the Track options available, and it is highly recommended that both adult and youth cyclists take these classes before trying to race or jump into a drop in ride.)

Racing on the Track

The Ontario Cycling Association will be hosting the 2021/2022 Youth Track Development Series and the Ontario Cup Track Race Series starting the weekend of December 11/12 2021. Registration is now live. And earlier in November, the OCA is hosting a team pursuit clinic for some of the development riders.

Located in the same facility NCIM will be hosting regular adult and junior race nights on many Saturdays nights during the 2021/2022 season. The Akuna Cup hosted by NCIM is happening on November 6 for adults and juniors in honor of KeyIn Akuna, an important member of the track community who passed away last fall, and weekly racing will recommence after National Championships are over.

Starting November 12, three days of Junior Track National Championships will be taking place. For a full calendar of events happening at the Mattamy National Cycling Centre, please visit the Ontario cycling website.

Dropping in on the Track

Dropping in isn't skater lingo for divebombing from the top of the track down to the center, it's a fun way to try out your track skills without the demands and stress of racing. These drop in sessions for riders 13 and up are for "tempo riding" in groups on the track, so plan to be riding harder than your endurance pace, but at a pace you could theoretically hold for a solid hour. You will also need to be track certified (done by taking the try the track courses we mentioned above!) in order to participate in races and drop in sessions.

As coach David Jack says though, take it easy in your first laps: Consider finding a group that seems a little easier than you'd need and ride with them until you feel comfortable with the ebb and flow of the track before jumping into a harder group. There is some skill required to be able to stay in a paceline while navigating around the track riding a fixed gear bike!

Drop-ins happen almost every weekday unless there are events going on, and pricing ranges from \$15 to \$20 per 60 to 90 minute session. Because spots are limited, it's a good idea to sign up well in advance, otherwise you may find that the session you hoped to do is full.

About the Author

Molly Hurford is a journalist in love with all things cycling, running, nutrition and movement-related. When not outside, she's writing about being outside and healthy habits of athletes and interviewing world-class athletes and scientists for The Consummate Athlete podcast and website, and most recently launched the book 'Becoming A Consummate Athlete.' She's the author of multiple books including the Shred Girls, a young adult fiction series and online community focused on getting girls excited about bikes. Molly is a little obsessed with getting people psyched on adventure and being outside, and she regularly hosts talks and runs clinics for cyclists and teaches yoga online and IRL... And in her spare time, the former Ironman triathlete now spends time tackling long runs and rides on trails or can be found out hiking with her mini-dachshund DW and husband, cycling coach and kinesiologist Peter Glassford.