

PT PT INTERVIEW

PT takes a deep breath and talks to 'altitude' specialist **Richard Pullan**

Richard Pullan runs the Altitude Centre in London's Covent Garden. It's a specialist facility that enables athletes and trainers from numerous sports to benefit from exposure to altitude, without going anywhere.

Pullan explained that altitude training can improve your endurance capacity by boosting the number of oxygen carrying red



blood cells – basically you put more fuel capacity into your aerobic engine. He used his own practical experience as an endurance athlete, particularly as a rower – he has competed in the Ward-Evans trans-Atlantic race – to find out how the different altitude training protocols really benefit athletes and trainers. He explained that this involved a great deal of trawling through research papers, attending symposiums, and talking to experts from all over the world – as well as experimenting on himself.

At the Altitude Centre Pullan has a machine that generates thin (hypoxic) air. This is pumped through a tube at the end of which is a face mask that you put on and breath through. Note you are NOT exercising – sitting still and doing this is enough to get the altitude training benefits. Breathing performance is then monitored by computers. Pullan advocates the 'intermittent hypoxic altitude training method' (IHT). It's sort of interval training. It intersperses hypoxic conditions with non-hypoxic ones over a series of sessions. Pullan has also designed a special computer programme that enables clients to specifically control their breathing by keeping a virtual ball in a virtual target. Pullan also works with clients off-site,

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for example, at the near-by The Third Space Health Club. The facility has a hypoxic chamber complete with treadmills and rowers, which was actually installed by Pullan's company and enables him to provide exercise based altitude training workouts.

So who attends his highly specialised form of personal training? “Most people are doing

it for a purpose because they are training for a specific event to boost their endurance, such as cyclists entering the Etape (a race for amateur cyclists over a stage of the Tour de France course) or because they are training for a specific competition or event at altitude,” explained Pullan. He also supplies all the UK sports institutes and some premier league football and rugby clubs. Pullan also explained that the latter use altitude training for injury rehabilitation purposes. A hypoxic environment can speed up the healing process – although the exact mechanisms are highly complex. For soft tissue injuries the treatment is not too dissimilar from the way more standard ice and hot and cold treatments work. Pullan also explained how the treatment will work for bone injuries. “Hypoxic training also stimulates Human Growth Hormone (HGH), so if you have a broken arm you can run in an altitude chamber and HGH will be produced and carried all through the body which will actually help mend your arm.”

As an example of how IHT can enhance performance Pullan mentioned free-diver Mark Harris who improved his breath hold from 6min 30sec to 7min with only 15 days of IHT training. So if you want to up your endurance for a marathon, or 10k run, don't hold your breath, give Pullan a call.

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