

TRI BIKE BASICS- AEROBARS

BY AARON HERSH

Triathletes use aerobars to get into a tuck position that reduces wind drag. We stole the idea from ski racers, but aerobars are one of the most cost-effective ways to upgrade a road bike for triathlon. Light, airfoil-shaped carbon bars are eye-catching, but an aerobar's most important attribute is how it positions the rider. Some are designed to pretzel the rider into an ultra-aggressive position and others are much more forgiving. The right type of bar for you depends on your preferred position and riding style.



Integrated aerobar 3T Aura-Pro

Photos by Nils Nilsson

ROAD BARS

The standard road bar, also known as a drop bar, provides comfortable hand positions and gives the rider excellent control of the bike. This style of bar is ideal for road and group riding, but it puts the cyclist in an upright position that creates a lot of wind drag and slows the rider in a triathlon.

CLIP-ON AEROBARS

A clip-on aerobar can be added to a road bike without making any other changes to the bike. Bolt it onto your road handlebar and you are ready to go. The shifters and brake levers are still located on the

drop bars, but the aerobars allow the rider to get into a wind-cheating tuck that saves major time and energy during the bike leg. Adding clip-ons doesn't alter a bike's

mechanical function, but riding in aerobars changes the rider's position dramatically. It can be difficult to find a comfortable aero position on a road bike, and some styles of



Clip-on aerobar, Profile Design T1+

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aerobar are well suited for use on a road bike. Others are not.

Clip-on aerobars that position the elbow pads high above the handlebar and back toward the rider make it easier to ride in an aero position on a road bike. The Profile Design T1+, the Oval A700 SLAM and the Bontrager Race Lite Aero are all reasonably priced bars with fit characteristics that are ideal for use on a road bike. In addition to selecting an appropriate aerobar, moving the saddle forward and the handlebars up can help compensate for the changes caused by adding aerobars to a road bike, but being professionally fit to your bike is the best way to ensure your comfort and efficiency.

INTEGRATED AEROBARS

Triathlon bikes are usually built with integrated aerobars that have shifters at the end of the aero extensions and brakes on the basebar.

This style of aerobar allows the rider to shift without leaving the aero position. An integrated aerobar can be installed onto a road bike, but it is best reserved for bikes with triathlon-specific geometry.

Manufacturers often refine the shape of the basebar to reduce aerodynamic drag and save a few seconds. The basebar on the 3T Aura, pictured, has an efficient airfoil profile. Techie upgrades, such as a sleek carbon basebar, can make a bar slightly faster than cheaper options with less sex appeal, but the bar's fit characteristics are far more important than any flashy upgrades.

Like clip-ons, integrated aerobars come in different shapes that accommodate different riding styles. Bars that locate the pads high above the basebar, such as the Syntace C3/Stratos CX combination, are ideal for riders that prefer a more upright

position while low-profile bars such as the HED Corsair can accommodate a very aggressive position. Although it can be difficult to ride in a low aero position on a road bike, tri-specific geometry lets many cyclists get low and increases the number of aerobars that might accommodate your personal fit. Again, it is best to consult an experienced bike fitter to find the bar that best suits your needs.

EXTENSION SHAPE

Extension shape is another common difference between aerobars. Some extensions sweep upward and let the rider grip the bar without flexing their wrists. Other bars, known as S-bends, are designed with only a slight kink so the rider can tug on the extensions to get more leverage over the pedals during a hard effort. Extension shape is purely a matter of personal preference. ▀