

## **Time Trialing**

By Susan Ellis

Skating the perfect time trial, whether long track or short track, takes preparation and planning.

You must be prepared both mentally and physically to put it all on the line and know what goes into putting everything you have into attaining the best time you can.

Physically you must do the appropriate training for the specific distance you are time trialing in. Then you need to test your physical preparation in simulation time trials to find out if your training has taken you within range of your target time. Then the question is: "How can I make it even better?" Often the answer lies in the mental preparation and execution. This starts with having a time trial plan or race plan.

***Despite her clear mastery of her sport and competitors, Nesbitt remains grounded, "I feel confident in my skills and fitness, but what I've found is that it's important to have a good race plan; that makes the difference between a good race and a bad race. That, and you can never underestimate anyone; people can just 'show up' and perform.***

***~ Christine Nesbitt following her 4th gold medal in the 1500m this season.***

A time trial plan should include your target lap times for each lap, your track pattern as this does change during the race as you fatigue, your technical cues, and your mental cues.

Some people like to skate what is called a flat time trial. That means that once the opening lap is complete, all the lap times after that are the same with no drop off or getting faster.

Some like to skate a progressive time trial, which means opening fairly conservatively and getting faster each lap. The progressive time trial is risky though because if you open too slow you can never make up the time in the end. Not too many are successful with this method.

Another method is to think of the time trial in 1/3 increments. For instance, in a 1000m short track time trial, the goal in the first 3 laps is to open fairly hard and build your speed. The next 3 laps is about trying to stay consistent with your lap times and maintain the speed you built in the first 3 laps. The last 3 laps, where the fatigue really starts to set in is where you are trying to build speed again, even though the lap times will be dropping off slightly because of fatigue. Your goal in this method is to not let the lap times drop more than 2/10ths per lap.

Learning to skate a good time trial takes lots and lots of practice, finding the right opener, learning what lap times you can handle without dying the big death at the end

and losing more time than you gained by opening too fast, learning what tracks work to help give you the best speed but still maintain relaxation and conserve energy, knowing if 2 hands on your back work better than two arms or one arm swinging, or when to use just one arm or two arms.

Attitude plays a huge role in successful time trialing. Many skaters will never be as good as they can be because they choose to HATE the time trial. In the US and in Korea time trialing plays an important role in short track team selection, and of course you can't be a good long tracker if you HATE time trialing. The wrong attitude can create unnecessary stress in the mind and tension in the body during the time trial. It is also mentally draining before the trial. So, suck it up and find some mental cues that will relieve fear or anxiety of it and allow you to focus on the things you need to do to be your best.

A sample time trial plan for a 1000m short track might look like this: **Target time – 1.36.8**

Keys to success: 3 – 3 – 3 Accelerate 3, Strong exits, Energize tempo

*In the heat box: Imagery of the time trial including track pattern and mental cues.*

*Stepping on the ice: Deep breathe, let it out, and feel confident and ready for the challenge. No fears, no doubts.*

*Come to the line: Another deep confident breath. "I'm ready"*

*Lap 1 = 12.7 Open **hard & quick!** 3 cross in to 1st corner, 2 cross out. **Accelerate** hard out of 1st turn, 4 strokes on 1st straightaway. **Accelerate** into the second turn – 2 cross in, **Accelerate out** – 2 cross out. Feel the burst out of the second corner. Lean it! Great! Reinforce good job done there!*

*Lap 2 = 10.4 Continue **acceleration** in to and out of turns. Use wide / wide track – 2 in, 2 out. Continue building speed, @ 95%. Feel the ride. Focus on "smooth"! Weight moving forward.*

*Lap 3 = 10.3 Feeling **strong**, continue to push it, affirm it's going well. Focus: I have **power**, it feels good. Switch to 1 in 3 out. Chest down!*

*Lap 4 = 10.4 I am feeling **relaxed** but **strong**. Think: "I'm doing well". **Work the exits**, come out fast but smooth. Chest down, knees driving. Maintain speed – 1 in 2 out. Hands on back on straights, one arm swing on corners.*

*Lap 5 = 10.4 Good work, keep it up, keep it **strong**, feel the ride, **work the exits**, 1 in 2 out, feel the power. Ride! Breathe.*

Lap 6 = 10.5 Refresh now, find new energy. I am so strong! Continue to work the exits hard. Refresh position, holding scrunch. Keeping it smooth, feeling the lean, feeling the ride.

Lap 7 = 10.6 OK, here we go, the final sprint, I am so **strong!** Only 3 laps to go. **FEEL: NEW ENERGY**, Feel it! Go! **Work the exits. TEMPO OUT!** 1 in 3 out. One arm swinging.

Lap 8 = 10.7 Going well, getting stronger now, pick it up! "I can do this"! I'm strong! **Work the exits.** Stay compact! Now it's 2 in 2 out again. Give it everything! **TEMPO!** Two arms now.

Lap 9 = 10.8 Awesome! The Last Lap! Pick it up.! **Give it ALL!** Focus on the line! Charge to the line. **TEMPO** to the line! Go!

It is important after each time trial, whether practice or race situation, to record your lap times, how you felt in each lap, what you were thinking and doing in each lap. Evaluation helps you to identify what went well and where you still need to improve. You should discuss your time trial plan with your coach well in advance of the competition so you can both practice it during training. Let your coach know what cue words will help you the most in your race to feel and do the things you need to do. It doesn't help you if you want a certain rhythm and your coach is calling out another rhythm or cue words that you have no idea what they mean.

Having someone video you if possible will help in the assessment to identify exactly where improvements can be made and what the improvements are. For instance: your target time in your 1500m long track is 2:10. So let's say you set your plan for 28.3, 33.7, 33.9, 34.1. But you actually skated 28.0, 33.8, 34.4, 34.8. Your time is now 2.11 instead of 2.10 and it cost you 3 positions in the rankings. What happened? Did you open too fast causing too much energy to be used at the start of the race? Were your entry and exit points exactly where you wanted them? Did your technique change? Position got too high, pushes going backwards, knees not driving through, arm swing? Were your hips coming under you to set up good initial pressure? Did your tempo drop too much? Did you use the technical and mental cue words you needed to execute the things you wanted? Were they the right ones?

The key is to identify areas in the race that went well so you keep those things in your future plan, and to identify areas that didn't go as well and exactly what needs to change in those areas. Identifying areas of change is one thing, but now you need to develop a training and practice plan that works towards those changes. If your knees drive through well when you are not tired but not so good when you are fatigued, is this a matter of you allowing the fatigue to dictate what you need? If you only think of knee drive in training when you are fresh and then just allow yourself to get sloppy because you are tired that is exactly what will happen in racing. You need to find the feeling of consistent knee drive no matter what the fatigue level and use your mental and physical cues to push through it. Only then will you be able to do it consistently in racing.

Something I hear a lot from athletes after a poor time trial is “Why do I always do that!?”. The answer could lie in the preparation. If you always do what you always did, then you’ll always get what you always got. Change the preparation to do what you always want and you will eventually get what you’ve always wanted.

**Race Planning Tools:**

Long Track Lap Time Calculator

Short Track Lap Time Calculator

Competition Plan

Thanks to Carl Cepuran for sharing the LT lap time calculator!

The Long Track Lap Time Calculator is designed for a typical, average, all-arounder type skater who is not a pure sprinter and not a pure distancer, but a good balanced athlete. It is just a guide that should be altered for your own strengths, weaknesses, style, and preferences.

Further reading – Pain control:

[How to Push Past the Pain, as the Champions Do – The New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/19/health/nutrition/19best.html?_r=1&pagewanted=2)

([https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/19/health/nutrition/19best.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=2](https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/19/health/nutrition/19best.html?_r=1&pagewanted=2))

[Pain: A Matter of Perception for Endurance Athletes?](https://serendipstudio.org/exchange/jlustick/pain-matter-perception-endurance-athletes)

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[Pushing Past the Pain of Exertion – The New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/29/fashion/29FITNESS.html?mtrref=www.ellismethod.net&gwh=B961137047A51D8E383549834730D551&gwt=pay&assetType=REGIWALL)

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/29/fashion/29FITNESS.html?mtrref=www.ellismethod.net&gwh=B961137047A51D8E383549834730D551&gwt=pay&assetType=REGIWALL>)