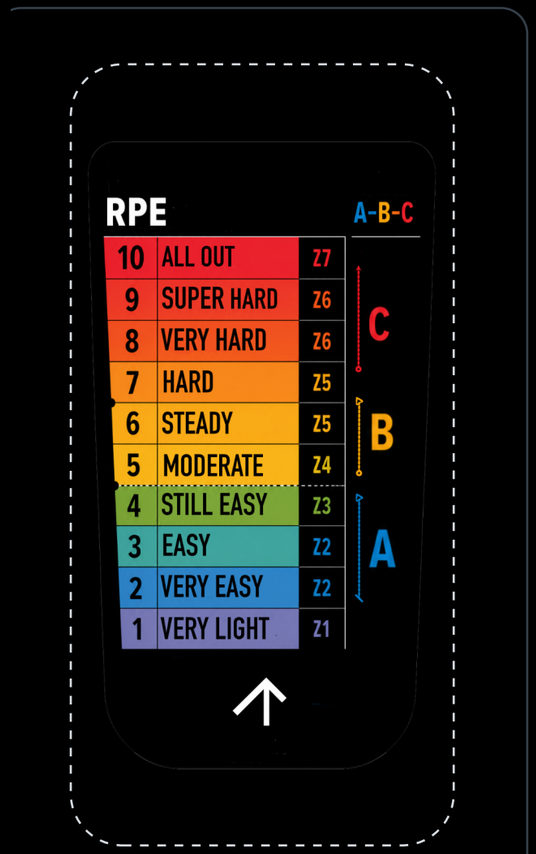
ABC ZONES

A shared language to help athletes connect intention, perceived effort and training intensities in the field.



THREE INTENTIONS TO RECOGNISE

A — EASE — RPE 1-4 • Z1-Z3

Comfortable, controlled and sustainable

Easy conversation, full sentences

B — ENGAGEMENT — RPE 5-6 • Z4-Z5

Sustained effort, focus and control

Shorter phrases, stronger breathing

C — CONSTRAINT — RPE 7-10 • Z5-Z7

Intense, demanding and time limited

Single words or speaking is difficult

SUBJECTIVE LANDMARK

TALK TEST

Speech complements RPE: easy in A, shorter in B and difficult in C. Always consider duration and context.

PHYSIOLOGICAL LANDMARKS

A/B ≈ LT1/VT1
B/C ≈ LT2/VT2
After individual testing

> ZONE "2"

Reference point: upper A • sustained endurance

> THRESHOLD

Reference point: boundary with C • threshold

RPE FEEL SPEECH AND INTENTION

RPE	Perceived effort	Ability to speak	ABC	7 zones
1	Very light	Conversation is very easy	A	Z1
2	Very easy	Easy conversation	A	Z2
3	Easy	Full sentences	A	Z2
4	Still easy	Full sentences, stronger breathing	A	Z3
5	Moderate	Short phrases are possible	B	Z4
6	Sustained	Short phrases are difficult	B	Z5
7	Hard	A few words	C	Z5
8	Very hard	Single words	C	Z6
9	Very, very hard	Speaking becomes very difficult	C	Z6
10	Maximum	Speaking becomes impossible	C	Z7

THE PRINCIPLE

UPRIDE CYCLING

A BRIDGE BETWEEN THREE DIMENSIONS

The ABC scale brings together the stated intention, the athlete's perceived intensity and objective data expressed as training zones. It does not seek to make them identical, but to make their relationship simple, readable and directly usable in the field.

A PHYSIOLOGICAL MODEL, TRANSLATED FOR PRACTICE

ABC draws on the physiological three-zone model widely used and popularised by Seiler. It distinguishes three intensity domains separated by two major physiological thresholds: LT1/VT1 and LT2/VT2.

IN PRACTICE

1 BEFORE

Follow the intended training focus or focuses. The athlete should know what they are trying to produce and how long they should be able to sustain it.

2 DURING

Check sensations regularly. On changing terrain, preserving the intention matters more than holding a perfectly stable value that is difficult to reproduce on open roads, in a group or in changing weather.

3 AFTER

Identify the dominant register and its nuances, then compare this feedback with RPE and the available data.

INTERPRET WITHOUT RIGIDITY

The boundaries between A, B and C do not directly measure physiological thresholds. After individual testing, they may be related to LT1/VT1 and LT2/VT2 to enrich the analysis. Without testing, ABC remains fully operational: intention, perceived effort and speech are enough to guide the effort.

HOW TO READ IT

- ABC - guides intention and engagement; links with RPE and the seven-zone model remain indicative.
- ZONE '2' - a reference point in upper A, reflecting sustained endurance work.
- THRESHOLD - a reference point at the boundary with C, reflecting maximal sustainable intensity.
- EXTREMES - training occurs mainly between RPE 2 and 9; RPE 1 and 10 primarily serve as perceptual anchors.

WHY USE IT?

ABC remains available all year, across all terrains and conditions, and in different endurance disciplines. It helps athletes become progressively autonomous: understand the instruction, choose their engagement, recognise their sensations and interpret data without becoming dependent on it.

POINT TO WATCH

A mismatch between the stated zone, reported RPE and the data is not automatically an error. It opens a discussion about fatigue, conditions, understanding of the instruction or the athlete's ability to self-regulate.

REFERENCES

Borg, G. (1982), Psychophysical bases of perceived exertion. MSSE, 14(5), 377-381. • Foster, C. et al. (2001), A new approach to monitoring exercise training. JSCR, 15(1), 109-115. • Seiler, K. S. & Kjerland, G. Ø. (2006), Quantifying training intensity distribution in elite endurance athletes. Scand J Med Sci Sports, 16(1), 49-56. • Seiler, S. (2010), What is best practice for training intensity and duration distribution in endurance athletes? IJSPP, 5(3), 276-291. • Sitko, S. et al. (2025), What Is Zone 2 Training? Experts' Viewpoint. IJSPP.