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Roadkill Fitness: Surviving and Thriving Through Variance

Motorcycle nomad Pat Sherwood is forced to embrace his weaknesses and finds he's still got strengths.

By Pat Sherwood

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Ian Wittenber

I'm not a talented Olympic lifter, and that doesn't bother me. I would get my ass kicked by Lindsey Valenzuela, Elisabeth Akinwale or Camille Leblanc-Bazinet using the same loading. I practice the snatch and the clean and jerk because of the positive adaptations they provide to my overall fitness.

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Ian Wittenber

On those days when he can get to an affiliate, Sherwood joins the group for the workout of the day.

With that in mind, I try to do 30 squat snatches a week just to keep my “skills” sharp. A few months ago I began this little ritual with 135 lb. Each week I would stay at the same weight or, if I felt froggy, bump it up 5 lb. These sessions are like a rushed heavy day for me. I don’t time them (just as I wouldn’t time a heavy day), but I move with a purpose and try to minimize my rest. The key to neurologically demanding lifts is practice.

The heaviest I recently worked up to was 30 snatches with 165 lb. I was ecstatic!

But given that we were about to begin a 100-day motorcycle journey through 16 countries, the only gear I decided to pack was a pair of wrist wraps and a jump rope. I was prepared for my precious squat snatch to go to shit.

That hasn’t been the case, though. As I write this—35 days into our expedition—we’ve only been able to touch a barbell about twice every seven to 10 days, which is way less than I’m used to. The overwhelming majority of our workouts have been with body weight or very light weights. Burpees, air squats, handstand push-ups, hollow

rocks, broad jumps, running, and doing Cindy when we can find something to hang from have occupied the lion’s share of our programming.

At the Zion National Park in Utah, we marked out the distance and did Death by 10-Meter Sprints. It was hot and the level of suffering was high. In the same parking lot, we used parking-space lines as broad-jump goals. Once you landed on the line, we did air squats until our legs shook. With literally zero gear, we crushed ourselves.

When we’ve rolled into a country or city with an affiliate, we usually join a class. Whatever the WOD is, we do it. For better or worse, most have been light workouts. We have yet to pop in on a heavy day or Oly day. It’s not uncommon to do 150 burpees on our own one day, then hit an affiliate the next day only to find 90 to 100 more burpees in the workout. Oh well—we’re happy just to work out with some fellow CrossFit athletes.

At CrossFit 52 Hermosillo in Sonora, Mexico, we joined the 7-p.m. class for a team WOD. We made new friends who spoke a different language, and through broken

Spanish and hand gestures we completed the WOD. We had a frigging blast. A language barrier was a new form of variance for us.

After a day of riding in the freezing-cold rain, we pulled into the parking lot of Distrito CrossFit in Guadalajara, Mexico. To add insult to injury, the box is at about 3,000 feet of elevation and the WOD was a version of The Seven. Shit! That's one of the most painful WODs in the world, and it's the last thing we wanted to do. So, we took off our wet clothes, put on some shorts, took a sip of water and proceeded to get demolished by the workout and basically everyone in the class.

In Cholula, Puebla, Mexico, at CrossFit 72700, we finished another all-day ride in the cold rain and immediately did Helen at 2,150 meters, aka 7,050 feet of elevation.

Sinaloa, Mexico, is best known for the infamous cartel with the same name. With that in mind, we decided camping outdoors was unwise. We stayed in a hotel that had a pair of 30-lb. dumbbells and wound up creating something awful. We hit a 10-minute AMRAP of 5 dumbbell burpees and 5 dumbbell thrusters. It was brutal, and we didn't get kidnapped by the cartel. I call that a win-win.

In Mazatlan, Mexico, you would pour sweat standing in the shade. We waited until the sun went down and found a park that had monkey bars. Cindy was performed at night in the mud and grass of the park. Twenty minutes and 21 rounds later, we felt like champions for getting in another workout when all we wanted to do was seek out air conditioning.

This next one was so bad that I hope someone tries it: while at a hotel gym in Guadalajara, I maxed out the treadmill incline and set the speed to 3 mph. I then brought a set of 50-lb. dumbbells and put them next to the treadmill. For 60 minutes, I walked on the treadmill (no hands!) but hopped off every 6 minutes for 10 dumbbell thrusters. So I got in 3 miles of uphill walking and 100 dumbbell thrusters. I nearly died after that one. Variance, indeed.

The few times I have been able to hit my own workout at an odd time between an affiliate's classes, I have tried to touch a heavy barbell simply to keep my training balanced.

What I've discovered has surprised me: I've felt great with heavy loads even though 90 percent of what we are doing has been body weight or light. Heavy loads for sets of 3 or 5? Done deal: no change in my numbers.



Pat Sherwood

At CrossFit 502 in Guatemala, Sherwood found out his squat snatch had not abandoned him during weeks of body-weight training.

Recently, I got to do my 30-squat-snatches workout in Guatemala City, Guatemala. As I warmed up, I was talking to myself, preparing myself for a disappointing session: "Just do 30 at whatever weight feels heavy given how sporadic lifting has been. If 135 feels heavy, that's OK," I told myself. Long story short, I used 165 lb. and felt amazing. This has happened both times I've been able to lift heavy.

My theory is that my normal training before this trip might have been slightly biased to barbell work. If that's the case, it's probably doing me more good than I realize to focus on running, body-weight WODs and WODs with light weights.

CrossFit has always professed that embracing the things you are not good at will improve your overall fitness in such a dramatic way that it's tough to explain. I knew this already. So why am I shocked? Maybe because I'm not giving the advice to someone else this time; I'm living it.



About the Author

Pat Sherwood works for CrossFit as a flowmaster and member of the Media Team. He's done just under 200 seminars all around the globe for CrossFit HQ and competed in the 2009 CrossFit Games. He hates HSPU and loves ice cream.