



Cycle the virtual Tour de France 2020 | Photo source Zwift

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PLATFORM FOR CYCLISTS ALLOWS FOR TRAINING AND GROUP RIDES REMOTELY

 SPORT & FITNESS

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, a digital racing platform has combined with hardware that makes any bike high-tech and stationary

Spotted: With the COVID-19 pandemic preventing us from exercising outdoors and with other people, a platform that allows people to bicycle with friends has taken off. Zwift is an app that allows cyclists to not only train at home but to ride along with friends — virtually. Zwift was founded in 2014 but saw its use grow exponentially during the pandemic, as people looked for other ways to get their daily exercise.

Through Zwift’s digital platform, you can go on privately organised group rides, making the app as much a social experience as a means of exercise. The surge in use actually came as a surprise to Zwift, which had pulled its online advertising, expecting a seasonal drop in the app’s usage as the weather warmed up.

To use Zwift, cyclists must turn their road and racing bikes into stationary ones, for home-usage. Many cyclists have turned to Wahoo for this, a company which manufactures high-end gear such as Kickr, a large flywheel that uses algorithms to replicate the sensation of riding on the road; or Climb, which lifts the bike frame up and down to simulate hills. Consequently, Wahoo has seen a surge in business that mirrors Zwift’s.

Virtual cycling is also now poised to go one step further. With restrictions on live sports events still in place, Zwift and the Amaury Sport Organisation (ASO), which runs the Tour de France, are partnering on a virtual charity race which will be broadcast across the globe. The race will take place over three weekends and begin in Watopia, a fictional, fantasy racecourse in Zwift, but will end at a virtual Arc de Triomphe in Paris. Julien Goupil, ASO media director **explains**, “I’m not saying it will be

the same if you win the virtual Tour as the real Tour. But I think it will create some noise on social networks, and there will be some competition.”

During the coronavirus lockdowns, virtual and at-home exercise has been a necessity for many people, both physically and mentally. At Springwise, we covered a [marathon](#) that is encouraging individuals to run and a wearable that focuses on helping athletes [avoid](#) popular areas. But it remains to be seen whether people will want to exercise away from crowds once the pandemic subsides.

Written By: Lisa Magloff

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Website: [zwift.com](https://www.zwift.com)

Contact: [zwift.com/uk/contact-us](https://www.zwift.com/uk/contact-us)

Takeaway:

Using Zwift requires that cyclists invest in either a stationary bike, or the gear to convert their own into a stationary cycle. But for avid cyclists, it is a way to bring realism to virtual cycling. However, its use in Esports may be subject to some of the same issues as real-life cycling. For example, the app calculates your speed based upon your strength to weight ratio and some suggest that the app can be “gamed” by shaving a few pounds off the riders’ weight. But for non-pros, it is a great way to ride socially and to keep your body and your mind healthy, at any time.