



Cyclists of every age and ability ride for fun, fitness, good causes

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They sport muscular calves and sleek upper bodies, and are encased in aerodynamic helmets, reflective Lycra and slick rain gear, their bodies tucked in tightly atop delicate two-wheelers that seem unable to hold the weight of a toddler and yet handily transport their adult charges up steep inclines and down breezy slopes.

It's been said, and you need only look about to see the evidence, that cycling is the new golf. And so it seems, at least for baby boomers, who do have a habit of reinventing the wheel.

Easy to see why. Cycling is flexible, lacks boundaries, has less impact than many other sporty pursuits and need not be expensive. And, of course, it can be done year-round in this little corner of the country, where snow is an infrequent inconvenience.

And so today we have a Metro Vancouver landscape chock-a-block with triathletes in training, trail riders, BMXers, cross-country tourers, back road racers and mountain bikers. They're competitive and non-competitive. Some ride bikes to and from work. Others prefer comfy ultra-trendy cruisers, with their singsong bells and wicker baskets.

You also might have noticed that, along with the bike shops that have popped up all over town like new annuals planted in the retail garden, there are dozens of bike-related events filling the calendar, many of them with altruistic intentions such as raising awareness and funds for causes from mental illness to cancer research.

Wheel 2 Heal. Friends for Life Bike Rally. Cycling for Independence. Race the Ridge. Ride Don't Hide. GearUP4CF. Test of Metal. Enough is Enough Ride. Velopalooza. GranFondo.

The Ride to Conquer Cancer, for one, raised \$9.1 million earlier this month when its 2,100 entrants embarked on a two-day ride from Vancouver to Seattle. Since 2008, the event has raised \$200 million across Canada.

Many of the riders are elite, but just as many are inexperienced, with adventure and altruism often the driving forces.

Philip Josephs is one of those who has joined the accidental cyclists' club.

He's 63, retired from the Vancouver park board in 2010 and admits he has "never been a proper cyclist.

"I had never done more than a day of cycling," says Josephs, nor did he own a bicycle built for racing.

But when the opportunity came to take part in the End to End bike ride across Britain last month, he took up the challenge along with two friends: 64-year-old Mark Podkolinski and Peter Thorne, 62.

In preparation, Josephs did a bit of training and took his trusty 24-speed touring bike to The Bike Doctor in Vancouver, where it was outfitted with puncture-proof tires, revised handle grips and a "granny gear" to help him up the hills.

The Bike Doctor owner Paul Bogart has run his store for 23 years and is familiar with the cyclical popularity of cycling.

There's no question, he says, the sport is increasingly appealing to baby boomers looking for a way to maintain low-impact fitness and, literally, expand their horizons.

"There are a lot more older people wanting to get into cycling who haven't been doing it for a long time. It can be a daunting thing for a non-cyclist ... but it's surprisingly easy to get into. Everyone rode a bike when they were young."

Not only has recreational cycling become more socially acceptable, says Bogart, but events like fundraising ride-a-thons provide "a safer venue supported by a community of people who aren't pros."

He has also noticed more customers take their bikes with them when they travel, incorporating cycling into vacations.

Josephs and his pals started out in Glasgow May 9 and eventually wound their way to Land's End in Cornwall, on the southern tip of Britain, along with 3,000 other enthusiasts, staying in villages and B&Bs, and the occasional hostel, and sampling local fare like haggis and black pudding along the way.

They cycled 1,600 kilometres during 19 days, uphill and down dale, covering an accumulated elevation that was calculated by a computer attached to one the bikes at 16,735 metres - about twice the height of Mount Everest.

It was as much a convivial quest as a physical and mental challenge for Josephs, and also a way to reconnect with the country in which he was born but had seldom explored beyond London.

"The toughest part of the journey was the hills," he says, perhaps not unexpected given his regular exercise is taking the family dog for its daily walk.

"But once I started, I knew I would get to Land's End somehow."

He did, and he was not alone.

"A lot of the people on the trip were people like us," he says, meaning baby boomers seeking a personal challenge and a way to give back.

Josephs alone raised \$4,500 to help those suffering from brain cancer.

"I think people, as they get older, should have a few goals, you know, where you are extending yourself."

And it doesn't hurt, he says, "when you have a different pub to go to every night."

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