



Thursday, March 24, 2005

This group takes cycling seriously

By Mike Touzeau

Long before Lance, these folks were into this big time.

No club, no bylaws, no meetings called to order. Instead, they just "form up and go."

Some from Sahuarita, a couple from Tucson, the rest from Green Valley, they all have one shared passion--a love of the open road atop their favorite two-wheeled transports.

Every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday morning, they do the same thing they've done for more than 10 years now--circle the wagons, er, bikes at West Center and head out to the San Xavier Mission or Madera Canyon, or maybe Mount Hopkins visitor center to put in their 50 or 60 miles.

They carry tools and extra tubes to help each other out, just in case, and sit down for breakfast or lunch together at the halfway point, or when they get back, 20 or so neon yellow-jacketed seniors around the table, sipping coffee and swapping stories of the road.

They admit they're serious about this, and in fact, consider themselves the unofficial "A Team" of informal cycling around here, "the fast group," as the equally unofficial group leader Bill Adamson calls his followers, since their five- or six-hour trips require the kind of communal effort that apparently wasn't forthcoming from the splinter group that prefers to take a more leisurely pace, "the half-fast group," they're playfully dubbed.

"These are all good, experienced cyclists," said group member Dan Blodgett, "and they teach you a lot."

Ruth Huking founded the group about 15 years ago, and Bob Gullet has kept it going for "members" like Adamson, who took up the sport through his 40-year friend and fellow engineer Jim Jordan, who lured him away from running marathons and taught him proper technique and race strategy.

Adamson and his wife Marylee were also inspired by long-time riders like Vinton Clarke, who at age 85 a few years ago was still doing 100-mile jaunts.

National competition

The couple has ridden in national and Senior Olympic competitions, and Bill has done the Triple Bypass twice, not the operation, but the race. It's a 120-mile, 10,000-foot climb over

three major mountain passes in Colorado.

They also participate in the Bike Patrol for the El Tour de Tucson and the one in Phoenix.

It becomes increasingly obvious after you meet with these 60-80-year-olds that this is not for sissies.

Gullet, for example, has had two knee replacements, and according to Adamson, "threw away his walker two days after the surgery, threw away his crutches a week later, and rode a 'century' (100 miles) within that year."

Former Chicago Black Hawk Len Wilson is still running with "the fast group" at age 77. He didn't even start bicycling until after he'd retired.

Harold Herum, now in his 70s, has ridden across the country and down the Mississippi, Eleanor Hamre, who has won four national biking medals, helps represent the ladies, and John Crankshaw carries a photo around he calls "the fat guy" to remind him of the 150 pounds he lost from cycling.

Calgary snowbird Carmen Augustini is probably the most accomplished rider, though, having finished 16 Ironman races, setting several records in Canada and the United States in his age group.

Triathlete of the Year

He was the Canadian National Masters Long Distance Triathlete of the Year in 2001 and has also made Inside Triathlon magazine's All-American list four times.

Augustini's a Canadian track cycling champion and has done the Boston Marathon in less than three hours.

So, though they're in it for the fun and fellowship, and of course, the exercise, make no mistake, these folks are serious cyclists.

"Like any other sport, you don't get there by wishing," Adamson said, "you get there by doing."

Alluding to the famous line "because it's there," from mountain climber George Mallory when asked why he scaled Mount Everest, Adamson gave a simple, straightforward answer to those who might ask why the group that's average age is close to 70 continues to push the pedals hard for 150 miles every week.

"Because we want to, we like to, and we can."

mtouzeau@gvnews.com 625-5511 x 127