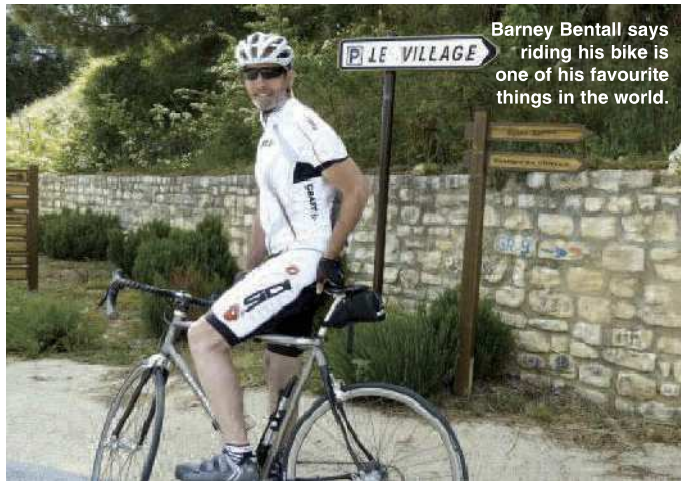


[PEDALING]

Barney Bentall and Jim Cuddy Strut Their Stuff...

BY LISA EVANS



Canadian artists Barney Bentall and Jim Cuddy are not only great musicians, but cyclists too. This September, they combined both passions at the 2013 GranFondo in Niagara, Ont. While music may be their livelihood, cycling is their passion.

In addition to cycling the 125 kilometres of the Fondo, they also jumped onstage to deliver a free concert to close off the event. Here's what they had to say about the sport and their post-Fondo performance:

Barney Bentall

You could say Vancouver-based pop/rock singer and songwriter Barney Bentall has music in his blood, but perhaps if the Juno-award-winning artist hadn't made a career in music, he would have been a cyclist. "I started mountain biking in North Shore Vancouver when it was really almost a fringe sport," says Bentall, who rode in his fourth gran fondo in Niagara this fall. "Riding my bike is one of my favourite things in the world," he says recalling childhood days when he borrowed his sister's bike to ride down the steep ravines in Calgary, Alta.

Bentall has found a way to integrate his passion for cycling into his musical career. "I usually go away to write [songs], and I always have a bike with me, so I'll be working on songs and I'll go out for an hour or two," he says. The opportunity to take off on the open road provides Bentall with a platform to distill his thoughts. "Things will kind of unlock when I'm out there on a bicycle," he says.

Bentall even takes his road bike with him on tour. His favourite, which he will be riding at the Gran Fondo, is a custom hand-built bike made by Sam Whittingham. Whittingham, the founder of Naked Bicycles based out of Quadra Island, B.C., holds the world record for the fastest human-powered machine. "It looks more like a rocket than a bicycle," says Bentall. The titanium frame has couplings in the middle that allow it to fold in half. "I can fit it in a checkable suitcase, but it's a full-size road bike. It's a beautiful machine," boasts Bentall. Even when this cycling enthusiast doesn't have his Naked bike with him, he's developed relationships with bike shops across the country who lend him a bike when he's visiting.

Living on Bowen Island, located in Northwest Vancouver, provides Bentall with some great hills to practise on. "Right near where I live, we



have a pretty big hill that takes exactly 18 minutes to ride up. At the end of the day, if I haven't done anything, I'll just hop on the bike before it gets dark and ride up that hill," he says.

Bentall is just as excited about performing at the Fondo as he is about riding it, saying the euphoric atmosphere of the audience fuels his passion for performing. "[Jim Cuddy and I] go up there in our cycling outfits and play in front of all these people who are in this wonderful state, having just accomplished this bike ride," he says.

Jim Cuddy

Blue Rodeo singer/guitar player Jim Cuddy was first introduced to cycling while performing in California six years ago. "Everyone was biking, and I thought okay, I'll try this, and I couldn't believe how hard it was," Cuddy laughs. After learning a few riding tips, he became hooked on the sport.

His wife, actress Rena Polley, began riding with him the following year. Being able to do an activity with his partner of more than 30 years was a great motivator. "We don't really do any other sports together and it's such a gender-equal sport," says Cuddy. Together, the couple has been on several cycling trips, including one to Cape Town, South Africa, which Cuddy describes as some of the most beautiful scenery in the world. Polley joined him at the Niagara GranFondo on Sept. 14.

While Cuddy has participated in two gran fondo events in Vancouver, he's excited to do the ride on home soil. Although he lives in Toronto, Ont., he also has a home on the Niagara Escarpment and says he's looking forward to cycling through the landscape, which transforms into a thing of beauty in the fall.

Although Cuddy appreciates the physical-activity benefits of cycling, it's the sensory experience of the sport that appeals most. He says the ability to propel oneself through space using one's own physical momentum allows for the opportunity to take in the sights in a very different way than would be possible behind the wheel of a car. "The first thing that struck me about biking is that while you're seeing the land, you're also smelling and feeling the air," he says.

Performing with longtime friend Bentall is a highlight of the Fondo for Cuddy. The duo have jumped up onstage at the last two Vancouver fondos, performing with the house band in their cycling gear. "The pictures we have of ourselves are pretty funny," says Cuddy, who says the energy he derives after a day of cycling makes performing all the more enjoyable.

"I think people feel performing is just so incredibly enervating that you couldn't possibly do it after a long ride, which is quite the reverse. You're actually kind of energized after a ride. A lot of people come up to both Barney and I and say, 'I can't believe you got up there and did a couple of songs,' and we say, 'I can't believe you sat on your ass and drank beer,'" laughs Cuddy.