

[PEDALING]

CLUBS

Handcycling Club of Canada

BY LISA EVANS

F In October 2008, at the age of 37, Robert Buren broke his back mountain biking. "I went off a jump and landed on my head," he says. Four weeks later, he was zooming around the hospital on a handcycle. "It was the best feeling in the world," he recalls. He immediately ordered one and within nine months completed the Ride to Conquer Cancer, a two-day, 200-kilometre ride from Toronto to Niagara Falls, Ont. The only handcyclist among thousands of able-bodied cyclists, Buren realized how underdeveloped the sport of handcycling was in Canada.

Cycling had been such a large part of Buren's life before his accident, it wasn't something he was going to give up. He knew there were others who, like him, had lost the use of their legs in adulthood who felt the same about the sport. The independence the handcycle provided, the social aspect of the sport and the physical and mental health benefits Buren experienced were incredible. "Being able to power myself [after losing the use of my legs] was amazing," he says. So in the beginning of 2013, Buren co-founded the Handcycling Club of Canada. Now with 70 members, the club's mandate is to promote the sport of handcycling in Canada and show those with disabilities a new way to be active.

Members of the club have found running races such as the Yonge Street 10K ideal environments for handcycling. "Because the road is closed and it's safe, it's a great opportunity [for us to get out on our bikes]," says Buren. While some members have raced in Defi Sportif and a few members are Paralympians, the club's main focus is recreational. "We get together, go for a ride, stop at a coffee shop and talk to the general population about what we're doing," he says.

When out on the road, Buren says the public's reaction to the group of handcyclists is often amusing. "We get comments like 'That looks like a comfortable bike' or 'Lying down on the job, are you?'. They just think it's a recumbent bike," he says. One of the goals of the club is to educate the public about handcycling as a sport. "It goes from the assumption that it's a recumbent [bicycle] to 'Oh my good-



ness, how are you doing that?' Quite often, people are inspired or surprised to know that people who can't use their legs are getting out," says Buren. Able-bodied cyclists are even more impressed. "We run into able-bodied cyclists who say 'I had to walk up that hill, how did you do that?' I just laugh and say 'I didn't have a choice. I couldn't walk up it,'" he jokes.

Those roadside conversations have caused membership in the club to grow. "When someone calls and says they're interested in handcycling, we'll ask for their location and match them with someone who lives nearby," says Buren. Members love to talk handcycling with anyone who is interested.

One of the goals of the club is to allow members to sell, borrow or loan their bikes. The average handcycle costs \$6,000-7,000. "It's an unfortunate barrier for many people," says Buren. The other unfortunate barrier is safety on the road. "Every year, someone gets hit by a car, which can have disastrous results," says Buren. To reduce the risk, Buren says everyone attaches a flag to their bikes and the group often rides with an able-bodied cyclist to increase their visibility. "On a good handbike, you can keep up with most able-bodied cyclists," says Buren, whose own bike has flown down a hill at 83km/hr and typically has an average speed of more than 30km/hr.

The club recently received a \$5,000 grant from the Canadian Paralympic Committee to aid with the promotion, recruitment and development of the sport of handcycling. "We'd love to see a good representation of handcycling at all of the cycling events, races and charity rides. Rather than people being surprised to see handcycling, they will start to expect it," says Buren. Most of all, Buren hopes to give people such as himself who have lost the use of their legs a feeling of empowerment. "Many of [our members] suffered a spinal cord injury at some point in their lives and, while we miss our bikes, we're extremely grateful that we can still enjoy and benefit from cycling, just with our arms and handcycles instead."

For more information, visit www.handcycling.ca.

► IN BRIEF

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appeal for retailers and stakeholders in the Canadian cycling industry.

The board determined there is a need for BTAC to renew and revitalize its value proposition to its membership and various stakeholders.

Taking the year off to focus on reinvigorating BTAC and come back to the annual show in 2015 with renewed relevance, value, and sustainability, BTAC plans to signifi-

cantly revamp the association's brand and value proposition to its members this year.

IOC and UCI Discuss CX at Winter Olympics

An important discussion between the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) regarding the possible inclusion of a new cycling event at the Olympic Games

took place in January. Peter Van Den Abeele, off-road manager at the UCI, met with Christophe Dubi, sports director of the IOC, to discuss the inclusion of cyclocross in the Olympic Winter Games program, reported Belgium-based *Het Nieuwsblad*.

For years, cyclocross advocates have been hoping for years for inclusion in Olympic Games, but now a number of factors could

make this a reality, one being Brian Cookson, the new UCI president, is an advocate of cyclocross and apparently gets on well with the new IOC President Thomas Bach.

Cataford, Piccoli and Woods Sign with Italy's Amore & Vita

The Italian-based Continental road team Amore & Vita-Selle SMP has

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