

McGill Cycling Team

Studying Isn't the Only Thing to Do on Campus

BY LISA EVANS



McGill Cycling Team

When they aren't hitting the books, a group of students from McGill University are hitting the road on their bikes. The McGill Cycling Team is a student-run cycling program aimed at developing collegiate riders and providing university students with the opportunity to participate in races and social group rides during the academic year and summer.

Started by Patrick Cafferty in 2000, the original aim of the club was to help student cyclists participate in races such as the ECCC (Eastern College Collegiate Conference) at an affordable price. In 2009, as universities were reducing their costs by cutting funding to sports teams, McGill Cycling lost its varsity status and, with it, all funding from the university.

But through private sponsors and a team of dedicated students, the club has been able to maintain its presence on campus and make a mark in the city of Montreal. Today, McGill Cycling has evolved from a racing club to one that also promotes recreational cycling on campus. "We want to appeal to people who just want to ride bikes and have fun," says Philippe Tremblay, vice-president of sponsorships.

At the 2014 Army Spring Classic in West Point, N.Y. hosted by the United States Military Academy (l-r) Sarah Shipley, Andrew Yao, Dominique Danco, Pete Watson, Eric Burge, Mike Baird, Jessica Cooper, Philippe Tremblay, and Debra Kelsall.

Through an active cycling forum where weekly rides and events are posted, these university riders have contributed to building the popularity of cycling in Montreal. "It's probably the most active cycling forum in Montreal," says Tremblay. The forum attracts not only current McGill students, but also alumni and even members of the community who have no affiliation with the university, but who join the club's weekly rides.

While McGill Cycling prefers members to have some connection to McGill – either as students, faculty, staff or alumni – the only requirement to join the club is a membership fee of \$40. To race with the McGill Cycling Team, however, members must be current McGill students and pay a team membership fee of \$100. Currently with 23 racing team members and 45 club members, McGill Cycling has helped raise the sport's profile on campus.

Weekly group rides cater to a range of abilities and intensities, supporting the needs of all members, who range from neophytes to experienced racers. From the club's Monday morning beginner ride that focuses on the technical aspects of cycling to its Tuesday Points race around the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve F1 track and its weekend-group long rides (between 60-200 kilometres), there's something for everyone. This year, McGill Cycling added a new Wednesday morning women's ride to attract more women on campus to cycling. "That ride has become very popular," says Tremblay.

During the winter, members participate in spin classes led by veteran members, power training through their sponsor, Toguri Training Services, and weekly plyometrics sessions (a form of exercise known as "jump training" or "plyos" that focuses on muscle extension and contraction through repeated jumping, primarily used by athletes in martial arts or high jumpers to improve their performance).

By far, the club's most popular event is its spring training camp in South Carolina. While Montreal is locked in with snow, riders take their bikes down south during spring Reading Week. "The roads are awesome, and it's a great way to take your cycling to another level before the season has even begun," says Tremblay. It's also a great social bonding experience for the team.

The financial support the team receives through private donors helps student cyclists participate in races they otherwise wouldn't be able to afford. Apart from providing an opportunity for students to compete, Tremblay says the club also plays a role in developing future cyclists and bringing new riders into the racing scene. "We're allowing people to get the introduction to racing and the opportunity to develop, so once they've graduated, they can pursue their cycling career," he says. Plus, the added social element of cycling means students are able to develop networks of riders who want to continue racing once they've graduated. Tremblay, now in his third year of studies, says many of his friends are affiliated with McGill Cycling.

For many, riding with McGill Cycling doesn't end upon graduation. Tremblay notes that alumni play a key role in the club. "They have the experience and they're good at motivating younger riders," says Tremblay. Some alumni remain club members because they enjoy going to McGill Cycling's training camps, participating in weekly rides and receiving the benefit of membership perks, including discounts from sponsors.

For more information, visit www.mcgillcycling.com.

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