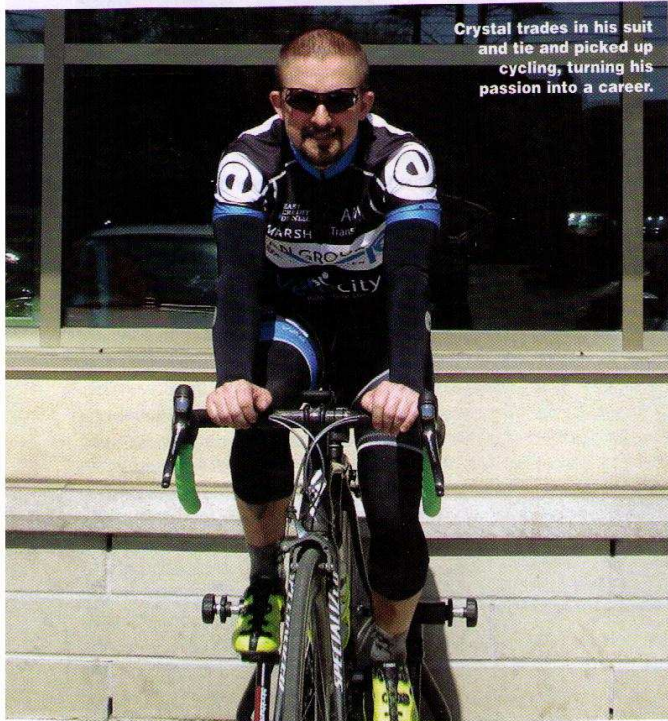


Trevor Crystal Takes on Canada

7,000km Over 17 Days



Lisa Evans

Trevor Crystal has undertaken many physical challenges since re-embracing his childhood love of cycling less than 10 years ago, but on Sept. 5, he will embark on the greatest adventure yet.

Crystal will join dozens of other cyclists in what promises to be a physically grueling, emotionally heart-wrenching and mentally exhilarating experience of a lifetime. He and his Specialized Roubaix Expert road bike will hit the pavement, putting in 200 to 300 kilometres per day, riding for 17 days from Vancouver, B.C. to Halifax, N.S. as part of the Sears National Kids Cancer Ride.

Known as the "Bike Guy" at Toronto's Chain Reaction Bicycles, Crystal re-discovered his love of cycling after ditching his suit-and-tie career as a project manager and embracing a healthier lifestyle. At 5'5" and 210 lbs., he seemed an unlikely candidate to one day cycle across the country. "Despite having excelled at other sports, like winning a national title in wrestling, somehow I lost sight of fitness as a part of life. It might have been the all-too-common quest for the almighty buck that blinded me. After over a decade in a suit, it was obvious from my size that big changes were necessary," reminisces Crystal.

He fell in love with a Cannondale "Bad Boy" and decided to turn his passion for cycling into a career. Having had this life transformation on the floor of Chain Reaction Bicycles, Crystal talked the owners into letting him help out around the shop. "Having no experience in the bike industry at all meant I was starting at the bottom, but I knew this passion for cycling was here to stay," he says. Riding two hours to and from work turned Crystal into a veritable, devoted cyclist. "It was a great vacation from the day-to-

day stuff going on and it cemented my love for the road," he says.

He embraced charity bike rides, first with single-day events "Ride for Karen" and "Bike for Betty" and then the three-day event "Tour for Kids." Through his interactions with others in the bike industry, he became familiar with the Coast to Coast Against Cancer Foundation and the Sears Canada National Ride. While the physical challenge of the ride was appealing, being a father was what prompted him to register. "I am so utterly grateful that cancer has not touched my son directly. Like most other kids, he has had his fair share of nasty flus, colds and scary fevers. I know what it feels like to be helpless when he is sick. I also know that fear pales in comparison to the fight for life too many children and their families afflicted with cancer have to undertake every day," he says.

With a grueling training schedule, Crystal is determined to stay healthy and build up his endurance, making sure he's in top shape for the epic ride. Falling behind, taking a day off or getting picked up by the sweeper vans is not an option. "The kids never get a chance to take a break. Their families never get a chance to take a break, so it's really motivational in that way that when your legs are screaming and your heart's pumping and you feel like you're completely out of breath, it's like, you know what, just tough it out and get through it because the kids don't really have a choice," says Crystal.

While Crystal's former project-management career had him traveling to various parts of the country, traversing the vast landscape on the saddle provides a unique perspective that few get to experience. "Cycling is a much more intimate way to travel and you do get a chance to take things in a lot more than when you're flying by at 80 or 100 kilometres in a car or thousands of feet above," he says.

While looking forward to navigating the triumphant Rocky Mountains, Crystal says the most challenging part of the tour will be the Canadian Shield. The steep grade of the frequent hills that line the Canadian Shield make for a tougher ride than the long, low-grade Rockies, making it difficult to settle into a rhythm. "Ontario's what I'm dreading the most," he laughs.

But perhaps the most challenging part of the coast-to-coast journey will not be the physical exhaustion Crystal and his teammates will battle daily, but the emotional toll the journey will take.

Ross Radar, who was instrumental in encouraging Crystal to take on the challenge, completed the National Ride in 2008. "At every stop, we would meet childhood cancer survivors. We heard many stories about the pain and suffering that this terrible disease caused, and about children showing strength, love and wisdom beyond their years as they faced their treatment," says Radar, who lost his grandfather to cancer while completing the ride.

At the start and end of each day, riders participate in a community event and visit pediatric oncology centers and hospitals where the doctors, patients and family members share inspiring stories of strength and hope with the cyclists, giving them the emotional motivation to push through the physical pain.

"The people stand out much more than the places," says Radar. "I'll never forget the warm welcome we received from the students in White River, and our ride out of town with them, the barbecue we had in Regina that no one wanted to end, the over-the-top and unexpected hospitality that we received at the Papat Saloon and, most of all, each and every childhood cancer survivor who floored us with their view that we were heroes. It was unimaginable to us that these kids thought we were doing something hard after what they were going through. They were our heroes, and it was humbling that they thought of us this way."

Crystal and his team of 26 other riders will depart from Vancouver on Sept. 5 and will log more than 7,000 kilometres in 17 memorable days, arriving in Halifax on Sept. 21. For updates on his journey, visit his blog at <http://trevorcrystal.snkor.com>. — Lisa Evans