

COMPUTERSHARE CHANGE A LIFE EVENT

# Top-level cycling

BY OSCAR GOLDSTUCK

**THE figures tell a large part of the story: a cycling event over 423 km through four countries in three days, with 81 riders, including 15 chief executive officers, managing directors and company presidents, five financial officers and financial directors and 20 directors.**

It is the story of the *Computershare Change a Life Cycle Event* that was held in Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and Zambia in September.

The event was organised by Computershare as a fundraiser for the Mike Thompson Change a Life Trust, which is aimed at projects to assist in crime prevention and detection, helping victims of violent crime and changing lives.

Chief executive Stan Lorge bought into the concept at an early stage and Computershare pulled out all the stops to make it a memorable and successful event.

It was initially aimed at corporate institutions, as shown in the demographics of participants.

The largest contingent was from Computershare, with ten cyclists, including chairman Martyn Drake from the UK, followed by Viva Formworking and Scaffolding with seven, and the JSE with six.

Participants who had featured in previous surveys of cycling executives (*Cycling News*, November 2006 and Nov 2007) included Russell Loubser and Nicky Newton-King of the JSE, David Coutts-Trotter of Sun International, Mthunzi Mdwaba of Torque IT, Diane Radley, now of Old Mutual, Granville Rolfe of Macsteel Trading and Stephen Horwitz of Central Welding.

Also in the field was TV presenter Gerald de Kock, still exhausted from his stint at the Beijing Olympics.

The event started at Victoria Falls on Friday, September 5. Participants had arrived the day before, which was spent setting up bikes, getting used to tandem partners in some cases and getting to know fellow participants. The night was

spent at the Elephant Hills Hotel.

Each participant was given three sponsored cycling shirts, one from Computershare, and a different one for each day. It made an impressive sight, the whole peloton dressed identically every day, whether at breakfast, as part of the daily staggered start, on the road or simply for a group photo.

On the Friday morning, we set out for Botswana, through the Zambezi National Park, to the border post at Kazangula. There were not many sightings of game, but some groups passed a herd of elephants; between 10 and 12 of them and some 60 or 70 metres from the riders.

We also saw small herds of buck, mainly in the Chobe area. One of the highlights was a herd running across the road in front of one of the groups on day two.

Stage one covered 88 km and included well-organised tea and lunch stops, a feature of the tour. One big debate was to choose between the fruitcake and the banana loaf. There was no shortage of food, fruit, liquids, energy supplements, lip balm and sun tan lotion.

The night was spent at the luxurious Mowana Lodge on the banks of the Chobe River. Participants were given the option of a river cruise or a game drive. It might have been the time of the year, with water levels relatively low, but driving along the river we saw at least 100 elephants and hippos, numerous species of buck, some buffalo, a lone hyena, and even a pride of lions.

At this early stage, the battle lines were already being drawn. The elite group, led by Andrew and Ali McLean, and consisting of four tandem and eight individual cyclists, set a blistering pace.

Three of the tandems were used by married couples. The fourth was piloted by multiple Duzi winner and sports professional, Martin Dreyer, and Peter Gray, CEO of JCI, who had won the honour in an auction at the launch of the event. Former Transvaal rugby player Hempas Rademeyer and his wife Martie were also in the lineup.

A special mention must be made of Toyota, who transported all the bikes from Johannesburg to Vic Falls and back. They also supplied all the support vehicles. Toyota's Andrew and Cindi Kirby, usually mountain bikers, were also on a tandem in the lead group.

Day 2 saw the team head through the Chobe National Park, towards the Ngoma border post with Namibia, about 60 km away, and then another 60 km in Namibia as we made our way to the overnight stop at the Protea Zambezi River Lodge in Katimo Mulilo.

It was a long, hot day and the discipline of the first advanced group, led by Ian Martin, was the talk of the team, if not the town. By then it was clear that Ian's team's strategy to "stay in the cupboard" was the way to finish on time and in one group. This the 20 members achieved with admirable precision.

The second advanced group was led by Thabang Skwambane, who had previously cycled from Cape Town to the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, a journey of about 5 500 km, which he covered in 62 days. For him, this tour was a piece of cake.

The largest group on the tour, comprising about 30 riders, boasted most of the Viva and JSE groups.

The third day was the big one, 214 km

through three countries, to our finish at the Victoria Falls Hotel. It was a tough day, with heat, a seemingly never-ending gradient (we had been told it would be downhill!) and continuous winds.

Temperatures reached the high thirties on each of the three days. We also had to contend with many potholes.

As can be expected, the day was not without its drama. Many cyclists took turns in spending time on the support vehicle. Nicky Newton-King, deputy CEO of the JSE, even found that her bike had fallen off the back of the support vehicle. It was later found in a roadside village, but badly damaged.

With about 30 km to go, her bike's pedals were swapped with those of a bike belonging to a participant who was unable to finish because of health reasons. That, unfortunately, worked only for a short distance before Nicky realised the pedals had been fitted incorrectly.

She was ready to pedal with one foot, even walk, but, fortunately, another bike became available. One of the participants had suffered from heat stroke and Nicky was able to finish the event on her bike. Few people can say they rode on three bikes in three countries in one day!

There was no unlimited supply of bikes. Of the 81 starters, 79 finished the





event, crossing the Victoria Falls Bridge and completing the last stretch to the hotel.

Tour director Ursula du Plooy estimated that the combined value of bikes that traversed the route was R1,5 million; the figure declared to insurance underwriters.

A good innovation was a comprehensive supply of spare parts on consignment from CycleLab. It included all levels of components: everything from an entry-level to a Dura Ace wheel or group set and more to ensure that mechanical problems did not spoil the event.

Genial Dennis Sprong was always willing to assist with even the most minor problems and to dispense advice.

The fourth group, the intermediate team, led by a tandem piloted by Dennis and Ursula, rode into the hotel grounds after 20:00, having left the Zambezi Lodge at 06:00. They were greeted by

thunderous and emotional applause from the entire peloton. Except for two cyclists who had to pack up because of health reasons, the entire squad had finished.

Towards the end of the ride, we had also stopped for a break at a picturesque River Club (worth a return visit), before a leisurely ride into Livingstone and finally our destination, the grand Victoria Falls Hotel.

The Zimbabweans did everything possible to make our stay memorable despite obvious problems such as a shortage of mixers for drinks, teaspoons and tomato sauce for our burgers, even at \$20 a time. Hawkers did good business selling 100-billion dollar notes as tourist souvenirs.

There was also a severe shortage of

sleep. On the first day, we were up at 05:30 and on the next two at 04:30.

Fortunately, there was a rest day before what was arguably the highlight of the tour, the gala dinner that turned into a rip-roaring party.

Various awards were made.

The most significant was the choice of Mthunzi Mdwaba as personality of the tour. It won him an entry into Computershare's 2009 event, details of which will be announced in due course. However, it will take place in mid-September, with Rovos Rail providing the accommodation.

Nicky was presented with a brand new bike for her travails; one made from wire by local craftsmen.

The event raised over R3 million for its beneficiaries, making it probably the biggest single South African cycling fundraising event to date.

Another spin-off is that the Tour de Zambezi may return as an annual ride. Heather Wilson of Wilderness Safaris, organiser of that tour, played a big role in ensuring that this year's event also went off smoothly.

Next year's ride promises to be an even better one, but because of the logistics of a moving hotel, participation has been restricted to 60 entries. By the time the gala dinner was over all these places were taken up. -CN

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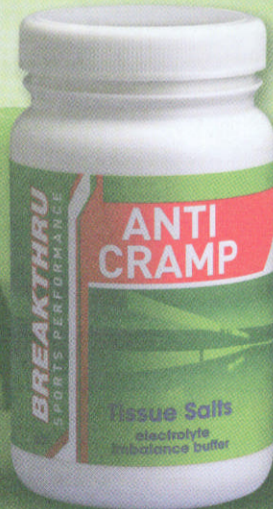
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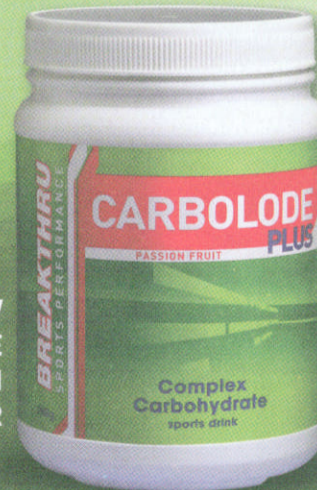
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