

## Simpson Desert Cycle Challenge Newsletter

Nov 2006

Race dates for 2007: 2<sup>nd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> October

With the 2006 event now well behind us, thoughts turn to the 2007 Cycle Challenge – celebrating 20 years of mountain biking madness in the Simpson Desert.

I guess the anniversary is a good time to look back at some significant moments in the history of the event:

The very first mountain bike race across the Simpson Desert was organised by Hans Tholstrup and took place in 1987. The race intended to cross the Desert via the French Line but was abandoned because of the continuous deep sand and an alternate route sought. The experiences of those 'first-timers' are pretty well summed up in this little ditty by rider Ian Kakoschke:

### **The Bloody Mighty Simpson** by Ian Kakoschke

We headed for the Mighty Simpson  
With bikes, 4 x 4's and stuff  
We came to the Mighty Simpson  
Cause we thought we were bloody tough.

We started across the Simpson  
We didn't dare look back  
But The Bloody Mighty Simpson  
She stopped us in our track.

We chose another Simpson road  
And continued on our ways  
We cycled like a crazy bunch  
For two more bloody days.

A final dash, the Birdsville pub  
Was very, very near  
We shared a smile, a tired yell  
We'll be back again next year.

Well, we challenged the Mighty Simpson  
And we put on quite a show  
But The Bloody Mighty Simpson  
We didn't beat her though.

Of the 29 riders who tackled the 1987 event, only one name has continued to reappear with monotonous regularity over the past twenty years ..... that of a certain Leon Fisher, better known as "Fish". Fish is the current record holder, having competed in eight Simpson Desert races. He emerged as overall winner in 2001 and 2002 and has managed 100% on many of his attempts.

In 1988 Jack and Mary Mullins founded and directed the first Simpson Desert Cycle Classic, an event

created to raise money for the Paraquad Association. They continued to run the event until 1994 when they retired and handed over to Rod & Loz Townsend.

Rod and Loz are both former race competitors, Loz being one of only two women dumb enough to have cycled the event four times. They directed the race from 1995 until 2001, also creating an association with the Paraplegic Benefit Fund as nominated charity for the event. Having moved to the U.K. in 1999 they reluctantly handed over the reins following the 2001 race. While a rumour is circulating that Rod is planning his "comeback" ride in 2007 – perhaps it is Loz who is in fact secretly preparing to race again?

Also on the rumour-mongering front – it seems that the front end of the field will be slugging it out for line honours next year with several previous race winners announcing their intention to race. 2006 race winner Ed Bourke plans to defend his title, with 2001/02 winner Leon Fisher also in the hunt. Three time winner Jack Oldfield from Alice Springs is wondering if a possible career change will impede his plan to return to the Desert in 2007. That old Desert fox Linc Gore may also emerge from his burrow and drag along a few Police mates for the ride.

2007 is shaping up to have a strong female contingent with several previous competitors returning. Over the past nineteen years just six women have successfully ridden 100% of the event.

If you measure success by completing 100% of the race, then Ed Bourke stands out from the pack having made 100% in all four of his attempts. Jack Oldfield is right behind with three out of three. Andrew Koop has three 100%s from four attempts and there are a number of competitors with more than one 100% to their name.

Then there are those competitors who don't manage to complete 100% and don't finish anywhere near the front of the field. In 1994 the Heslin Endurance Award was inaugurated in recognition of those efforts which don't show up in the overall results but are a huge personal challenge met and overcome.

The first award was presented to Dennis Litvensky, who broke away from the lead pack to battle alone through a dust storm for thirty kilometres to win the final stage of the 1994 event. In 2001 Graham Butt earned the award for his effort cycling fifty kilometres without a bike seat when his broke .... after some innovative bush repairs to his bike by support crew he was able to continue the race over the following days

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and complete 100%. Other extraordinary efforts include one rider who cycled sixty kilometres just to reach the start line, arriving at 9pm after his support vehicle got irretrievably bogged on the way in.

Several competitors have fought their way through the Day Two morning stage to get within sniffing distance of the finish line before being cruelly caught by the pursuing Sweep vehicle. In 1994 Linc Gore got to within four miserable kilometres of the finish when he was caught. Andy Griffiths and Scott Todd had a similar experience in 1995, nabbed within spitting distance of the camp. All these unfortunates have since returned to the Desert and successfully (and maybe even permanently?) exorcised their demons.

And finally a look at another rider well known for his determination and persistence in the Desert ... or is he just a REALLY slow learner? He is formally known as Richard Ware but more commonly referred to as "the Bean" .....

Bean has now clocked up twelve consecutive trips across the Desert with the race. He first appeared on the scene in 1995, as support crew for his daughter Heather. That experience seemed to trigger something in Bean and he launched himself into a series of ill-fated attempts as a rider, pedalling himself into race history as the only competitor silly enough to ride seven consecutive events.

On the way he created a cycling phenomenon which became known as the "Bean Team". This group of riders was completely uninterested in the competitive nature of the event, being far more focused on torturing the Sweep, amusing the Water Stop officials and drawing together riders in need of some inspiration to get themselves across the finish line.

After five years Bean changed tack and decided to take the race "seriously", consulting three time race winner Jack Oldfield for advice as to how he could achieve the elusive 100%. No-one took him seriously of course but when the Desert relented in 2001 and let 21 riders finish 100% in relatively benign conditions the Bean was among them.

He raced again in 2002, finishing in 13<sup>th</sup> place and completing 79%, thus proving that his success in 2001 was in fact a total fluke.

After a few years of toil assisting Trent of Synergy Sport to run the event, he was back in 2006 as Race Director, which at least spared us the annual appearance of his stained and disgusting riding shorts

– framed by the Army team and now serving as an appropriate Trophy for the Inter-Services competition.

While he is best known for his entertaining and persistent cycling efforts, Bean is also a dedicated supporter of the Paraplegic Benefit Fund and remains the event's single most successful fundraiser. The only question that remains is of course ..... will he ride again in 2007?

And now a word from the Bean himself .....



From Race Director 2006  
Richard 'Bean' Ware:

*Now that we have arrived home safely after yet another enjoyable trip.... this was the first time in twelve years that I have struck VERTICAL sand dunes and*

*Louise's description was very apt. But then again the Desert always has something special for us.*

*On behalf of the SDCC and PBF I would like to thank you all for your assistance, cooperation and encouragement which helped us to run a great event, providing you with the trip of a lifetime and giving valuable financial assistance to the Paraplegic Benefit Fund.*

The new website is now largely complete and on-line at [www.sdcc.org.au](http://www.sdcc.org.au)

A Bulletin Board system is being developed where those who are interested in competing but lack a suitable 4WD vehicle can register and be linked with an available crew.

We are seeking volunteers to act as Regional Representatives for the event. If interested you must be prepared to have your name and contact telephone number listed on the website and to receive telephone enquiries from potential competitors within your state. Regional Reps must have competed previously in the event and past experience as support crew would also be useful. Representatives are currently required for QLD, WA, TAS and ACT. Please contact Ed or Gaye Bourke at [edgaye@fasteddy.com.au](mailto:edgaye@fasteddy.com.au) if interested.

See you out there,

Gaye (Flipper)