

Heart-to-Heart



2023 Tour Teasers

The following HeartCycle tours have space available for you!

Sardinia, Italy

June 10-20 Rich Crocker will be coordinating this amazing tour that is returning due to rave reviews from 2018. Sardinia is like heaven to any keen cyclist: the roads are perfectly paved with minimal traffic. This beautiful trip will put you in the heart of the most ancient land in Europe. Among mountains sculpted by wind and sun, with its deep canyons, white sand beaches, and unspoiled forests, we discover nature, archaeological remains which are unique in the world, gastronomic treats, and traditions. This is an advanced tour, but not all about the riding, the last day will have a boat tour of beaches.

Million Dollar Views in the San Juan Mountains, CO

June 24-30 Arguably the most beautiful part of Colorado, the San Juan Mountains along U.S. Highway 550 (the Million Dollar Highway) offer stunning views in every direction that are best enjoyed by bicycle. Late June is the perfect time of year to ride in southwestern Colorado; monsoons don't start until July. The weather is sunny with average lows in the 50s and average highs in the 70s. Join us for spectacular scenery, unforgettable riding, good food, and fun. Both Silverton and Ouray are historic towns—enjoy their charm & maybe a hike or hot springs!

Grand Valley Ramble, Colorado

September 17-22 Join us for 5 scenic days exploring the Grand Valley in western Colorado. This is a fixed base tour staying in the heart of downtown Grand Junction at the Hampton Inn for five nights. Riding up and across the Colorado National Monument with its spectacular scenery on 2 different days should be on your bucket list of rides to do in 2023. The spectacular lunar-looking landscape is accentuated with majestic spires of red rock and panoramic canyons. We will also explore Fruita farmland and cycle the Palisade fruit and wine loop with a visit to an alpaca farm and ride past numerous wineries where wine tastings are optional, and have a remote start at the quiet crossroads of Glade Park for a ride to the Utah state line and back. Most of the roads we will be riding do not have shoulders, but very low traffic. Join us in western Colorado for a great fall ride.

Check the HeartCycle website for the full tour descriptions and Tour Leaders contact information if you have more questions.

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Tour Director Musings

My first 2023 HeartCycle tour is just 10 weeks away and that means, time to pile on the layers and get back onto the road for some training. As many of us know there is no season you cannot bike, IF you have the appropriate clothing and gear. Let's dust off the toe warmers and tights and find that under layer (maybe two or three) and get ready to ride. Some of you might need fenders for the rain and others some traction on those tires, watch out for the loose gravel on the shoulders or corners and enjoy the ride. Maybe you are lucky and went south for part of the winter and are enjoying warm temps where you can easily ride and have year round biking. For the rest of us, enjoy your seasonal sports but tryout some winter biking.

If you need some incentive to bike, sign up for one of those 2023 tours that has space for you. HeartCycle would love to see you on one of our tours this year.

Judy Siel, Tour Director

Stranded

By Trevor Ward, Cyclist Magazine

Legend has it that Ernest Hemingway bet his literary rival F Scott Fitzgerald that he could write a six-word story that would make the reader cry. He won the bet with this: 'For sale: baby shoes. Never worn.'

I have my own six-word story that would reduce any self-respecting cyclist to tears (although whether with sadness or laughter is a moot point): 'Punctured. No spare tube. Walked home.'



(Illustration Sean O'Brien)

OK, it may not pack the atmospheric punch of Morrissey suffering a similar, six-word fate in 1983 – ‘Punctured bicycle on a hillside desolate’ – but I believe my version has a better narrative.

My walk home should have been ten miles. In fact, I walked slightly less than a mile, just far enough to get me from the ‘hillside desolate’ to a busy A-road where I could flip my machine upside down and stick out my thumb: ‘Inverted bicycle to inspire drivers’ pity’. It’s a tactic I’ve shamelessly resorted to on several previous occasions. And the story has always had a happy ending.

I want to reassure readers of a nervous disposition that most drivers are just like you and me: wanting to co-exist peacefully with their fellow road users

‘Kindness’ is a much-neglected attribute in today’s world. If certain corners of the internet are to be believed, it is something cyclists are hardly, if ever, shown by fellow road users. Spend long enough on certain social media feeds and it’s easy to believe all drivers are out to kill us.

As a rider who has been the recipient of as many random acts of kindness as close passes, I want to redress the balance and reassure readers of a nervous disposition that most drivers are actually just like you and me: wanting to co-exist peacefully and harmoniously with their fellow road users.

I should explain that I don’t usually go out for rides without a spare tube but I was rushing to see the Queen’s funeral cortège on my local bypass – that’s a statement of fact, not another Morrissey lyric – and in the chaos of such an historic moment also forgot to pack my raincape, pump and tyre levers.

I had barely flipped my stricken machine upside down when the driver of an SUV hauling a trailer and traveling in the opposite direction tooted his horn at me. Soon he had performed a U-turn and was parked on the verge next to me asking what had happened.

The problem with flipping your bike upside down to elicit pity and/or assistance is that you then have the embarrassment of having to admit the scale of your problem isn’t actually that catastrophic.

In this case, my Good Samaritan was undeterred. ‘I was on my way to buy some bunkbeds so the trailer’s empty, we can stick it in there,’ he said. ‘Where’re you heading?’

I told him it was at least nine miles in the opposite direction from his bunkbeds but he wrestled my bike into the trailer anyway and soon I was sat behind him and his companion. I assumed one or both must be a cyclist to have shown such kindness but neither was. My savior was a guitarist in a local covers band called 'KGB' (whom I unreservedly recommend to anyone looking to book a wedding band in the Angus area of Scotland).

When they asked where I'd been heading before my mishap, I suspect they'd have preferred a more interesting answer than 'off to watch Her Majesty's funeral cortège go by on the A90' but they concealed their disappointment well. Soon they were dropping me at my front door and were almost on their way before I had time to rush indoors, grab a bottle of Co-op Rioja from the kitchen and offer it to them in gratitude.

And this wasn't an isolated instance of the kindness of strangers either. I once suffered a snapped chain 30km from home. Five minutes after flipping my bike upside down a van pulled up and the driver took me to my local bike shop. (If you ever need a new toaster or fridge, I can unreservedly recommend Colin M Smith Electrical Appliances of Arbroath, Forfar and Kirriemuir).

Another time my rear derailleur was mangled in my spokes on a climb 40km from home. I knocked on the door of the only house for miles around, complete with flash Mercedes estate in the driveway, and was not only provided with a sandwich and mug of tea but was also offered a lift home if I couldn't get hold of my wife on the phone.

Yes, bad things occasionally happen to cyclists on our roads. But other times there are only happy endings. As Hemingway or Morrissey might have put it: 'Stranded. Then stranger's kindness rescued me.'

The bike is not enough

Cycling is great for fitness, but your body needs other activities to protect it in midlife, as Phil Cavell explains:

The fundamentals of bicycle architecture and biomechanics have remained largely stagnant since the ‘modern safety bicycle’ won out over the penny-farthing nearly 150 years ago. But that still leaves our ageing athletic bodies exposed to the resultant forces of mostly unchallenged Victorian design. Luckily our forefathers got enough of their sums sufficiently right that many of us can ride as often as we like without pain or injury. But does that mean cycling can provide all the exercise we need to provoke the changes we desire within our bodies to increase fitness and maintain health as we age?

To answer that we need to think about the headwinds that blow in the face of midlife cyclists – and arguably the most profound of those is sarcopenia, or age-related muscle fibre loss. The etymology of sarcopenia is ‘muscle poverty’, which is quite different from muscle atrophy that results from a lack of use when you, for example, break your arm and it has to be immobilized in a cast for eight weeks.

Sarcopenia is an age-generated and progressive (but not linear) decline in muscle fibre density. This starts in our thirties and accelerates from there, with several cliff-edge events, into our eighties. Without intervention we will lose around 50% of muscle mass between the ages of 40 and 80.

Many people migrate to cycling because they want to get away from high-impact sports, and yet here we are advocating a midlife return to it

Cycling, even at your threshold, simply does not provide a sufficient loading dose to offset sarcopenia. The only way to counteract the eroding effects of sarcopenia is high-dose resistance training to work on the bulk and strength of the remaining fibers. If we want to maintain strength and function in our prime-mover muscle groups, we have to add in a couple of sessions at the gym or similar – think climbing wall, Ashtanga yoga, etc. Not necessarily what we want to hear, I know.

No bones about it

Then there’s another ‘penia’: osteopenia. It’s the lesser cousin of osteoporosis and is a condition whereby our bodies use more precious bone mineral calcium than is being manufactured. Osteopenia is a mid-point between a normal level of BMD (bone mineral density) and osteoporosis.

We hit peak BMD at around age 30 (at which point the calcium stored in our skeleton weighs around 1,500g for males and 1,200g for women), with a gradual decline as we age. Cyclists – especially midlife ones – all too often find out they have low BMD when they sustain an injury after a seemingly innocuous crash.

Bone minerality is encouraged by a healthy diet rich in vitamin D and appropriate loading through our skeletal bone. ProTour physician Dr David Hulse explains, ‘Bones respond positively to load and stress by increasing their bone mineral content by pulling in calcium from the bloodstream, provided it is available.’

The clue here is ‘load and stress’. The irony is not lost on me – many people migrate to cycling from rugby, football, squash, running and the like because they want to get away from high-impact sports, and yet here we are advocating a midlife return to high-impact activity. But we can’t escape the facts – cycling produces virtually no load-stimulus into our bones, something that is vital for healthy BMD.

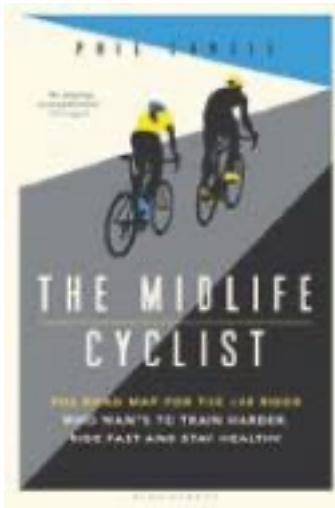
I suggest resistance training or a gentle 3-5km trail run per week if you can. Trail-running is better than road-running for a few reasons: it is slightly lower impact; it appeals to cyclists’ innate love of freedom; and most importantly every stride is a little different. Or as physio Graham Anderson describes it, ‘Cyclists can generally benefit from more chaos in their exercise diets.’

Stand up and be counted

Our third significant headwind is postural. If all you do is cycle then your whole exercise universe consists of being strapped around a Victorian contraption working at your theoretical maximum with a flexed spine, closed hip and feet welded to a fast-rotating crank. Aside from this being entirely abstract from how we have evolved to function, our bodies tend to adapt in a somewhat unhelpful manner – tightness in the posterior chain (calves, hamstrings, glutes, lower back) as well as upper traps and hips, to name a few.

The fix here is to spend some time working in a more natural body posture, meaning spinal extension and open hip. This could be walking, running, swimming, or my favorite for cyclists: SUP or Stand Up Paddle boarding. SUP is a challenge for cyclists because you really do have to balance (on a bike we just have to trust the laws of physics). Paddle boarding requires you to produce power through the upper body that is transmitted through an engaged trunk, legs and feet into the board. There is no freewheeling, only engagement.

And best of all – the clue is in the title – you ‘stand up’ in spinal extension and so work your weakened back and shoulders. I can see the day when there will be pelotons of us midlife paddlers going up and down the river in our Rapha SUP gear, sharing energy bars and sprinting for lock signs. But this morning it was only me. Again.



Phil Cavell is co-founder and bikefitter at Cyclefit in London. His book *The Midlife Cyclist* is published by Bloomsbury

Colorado HeartCycle 2023 Tours

History in the Finger Lakes Region

Rochester, New York

August 13 - 19 Status: Cancelled
6 days, Intermediate \$1,800.00
Janet Reilly, kayaks06@verizon.net
Gail Golderman, goldermg@union.edu

New England Seacoast

Portland, Maine

September 10 - 16 Status: Waitlist
6 days, Intermediate \$1,500.00
Kurt Arehart, klarehart@gmail.com
Jim Bethell, bethell.jim@verizon.net

Grand Valley Ramble

Grand Junction, Colorado

Sept. 17 - 22 Status: Open
5 days, Intermediate \$1,200.00
Judy Siel bjsiel@msn.com
Barry Siel, bsiel03@gmail.com

Slovenia, Italy & Croatia

Ljubljana, Solvenia

Sept. 23 - Oct. 2 Status: Waitlist
9 days, Intermediate \$4,400.00
Cindy Dore, cdorecycle@gmail.com