



The Russon Family - Rick, Josie and Irene

Out and About

Midlife Cycling
By Nancy Charles

Telling you that Rick Russon, co-owner of Midlife Cycling, is excited and enthusiastic is like describing a roller coaster as calm and dull. Rick is energized to the Nth degree, and frankly, it's contagious. His sincerest hope is that everyone catches the cycling bug for life.

Midlife Cycling was born after a journey that began with Rick discovering his own limitations as he approached his 40s. As an avid and long-time runner, he began to notice that his miles were getting slower by a few minutes, and so he started a search for his next passion. From running on the ground to leaving the ground, Rick began flying.

As a pilot, he was doing philanthropic work with Angel Flight, a group who donates their flight time to transport nonemergency medical patients to other states for needed treatment. Angel Flight is a cause he cares much about (as evidenced by the box of brochures in the trunk of his car). Once he and his wife adopted baby Irene from China, however, Rick realized he needed to be ground-based more often, and that also gave him a compelling reason to stay healthier longer, which began another search. This search led to what he says is his "addiction" to cycling.

Rick wanted to avoid adding another "task to do" into his already full life of work and family obligations. His desire was to be outdoors in our beautiful state with his family. As a family, they joined the Denver Bike Touring Club and began riding together. After a couple of months of riding, Rick was stunned by the dramatic increase in miles he could ride and it sparked the question, "How and why does that happen?" He asked that question of an ex-racer in the bike club who directed him to the best source of athletic physiology, the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs.

Rick signed up to find his answers and in the process became a USA Certified Cycling Coach. As his cycling improved dramatically, he joined the Rocky Mountain Cycling Club, which caters to riders wanting longer rides, where he formed the Pace Line Group. These are riders who cycle in single file and switch lead positions allowing them to ride longer by breaking the wind's impact on the riders who follow. This group is now approximately 200 strong. They ride in small groups, but are linked mostly by e-mails, often with training and riding advice from Rick.

It soon became apparent to Rick that e-mails and occasional articles for both bike club newsletters was not enough. He needed a mechanism to deliver more information to more people. Midlife Cycling was created with his riding partner, Dan Shields, as a way to bring the joy of cycling to people who weren't already doing it. Now he could conduct seminars and clinics for the public at large.

So, what is Midlife Cycling and what are they trying to accomplish? It's not about getting on a bike and seeing how far you can ride or how many races you can win. Actually, it's not about competing at all, Rick states; it's about "creating a sustainable, healthy lifestyle." He mentions some of the most persuasive reasons for taking up cycling for life: "...living longer and healthier for your kids and grandkids, enjoying and fully experiencing the joys of being an Empty Nester, keeping fit well into your 70s and 80s, not having to worry about weight gain (and still eating what you want, including dessert), and participating in active vacations." Midlife Cycling is not just about riding, it's about meeting a community of others who not only enjoy cycling, but also enjoy good food and travel.

I'll be honest with you, I can't ride around the block without getting winded and I don't classify as middle-aged (being somewhere in my 30s). So, I asked Rick if the name of his company means it doesn't include people like me. Though the name speaks clearly to a

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certain population, Rick feels that Midlife is more about the lifestyles of people in their 40s and 50s. Certain components of middle age do exist for many individuals like me and include career, family responsibilities and community involvement. It's about achieving balance, Rick believes.

His pet peeve is when people tell him they don't have time because of all their responsibilities; he feels that is a poor excuse. Cycling doesn't need to happen on a regular schedule. There is no rulebook that says that one must ride, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. You certainly can, but it's enough to ride after work one day and ride one weekend day. Again, it's about finding that "compelling reason" to integrate cycling into your life. If Rick told you that by cycling you could eat what you truly enjoy, never diet and lose weight, or control Type II diabetes completely without medication or participate in Ride the Rockies in your 70s, all while enjoying the beauty of nature and company of wonderful friends, would you do it?

Rick makes it sound easy to start and guarantees a cynic as myself that it actually is easy. His next training program starts in October and runs through August of next year. He spends the whole first month on adaptation, which means developing a habit. Rick means anything, like five crunches everyday during the morning or evening news. During November, it's about increasing what you're doing and December's clinic is called Holiday Survival. All this goes on while learning how exactly to exercise, to avoid injury and pain. The training includes everything, even how to pedal, shift gears and position your body while you ride. Unlike most cycling coaches who coach by passing information along, Rick feels that it's important to actually ride with people to understand what they do on the bike.

Rick states that the bicycle is the most unique instrument for exercising; it bears and supports your body weight and you can control your body's energy output and consequently, your heart rate. An easy ride can burn around 1200 calories per hour. Rick talks about riding for several hours and stopping at a restaurant to enjoy a 4-course meal, guilt free and really steers people away from thinking they need to eat carrot sticks and celery with a glass of water for dinner.

Rick's goal for his company is to bring people together for a vibrant and whole life that is healthy, fun and fulfilling. The Web site www.midlifecycling.com is home to numerous testimonials of people whose lives have been changed by getting on a bike. Check out their inspiring letters. Call (303)281-9424 to learn more and to find out this month's discount for registering for clinics/seminars. Well, I better be going; I need to talk to Rick about this "bug" I caught from him. Making time to invest in my own health IS contagious—maybe I'll see you on the road with my cycling coach riding shotgun. Happy Trails!

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