

# Climb Every Mountain

BY JOHN THOMSON

“Cycling is all about suffering. I get a lot of enjoyment out of it but there’s also a lot of pain.”

Sixty-year-old Bob Landy, athlete, entrepreneur, husband and father of two is training for the Haute Route, a gruelling seven-day bicycle race through 19 alpine passes between France and Switzerland. It is considered the world’s highest and toughest, right up there with the Tour de France, and the 2014 version kicks off this August. Bob will be there.

Bob runs his own business as a freelance video editor on TV shows, industrials and documentaries. He loves his job and the people he meets. Best of all, he has a lot of free time on his hands in between gigs.

Always an athletic guy, as one of five children growing up in Winnipeg, he remembers riding his bike along the banks of the Red River. As a university student in Toronto, he rode his bike to class. A job posting took him to Yellowknife, no cycling there, but when he moved to Vancouver in 1986, he took up downhill skiing and went to the gym. Sure, he was getting on in years but he thought of himself as pretty fit. “I’ve always seen myself as a 23 year old,” he says proudly.

Then in 2009, a reality check.

“When I was 55, my son came home from university and I said, ‘I’ll go for a ride with you.’ I got out my bike, which hadn’t seen air in the tires for numerous years and, of course, I’m not doing that well. I remember having to stop twice to get to the top of the Lions Gate Bridge. Holy cow! So I started riding my bike a little more and I started commuting to work. I’d drive the car three or four kilometres to work and then I’d ride in.”

He started buying the clothes – the jerseys and the chamois shorts – and joined the Glotman Simpson Cycling Club. The club hosts skill sessions, group rides and the annual Cypress Challenge, a race to the top of Cypress Mountain to raise money for pancreatic cancer research. So far, the Club has raised \$800,000.

“Bob’s on a mission,” says Club President Michael Daerendinger. “And he’s certainly picked it up a notch this year.” Bob’s hired a personal trainer to help him prepare for the Alps. He doesn’t do anything in half measures.

“I’m a pretty competitive guy,” he admits, conceding that his first Whistler Gran Fondo, a 120-kilometre



Photo: Dettler Klähn



road race from downtown Vancouver to Whistler Village, almost did him in.

"I maxed my heart rate out before I even hit the [Lions Gate] bridge. My heart rate was 185. I was huffing and puffing. You're still pedalling at a good pace, but that hill is coming and it's going to hurt. I hit the wall in Squamish and struggled to finish."

But finish he did. And three more Gran Fondos after that. "I'm always pushing the envelope. I will crawl to make it," he says proudly.

Why does he push himself to the point of almost blacking out? He says it's partly a concern for the environment, partly a way to keep fit and largely the thrill of setting a goal for himself and beating it. Landy is a driven individual. Nothing deters him, not even his own cancer scare.

"I had a biopsy," he says matter-of-factly. A routine check-up revealed stage 3 prostate cancer. The doctor wanted to operate right away. Bob said no. He had another GranFondo to prepare for.

"I wait the year. I do the Fondo. I do the surgery. How long until I can get back on the bike? Six to eight weeks."

Now, three years later, his cancer has been removed and he's training for the biggest ride of his life, the Haute Route.

"He is an incredible cyclist," says his personal trainer Allan Prazsky. "We throw him through a whole number of workouts and he's always looking to push himself. I think that's the indicator right there. He's definitely not scared of going into the hurt locker."

Prazsky's also helping nine younger athletes prepare for the Haute Route but he takes a different tack with Bob. Exertion builds up lactic acid and the older a person gets, the harder it is for the body to flush it away. Lactic acid inhibits performance. Older athletes need a longer recovery period, so Prazsky has Bob riding hard followed by a week of rest.

"Most of the guys I train with are driven individuals and the hardest part is telling them to stay away from the bike," he says. "That's a critical component of success but it's often overlooked."

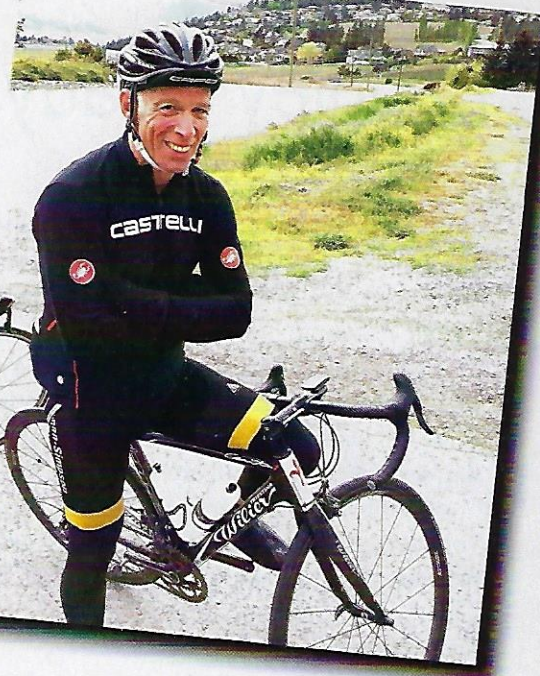
Bob isn't happy about resting – he'd ride every day if he could – but he fol-

lows his trainer's advice. "I've got one shot at it. It's like a project," he says. "If I'm going to put out all this effort, I want to make sure I can do it as well as I can."

He's already committed his wallet, spending over \$15,000 to date on registration, accommodation and a new bike. Afterwards, he and his wife will take their first European vacation, "the honeymoon we never had," he says. But first he has to race.

It will be a tough slog and if he's worried about his advancing years, he doesn't admit it. He recounts the story of a fellow cyclist he met on the circuit.

"He rides up those hills, one arm, one leg. There's no rest for him. An unbelievable guy. The age thing? If a guy with one arm and one leg can do that," Bob continues, "age isn't a big deal. Sure it knocks you back but it doesn't stop you from doing things. You can't even think about your age in terms



of what you want to do."

Bob's goal is to place in the top 20 in his age group. It sounds like an uphill battle, but if a gent with one arm and one leg can climb every mountain, Bob reckons he can climb his too.

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