

No hope in hell

I was looking for a way to break down stress. Hugo my friend, suggested that I try cycling with him. Hugo was born to cycle, he has the perfect frame for a cyclist. He rode his bicycle throughout the year, and when it came to 'Argus time' he trained harder, just to be fit enough to enjoy the Cape Argus race. He had been doing this for quite a number of years and it worked for him.

So I bought a bike, and started to ride with him after work. Hugo was glad for the company, and as we rode we'd shout comments back and forth to each other, making jokes and racing to see who could get to the waypoints first. Hugo would continually talk about the Argus, and it wasn't long before he'd convinced me. Having the goal of riding the Cape Argus cycle race made our training become a little more serious.

I gradually put more and more effort into training sessions. I also started to ride all the local races with Hugo. Hugo always said a 'sub-three' was his target. That meant finishing the Cape Argus race in under three hours. This requires extra effort, which separates the casual cyclist, from the serious cyclist.

When one starts to ride you have to acquire good race results, to receive a better starting position in your next cycle race. We decided to push for a good time in the 1998 Highveld 94,7km cycle race in Jo'burg. We would submit these race results to qualify us for start position placing in the 1999 Cape Argus race.

In 1998 I completed the 94,7 race in 3h5m. Which was just outside my target speed for the Cape Argus race. The Argus has tens of thousands of cyclists taking part, and one's starting position is critical for achieving a good finishing time. Hugo and I were of similar performance at that stage as we had finished the 94,7 race together; but because he was well known to the Argus Race organisers he was placed in an earlier starting group than myself.

During that Argus race I pushed as hard as I was able. At times the congestion was so bad I had to brake and slow down. I snaked my way through the cycling crowds, gradually gaps started to appear where I could overtake a few people at a time. The hills worked in my favour because the casual riders would ease off to the side, allowing the faster riders to overtake on the right. A few people joined me as we caught up with and worked our way through the earlier groups. The number on their shirts served to indicate how far we were progressing.

Hugo and I had started the race at different times but on the last 10km stretch of the race, I suddenly noticed Hugo in the group before me. His yellow Vlaanderen cycling shirt was highly visible and familiar to me. I caught up with him and smiling he joked, "Where've you been? I've been waiting for you!" We laughed and rode the last stretch together, enjoying the moment.

After crossing the finish line we shook hands and he said, "Well that's your first Argus!" I was happy with my result, but knew I could have done better. According to the official result I had finished just outside my target time, in 3h3m. I told Hugo, "I could have done it if I'd started in an earlier group, now I'll have to ride it again next year!"

That following year saw me competing in more races and training before and after work. I became more accustomed to riding in groups and learnt how to slipstream riders to conserve energy. I was a good long distance rider, but had to work very hard to keep up with the faster riders in the beginning of the races. Riders try to shake off the slower riders who slipstream throughout the race. They put in short sprints and race up hills, then the riders who are slipstreaming have to work hard too. If they haven't put in the training they fall back. Once a gap of a few metres has been established between the rider and the group, the additional wind resistance quickly tires out the rider, and the group accelerates away from them.

The leaders of a group usually rotate, taking turns at the front, pushing hard for a few minutes and then falling back to recover. Taking turns against the headwind pulls the group along and sets a good pace. Unfortunately, there are riders who stay back in the middle of the group, taking advantage of the groups pace but never contributing to the total effort of the group. They wait till the closing stages of the race, sometimes even the last 100m, and then they sprint off from the group, powered by their reserved energy. Leaving those who have laboured throughout the race, metres and places behind.

The finish times may be close, and the finish position of a rider may seem to indicate who was the stronger rider; but a stronger rider may finish many places behind a shrewd tactical rider. Tactics and performance do play a role in a group of hard working cyclists, but when a rider doesn't pull his weight, the finishing results don't reflect the true story.

I soon realised that the Cape Argus race was not the hardest race in South Africa, the hardest race is the one where you can cycle flat out; without being held back by road or race conditions. One of these races is called the 'Jock Cycle Tour', the frequent hill climbs and the 150km distance mean extra hard work, as the usual race distance is between 80km and 120km.

That year I worked out a training route of 40km. I would get up while it was still dark, ride the route in the chill of the morning and ride the same route after work in the heat of the afternoon. I noticed my average speed gradually climbing as I clocked up the kilometres. Cycling gives back exactly what you put into it, the harder you train the more comfortably you ride in race conditions.

In 1999 the Highveld 94,7 race day was a little rainy, but I managed to finish in 2h53m. I was thrilled with this result. Now the Argus organisers would be able to start me in an earlier group, giving me the opportunity to finish in a sub-three time. There was a snag though, the winter rains in the Cape had loosened the mountain slopes and rendered the road around the last part of the coast unsafe for use. The unsafe section was closed, and a new 'Detour' route was organised.

So the route had been changed, the last part would be different, but my performance was improved by the extra training! I was confident I would do much better in 2000. In 1999 I had started in the H group, 2000 saw me starting in the E group. I now had a real chance of cracking the sub-three target.

The start of the race was tougher than the previous year because the riders pushed to shake off the 'slipstreamers'. I battled to hold on in the climbs, I worked hard and kept my position in the group. Just as we started to settle down we caught up to a large group of cyclists. We had to brake hard and slow down, the whole group bunched together forming one big group of cyclists.

It was quite scary riding around that coastline in that group, at times I had riders hands touching mine as we pushed on looking for places to overtake. Our initial push had been thwarted by bicycle traffic, and we now had to thread our way carefully through the group, until we hit the more serious climbs. It was hard going but I welcomed these hills as it pulled the group apart and created spaces for overtaking.

I met Hugo on a hill climb and we rode together for a while. I kept pushing hard and he disappeared behind me. I pushed so hard up that steep climb from the coast I became light headed and rode right off the tar. Fortunately I didn't hit any stones and was able to ease back onto the road again. It gave me quite a scare so I told myself to calm down and concentrated on spinning slower to allow my breath and aching muscles to recover. Coming downhill we were also able to take advantage of the gaps in the group to overtake. Now we were working our way through the D group riders and I felt confident of finishing in a good time.

The 'Detour' took us up a long slow climb, and I concentrated on spinning comfortably instead of pedalling slowly like I'd done the year before. Coming over the hill we started the fast decent, picking up speed until we rejoined the motorway, back the same way we had come from the start. It was then that I suddenly realised, "I have no idea where the finish line is, it was moved since last year!" I thought, "Last year the race had ended on a long flat section, so this year we'll probably finish in town!" I kept pushing my legs, overtaking riders and telling myself it was only a few kilometres to go. But in the back of my mind there was a nagging thought, "What was in store for me?"

I knew the race finish was critical, and I hadn't thought to check it out, "Man! How stupid was I? Don't be negative!" I told myself, and carried on sprinting. We rode into the town centre, I became more and more anxious as we kept riding with no finish line in sight. Then as we turned a corner, there was a final up-ramp back onto the freeway. "Oh, No!" My legs were screaming at me to stop but I had to keep going. The riders I had passed on the hill now started to overtake me, I started to panic, "I'm losing my hard work to stupidity! Why didn't you check out the finish?" My anger gave me the power I needed; I jumped off my seat and stomped the pedals to get the last out of my legs. Just as I started to regain the lost places, there was the finish line. "Damn!" I was angry with myself. My chest was heaving and I almost fell down when I got off my bike. I had put everything into the race itself, but by not knowing about the finish had cost me a dozen or more finish places!

Officially, I had finished in 3h8m, 867th out of 30081 finishers. I had done very well, but I knew that my ignorance had cost me. Hindsight is an exact science, I could only blame myself! I should have taken the time to find out how the race finished! I didn't break my sub-three target time, but judging by my finishing position, my performance was in the top three percent. I was happy with my race, I had avoided accident and injury, had no punctures, my bike and body hadn't let me down.

I was pleased overall with the way the race had gone. I could hear my father's voice, saying, "Chalk it up to experience!" Slowly I got back on the bike. "Ouch! Now the saddle is uncomfortable!" I rode slowly back to the hotel. Propping my bike against the wall of my room, I threw my medal on the bed, stripped off my race gear and jumped into a hot bath considering what to do next.

I decided to go home as I had nothing planned in Capetown after the race, and I was missing my wife. I quickly packed, paid the deskclerk and took my suitcases and bike to the car. I phoned Beverly, told her how the race had gone, and that I was leaving and should be home before 1am, she told me to be careful and promised to wait up for me. I drove to a garage on the waterfront, filled up the car, bought a sandwich and cooldrink. "Time to go home!", I told myself. The last group of cyclists had only just left the start and the road was being reopened for traffic. I watched the cyclists cranking their way up the hill, and I smiled leaning back into the soft seat of my bakkie, with the cool ocean breeze blowing on my face. It was going to be a long ride home!

I was halfway to Colesberg when my cellphone rang. It was Andries, he had ridden the race on a tandem, swapped his tandem bike for his single, and was riding the race route again! "Where are you?" he asked impatiently, "Halfway to Colesberg!", I replied. "What? That's crazy!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't you stay the night, and go home tomorrow?" I replied with a smile, "Yes, I know it's crazy, but I'm not the one riding the race again!" He laughed, and told me about the fun they were having. Eating various snacks, having their legs massaged, and partaking in the luxuries one can enjoy on a casual 2nd time around. We discussed the race and he told me to be careful driving home.

I had driven down alone and now I was riding back alone, the music kept me company but it wasn't long before I realised my eyes were closing. I would stop at a garage, walk around a bit, go to the bathroom, get something to drink and then be off again. Thank goodness for Redbulls, the caffeine helped me to stay awake. I stopped every two hours or so to walk a bit and wake myself up, but when it got to 8pm I only stopped when I needed fuel for the bakkie. I had left Capetown at around 11am Sunday morning, and it was after 1am, Monday morning when I drove into my garage. The drive back had been more of an endurance event than the race itself. I was home safely, and Beverly was pleased to see me back, a day earlier than I had planned. I quickly unpacked, showered and jumped into bed.

7am being Monday, I went to work. They were surprised to see me, and told me I was crazy to drive back that Sunday. That evening we decided to go out and see a film, I had bought two official race T-shirts, and Beverly and I were wearing these as we walked through the shopping mall. A guy at a coffee shop stopped us and asked, "Did you ride the Argus?" Staring at our T-shirts, he had a sort of bewildered look on his face. "Yes," I said. "I rode it yesterday." He looked at me disbelieving and stated, "You didn't ride the Argus!" I laughed and we walked away.

It's been nearly nine years since I rode that race. I can still remember the disappointment I experienced at the finish line, far clearer than the rest of my ride. If only I had studied the finish. It wouldn't have influenced my time much, but I would have been prepared for that last incline. Conserving my energy for the up-ramp would have allowed me to maintain my finishing position.

A few years ago, I was watching Kobus van Rensburg on satellite TV; Kobus is a faith healer with incredible compassion for the sick. Preaching from his pulpit at Spirit Word Ministries, his photographic memory allows him to continuously quote scriptures. I remember thinking to myself, "I should know what he's talking about. I have a number of Bibles, but I've never made time to study them! I don't know what he's talking about! Here's another finish-line, I've no knowledge of! What happens when I reach the end of this race? What if I've got it all backwards? It'll be too late then to panic, and make changes to my lifestyle!"

It's thanks to Kobus van Rensburg, that I started to read the Bible in earnest. I started with my Ryrie Study Bible, and read from Genesis to Revelation. It was hard going at first, like hill climbing on a bike. It was very boring in places and just seemed to go on and on, but I persevered. Many months later, I finished reading the Study Bible and decided to buy the Charles F. Stanley, Life Principles Bible. The text seemed easier to absorb the second time, the stories felt familiar, and a feeling of comfort settled in. I started to notice similar themes and topics in the different books. I highlighted verses which I felt were important with a yellow marker. I also noted the related verses in the margins of the pages. I bought a Strong's Concordance and looked up verses from all the books which discussed similar topics. This was particularly enlightening.

What is preached from pulpits is not always the whole truth. Sermons are given a spin or flavour, depending on which denomination the Pastor is from. The church's doctrine determines the interpretation. By the third time I'd read through the Bible, I had started to email Pastors and ask them questions on what they were preaching. I also asked them for answers to questions on scriptures I had. There was surprisingly very little response to my emails, I thought these people would be very willing to assist me?

I realised that I really am pedalling my own bicycle of faith, I am surrounded with other cyclists, but each one is really only concerned with their own race. Most have no idea what the finish looks like. There are some who have given up, sitting back on the saddle watching others cycling by, waiting for someone else to pedal their bike for them. But this race has a predefined time limit, this Creation will come to an end. Whether we live to see the finish line or not. We only have our lifetime to get to know the Race Organiser. We may know of Him, but He must know each one of us by name. If we want to qualify for the next event, we must meet His qualification requirements.

From what I've read in the Bible, this race only lasts for 6000 years. According to Jewish historians, man has been riding this race for 5769 years, there is potentially only 231 years left. To put it another way, if we compare this race to a 280 day pregnancy, there are only 10 days left before the child is born! Will you be prepared for that finish line? Will you qualify to live in the new Creation to come, or will you be destroyed in the lake of fire? That's up to you, each participant makes their own choice. Bibles are found everywhere you look, but very few people read them to discover the truth. I urge you to read the Bible for yourself. Find out firsthand, because so much of what I hear preached does not agree with the Word of God.

If one sets aside 90 minutes on a weekend to sit and quietly read the Bible, one will read through the whole Bible in a year. If one reads for 90 minutes a day, one will read through the whole Bible seven times in one year! The advantage of doing this is that, when somebody tells you something about the Word of God, you will know instantly whether it is truth or error. God knows those who read His Word; as you read you get to know Him, He remembers your name.

Life is not about clothing, food, drink, or owning the best bike: It's about knowing who you are; knowing the correct choices to make; knowing what the finish-line actually looks like; letting the 'The Race Organiser' get to know you; and you meeting His requirements for qualification. If you die before doing this, you are automatically disqualified and there's no hope in hell! Our Hope is in heaven and He intercedes with His Father on our behalf.

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."
(Joh 8:31-32)

A man has deprived himself of the best there is in the world, who has deprived himself of intimate knowledge of the Bible. (Woodrow Wilson)

The Bible is a book in comparison with which all others, in my eyes, are of minor importance, and which in all my perplexities and distresses has never failed to give me light and strength. (Robert E. Lee)

I consider an intimate knowledge of the Bible an indispensable qualification of a well-educated man. Contact with the finest influences which have ever come into human life can be obtained only in this way. (Robert A. Millikan)

Try to comprehend as much as possible of this book with your mind, and accept the rest on faith, and you will live and die a better man. (Abraham Lincoln)

There are no songs comparable to the songs of Zion, no orations equal to those of the prophets, and no politics like those which the Scriptures teach. (John Milton)

We search the world for truth: we cull the good, the pure, the beautiful, from graven stone and written scroll, from old flower fields of the soul; and, weary seekers of the best, we come back laden from our quest, to find that all the sages said is in the book our mothers read. (Whittier)

All that I have taught of art, everything that I have written, every greatness that there has been in any thought of mine, whatever I have done in my life, has been simply due to the fact that when I was a child my mother daily read to me a portion of the Bible, and daily made me learn a part of it by heart. (John Ruskin)

In what light soever we regard the Bible, whether with reference to revelation, to history, to morality, it is an invaluable and an inexhaustible mine of knowledge and virtue. (John Quincy Adams)

The Bible ought to be read, were it only for the sake of the grand English in which it is written. (Alfred Tennyson)

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. (Psa 19:8)

THE BIBLE

Born in the East and clothed in Oriental form and imagery, the Bible walks the ways of the world with familiar feet and enters land after land to find its own everywhere. It has learned to speak in hundreds of languages to the hearts of men. It comes into the palace to tell the monarch that he is a servant of the Most High, and into the cottage to assure the peasant that he is a son of God.

Children listen to its stories with wonder and delight, and wise men ponder them as parables of life. It has a word of peace for the time of peril, a word of comfort for the time of calamity, a word of light for the hour of darkness. Its oracles are repeated in the assembly of the people, and its counsels whispered in the ear of the lonely. The wicked and the proud tremble at its warnings, but to the wounded and the penitent it has a mother's voice.

The wilderness and the solitary place have been made glad by it, and the fire on the hearth has lit the reading of its well worn page. It has woven itself into our dearest dreams; so that love, friendship, sympathy and devotion, memory and hope, put on the beautiful garments of its treasured speech, breathing of frankincense and myrrh. No man is poor or desolate who has this treasure for his own.

When the landscape darkens and the trembling pilgrim comes to the Valley named of the Shadow, he is not afraid to enter; he takes the rod and staff of scripture in his hand; he says to friend and comrade; "Goodbye, we shall meet again." and comforted by that support, he goes toward the lonely pass as one who walks through darkness into light. (Henry van Dyke)

These quotes and introduction are taken from the two excellent, Dallas High Schools; Old Testament Bible Study Course and the New Testament Bible Study Course.

Bible Study Course - Old Testament (Sept 1954) - I SBN : 0-925279-44-7 Price \$4.95

Bible Study Course - New Testament (Sept 1946) - I SBN : 0-925279-28-5 Price \$4.95