

FEATURE STORY

WINTER BRAKES

THE BIKE MS GUIDE TO BEATING THE COLD THIS OFF-SEASON

BY TAREK WILEY

For a moment everything is calm. The cyclists stand at the ready, one foot on the ground and the other resting eagerly on their bike pedals, anticipating the signal. Suddenly, over the sound of their anxious breaths, a voice echoes through the speakers. “Go!” The calm disappears, and the avalanche starts as Bike MS: Tour de Farms gets underway.

It can be difficult to visualize the start of a cycling event when winter’s icy breath is blowing on your neck, but now is the perfect time to start setting goals, raising funds and preparing for the 2015 event.

WARM UP

For one weekend in June, DeKalb, Illinois, will become the focal point of the MS movement as thousands of cyclists descend on the town for Bike MS: Tour de Farms 2015, part of the largest fundraising cycling series in the nation.

But for now, the aspirations of many cyclists remain as frozen as the roads outside. Yes, the temperatures will rise and their bikes will thaw, but in the meantime, what’s the eager Bike MS enthusiast to do in these bitter winter months?

“Winter months, I’m in the gym,” said Bill Artz, captain of the BMO Harris Bank Bike MS team. “I do the elliptical and the Stairmaster. If it’s warm enough, I hike outside or I may go for a ride, but for the most part I’m in the gym.”

When he’s not training in the gym, Bill is trying to grow his corporate team and increase his fundraising efforts for Bike MS.

“Our goal this year is to get 40 or 50 people for the team,” said Bill. “We do a couple of things around the office to generate some buzz and build the team internally leading up to the event.”



Bike MS cyclists, Ray & Kris Hallowell

For Bill, preparing for Bike MS also means considering new ways to challenge himself, which is why he first joined the event.

“I used to run a lot, but I had problems with my feet, so I started biking,” said Bill. “I started by riding around the neighborhood. I’d probably do about 10–15 miles at first. Then, I started looking for longer rides, which is when I found Bike MS.”

Kris Hallowell, on the other hand, prefers to keep her rides as short as possible. She rides with her husband, Ray Hallowell, as a member of Team Alpine. Ray has been a cyclist all his life, while Kris’ history with bicycles is a bit ... traumatic.

“I totaled two of them as a young teen,” said Kris. “I have a fear of bikes and traffic. Also, I tend to fall over sideways, so I don’t ride alone.”

But being bicycle-challenged hasn’t stopped Kris from getting involved in Bike MS.

“Even if someone cannot ride, they can volunteer within their abilities,” she said. “People can be cheerleaders along the route, welcome the riders back from their rides or just be there to say thank you. The more people and teams the better. And of course, there is always fundraising that can be done by anyone.”

“I try to take advantage of BMO’s corporate matching gift policy,” said Bill of his fundraising efforts. “If you can get that, the funds double up. It makes it a lot easier.”

Bike MS is about identifying your personal challenge, setting goals and accomplishing what you set out to do, even if that means doing something that scares you.

“Ray suggested I ride on Sunday with him on a tandem bike in 2010, and I have ever since,” said Kris. “That year was the first time I was on a bike in over 30 years. He led me kicking and screaming for 35 miles, not letting me give up ... It’s hard to jump off a moving bike.”

FEEL THE BURN

Bike MS isn’t just for the people on bikes. It’s for anyone with a burning passion for making a difference in the lives of everyone affected by MS.

“I believe all of our friends see themselves as part of our team to end MS,” said Ray. “Bike MS brings into focus the importance of fundraising to support MS programs and research, and it allows our friends to provide a measure of support to Kris and me as well as to the MS Society.”

Kris began experiencing numbness, double vision and loss of balance in 1984, shortly after the birth of their first son. After an MRI confirmed that she had MS, she went into a deep depression.

“My mom researched and found the MS Society and forced Ray and me to go to a support group meeting,” Kris explained. “That was the best thing that ever happened to me. I grew emotionally and physically. The world became bright again, and I said I would never again go to that dark place, and I haven’t.”

The money raised from events like Bike MS is what makes transitions like Kris’ possible, and it’s all thanks to the dedicated participants who are working together for a mutual cause.

“I think that most people who get involved in Bike MS have a connection, whether it is some relative or friend who has MS,” said Bill. “My brother has MS, so that’s one reason I do it.

“What I find particularly motivating is when people who have MS do the ride, conquering the physical challenge of even a portion of it. When you see it on the road, people doing their best to



**BMO Harris Bank
Team Captain,
Bill Artz**

complete the ride in the best way they can, it’s really uplifting.”

TURN UP THE HEAT

It’s never too early to start preparing for Bike MS: Tour de Farms, and the MS Society wants to help. With different rallies, team challenges and training rides throughout the winter, you’ll be out of hibernation and well on your way to surpassing your goals in no time.

Get started today, and see how your efforts this winter can make a difference to you and everyone affected by MS.

Whether you are a rider, a fundraiser or just looking for a fun event, there is something for everyone at Bike MS.

“There are distances for every skill level, and the food, live music and activities make for a good time for the whole family,” said Ray. “Also, it’s important to come together to support a common cause.”

Bike MS: Tour de Farms 2015 takes place June 27 and 28 in DeKalb, Illinois. Start preparing now for a weekend-long event that will stay with you for a lifetime.

“People need to understand that it’s a really unique event, and it’s a lot of fun,” said Bill. “There’s a lot of camaraderie that comes with working toward a cause. The whole event is a fun, worthwhile couple of days.”

For more information or to form a team, register as an individual or donate online, visit www.bikeMSIllinois.org.