

“This year we did the Étape du Tour that started in Modane and we did the Télégraphe, the Galibier and Alpe d'Huez. On Alpe d'Huez it was very hot 33 degrees pfff, I am a woman 47 year's old, 1m66 and 85 kg so I am too big normally but I have learned to ride with the heart meter so I can do it. But on Alpe d'Huez it was very hard and I was on the point of giving and getting in the bus. But I was seeing so many young people on the side of the road waiting from the bus and I was still on my bike and I have so much adrenaline inside me that on the moment that some people on the side were saying 'that's very good miss come on come on' that I was going on and the last 3 km were the most hard but also the most beautiful of the day. The bus was just after me and I say to myself come on Caro you can do it finish here in time and yesssss I did it, I don't how but I had a feeling of flying and my legs going like crazy and my bike was going faster and faster and now I am so proud of myself that I have done it!! I was climbing it for 2 hours and 19 minutes for some people it is very long but I am very very happy that I have done it yessss!”

A participant

The Motivations of Amateur Cyclists

| | |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 4 |
| RESULTS & DISCUSSION: THE MOTIVATIONS OF AMATEUR CYCLISTS | 5 |
| Tools to help keep the commitment to training hard..... | 15 |
| Types of goals cyclists set themselves..... | 16 |
| CONCLUSIONS | 17 |
| APPENDIX 1: IN THEIR OWN WORDS | 18 |
| 1. The Attractions of Cycling | 19 |
| 2. Pain and Suffering on a bike..... | 20 |
| 3. Being “in the zone” | 21 |
| 4. Motivation to Train | 22 |
| 5. From Passion to Obsession..... | 23 |
| APPENDIX 2: METHODOLOGY | 24 |
| APPENDIX 3: ABOUT MINDSTORE AND MARVIN FAURE | 25 |

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to explore the motivations of amateur cyclists, and especially those who participate in the major sportive races in the mountains such as the Étape du Tour, the Marmotte, the Time-Megève-Mont Blanc, etc. These mythical events are not for the faint-hearted. Simply participating with a realistic chance of finishing inside the time limit requires considerable dedication and many long hours of hard training.

The average distance covered by the research participants per year is 6,500 km, with a maximum of 20,000 km. A brief calculation tells us that the average time spent cycling per week must be at least 5 hours, not including time spent changing, showering and maintaining the bike. Many people spend considerably more time than that.

This investment in time and energy cannot be made without consequences on one's personal or professional life. So why do we do it? What pushes cyclists to constrain themselves willingly to such extremes of effort, indeed of pain and suffering, knowing that the great majority have not the slightest chance to win an event (or even to finish in the top 500)?

Human motivation is an extraordinarily complex topic and no two people have exactly the same mix of motivations. It is therefore not possible to point to one single overriding factor that explains why we do it, but rather a whole range of contributing motivations that combine together in different ways for different people.

We have quantified the relative importance of these motivations on average to a population of 600 cyclists from over 29 different countries, and thus feel rather confident in claiming that our list applies to the majority of amateur cyclists who approach their sport with significant levels of dedication.

We hope you enjoy reading the results.

Marvin Faure
November 2011

We thank ASO l'Étape du Tour Mondovelo, DSO Sports, Hot Chillee, the organisers of the Time-Megève-Mont-Blanc and Vittoria for their valued support, without which this research would not have been possible.



RESULTS & DISCUSSION: THE MOTIVATIONS OF AMATEUR CYCLISTS

Please refer to Fig. 1 for a chart of the nineteen principle motivations of amateur cyclists. Each of these is discussed below in detail. The percentage number given in brackets after each headline motivation is the percentage of cyclists for whom this particular motivation is either “Very Important” or “Quite Important”. The nineteen principle motivations are (in decreasing order of importance):

- I just love riding my bike (94%)
- In order to stay physically fit (93%)
- It is a personal challenge (90%)
- I feel really good afterwards (90%)
- For my health in general (90%)
- I love the feeling of pushing myself to the limit (and beyond) (88%)
- Time out for myself, away from day-to-day stress (80%)
- I need to prove something to myself (70%)
- Camaraderie (66%)
- I need it, otherwise I don't feel good (digestion, sleep, mood...) (58%)
- I am highly competitive and love the racing (57%)
- What doesn't kill me makes me stronger (53%)
- Great way to network and meet people (50%)
- I am pushing back the moment when I'll have to stop all sport (41%)
- To lose weight (38%)
- At my age, this is maybe the last chance to compete in a physical sport (37%)
- I want to prove something to others (23%)
- Rivalry with someone else (23%)
- Pressure to join a team (8%)

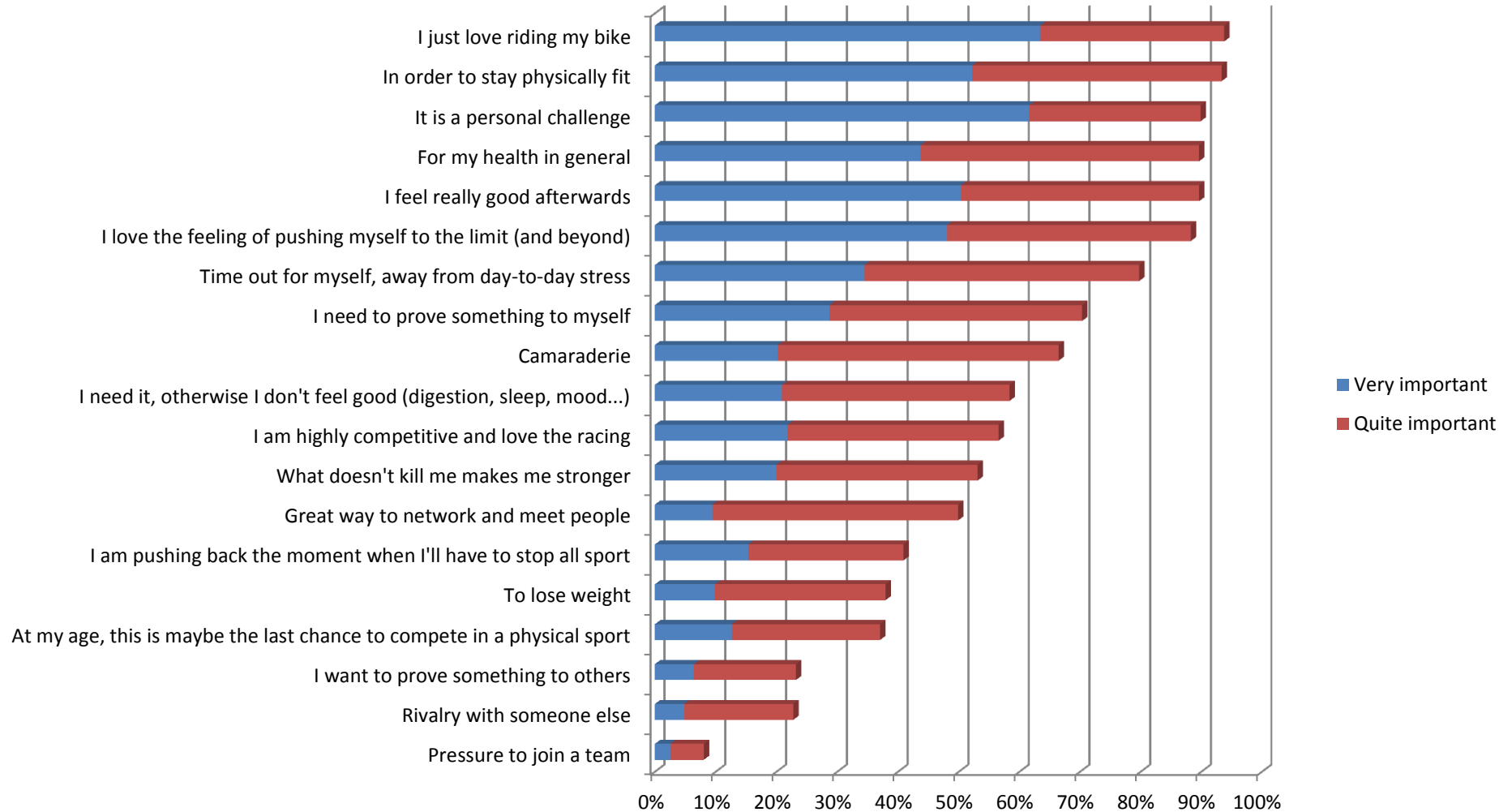


Fig 1. Why do you participate in tough cycle races?

In order to simplify the following discussion, we have grouped together the motivations that are similar (for example, all those related to health, physical fitness and well-being).

I just love riding my bike (94%)

The number one motivation in cycling is of course the sheer pleasure of riding a bike. As every school boy knows, bicycles are the most efficient form of human-powered locomotion ever invented. There is something very satisfying in travelling at high speed using no more than the power in one's own legs, and we can all remember that happy day when at last we miraculously found our balance and cycled without stabilizers for the first time.

These simple pleasures are accessible to all: children, commuters and occasional weekend cyclists as well as the more serious cyclists that we addressed in this study. For serious cyclists, however, these pleasures are experienced at a deeper, more intense level.

The thrill of speed and mastery over danger is particularly high in the mountains, when, after the long struggle against gravity to reach the top, one is free at last to swoop back down again through the corners at death-defying speeds, leaving no margin for error or misjudgment. Here, the joy of speed as one accelerates down narrow roads, often with limited visibility and poor surfaces is primeval, scary and addictive. How vulnerable the cyclist is, riding at 60 or 70 km/h on tires no thicker than a finger, clad in the lightest of clothing, almost unprotected! One rider reported how on one breakneck descent in the clouds, with visibility less than 20 yards, he relied totally on his Garmin to warn him of the approaching hairpins. To take such risks and survive gives a heightened sense of being alive as well as bragging rights in the club for many years thereafter. This is fun stuff!

On the best days, the miles slip by as the pedals turn in a smooth and effortless rhythm, heart beating powerfully, breathing easy and the mind at rest, in an almost meditative state of calm. On such days one can go far beyond the simple pleasure of riding to reach the elusive, addictive state of "flow", or the "Zone", when everything seems easy and personal bests are set and beaten. This state comes at least partly from total absorption in the moment, which makes the cyclist lose the sense of time passing, and partly from the effect of the endorphins secreted by the body after a period of intense effort. The "Zone" is generally only experienced by the most highly trained cyclists and cannot be accessed at will. But what pleasure when it does happen!¹²

¹ The state of "flow" was first described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the 1970's and has been studied by numerous researchers since, in many different sports. Terminology varies and includes the "Zone", the "groove", "white moment", "to be locked in", or the "runner's high". There is no generally accepted definition of these terms; however it seems to us appropriate to consider "flow" as a state accessible to anyone undergoing an absorbing and enjoyable activity and the "Zone" as a state of optimum performance, well beyond that normally achieved. Various techniques have been developed to help athletes attain the "Zone", but none of them are 100% effective. The "Zone" remains elusive...

² During the course of this study, we received numerous reports of the experience, with 45% of the participants reporting that they have experienced something similar at least once. The study was however not designed to investigate the "Zone" and we are not able to suggest why some people have experienced it and the others not. You will find a selection of these reports in the chapter "Being in the Zone" on page 21.

The three or four-fold increase in speed and range on a bike compared to running opens up a world of freedom and discovery: this is another important element in the enjoyment of cycling. Motorists and motorcyclists can of course take the same roads, but their experience, isolated as they are from the environment by the noise and protection of their machine, can appear pale and tasteless compared with that of the cyclist. The cyclist is much closer to nature. How many details of the countryside, from the soft rustling of the wind in the trees to the deer slipping quietly into the woods or the beetle crawling across the road are lost to all but the cyclist? All cyclists have experienced that thrill of discovery, of rounding a bend in the road or cresting a rise to see a new vista spread out before their eyes. Many have also experienced the apprehension of getting lost many miles from home, and the prick of fear that comes with the thought, where am I and will I be able to get home by myself?

The pleasure of discovering new regions and beautiful scenery is a key reason for many to come and ride sportives, especially in the mountains. There is no need to worry about finding one's own route, just allowing oneself to be guided by the organizer, who will have taken care to choose the most scenic, cycle-friendly routes in the area. Some of the sportives take the riders truly off the beaten track to places one would never normally go: on the Drôme 2010 for example, where the route goes deep into the Vercors, the participants hardly saw a single car for several hours while riding through some of the most stunning scenery in France.

For many people, the bike is much more than something to ride and keep in the garage. The bike itself is a huge source of pleasure, of pride and of motivation, and many hours are spent deciding which one to buy and then lovingly cleaning it, maintaining it and upgrading it. A top of the range racing bike is a subtle blend of image, history, technical prowess, esthetics, style and embodies a myriad of choices. People become very attached to their favorite brands and wouldn't consider changing: witness the long discussions and unchanging positions taken on the relative merits of Campagnolo, Shimano or SRAM groupsets. Those with the means to do so buy a new bike every year: most of the rest dream of being able to do so.

The most basic motivation for serious amateur cyclists is thus the pleasure and enjoyment that cycling brings them. This rather unsurprising conclusion is almost circular: 'I love cycling because I love cycling' and needs further exploration. We uncover the deeper motivations in the following pages³.

³ Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this is that 6% of the participants do not consider "I just love riding my bike" as an "Important" or "Quite Important" motivation for their cycling. The analysis of this group suggests that, for them, the love of riding is secondary to other factors and in particular "pushing myself to the limit", a "personal challenge", "proving something to myself" and "staying physically fit".

In order to stay physically fit (93%); for my health in general (90%); I feel really good afterwards (90%); I need it, otherwise I don't feel good (digestion, sleep, mood...) (58%); to lose weight (38%);

The health benefits of practicing an aerobic, endurance sport such as cycling provide the essential purpose that is at the root of nearly everybody's motivation. The need for exercise is felt both physically and mentally. Some people report feeling out of sorts, listless, or even “dirty” when they have been unable to ride for two or three days. They may find it difficult to adjust their calorie intake with the ups and downs of training, with the result they eat too much on off days and have problems with digestion and sleep. These physical effects soon spill over on mood, making them edgy, irritable and impatient. All of this slips back into place as soon as they can get out for a decent ride again.

The health benefits raise cycling above the level of a purely selfish, personal pursuit: who can argue with a pastime that results in a happier and more relaxed individual, with better health and a greater life expectancy? The healthy aspects of cycling, both physical and mental, go a long way to explaining why cyclists' families are willing to tolerate the long hours spent out on the road.

Evolution didn't equip us for modern life and many of us feel a deep need to escape from the soft, effortless life surrounded by labor-saving devices at home and in the office to take on extraordinary physical challenges. Sometimes the primary motivation is simply to prove that we too can do it (e.g. complete the Étape du Tour), sometimes it is the addictive effect of the endorphins that keeps drawing us back for more; but the more time one spends on the bike, the more the physical need for exercise seems to grow.

Some fascinating recent research (well described in chapter 28 of Christopher McDougall's best-selling book *Born to Run*⁴) provides a strong indication that the human race was indeed born to run. For many millennia we captured our prey, not like the Neanderthals with spears and traps in epic fights to the death, but simply by isolating them and running them down. Unlike humans, animals are unable to sweat or drink while running and are therefore incapable of regulating their body heat during a long period of moderate exercise. They can easily outrun us initially, but after several hours are no longer to do so, and collapse exhausted and overheated. It is then a simple matter to move in for the kill. Our ability to run long distances at moderate speeds is still present in our genes and manifests itself as a need for physical exercise.

As a means of exercise, cycling has the great advantage over running, and any other sport dependent on running, such as football or rugby, of being impact-free and therefore much less traumatic. Carried by his machine, repeating continuously the same, smooth cyclical movement, the cyclist is protected against the constant shocks and trauma induced on the legs and body by running on hard surfaces. This is an important motivation for many people that have come to cycling later in life, after suffering injuries to their feet, their legs or to other parts of their bodies that prevent them from running comfortably. Cycling thus allows them to keep physically fit and in good health while still practicing an outdoor sport.

⁴ McDougall, Christopher (2009) *Born to Run: the hidden tribe, the ultra-runners and the greatest race the world has never seen*. Profile Books, London.

It is a personal challenge (90%); I need to prove something to myself (70%)

The personal challenge takes many forms, from cycling a certain distance (100 miles, 200 kilometers, around Lake Geneva, from London to Paris...), to cycling over the mythical mountain passes made famous by the Tour de France (the Galibier, Alpe d'Huez, the Tourmalet...), to simply beating one's personal best on a particular circuit or on a particular local climb. Sometimes miles and mountain passes are collected like trophies, each one ticked off as it is achieved. The simple fact to write down a list of ascents to be tackled this year is a powerful motivation to go and do them.

The lack of adventure, let alone hardship, in many people's lives leads some to seek it out and test themselves against self-imposed adversity. There is something heroic about finishing the Étape du Tour if you have never ridden more than a few dozen miles on the flat before taking up the challenge (as there is about many people's determination to finish a marathon at least once). This is a very different motivation than that of the serious rider, who covers perhaps 12,000 or 15,000 kilometers per year and can reasonably target a place in the top 500.

There are many different races going on at the Étape du Tour. The race for a place on the podium probably concerns less than 50 contestants out of the more than 8000 starters. Amongst the rest, some will be racing for a specific place in the hierarchy; others set out to beat a particular time; while the majority is there simply to experience the race on closed roads over exactly the same course as the professionals. Still others begin with the sole goal of reaching the finish line before the broom wagon. Some will stop, admire the scenery and take photographs en route, while others will push grimly on past the feed stations, not even stopping for 30 seconds for fear of losing time.

The most important aspect of a personal challenge is that it is entered into willingly. It is a personal choice, perhaps in some cases the acceptance of a gauntlet thrown down by someone else, but never imposed against one's will. In a world where much of our lives are dictated by the demands of others it is precious to have a few hours of autonomy each week where we are completely free. This freedom empowers us to impose on ourselves much higher constraints than we would ever willingly accept from an external power. We become our own hardest task-masters, demanding and obtaining ever higher tolerance of pain in the quest for ever higher levels of performance.

Nine people out of ten cite a "personal challenge" as being an important motivation in their cycling, while seven out of ten feel the "need to prove something to myself". Two persons out of ten thus seem to be saying that setting a personal challenge is not linked to a need to prove something to themselves. Why is this? We can't provide a firm answer to this question, but speculate that these persons may simply consider that they have no need (or no longer need) to prove anything to themselves. This group cycles on average 8,500 km per year, which is 2,000 km more than the average for all the participants. Perhaps their search for a personal challenge is motivated only by the pleasure in succeeding at something hard?

I love the feeling of pushing myself to the limit (88%); what doesn't kill me makes me stronger (53%)

There is a straightforward physiological explanation for loving the feeling of pushing oneself to the limit: the addictive pleasure of endorphins, the brain's feel-good chemicals released after a certain period of physical exertion. These hormone-like substances can mask pain as well as create the state of euphoria and well-being called "being in the Zone" or the "runner's high" (see the footnotes on page 7). Once experienced, the quest for this feeling can become almost obsessional: for some people, the reward is so great that all the efforts, the pain and the suffering are worth it for those few hours when everything falls into place, what was once hard becomes easy and one feels ready to take on anything or anybody.

There is also a mental dimension to pushing back the limits. It is personally enriching to keep testing the boundaries. Most people reach their mental limits long before the physical ones, giving up well before this becomes an absolute physical necessity. These experiences can be the occasion for learning something deep about oneself. In Nietzsche's famous phrase: *'what doesn't kill me makes me stronger'*. Every crucible experience, every true test where one pushes one's body to extremes that one didn't believe possible opens up new possibilities, new limits to be tested in their turn. Stories of extreme endurance show us that truly we do not know what we are capable of until we are forced (or force ourselves) to find out. Testing these limits is a rich personal experience.

One of the great satisfactions in life comes from the increasing mastery of a challenging skill, thus continuously pushing back the limits. Cycling performance is easy to measure, even with the most basic equipment. The fact that it is possible to continuously improve one's performance for many years after initially starting the sport is highly motivational and keeps one coming back for more, to answer the eternal question: just how good can I become? Where are my limits?

Most cyclists love to retrace their route on the map after a hard ride, to relive it and say: 'yes, it was tough, but I did it'. It is particularly gratifying to follow exactly the same route as the professionals we see on television, whether in a stage for the Tour de France or a one-day classic such as Paris-Roubaix or Liège-Bastogne-Liège. At least for a few hours, we ride the same roads as our heroes and we can briefly imagine what it is like to be one of them. The success of GPS recording devices like the Garmin can surely be partly explained by the pride taken in looking back at the route and the route profile, beautifully presented in Google Maps together with the related distance run, height gained, speed, heart rate, cadence and even power output data. All of these data can be carefully accounted for and used to set new targets. It is also no accident that the route maps and other data can be uploaded to the internet and shared with others: providing proof of what we did and a factual exposé of the suffering we went through.

The quest for higher performance also explains the search for the best possible bike and equipment, and the large sums of money that are spent on them. A new, carefully chosen bike is a great reason to get out more often and train harder: surely my new bike will help me perform better in the next race!

Cycling is a great leveler, teaching patience and humility in this never-ending struggle for improvement. Nothing ever seems to be definitively acquired; it is enough to take a break of three weeks to find one's performance put back by several months. Too much emphasis on endurance will reduce one's ability to

react to a sudden change in rhythm, let alone sprint. Focusing too long on spinning fast will result in an overall loss of force (and vice-versa). The bike is a hard task-master, unforgiving and cruel in her demands for an out and out, comprehensive commitment. What greater satisfaction than measuring one's improvement, what greater frustration than seeing performance slip away!

Time out for myself, away from day-to-day stress (80%)

In today's world, with constant interruptions and seemingly permanent and conflicting demands on one's time, taking time out for oneself has become a priority. Failure to do so results in living under a permanent state of low-level stress (with frequent peaks in the stress as too many demands coincide on one's time). Many people experience the pressure to be constantly available and feel obliged to respond almost instantaneously to messages received on their Blackberries or iPhones. The medical consequences of this constant stress have been well-documented, with sharply increased risk of cardio-vascular diseases, cancers, obesity and other ills of modern life. It is therefore not surprising that four out of five cyclists in our study see taking time out for themselves as an important factor in their motivations to get out and ride.

The escape to the open road is a great way to release tension and 'get away from it all' for a while. The physical fatigue that comes from spending four to five hours on the bike at a good pace helps to evacuate the adrenalin and toxic byproducts of stress, while the calm, meditative state achieved on such rides creates an inner peace that enables the rider to return and face the world with increased self-control and clarity of thought. In his book *The Escape Artist*⁵ amateur cyclist Matt Seaton tells how riding was for him an essential safety-valve; the means to manage the stress of his wife's terminal illness shortly after giving birth to twins. He describes how, during long, solo rides during her final few months he was happy to be alone with his thoughts. Even though the loneliness reaffirmed his sense of isolation, by the time he turned for home, his mood had lightened and the demon was at least temporarily exorcised.

Heavy physical exertion is a very effective way to escape mental stress. As Karl Marx once said: "*The only antidote to mental suffering is physical pain*". It is not unusual, at least for men, to use a particularly hard training ride as a means of managing the aftermath of bruising arguments or other conflicts at work. Such situations result in the automatic secretion of adrenaline, with mostly negative consequences in the absence of physical conflict. Physical exercise is an excellent way to rid the body of the aftermath of these situations.

Camaraderie (66%); great way to network and meet people (50%)

There is a certain sense of belonging to the cycling family. Riding in the bunch or the peloton has a clear set of rules and etiquette that is hidden to the non-initiated. No other sport has the equivalent to the peloton, where teamwork and the fellowship of the road enables the group as a whole to ride much faster for much longer than any one rider could manage alone. Riding wheel to wheel and shoulder to shoulder in a large peloton at high speeds for long distances is an exhilarating experience, each rider advancing in line, taking his turn on the front and dropping back in a synchronized movement that is deeply satisfying when well executed. Little is said: there is no need for speech, since all understand what needs to be done. Each is in his own world, yet

⁵ Seaton, Matt (2002) *The Escape Artist*. Fourth Estate/Harper Collins, London.

very aware of the companionable presence of the other riders next to him. There is no hierarchy in the bunch, no distinctions of class, education or professional standing, just the mutual respect accorded to those that ride well and do their share at the front. Those that fit in, doing their share of the work while riding ‘cleanly’ and smoothly are easily accepted and welcomed to the family, while the ‘wheel-suckers’ or those that ride clumsily or dangerously are given the cold shoulder.

Club rides, riding with a regular group, cycle camps and indeed sportives are a great way to meet and spend time with like-minded people. Other cyclists are the only people able to appreciate cycling stories at their proper value, and the only people with the patience to listen to them for any length of time. Exchanging with others allows us to brag about our exploits, to share favorite routes, to pick up tips and to learn from the more experienced, as well as helping the miles to slip by more agreeably.

Some riders form part of teams that regularly race together, and for them part of the motivation is the altruistic pleasure of working hard to help the team achieve its objectives for the event. If one doesn’t have the legs to win a race, the next best thing is to help a teammate to do so.

Finally, networking remains a crucial skill for success in business: what better way to meet and develop relationships with people than through a shared passion for sport and the great outdoors?

I am highly competitive and love the racing (57%)

Competition is of course an essential motivation for many people and the competitive spirit is certainly very much alive for over half of the cyclists surveyed. The drive to measure oneself against others has very deep evolutionary roots: the strongest and fittest man was always the most likely to survive and pass on his genes. This explains why some riders will make a competition out of anything and cannot bear to be beaten, if only in the sprint to the next signpost.

It also explains why some are willing to work harder in training and take greater risks during the race: for them the competition is everything. When the results are there, they justify all the sacrifices and risks taken; when not, the lack of results justifies redoubling the efforts to do better next time. A strong competitive drive can result in becoming truly obsessive, looking for every possible source of gain in training and in pre-race preparation and nutrition, in tactics during the race and of course in the bike itself which must be the highest specification possible.

I am pushing back the moment when I'll have to stop all sport (41%); at my age, this is maybe the last chance to compete in a physical sport (37%)

This particular motivation is obviously age-related and has no relevance to younger cyclists. The desire to ‘stop the clock’ becomes more and more marked as one gets older. Perhaps, to paraphrase Pete Townshend⁶ (The Who), many cyclists over a certain age “*hope to die before getting [too] old*” to ride their

⁶ “I hope I die before I get old”. This is a line from “My Generation”, a song composed by Pete Townshend in 1965 for the British rock group “The Who”.

bikes. There is clearly an element of rebellion and refusal to accept “common sense” and well-meaning outside pressures to put ones’ feet up and “act one’s age”.

The benefits of moderate exercise in terms of better health and increased longevity are now beyond doubt, and fears that the extreme efforts of hard stage races will actually reduce life expectancy have been shown to be false, at least for professional cyclists. In a recent study published in the International Journal of Sports Medicine⁷, the authors gave the results of their study of the longevity of 834 cyclists from France, Italy and Belgium who rode the Tour de France between the years 1930 and 1964. To quote directly from the abstract: *“We found a very significant increase in average longevity (17%) of the cyclists when compared with the general population. The age at which 50% of the general population died was 73.5 vs. 81.5 years in Tour de France participants. Our major finding is that repeated very intense exercise prolongs life span in well trained practitioners. Our findings underpin the importance of exercising without the fear that becoming exhausted might be bad for one’s health.”*

I want to prove something to others (23%); Rivalry with someone else (23%)

Sometimes, the competitive spirit is channeled by a desire to prove something to others, or by the desire to beat someone else. Intense rivalry can indeed be a very strong motivator, leading even to secretly redoubling one’s effort in training and dissimulating one’s true condition until the chosen moment to prove who is the strongest. Listen to conversations on the start line for a race or a sportive: how often do you hear people say that they have trained hard and are feeling really strong? It is far more common to hear claims that one has hardly trained at all and can’t possibly expect to do well!

Since wanting to prove something to others and rivalry with someone else are external motivational factors, they may have a powerful effect in the short term but rarely last for long. Once one has proved that one can do it, or once the rival has been comprehensively beaten, there is no need to keep on doing it. Unless these factors are replaced by the more permanent factors cited earlier (love of riding, health and fitness, new personal challenges, etc.) the persons concerned will find their motivation falling away over time.

Pressure to join a team (8%)

The final motivation that we found for cyclists was pressure to join a team. It is not uncommon, especially in the UK, for teams to be formed around specific events (e.g. London to Paris). The aim of such teams is often to raise money for charity, providing a “higher purpose” that justifies all the time spent training and preparing, as well as the time spent on the event itself. The teams tend to be formed either amongst co-workers in a company or amongst a group of friends, and the social pressure to join can be quite intense!

⁷ Sanchis-Gomar F, Olaso-Gonzalez G, Corella D, Gomez-Cabrera MC, Vina J. (2011). *Increased Average Longevity among the "Tour de France" Cyclists*. International Journal of Sports Medicine. 32(8):644-7.

Tools to help keep the commitment to training hard

Participants reported the tools listed below in Fig 2 as either being “*Very Important*” or “*Quite Important*” to keeping their commitment to training hard.

Clearly, goal-setting is crucial to maintaining the motivation. This is hardly surprising: without clear goals what would be the reason to push oneself hard in training? Sooner or later motivation would inevitably flag, and the goals are needed to remind one why one is doing it. See Fig.3 for the types of goals that are commonly used.

Visualization and affirmations (or positive self-talk) are also seen as very important tools in maintaining motivation. They are linked to goals: for a goal to be credible and effective, you have to be able to see yourself achieving it. The more you visualize success, the more likely it becomes that you will make the necessary efforts to ensure success. Positive self-talk helps to get through the moments of self-doubt or the off-days when the weather is bad or the heart isn’t in it.

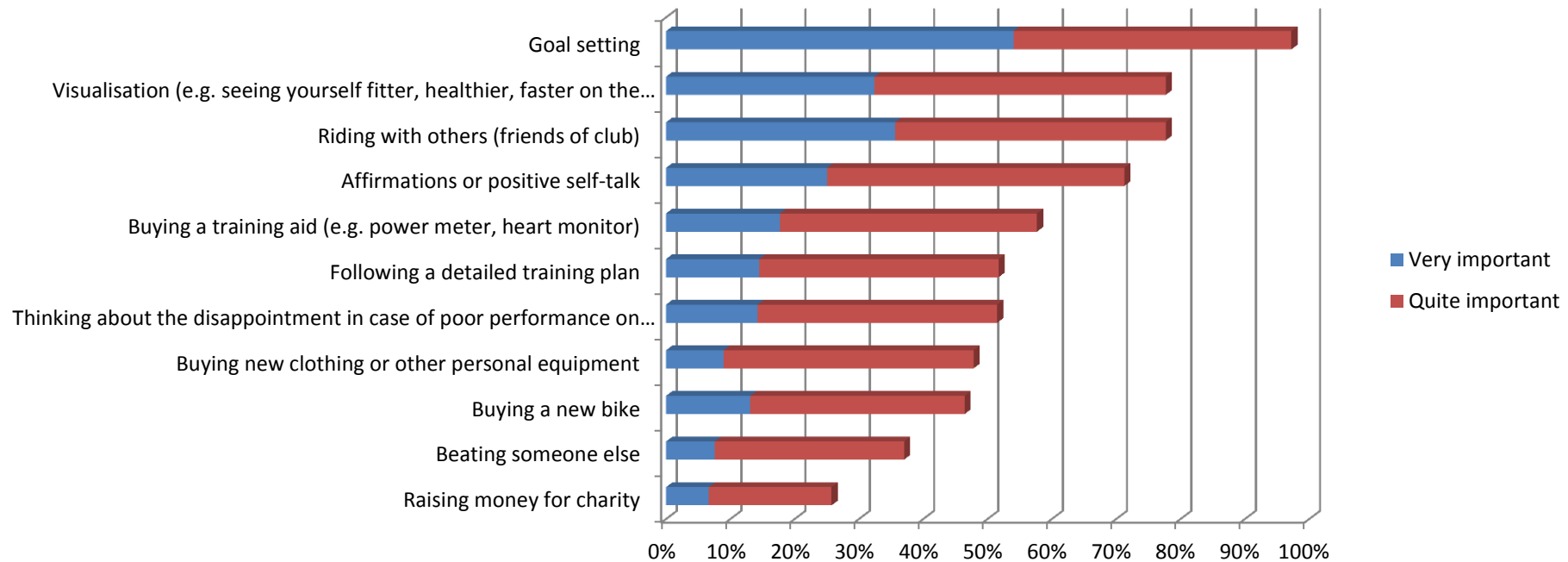


Fig. 2 Tools to keep commitment to training hard

Types of goals cyclists set themselves

The participants reported setting the following types of goals for themselves (multiple answers were allowed):

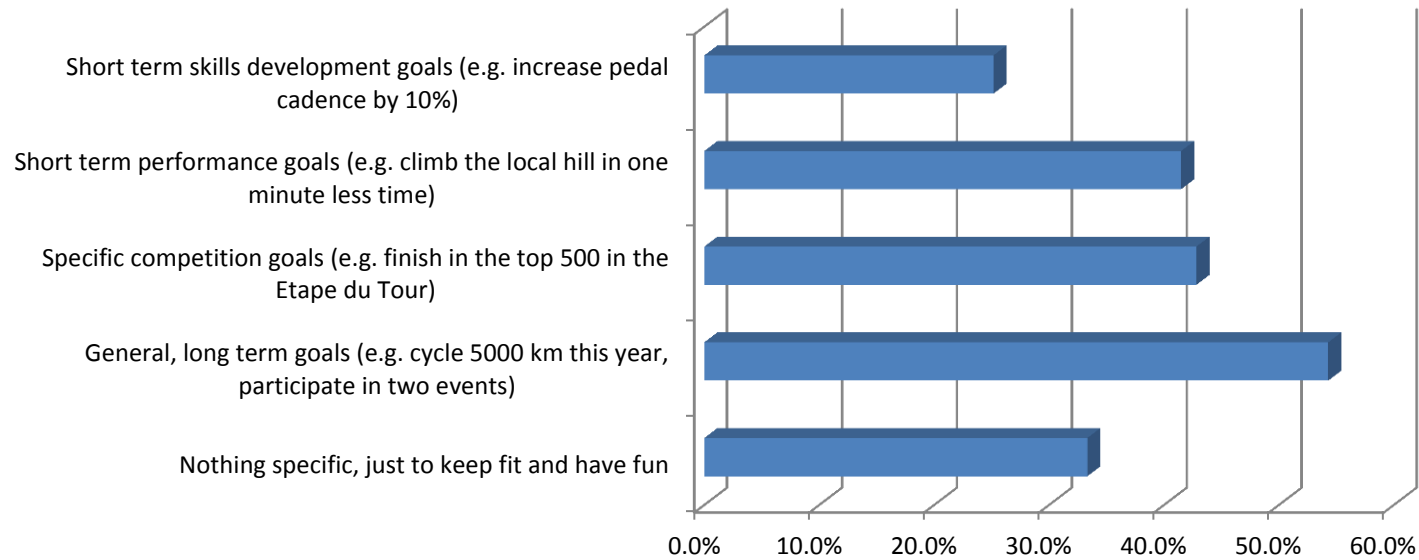


Fig 3. Types of goals

Note that the majority of these goals are specific and measurable, thus increasing determination and eliminating all doubt as to whether they have been achieved. Some specific examples:

- *Finish Paris-Brest-Paris in less than 60 hours.*
- *Find new routes or hills.*
- *Ticking off the cols on a list.*
- *I aim to improve my VO2 Max each time I am tested, approximately every 6 months.*
- *Having a 5 meter advance after each 90 degree (or more) corner in comparison to my team-mates.*
- *I'm a triathlete who loves to ride. Beating cyclists is a great goal but I have triathlon goals set for 2013 already.*

CONCLUSIONS

As we stated in the introduction, human motivation is an extraordinarily complex topic and no two people have exactly the same mix of motivations. We have identified a whole range of contributing motivations that combine together in different ways for different people.

It is interesting to note that, of the nineteen principal motivations identified, all but the last three (and therefore the least significant) are intrinsic, meaning that they come from inside the person and are based on real interest or enjoyment, as opposed to extrinsic motivations that come from outside, such as rewards or punishments. This is not about winning, or proving something to others, but about doing something we love, that is good for our health, that makes us feel good and that represents a personal challenge.

These findings are aligned with those of researchers in the corporate world, who have found that for all except routine, repetitive work⁸, intrinsic motivational factors are more powerful than extrinsic. In other words, motivating people to do their best at work is very little about carrots and sticks and a great deal about creating the conditions where they are self-motivated. The most important of these motivational factors are the same in cycling as they are at work:

- freedom of choice,
- doing something you love,
- a personal challenge,
- the possibility to progress,
- a higher purpose to what we are doing.

In the second round of our research, we will investigate how to transfer some of the incredible motivation and dedication shown by amateur cyclists to the workplace, and how companies can create conditions at work that are truly motivating.

The survey link is here: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YG2VDGG>

Please do continue to participate: your input is truly valued.

Marvin Faure
November 2011

⁸ For an overview of recent research see, for example: Pink, Daniel H. (2009) *Drive: the surprising truth about what motivates us*. Riverhead Books, New York.

APPENDIX 1: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The following sections contain verbatim quotes from the research. They have been selected to be as representative as possible of all the hundreds of opinions expressed.

1. The attractions of cycling
2. Pain and suffering on a bike
3. Being “in the zone”
4. Motivation to train
5. From passion to obsession

1. The Attractions of Cycling

What first attracted you to cycling (as an adult?)

- *Sense of freedom, ability to really see the areas in which I was riding, and because it offered a non-impact alternative to running for my knees.*
- *Speed, technique, endurance, it's the most heroic of all sports!*
- *Great outdoor exercise in great scenery, I don't like running (bad joints), love the Tour de France.*
- *I remembered how good it was as a kid and needed to get fit again.*
- *Great exercise you can do anywhere as a solo rider as well as the fun of group rides.*
- *You want to feel like pro riders feel.*
- *Freedom, peaceful, great work out, social, spectacular scenery.*
- *The freedom, the speed, the thrills.*
- *Antidote to aggravation of modern working life, interest in cycling culture and history, personal challenge, exercise and competition.*
- *First it was bike commuting, then a charity ride, then purchased a road bike and got seriously into training.*
- *As a challenge, I wanted to have a go at riding the Etape and finishing it - just to see if I was capable.*
- *A way to discover new regions, beautiful scenery, and keep fit at the same time. A bit like the 'slow food' movement, when you're on a bike you can enjoy many of the pleasures you cannot when driving in a car--like the smells and sounds of the countryside.*
- *Drive of moving yourself forward at speed under your own power. The adrenalin rush from a fast descent. Ease of travel between places.*
- *My partner was competing in a race and I wanted to join him.*
- *Excellent sport without the usual trauma generated by running long distance. It is a real alternative to my other sport activities with less damage to my body. Especially when you become older.*
- *The need to do something significant for my health and the lower impact of cycling on knees (I have had knee surgery and osteoarthritis in both knees) attracted me to cycling.*
- *The speed and the toughness of cycling.*
- *Freedom and getting outside while getting the best cardio workout.*
- *Racing for a good cause: climbing the Mont Ventoux for sick children.*
- *Speed, then the Tour de France.*
- *I played contact sport (rugby, American football) until the body cried enough. Cycling doesn't impact on the body like running etc and I can push myself as hard as I like without physically bashing up my body - not excluding crashes :-)*
- *The overall fun and meeting people and to try always to be better than before.*
- *Fighting with my own weaknesses.*

2. Pain and Suffering on a bike

“No pain, no gain”. Pain and suffering seem to be an essential part of progression on a bicycle. Please describe what you think about when you are out riding on a very tough training session. What drives you on? How do you force yourself to ignore the pain?

- *What drives me on: When I feel like stopping, I think of “the other guy” giving up on the same kind of session, so if I carry on, I’ve dropped him on the climb! I’ve got the edge already. I sometimes think of people with clogged arteries sat on sofas in front of TVs... Ignoring the pain: It isn’t really pain – child birth is real pain, my best friend (a competitive runner) told me! Training is more “controllable discomfort” and temporary, and the more uncomfortable it is, the better it feels when you stop. Also, most people aren’t aware of the level of “pain” they can withstand simply because they’ve never been there before. In a competitive situation, you need to know where your limits are – how do you know those limits (and sensations) if you don’t go there from time to time in training?*
- *Knowing that at the end I will have achieved something, especially if it’s something other people see as something they wouldn’t expect me to do. In order to ignore the pain I always assume that I’ve done something else that was harder*
- *The achievement of reaching the top of a tough climb. If you hurt everyone hurts: work through it for the gain.*
- *Focusing on rhythm & pushing myself beyond what my body is trying to say.....it is a mental game.*
- *I am a scientist and engineer. When it hurts, I watch the numbers and aim higher than last time.*
- *Focus on the scenery and beauty of the area -- or just the plants in the ditch on the side of the road. Think about major health problems I am hopefully avoiding by riding hard. Realization that this is one objective I can reach where there are no bosses, clients, family, or others putting up obstacles in front of me that would slow me down or mess me up.*
- *It depends; it’s important to train intervals so you have periods of “on” and “off”- during the efforts I think about the positive effects of training and how my training is like money in the bank for the actual events. During rest phases I am either preparing my brain for the next effort by calming down my breathing and heart rate or I am chatting with friends or, if alone, just mulling over life’s many puzzles. The expectation of post exercise endorphins keeps me going and being able to eat as much as I like. Train in intervals so you know when the pain is going to stop- you choose the pain so savour it, other people are not as lucky and will be working three jobs while you are free to cycle!*
- *Gaining a few extra seconds and then enjoying the blast down the other side of a climb. This pain is nothing compared with the physical and mental pain I have suffered due to serious accidents. Pain goes away when you stop!*
- *I think about pushing thru the pain and how getting thru this NOW will make me stronger for the next ride. I will be better. I need to keep going to get to the destination. At the very least, as long as I’m pedaling, I’m making progress. Others can do this, so there’s no reason why I can’t!!*
- *Experience from Kundalini Yoga. Repeat the mantra Sata Nama Sata Nama Sata Nama.*
- *Thinking about friends/family who are experiencing pain due to terminal illness who don’t have a choice.*
- *Hum songs & keep my eyes down.*
- *I use mantras and visualisation to ignore the pain, but fear of failure drives me on.*
- *Wanting to improve and get faster. The satisfaction of setting a challenge and rising to it. Wanting to be viewed as good at something by others. Reward of what I can eat afterwards. Being better/faster than peers / husband!!!,*
- *Iron discipline, permanent watching the signals of my body, positive thinking in each situation, only focus on solutions, distraction - e.g. if it is very hot, I think about the feeling to jump in extremely cold water, or in a long and tough climb I try to calculate the remaining time to the summit according to my current speed, or it seems to be funny but it helps I solve easy maths problems and so on.*

3. Being “in the zone”

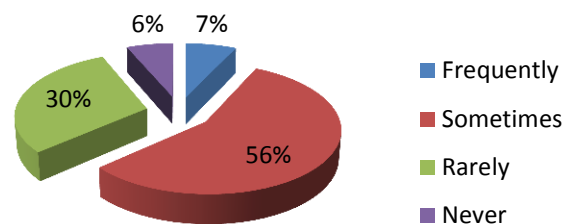
Some people report the experience of being "on a high" or "in the zone" while cycling hard. During such experiences cycling feels fluid and easy, the pain may disappear and there may be no sense of time passing. Have you ever experienced something similar while cycling?

- *Yes! Usually when I'm climbing, or more often when I'm simulating climbing on a spin bike in training. I get the goose bumps – it's exactly the same feeling as if I hear a moving passage of music – I was a professional musician for a while. I felt it especially (certainly for the longest) in during a ride up the Tourmalet in May this year – I was “in the zone” for the best part of an hour.*
- *Whether I'm on a short or long ride, I always feel I have to pass through a point of pain and/or concentration and/or motivation and/or self-belief to a point where I can really perform how I want. There is always a potential excuse at hand - self-doubt, the weather, tiredness - to get in the way but my experience is that there is always a 'better zone' to ride into. The feelings are of smoothness, calmness, confidence even if one feels extremely tired.*
- *YES - I love this feeling. It happens more in a hard spin session...feeling of euphoria washing up from my legs - amazing. A total high, feeling that I can achieve anything - positive, deliberate, clear.*
- *I have experienced this many times, which is another reason to cycle. This usually happens when I am climbing a hill that I know really well and, later in the season I am climbing better than usual (due to a peak of training). You keep checking your heart rate, all fine, your cadence is faster than usual and you feel a warm glow inside: push yourself harder and you feel a great sense of achievement that you have achieved this level of fitness.*
- *Sense of exhilaration cycling in a pack, especially in the latter stages of the Cyclotour du lac Lemman in 2010, in pouring rain, when in spite of the hours on the bike, I felt great, not cramps, and I knew we were on a fast time. The guys around me were clearly more experienced (and better?) cyclists, but I had no trouble staying with them, and in fact wanted to push harder. It just felt great, and there was little or no pain (unlike in most of the climbing I do regularly!).*
- *Yes! Sometimes you just hit that zone where everything clicks and you feel like you can ride forever. Usually in a group ride and if I'm on the front of a pull and just have a lot of power - it's great!! You don't want to move off for the next guy!*
- *Often, when the time is right I feel like I can go on forever. Act 2 of the Etape was a hard 10 hours... but compared to 10 hours at work the time flew by.*
- *I always say that endurance exercise is my meditation. I definitely get into a zone and retreat into myself and my body. When I'm on form, I can kind of step outside my body and it feels like a machine working efficiently for me. I love that feeling!*
- *Yes! This is why I ride! It doesn't happen that often, but the feeling of being in the zone is something I just can't get doing anything else. I call these purple days; when nothing I do causes any pain, I feel energised, and everything flows. Pure bliss! In many ways I live for these days.*
- *I tend to get into "the zone" while in a time trial or climbing steep hills. To me it feels like time stands still and all that matters is the rhythm of my breathing and my legs turning the pedals.*
- *Yes. L2P2011. On numerous hills, my legs were hurting, and if I had been on a training ride alone I might have been tempted to stop for a breather. But when I could see everyone around me suffering, and most of them suffering MORE than me, I felt in the zone and everything perversely felt easier. In my 6 years of cycling thus far, I have concluded that the barriers to progression are 99% mental, and 1% physical.*
- *There are times when I know that I am working my body hard and I feel that the heat, cold, or wind is too much, but if I push through the pain, I achieve a plateau where everything feels good again and I feel like I could go on that way for hours. It is like something clicks in my head that turns my body into a machine that just does what I want it to do and my mind is somewhat detached from what the body feels.*
- *Yes! On rare occasions when everything seems to have fallen in place. My legs feel exceptionally strong and I can spin without effort or pain and feel like I have power to spare for any effort.*

4. Motivation to Train

Do you find your motivation to train flagging sometimes, and if yes, what do you do about it?

| | |
|------------|-----|
| Frequently | 7% |
| Sometimes | 56% |
| Rarely | 30% |
| Never | 6% |

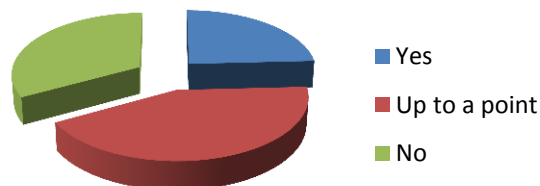


- *I find it more difficult to keep training without specific events as targets. Motivation for training has got a lot easier once I started keeping a training log as a result of using a GPS computer.*
- *Have a break. Go to the gym. Stay off the bike for a few days.*
- *Take a break for a couple of days. Think about the next upcoming objective. It helps to break the year up into sections and have clear aims for each section.*
- *Hard to fit everything in work/home/kids/sport but it's all a question of balance, without cycling everything else seems to suffer too.*
- *Getting out the door is the hard part - if motivation fails I'll just commit to the quick 30min route - when out and heart beat is up....it's easy to stay out another 30min*
- *I have a 10 minute rule. if I don't feel like going out, I say I'll go out for 10 minutes and if I'm still not into it, I'll go home and chill out. So far I've never gone home - once I'm out, I always get into it.*
- *Often it's because I just need a rest... so I usually allow myself some time off so I don't get burned out. I'm doing this for enjoyment... not to kill myself. The only one who cares if I'm a good rider is me!*
- *I just do different types of training to keep it interesting and still challenging*
- *Think of my really fat brother, my nice bike, or get on the weighing scales*
- *The best way for me to overcome a lag in motivation is just to go out and get on the bike. Once I get going, and hit a hill, it feels good again and I have no problem with motivation.*
- *Try and join group rides. I've also bought an indoor trainer for use during winter when it's just plain annoying going out. Finding a good training partner though is the best solution.*
- *I read a cycling article, look in the mirror and remember there are too many people who cannot ride like I do.*
- *Find an upcoming race or event to motivate myself.*
- *Take it easy for a few days - just go out with nothing in mind but to enjoy the ride, whatever it takes to just have fun.*
- *Try to train with friends - it's easier to keep the discipline in a group.*

5. From Passion to Obsession

Taken to extremes, motivation can become an obsession, leading us to neglect other things (such as work, family, home/garden, etc.). Has this happened to you? If yes, what have you done to bring things back into balance?

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| Yes | 24% |
| Up to a point | 43% |
| No | 33% |



- *I periodically text the friends I've either neglected or let down and offer to buy them drinks! They know me well enough that cycling comes first.*
- *I am sometimes too selfish with the family, this year I have cycled over 3000 miles average of 17mph means that is a long time on the bike away from my family, I do feel guilty about this.*
- *Still working on that. I don't have an answer. I do my best, but it isn't always successful.*
- *My wife brings me back to earth by giving me deadlines for household or family tasks, which are only fair. Also, in spring/summer I just get up earlier to train before work.*
- *Having a broader perspective on other things that matter. The family is pretty good at keeping me on the ground, with the right priorities too.*
- *No need, my wife is always very clear if I've overstepped the mark - and of course, I rebalance immediately; my children are also helpful in this regard.*
- *I needed a counter-obsession to work, which was taking over my life. Between work and cycling, I can do nothing else, so I pay workmen to do the home jobs (gardening, car maintenance, home improvements, etc) that I used to do myself before I had such a demanding job and cycled seriously.*
- *Stopped trying to be so competitive and enjoy it more! Not go into every race/training session with an agenda or goal, but sometimes just for the pure pleasure of the sport.*
- *Made a point of skipping training to be with family, friends.*
- *My wife tells me to wake up and live "in the now".*
- *Found a training programme that encourages me to work hard for shorter periods of time.*
- *I always remember and remind myself that my family has to come first, and that my young children will not be so young forever and that this time is more precious than anything.*
- *When things get out of balance, something begins to feel wrong, and I have to step back and assess my priorities. Balance is critical.*
- *Pressure of the real world cures me - paying bills and buying food. However, to be at the top of any sport you have to adopt a 100% single minded approach to the sport. World Champions are not balanced individuals with balanced lives. They are obsessives. Fact.*
- *Am thinking about it. Garden is a complete mess!! Great that I am married to a tolerant wife.*
- *Take a few steps back and find the balance. Having a very patient partner who is not afraid to let me know when the balance is not there.*
- *I have forced myself to take 1 to 2 days off a week and ride early in the morning before the family is awake. I have found the time off has made me stronger.*

APPENDIX 2: METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire was sent to cyclists participating in one or both of the Étapes du Tour 2011, as well as to participants of the Time-Megève-Mont-Blanc 2011 and of one or both of two stage races organized from the UK by Hot Chillee in 2011: London to Paris and The Alpine Challenge. The questionnaire was also sent to clients of DSO Sports and put on Vittoria's web site. Responses were collected during the summer of 2011.

- 594 responses were received, including 330 in French and 264 in English.
- 50% are of French nationality, 17% British, 9% American and 6% Italian. In total, 29 different nationalities are represented.
- 91% are masculine, 9% feminine.
- The average age is 43. The youngest is 18 and the oldest is 72.
- The average number of kilometres cycled per year is 6,500 km, with a maximum of 20,000.
- The average number of sportive races entered per year is 5, with a maximum of 28.
- The average number of years spent as an adult cyclist is 13.

APPENDIX 3: ABOUT MINDSTORE AND MARVIN FAURE



ABOUT MINDSTORE

MindStore is a consulting firm specializing in motivation, mobilisation and leadership. Established over 20 years ago, we work with large companies, international organizations and SMEs in France, Switzerland and elsewhere in Europe. Focusing primarily on the human dimension, we help our clients to motivate and mobilize their employees to make the changes needed to develop their competitive advantage and accelerate their growth.

At the forefront of the most innovative approaches to change, we co-design with our clients the process of transformation necessary to ensure their future. Our work includes consulting, coaching of key staff, training seminars, interactive workshops, major event design and facilitation and motivational speeches.

Recent clients include Barclays, BMC Software, Brocade, Coop, Dell, DCNS, GDF Suez E&P, LeasePlan, LyondellBasel, Menarini, Nestlé, Petrofac, Rhodia, STMicroelectronics, Sylvac, Trelleborg Offshore, UNAIDS, UNHCR and the WTO.

ABOUT MARVIN FAURE



Marvin Faure specializes in leadership and management development, human performance, motivation and business process improvement. He gained over 25 years of management experience in operations, sales and HR roles with international companies before starting his own consulting business, based near Geneva in Switzerland.

Marvin's focus is primarily on using innovative approaches to stimulate visionary thinking, innovation and commitment to high performance. His methods are inspired by the strengths-based and positive psychology movements, and are very effective in generating lasting change in areas that make a significant difference to business performance.

Born in England, bilingual English/French, Marvin has lived and worked in more than ten different countries, developing an ability to work effectively across cultures. He holds a first degree in engineering from Cambridge University (England) and an MBA from INSEAD (France). He is passionate about cycling and participates every year in sportives in the French Alps.

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