



# MTB in AR



**I**n the sport of adventure racing, the discipline of mountain biking is a distance gobbler. You can be assured that up to two-thirds of the course distance will be covered on two wheels, whether a 25km sprint or 800km expedition race.

You can also be assured that you won't be in the saddle all the time. You will ride, push, pull and carry your bike to get you to the finish.

### A shock to the system

A decade ago we debated shocks vs no shocks. Now the discussion revolves around hardtail vs dual suspension. Team Cyanosis' NICHOLAS MULDER says, "Full suspension is the way to go. With long distances and rough terrain, you definitely want to cushion your body as much as possible. Hardtails are meant for high speed cross-country racing, and that just isn't AR."

CLINTON 'HARDY' HARDENBERG, adventure racer and organiser of the weekly *Dark 'n Dirty* night rides in Centurion, loves his hardtail because it is lighter than a similarly priced dual suspension and less complicated for servicing. "To help me decide which one to use for a race I ask, 'How much time is expected to be spent on the bike?'" Hardenberg says. "Dual suspension is 'softer' on your body, which makes it suited to endurance racing."

### He ain't heavy...

Hike-a-bike sections are frowned upon by teams when the race director forces them to carry their bikes, after all, mountain biking should be about riding your bike, not carrying it. But hike-a-bike has its merits when it is navigational strategy. "It's a necessary evil in some cases," says Mulder. At one race Team Cyanosis carried their bikes up and

over a mountain faster than it took other teams to cycle around it. Mulder's teammate, CLINTON MACKINTOSH agrees: "We are never afraid of carrying our bikes if it will save us time. But if there is a longer, but faster option, like riding on a good surface, then we'll take it."

### Night blind (not)

The principle of riding at night is simple: the better you can see, the faster you can go and the more you stay alert, especially during long nights. As a team can ride at up to 95% of their daylight speed with good lighting, the team with the best lighting system will have a substantial advantage, especially where the terrain is technically challenging.

Team Dewpoint's captain and navigator, LAUREN GOULDING, affirms that a bright light helps to keep her awake: "As soon as the beam dims I find my eyes getting heavy". For Mulder, the hardest part of night riding is the tunnel vision you get after looking for hours at the spot where your light shines on the ground ahead.

### Tow 'em

To assist a slower teammate, towing is usually easier and more convenient than one-handed pushing. Towing should be practised pre-race so that the tower and towee know how to communicate with each other, attach and detach the towing system and to ride with the tow rope between them. "If you are inexperienced you face two problems: crashing and burnout," explains Hardenberg.

The towee should follow the line of the tower as closely as possible; riding to one side will pull the tower off balance. Crashes will certainly result when either of the riders makes a sudden change in speed or direction. The objective of towing is not to drag the towee through the race but to increase riding momentum. "It takes the edge off for the person being towed and allows them to keep up and recover," says Mackintosh. As such, neither rider should be forced to increase their effort; towing averages their efforts. Hardenberg wisely warns, "Tow too hard and you will soon find yourself in need of some towing."

The article *Bike Tow Rope System*, on [www.AR.co.za](http://www.AR.co.za) provides instructions for making your own tow rope system.

### The road is long

At a multi-day event teams can expect to ride stages of 70 kilometres to 140 kilometres in distance. And that's after spending 20 hours on foot, 10 hours in boats and six hours of klooing.

Just how do teams tackle these distances? "Getting through the long stages, particularly at night comes down to good sleep management and long-distance preparation," says Mulder.

As teams slow and lose significant amounts of time as they tire (and make poor navigational decisions), even a 45-minute nap will refresh them to such an extent that they easily make up the time lost during sleep.

Hardenberg finds big distances on long gravel roads tend to be mind-numbing. "We try various pace riding techniques, like changing the lead rider every two minutes, to keep everyone involved and awake," he suggests.

How do you eat an elephant? Mouthful by mouthful. "Mountain bike legs, like all others, seem to progress quicker when broken down into little chunks of kilometres," says Goulding.

### Bush mechanics

"Start with your bike clean, lubed and in good working order. Sort out all niggles before you leave for the race," advises Team Red Ants 'Queen Ant', NICKY BOOYENS.

Go tubeless with a good sealant or use tubes with sealant and tyre liners; and pack two pumps per team, spare tubes, allen-key set, chain links and chain breaker. "Apart from the usual, insist that every team member has their own dropout replacement for their derailleur with them during the ride (it weighs nothing). If the area is wet or muddy, also insist that everyone has replacement brake pads with them too," suggests Mulder.

### Keep your map onboard

Navigation on cycle legs is usually easier than that on foot. But mistakes happen often because distances pass faster (overshooting is common, despite odometers) and navigators do not refer to their maps as often as on trekking legs, where maps are hand-held.

On bike, map reading, whilst riding, is a lot more challenging. Stopping frequently to read the map adds hours and slows the team's pace and momentum.

A good map board – one that rotates – is key. Goulding agrees: "My map board is a non-negotiable piece of equipment. I can keep both hands on the handle bars and it reduces



the number of times I need to stop to look at the map."

### All's well that ends well

Mountain biking nirvana is easy to achieve with a steed in good working order, sufficient spares, tried and tested towing systems, race-quality lighting and good navigation. With these sorted, distance becomes irrelevant. **GM**

### □ Lisa de Speville

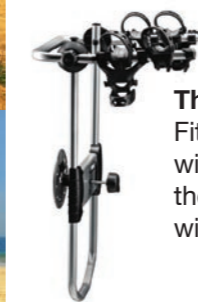
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