

Friday's Local Hero

Risk management at heart of racer's ups and downs, finds **Richard Winton**



DAVE BUCHANAN has conquered cancer, survived a life-threatening paragliding plummet and once exerted himself to such an extent that his heart stopped. Spending 24 hours on a bike, therefore, hardly constitutes a challenge.

Yet for most mortals, cycling the entire length of Wales off road – 328km from Caernarfon on the north coast to the Bristol Channel at Cardiff including 11,178m of climbing in just 22 hours, 24 minutes and 49 seconds – is scarcely comprehensible.

"People mocked me and said it was pie in the sky and couldn't be done," recalled the 39-year-old, who completed his self-designed course ahead of its inclusion as one of the Seven Deadly Spins series of mountain bike endurance events.

"I didn't go out to prove people wrong because I've tried that in the past and it always backfires. It didn't click until I was crossing the line when I thought 'hang on, people said I couldn't do this' and, in fairness, they all admitted they were wrong."

The sceptics had failed to appreciate the indefatigability of the Scot, who is gradually gathering renown in what is, effectively, a Le Mans for cyclists. A sport scarred by physical and mental trauma, 24-hour solo racing is not the kind of thing potential participants should enter without serious thought.

"I was drinking wine one night and playing around on the internet," explains Buchanan ominously. "I was going through one of those stages when you think you're getting old and I found this 24-hour race and thought 'I'm going to do that' when I was a bit pie-eyed. I filled in the form then realised 'aw naw, that wisnae I good idea' but I trained for it and did better than I expected, which just increased the challenge to do more."

The discovery arrived at just the right time to mollify the melancholy he had been feeling since a horrific accident while working as a paraglider tester.



KING OF SPIN: Dave Buchanan cycled, off road, the length of Wales in 22 hours, 24 minutes, 49 seconds. Picture: Matt Cope

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Ignoring instructions in the user manual not to attempt a particular stunt, Buchanan fell 1000ft and, although he managed to slow his descent by executing another illegal manoeuvre, he still slammed into the ground at around 25 metres per second. A shattered arm was, remarkably, his only serious injury but the break left the limb partially paralysed and left him "without a big dod of muscle in my shoulder; I couldn't even scratch my bum for months".

What he could do, though, was cycle and, although he did return to paragliding on his recovery, he found that it no longer held the same appeal. "I didn't stop enjoying

it because I bashed myself up because I've done that in everything at one time or another," admits Buchanan, who moved to Wales from Paisley in the late 1980s to take up an apprenticeship with the MoD. "I broke my other shoulder three months after that falling off the bike.

"For me, life is about risk management and getting the fun out of your level of acceptable risk and I still feel that paragliding is acceptable risk. But biking is probably the most demanding in terms of what you have to learn and put up with. I've ended up in hospital because of it with a thing called hyponatremia,

which basically means getting your nutrition wrong, and my heart stopped working. I learned a bit from that, I can tell you, but everything I've done so far in life – be it the smallest or most profound thing – has been a major learning experience."

None more so than Buchanan's battle with bowel cancer in the early 1990s. After surgery to remove half the organ, he underwent six months of chemotherapy during which time he enraged his consultant by cycling 20 miles to hospital for treatment after swimming a couple of miles that morning then planning two bouts of circuit training later in the day.

"They had said I could train but

I had to cut it back a bit after that rollicking," he recalls, referencing the time he had to be rushed to hospital while on Mount Snowdon after his bowel stopped working. "I do look at life a bit differently now. I've always been a bit of a go-getter but Jo, my partner, often comments that I can be a bit selfish but I think that probably stems from the cancer because I wasn't like that before, apparently."

His long-suffering lady eventually ended her resistance, taking up solo racing herself. "At end of my first race she said I was a miserable pig and she was never going to support me again so I said she should try it. She did and has never called me that since," says Buchanan, who is still without full sensation in three of the toes on his right foot after bursting a nerve during his epic journey.

"You go through enormous psychological and emotional changes, your hormones get shot to pot, your stomach and legs stop working then you're not able to eat and drink at times during a race. It's quite a shock to the whole body and mind but now she accepts what I do and does it as well, if not better, than me."

As he outlines the ordeals inherent in the sport and a training schedule that encompasses anything from 18-24 hours a week on the bike as well as strength training six nights out of seven, the overriding question is why does someone put themselves through that?

"For me the original idea, and it still satisfies me now, is that people think you're nuts," admits Buchanan after a pause. "And I sort of like that, not the recognition of being crazy but the fact that people sit up and take notice when they find out what you do. Some of the guys are totally hooked on it and can't miss a ride but Jo and myself can both take it or leave it a bit, although you do miss it on your day off . . ."

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White's story is a marvellous read

THANK you for two fascinating articles about Davie White this week.

Here is a man with a wonderful story to tell from a golden era of Scottish football. I have thought for a long time that Arthur Montford should publish his memoirs, but here's someone else with a tale to tell. Perhaps Hugh MacDonald could persuade them to go in print.
GR Strang, Camelon

Country having to pander to Old Firm

WHY is there no discussion taking place about the continuing shame on this country caused by the Old Firm? The police and the SFA have had to take special precautions and rearrange the final Old Firm game of the season before any other because their supporters cannot be trusted. Shame on all of those involved in this sorry affair.
Raymond Heath, by email

Ambassadorial role for Dalglish

AFTER watching the Hillsborough memorial service, I would like to know why there has never been any support for an ambassadorial post within Scottish football for Kenny Dalglish.
I find it incredible that a man who has arguably been our best and most decorated player, who has displayed exceptional dignity and compassion throughout his career, who always

had time for the ordinary supporter and has been a perfect role model for any aspiring youngster, has never had the support or backing of the national press.

Every other nation creates positions for their greatest ambassador, so why has there been no offer made to Dalglish?

After the latest, embarrassing events involving Scotland, maybe it's time that Gordon Smith offered him a post suitable to his reputation.
Stevie Hamill, Bannockburn

Grateful thanks for keeping truth alive

AS A Scottish Liverpool fan, I just wanted to compliment Doug Gillon on his article in Wednesday's Herald. It was an excellent read and I have passed it on to a number of my fellow supporters down south.

Thank you for helping to keep Hillsborough and the wrong doings of the police and press in its aftermath in the spotlight.
David J McElroy, by email