

oldest rider

# 34 and counting

At 87-years-old, there's no stopping **Eddie Tomlinson** from enjoying the Cape Town Cycle Tour.



**A**s the oldest rider at the Cape Town Cycle Tour, Eddie Tomlinson finds himself among a select group of riders. In his 87 years, he's entered 35 Tours, missing out on only one due to a broken leg he sustained a decade ago. With 2018 marking his 34th edition, Eddie takes a short ride through memory lane.

When he was just nine-years-old, Eddie rode his first few metres on a bicycle. Little did he know, those very metres would be transformed into tens of thousands of kilometres as it would become a lifelong love affair between man and his machine.

"It was for escape. I started riding a bike to escape where I lived which was in a built-up area in Edinburgh. There was no access to anything outside these areas, but I could get on my bicycle and go for a ride. It was a means of getting away from my environment.

"I used to go away every weekend and stay in youth hostels in

Scotland. Eventually I graduated and I joined a club and started racing. I found that my forte was long distance riding – the endurance stuff. By which stage the Cycle Tour had started and I was already living in South Africa."

In 1983, Eddie's journey with the Cape Town Cycle Tour began and he has remained fully committed to riding each year ever since. Once he got started, he simply couldn't stop, completing his first 15 while living in Cape Town. "And then in 1995 I moved to Johannesburg and stayed there until my wife and I eventually moved back last December. Even living up north didn't deter me from coming down every year to ride."

It's not difficult to see why he remains so faithful to a race like Cape Town Cycle Tour. Certain words like 'magnificent', 'challenging', and 'world class' come to mind, and visions of Misty Cliffs framed by a pale fog or a glassy Atlantic Ocean tease the imagination too.





Eddie and grandson Matthew at the 2004 Cycle Tour.

## The real race

But for Eddie, there's more to it than the 109 kilometre stretch of undeniable beauty. He has motives which are testament only to his character.

"Although the race is an incredibly beautiful one, it isn't the scenery that makes it so special for me, because I live here in Cape Town and I get to enjoy it everyday. My chief competitor is me. I'm not interested in winning, I just compete against myself. It's just the way I was born and the way I was built. It's in my genes. And I have very special genes, from my mother, my father, and this Jean [his wife of 65 years] right next to me!

"I think what drew me, and still draws me to endurance cycling is probably my psyche."

**"And I have very special genes, from my mother, my father, and this Jean [his wife of 65 years] right next to me!"**

His grandson Matthew, whom he is riding with this year would agree, and compliments his grandfather on his approach and sentiment to riding.

"He is highly intelligent and highly intellectual. You can spend hours with somebody and get a lot from them, be it from things said and even things not said. He isn't too chatty on the bike and there is a lot that goes unsaid that is actually very very loud," says Matthew.

"I think he is the most aware as a human could ever be when you are riding a bike. There is no better feeling of man and machine working in unison. When you're in the elements, in nature, it really is a great connection. He does like to get his head down and crack on with it. But he will no doubt shout at me for drifting off my line too!"

Of Eddie's fondest memories of the Cycle Tour, Matthew is a key protagonist. After all, Eddie did introduce him to riding bicycles as well as the Cape Town Cycle Tour when he was only 10.


"I used to push him up hills when he was tired. I can remember one Cycle Tour, we were on the stunning Smitswinkel going up the hill, and there was a voice at my back that yelled, 'Hello Granddad!', and he zoomed past me when the little rascal could have given me a push instead! So this year he is coming all the way from London to return the favour!" laughs Eddie.

## Eddie's secret spot

The Cape Town Cycle Tour route boasts some of the finest biodiversity in the world with a breathtaking balance of mountain and sea, and Smitswinkel is only one example of this. Over the years, Eddie has come to find some gems, of which his favourite is hidden in one the folds of Chapman's Peak.

"About 500 metres before the road summits on Chappies – on the Noordhoek side – there is a feature called Small Chappies, and people think that's the summit. But when you get there you can see the summit is still a further 500 metres to go. And just on the side of the road there, there is a well that is built into the side of the wall. Inside this well is a pool of crystal clear, ice cold water that very few people know about."

To reach this detail nestled in the mountain and finish the race on 34 occasions, Eddie surprisingly has no secrets to his success, because to him, it's quite simple really. The enjoyment of cycling lies in the training, and the training shouldn't feel like training at all.

"I've been riding bicycles since I was nine, and it's always been a part of my life. I particularly enjoy the advice of Fausto Coppi – one of the greats. He was asked about tips for becoming a great rider, and he said, 'ride your bike, ride your bike...ride your bike.' And I ride my bike." 



Another Cycle Tour finish for Eddie Thomlinson.