



The JSE team was among 70 South African business leaders and sports personalities to participate in the recent Change a Life Cycle Tour in Namibia

IN THE SADDLE

They were called The Wild Bunch but the JSE's riders were mounted on entirely different steeds compared to the famous gang of the same name that operated out of Wyoming in the 1890s and was led by Robert LeRoy Parker (better know as Butch Cassidy).

Although come to think of it, the name was entirely consistent with the Change a Life Cycle Tour's 'Taming the Wild West' theme...

The tour was launched in 2008 by Computershare to fund anti-crime initiatives after the murder of the company's senior manager, Mike Thomson, in September 2007. The JSE was one of the first sponsors to back the cycle tour, as it identified with the causes that the Mike Thomson Change a Life Trust supports. It has remained one of the key sponsors as a result of the significant branding and business networking benefits that the event offers.

To date, the tour has raised R12 million. 'It's all about the cause, the charities Change a Life supports,' says team member Trevor James, who is involved in marketing the JSE. 'Knowing that we are making a difference and changing people's lives is what this is all about. Great team mates, well-organised tours – that's all a bonus.'

JSE Deputy CEO Nicky Newton-King, who with CEO Russell Russell has been a regular participant in the tour since its inception in 2008, describes herself as an 'ordinary' cyclist. Her characteristic modesty conceals the enormous reserves of energy and strength of character required to finish a tough three day 500 km tour in conditions that ranged from extreme desert heat and shifting sand dunes to relentless coastal winds and mist, not forgetting Namibia's unique salt roads.

In the first stage of the tour, the cyclists travelled 130 km north along an undulating road from

Windhoek towards Okahandja. The JSE's group set a blistering pace from the start and she says that it was her most challenging day. 'The heat got to me on the first day, but the team looked after me fantastically,' says Newton-King.

Computershare Director Ursula du Plooy, who directs the cycle tour, says: 'When Nicky was unable to cycle in 2010, she joined the support team and got her hands dirty maintaining bikes and fixing punctured tubes. Because of her involvement, we were able to streamline our support activities into a much more efficient process.'


Route master Jonathan Scott's pre-race description of Day 2 says it best: 'Along the way there are no trees, there was no water, no shade, no cover, only endless miles of hot, glaring sand and rocks (it averaged 43C, spiking at 50 during the day). If we are lucky the wind will be behind us for most of the way.'

'Cruelly though, as we approached the coast, and the blue ocean came tantalisingly into view, cooler air would be brought by a fresh sea breeze that will blow directly against us.'

Team member Bernadette Rheeders of JSE Legal Counsel, who has cycled all the tours, says the camaraderie of the team and the support offered by the stronger riders meant she knew that they would finish Day 2 together. 'And not only did we, but we did so in style averaging 36.5 km p/hour!' she says.

Day 3 presented completely different, but no less challenging, conditions as the cyclists endured first coastal mist and wind and then the unique Namibian salt roads which take their toll on the wrists. 'We really had to dig deep into our reserves to keep going, but the day ended on a spectacular note with our arrival at the pier in Swakopmund,' says Newton-King.

Riding with former SA pro cyclist Malcolm Lange in the Amazing Race on the final day of the tour was a highlight for her, and the final dinner in the desert was a fitting end to another spectacular tour. 'We arrived as the sun was setting, and then travelled further across a lunar-like landscape to a tented camp where we were welcomed by a candlelit dinner in a natural amphitheatre.'

Says Rheeders: 'We cycled through four African countries on the first tour, climbed the Lesotho mountains on the second tour, experienced the warmth of the Malawian people on the third tour and this time we experienced desert heat of 50C. What keeps us going is what is next, and where it will be.' 



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