Competitive Cycling in Victoria:

An exploration of the needs of competitive cyclists within Victoria.

Survey Results Phase II

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Cycling in Victoria

Cycling is one of the highest participation activities in Australia with over 9.5% of its total population participating in the activity each year (2001 p.3). Within the state of Victoria over 406,000 people cycled in the year 2003 with the vast majority of cyclists participating in unstructured activity. Figures released by Sport and Recreation Victoria (2002) indicated that 9.6% of the 10.5% of Australians who cycled, did so without affiliation to a club, association, fitness centre or school. Within Australia, female participation is less than half that of males (Australian Sports Commission, 2001). On average, cycling participants were married males and ordinarily only participated in the one sport (Australian Sports Commission, 2000).

In contrast to many other sports, participation rates in cycling remain steady up to the 35-44 year age group and still remain high at 25.5% of participants for persons aged 45 years or older. There is little difference in participation rates between capital-city and non-capital city regions (Australian Sports Commission, 2000; Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2002). There are around 2,600 cyclists registered with the state of Victoria’s major competitive cycling body, Cycle Sport Victoria.

The major constraints to participating in cycling align with those reported for many sports and recreational activities. This list of constraints include time, cost, location, infrastructure, companionship, perceived skill, family commitment, season and climate, perceived fitness and perceived risk (Booth, Bauman, Owen, & Gore, 1997; Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions, 1999; Greig, 2003; Ravenscroft, 2004). The issue of assigning a list of generalized constraints to an activity like cycling is problematic. Often what is considered a constraint by one person (cycling in traffic) may be considered an acceptable challenge by another. Constraints and for that matter affordances, should therefore only be viewed in relation to the individual affected (Ravenscroft, 2004).

Whilst sport remains an important social phenomenon in contemporary society and has experienced an increase in participation over recent decades there appears to be a proliferation of new sporting forms that have presented ‘alternatives’, and potential challenges to traditional ways of conceptualising and practicing sport. Different forms of sport such as leisure sports, health sports and adventure sports are competing for space in an increasingly crowded leisure market (De Knop et al., 1996; Tomlinson, Ravenscroft, Wheaton, & Gilchrist, 2005). The commercialization of sport, changes in population and the tendency towards individualism produces pressure on the traditional sports clubs (De Knop et al., 1996; Tomlinson et al., 2005).

In following this trend, many of the older forms of leisure are declining in popularity and are being replaced by newer pursuits and behaviours. These can loosely be described as short term, informal, unstructured or unorganised sporting patterns. Traditional club based sports require a longer-term commitment and obligation, calling for the deferment of instant gratification whilst rules, skills and the complexities of competition are figured out (Australian Sports Commission, 2000; De Knop et al., 1996; Murray & Dixon, 2000). Thomson (2000) described a worldwide trend towards non-competitive activities that are less organized and regulated and have less emphasis on traditional
sporting values. In their work on water sports within the United Kingdom, The University of Brighton Consortium (2001) described this reluctance to join clubs through a reported survey of 23,200 adults. From this, only 15% of those who had participated in angling, 14% of those who had canoed and 23% of those who had sailed, were actually members of a club corresponding to their sport. Using a separate survey of 252 clubs it was estimated that of those people who were members of clubs, only one third were active on a monthly basis.

Consumers of leisure can now select from an increasing array of programs, events and facilities both across sports and within the sport activity itself (De Knop et al., 1996). Cycling offers no exception with a technologically-driven global industry that provides consumers a variety of choice in a world of cycling goods. Rather than taking an essentialist view of cycling, Cox (2005, p.3) describes the collective terms cycling and cyclists as being replete with complexity and contradiction. Indeed cyclists can cycle as part of a ride for charity; as a means to get to work; indoors in a ‘spinning’ class; on bush trails; in urban skate parks; over BMX tracks; on an activity holiday; against the clock during a time trial; in the backyard as a form of play or; as part of an informal bunch ride on public roads. Participants engaged in the act of cycling therefore differ markedly in the meanings and understandings they bring to this activity and further complicate the provision of programs, facilities and advocacy with often contradictory needs. Administrators of sport, and in this case cycling, need to consider the needs of their membership in order to make strategic decisions regarding the provision of programs, resources, and future directions.

This particular report targets people who have committed to affiliate with Cycle Sport Victoria, a traditional body charged with the administration and organization of the competitive sport cycling. It needs to be acknowledged that the views expressed within this report represent the average feelings of the respondents and cannot account for individual difference or represent the needs and views of those cyclists not included in the sample. To this end, administrators reading this report need to be aware that the responses may reflect the views of a minority of cyclists who have self selected by responding to this survey.

### Method

#### Sampling

Members of Cycle Sport Victoria (CSV) were targeted for this study. Cycle Sport Victoria primarily governs the sport of racing cycling (road and track) within the State of Victoria, has 46 affiliated clubs and approximately 2,500 affiliated members. Approximately 2000 racing members on the Cycle Sport Victoria database who regularly receive racing fixtures were targeted for this study. Ethics clearance was obtained by Monash University ethics committee prior to mail out.

#### Research Instrument and Data Collection

The study used a structured self-administered survey with 237 open and closed items that took approximately 55 min to complete. The design and content of the survey were developed using information from earlier research (O’Connor and Brown, 2005). The survey was divided into five sections, most of which related to various influences on cycling participation, including motivations and attitudes, previous experiences, social support, self-efficacy, reasons to engage, barriers to participation, availability of facilities, perceptions of environmental characteristics, and cycling intentions. Other sections focused on governance from the peak body and sociodemographic characteristics.
Data were collected using a mail survey method. The surveys were delivered in 2005, accompanied by a personalized cover letter and a preaddressed pre-paid reply envelope. Information about the survey was posted on the governing body’s web page encouraging participation. After excluding nonusable returns (e.g. return-to-sender, left address, etc.) a final response rate of 20.7% (n = 414/2000) was achieved. The response rate was lower than expected based upon previous survey mail outs. Financial and logistical constraints prevented follow up letters from being sent.

Part 2

Results

Socio-demographic Information

A typical respondent was likely to: be male (88.2%); 42.11 years of age (SD =12.3); married (77.6%); employed (86.3%); living in the city (54.4%) with an income above $50,000 (61.5%); fall in the normal health range for BMI (24.7); ride a bike worth more than $5,000 (34.1%); compete in B-Grade (24.9%) or C-Grade (23.9%) and of either European (62.6%) or Oceanian (35.4%) background.

Gender balance reflected that of the reported distribution within the sport, with the overwhelming number of responses coming from males 365 (88.2%), while 49 (11.8%) females and 8 ‘unknown’ comprised the rest. Again this reflects a major issue for the sport of cycling and demonstrates an inability to capture over 50% of the population. In parts of Europe and in non-competitive cycling, female participation rates are much higher indicating more can be done.

Despite the small response rate, this data tends to confirm that the sport of cycling draws largely from middle to upper socioeconomic groups. Whilst 28.6% of the sample earned less than $40,000 income, 71.3% earned above this amount. Within earlier focus groups, cycling has been branded both an expensive sport and on fewer occasions as one that is readily accessible (O’Connor and Brown, 2005). The demographic of this sample indicates cycling remains appealing to those people who earn relatively high wages whilst the flip side offers the possibility that it may be somewhat exclusive to those on lower incomes (10.5% of the sample earning less than $20,000). Consideration as to the affordability of cycling, particularly for a family, is discussed in detail at a later point.

It is worth noting the sports strong connection with people of European descent. In this sample at least they appear to be overrepresented based upon Australian population statistics (ABS, 2001) that looks at ancestry of birthplace by parents. Conversely the low responses from people of Asian (5%), African (0%), Middle Eastern (3%) and American (1.3%) backgrounds which make up 8% of the total population indicate an underrepresentation within this sample. Whilst this is not all that surprising given the cultural roots of cycling and the role of competitive sports in underrepresented cultures, it is worth considering in any profiling and marketing strategies.

Overall it would appear from this limited sample that cycling draws upon a fairly narrow band of the community. Despite being one of the highest participation sports in the country, 91.5% of the population is not engaging. Participation statistics for the sport are significantly lower again when
looking at the competitive sport of cycling. A worthy activity might be to note how government sporting bodies (eg. Australian Sports Commission) and other major sports (AFL, Soccer, Netball, Basketball, Triathlon) choose to either address or ignore the issues of appealing to a broader audience from both genders, many cultures, all ages and a wide socio-economic range to expand the sport of cycling in Victoria. Specific details and issues will be expanded upon throughout this report.

**Major Findings**

**Introductions to Cycling**

Participants within this sample indicated how they were introduced to the activity of cycling. Figure 1 provides a visual breakdown of the responses. As can be seen, a large number of respondents were introduced to the sport by a friend (26%) or family member (18.2%). A significant number crossed over to cycling from another sport (17%) while some introduced themselves to their local clubs (6.9%) or signed up to cycle in a major event (5.5%).

Figure 1: Introductions to cycling
The above data supports largely the conclusions of the qualitative data obtained from focus group discussions. Both sets of data can be summarised as follows:

Both focus group data and survey data support the social nature of cycling club affiliation. Overwhelmingly this theme revealed that cyclists became members of cycling clubs through personal introduction more than any other method. Friends, family, work colleagues or peer groups appeared to be the strongest method of introduction to the sport of cycling with a particular emphasis on family. It would appear that the financial and psychological investment required to join a cycling club imposes certain barriers that are more readily overcome through facilitation by family or friends. Those coming from another sport have most likely already overcome many of these barriers. The following quote from one of the focus groups in phase 1 of the study highlights this sentiment:

John: It appears to me that it's pretty important to have someone introduce you.
William: Convince you.
John: Let you feel confident enough to say you'll be right, everything will be okay, join it, you'll love it.

This being the case, perhaps the best form of marketing that governing bodies can engage in is an internal recruitment campaign. Providing existing club members with support to engage their friends or colleagues to become involved would appear to be a worthwhile strategy. Information material targeting friends and family, financial incentives, workplace initiatives, recreational rides, Full Cycle programs for youngsters and their parents at the same time would all be worth thinking about. There is a significant investment required to make the step up from cyclist to sporting cyclist and to have support from a significant other would appear to be an important ingredient in a successful transition.

On top of this the Family unit becomes another prime source to engage people in the sport of cycling. If mum or dad is involved then it is likely that their children will become involved. Alternatively, if the children are involved then it is also likely that mum and or dad will become involved. The wonderful thing about cycling that was mentioned repeatedly in the focus groups is that it is a sport in which the whole family can be involved. Because of this it is very important that clubs and event organisers consider and target the family. This is an example of where a recreational program that gets the parents engaged could have a competitive spin off through subsequently involving the children.

Organized events such as the Great Vic Bike Ride or Around the Bay in a Day provided a significant motivation to start cycling. This, on a couple of occasions, was associated with small groups of individuals deciding to take on a challenge and using these events as the motivation for the group. Interestingly, a number of competitive cyclists indicated they were introduced to the sport initially via these non-competitive events. Therefore it is worth the sporting side of cycling having a visual presence or affiliation with these event rides. People who complete a difficult challenge such as Around the Bay in a Day might be ready to look for more opportunities to participate in the sport. If they can cycle at a reasonable pace for 200 plus kilometres then they most likely will cope with graded club cycling.

While the temptation is to do much of the promotion at elite sporting races (ie. Bay Crits), this may be casting an elite shadow over potentially interested recreational cyclists. Watching high speed, high risk, shaved down, super competitive, lean athletes power around a crit circuit may send the wrong message about club racing and who should or shouldn’t bother being involved. Targeting
recreational rides might provide a more comfortable environment to attract new sporting cyclists. Alternatively when conducting major events, it may be worth showcasing some D grade cyclists with beer guts to give it a bit of perspective and let the average punter know they would feel right at home.

Transport was another attractor, particularly for those who hadn’t yet obtained their drivers license. For some, cycling was a form of transportation in their teens that became a part of their lifestyle. For a number of cyclists their introduction to cycling was a little more ambiguous with many suggesting that it was something they had always done since childhood and they couldn’t remember not cycling or a conscious decision to start cycling. For them the process of cycling was more a progression from trainer wheels through to road bikes.

The opportunity for competition or an alternative form of competition was a motivator for entering the sport. Some cyclists entered the sport via other competitive sports/activities, often mountain biking, running or triathlon. For some cycling was seen as an attractive alternative to the more physically demanding activities of team sports or running. Many were recovering from injury or had sustained them from sustaining the more high impact activities like running. Targeting these groups, perhaps through an initial subsidised licence transfer scheme (ie. Make it easier for triathletes to come over to cycling) might be well worth initial expense. Sponsoring triathlons, having a visual presence or creating links would also be worth exploring. Again, major running events might also be worth targeting. With this particular group, you have people that are very used to training and competing and so bring with them a greater resilience to barriers.

School was often mentioned as a good way to introduce people to cycling in focus groups but less than 5% actually got involved via their school. This does not mean school isn’t a viable place to attract new participants, but it would appear family, friends have the most success. Schools are bombarded with sports all competing for the same interests and it may be simply that cycling cannot compete against AFL, Soccer, Netball and the like. However the HPV program would seem one way of targeting a niche market. HPV’s often utilise velodromes and get kids training on road bikes and perhaps more synergies could be made in this area. Getting affiliated with ride to school programs might also be a way to lift the profile of the sport.

Things such as media exposure and significant sporting events like the Tour de France, Herald Sun Tour and Commonwealth Games all add to the profile. Some people did indeed report to be hooked by the sport through what they saw on TV. Again these do not stand out as powerful ways to draw people into the sport but it is difficult to measure the impact these events have at a subconscious level. Any positive exposure is of course good exposure. Unfortunately for cycling, often media exposure is centred around another cyclist getting knocked off their bike by a car or highlights of the major crash at the end of a TDF stage in which a mangled mess of bodies and bikes confronts people together with another scandal in which everyone involved appears to be taking drugs. Cycling as a body needs to be conscious of the image it is putting out there and must make attempts to exude the sports significant benefits and how these impact upon ordinary people. The sport could definitely do with some more good stories with happy endings.

How do you like your racing?

Style of racing:

Participants were asked to rank their most preferred style of racing (see Table 1) with choices including scratch, individual time-trial, team time-trial, individual handicap, graded handicap and criteriums. Track racing was excluded from this study due to space restrictions. Scratch races were perhaps not surprisingly ranked highest with 36.5% respondents placing it in first position.
Criteriums were next at 25.8%, followed by graded handicaps (14.7%), individual handicaps (13.1%), individual time trial (10.4%) and team time trials (1.6%).

Table 1: Preferred type of racing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Race</th>
<th>Ranked No.1 (%)</th>
<th>Ranked Top 3 (%)</th>
<th>Ranked No.6 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scratch</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterium</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicap Graded</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicap Individual</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Trial individual</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Trial Team</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The appeal of scratch races perhaps comes from the social and tactical nature of the event. Whilst handicaps require a consistently high pace, often in formation with little time for communication, scratch races allow for more interaction, rely on changes of pace and varied tactics. The scratch race is commonly seen at the professional level, has a strong identity and provided it is graded correctly offers individuals challenge that ranges from hanging on to the peloton through to riding clear for the win. Interestingly whilst 73.9% of respondents had it in their top three, 6% placed it last in their rankings from one to six. This would suggest that despite its popularity they should not form the totality of any club’s racing offerings. Whilst not directly measured here, based upon focus group data and the data from handicaps, it would appear that graded scratch races are preferred over massed start scratch races. It is assumed that the better the grading the more enjoyable the race with the aim to keep as many people together for as long as possible. Clubs need to be careful of individuals who get dropped from the bunch early and spend long periods of time off the back.

Criteriums are compact, fast, appeal to spectators and families and are often full of action. It appears that with crits some people love them (25.5% first place rank) and some people hate them (16.6% last place rank). For many it was in their top three (62.1%) but again should form only part of any cycling calendar. Crits are probably best done as a series although there is little evidence to support this. Logistically they are often easier to organise and marshal than road races.

There is a strong tendency for people to think that the style of race that offers an individual the best chance of winning would naturally be the one most people prefer to do. This assumption is based upon a false premise that people turn up to competitions because they want to or expect to win. Whilst winning is an important motivator for some (often the vocal minority), it is not the major reason why people turn up to a race. The most powerful motivators are not based upon extrinsic rewards, accolades or podium finishes and research shows that those who subscribe to this are least likely to continue in sport. Rather, people are driven by the intrinsic goals associated with companionship, teamwork, a sense of belonging, a sense of contribution, achieving a goal like finishing with the bunch or the powerful sense that they are improving and getting better. The results of this study confirm that whilst handicaps are popular, they should not be the sole form of racing. And whilst every individual in a handicap theoretically has a chance to win every time they race, this does not elevate handicaps to the top of the pile. From start to finish they are a tough, uncompromising event that requires everyone to perform at their limit in spite of how they feel. As we will discuss later, the social side of cycling far outweighs the desire for victory.

Of the two handicaps, the graded handicap came out on top. Whilst there was little difference between the percentage who ranked graded handicaps first (14.7) versus individual handicaps (13.1) there was a large discrepancy between those who ranked them in last place. Nearly 16% of respondents put individual handicaps in last place while just 3.1% had graded handicaps at the
bottom of their list. This again is perhaps reflective of the social element playing a significant role in cycling. It is likely that people enjoy riding with others to achieve a purpose, be it to stay away from the bunch behind or chase down those ahead, whereas riding in isolation perhaps appeals to more successful individuals. This data would suggest that handicaps should be run, but only as one style of racing alongside scratch and criterium races. There is a preference based upon dislikes for graded over individual handicaps.

Time trials whilst being the least popular certainly were not out of the mix. Just over 30% of respondents had the individual time trial in their top 3 whilst 18.9% had the team time trial up there. The ‘race of truth’ as it is called, probably more than any other race, illustrates some home truths about a person’s individual physiological ability. It removes the benefits of tactics (sitting on), and emphasises a person’s lactate threshold, something that is determined largely by genetics and enhanced with training. In small doses, the race of truth seems to have a role to play in any club cycling calendar, even if around 30% of the respondents preferred it the least of all styles.

Because of the relatively even spread of numbers, particularly related to people’s top three and bottom three choices, it is obvious from this data that people prefer a mixture of racing styles. While scratch races appear to be the favourite the overwhelming evidence here is they should not be all that happens. Despite the popular perception that because handicaps give everyone the chance to win, they are what people want to, the reality is different. Handicaps are a popular style of racing but should be considered as one style among many within a cycling event calendar.

Open Racing

Of the participants who responded, 25% did not compete in open events leaving 75% who competed in at least one. On average, those who did enter opens completed 5.8 events in the past 12 months. Of this 70.1% of the group participated in 0-5 open events, 18.7% competed in 6-10 open events with the remaining 11.2% competing in 11 or more open events.

The following statements were ranked according to how much they corresponded to the individual’s feelings. Table 1 summarises this data with a mean score and a range in which 68% of the population (1 standard deviation) fell. The range goes from 1 (does not correspond at all) to 10 (corresponds exactly) with a score of 5 being equal to a moderate correspondence (see Figure 2).

Table 2: How respondents feel about CSV run open events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Avg Score</th>
<th>Range in which 68% of respondents fell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixture:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I find the current fixture caters for my needs</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>3.9 to 8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Races:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Entry fees for open races are too high</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.3 to 8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I felt that an open race takes up too much of my day</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>3.8 to 9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The distance to travel to races is a turn-off</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.5 to 7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Prize money means very little to me</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>4.2 to 9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The quality of the race and field is most important</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.3 to 9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Open events are challenging and attractive to enter</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.0 to 9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Promoters of open events are generally well organised</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>4.8 to 9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officials:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. CSV Officials are friendly and apply the rules fairly</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.6 to 8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. CSV officials are easily approachable</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.3 to 8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I am generally accurately handicapped or graded</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>4.8 to 9.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen in the data a significant variation exists with many participants relating strongly with the statements whilst others offer the alternative sentiment. This large variation in responses need to be considered carefully when interpreting the data as it appears there is a diverse opinion amongst the cycling community. As is the case in question 2, in which participants were asked to respond to the statement that open race fees were too high, just as many people felt they weren’t as agreed that they were. If we focus on the mean scores, these generally came out with a moderate level of support for the statements with the exceptions of questions 2 and 4.

The imposition of open racing in terms of time and travel distance is clearly an issue that is an ongoing source of frustration for some whilst not rating highly as an issue for others. Generally speaking, imposition on time is one of the major reasons cited as why people do not participate in sport or physical activity. Not surprisingly this was an issue with a large amount of the cyclists responding to this survey. When the data were further analysed based upon geographical location, metropolitan cyclists felt more put out than regional counterparts (p<.05) with regards to the amount of time racing takes up.

Whilst travel is rarely rated highly as a barrier in sport, in the case of open cycling races people are often asked to travel great distances. As was the case for time, results for distance were spread with some being concerned and others not. Interestingly, there was no difference between metropolitan and regional cyclists with regard to distance they had to travel to races (p=.163).

With a mean score of 7.8 out of 10 most people surveyed found that open events were challenging and attractive events to enter. This is a positive score and reflects a general satisfaction with the appeal of open events in which promoters are apparently providing cyclists with challenging, well packaged options. A significant difference (p <.001) however was noted between upper and lower grades with A & B grades indicating a higher level of satisfaction than those in C, D and E grades. Whilst this isn’t a huge divergence, it might be of interest to promotors who could perhaps do more to consider the lower graded participants in their choice and promotion of events. Overall, the level of satisfaction dips a little when participants were asked to consider how well organised these events were (m = 6.9) but on the whole it remains a positive response.

When considering motivations for entering open events, it is apparent that most people prioritise quality of the race and its field over and above extrinsic rewards such as prize money. The majority of all grades either moderately agreed or completely agreed with the statement “prize money means
very little to me” (m=6.9, SD=2.7) despite on average being indifferent to the price of entry. Of no surprise is that the higher grades were significantly (p=.004) more concerned about prize money than participants in D and E grade who indicated that prize money was of little consequence. On the whole however prize money was not a major concern with respect to participation in open events.

The statement “entry fees for open races are too high” showed a divergence of opinion around the mean score of 5.2 (moderate agreeance with statement). 68% of the respondents opinion ranged between little affinity with this statement through to a strong affinity. An analysis by Grade of cyclist revealed no significant difference between upper and lower grades on the price of entry.

What day, what time?

As was mentioned in the introduction, traditional organised sport is under threat from informal recreational activity with one of the major reasons being flexibility. Thomson (2000) described a worldwide trend towards non-competitive activities that are less organized and regulated and have less emphasis on traditional sporting values. Whilst there is an increase in available leisure time to pursue recreational activity, this is confounded by the advent of flexible working conditions that place limitations on the strict time schedules that are characteristic of traditional sports (De Knop et al., 1996).

Not having enough time is frequently cited as a major reason why people don’t take up sport and cycling is no exception. Road racing, particularly for those who need to set up and pack up a course, places a significant imposition on people’s time. In modern society people often have multiple interests and commitments. What comprises a family now is completely different to 20 years ago and the issue of scheduling sport has become more complex. Other sports such as cricket have had to adapt how they package their sport to cater for these demands and no longer ask juniors to stand in the field for 5 hours on a weekend.

Administrators of sport need to consider the aspect of scheduling events, event length and flexibility carefully. The survey perhaps too simplistically asked respondents to consider the preferred time and day for racing. The majority of respondents preferred racing during the morning with very few people indicating a post 1pm start time as a preference (see Figure 3). There was also a preference

Figure 3: Preferred time of day for racing
to race on Saturdays (64.9%) over Sundays (35.1%). Careful interpretation of this data is warranted before jumping to a decision to host racing at 10am on a Saturday morning every week. Readers are reminded that this question may again be influenced by who is not responding because they have been excluded from the sport (and therefore this study) by time constraints. Consideration needs to be given for those who work weekends (retail, shift work), those whose children play sport, family commitments and the like.

**Correct Weight: A double edged sword**

BMI is a standardized measure used to determine risk of disease due to being overweight or obese. Cyclists in this sample appear to just fall within the normal range (18 – 24.9) for BMI as measured by weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared. Height is reported at 1.765 m (SD = .991) and weight is reported at 77.05 kg (SD = 13.88). At least on this measure, cyclists in the study appeared to be in the healthy weight range which tends to support the claimed health benefits of cycling.

Many allied health professionals are encouraging people to take up cycling as a low impact form of exercise and the sport of cycling stands to gain from this as an attractive, healthy pursuit. Whilst there is no question cycling has a positive impact upon health, an alternate explanation for why cyclists in this sample reflect a healthy BMI may lie more in who didn’t complete this survey rather than who did.

Competitive cycling (road cycling at least) places those people who carry extra mass at a distinct disadvantage due to the extra effort required to climb hills against gravity. Because the sport is impacted upon by power-to-weight ratio, the sport would naturally advantage and indeed self select participants who carry less excess weight. So whilst cycling has the potential of positively impact upon a person’s weight (fat mass), it may present an immediate and obvious obstacle to anyone with a moderate to high BMI. Given the rising incidence of people being reported to be overweight in this country (over 50% are above the BMI reported for this group of cyclists), this becomes an issue for the sport and its clubs in attracting and keeping new members. It could be that cycling events involving hill climbs places an immediate and obvious barrier in front of a large percentage of the population. Just as the sport of basketball favors the tall, the sport of cycling may privilege the lean.

Whilst at the elite level, this remains an accepted part of being a successful athlete, at the beginner and club level there are implications for scheduling introductory events that aim to attract new people to the sport. Given that people taking up cycling are most likely to be the one’s who haven’t yet gained its weight reducing benefits (and are therefore going to be the most affected by climbs), administrators and club officials need to consider this demographic in scheduling introductory or lower graded events. A preference for flatter circuits including criterium and track events may be more suited to getting this growing proportion of the population engaged in the sport.

To compound the effect of the earth’s gravitational pull, there is also the question of how people conform to the images portrayed in cycling. It is highly likely that based upon imagery (See Appendix A for examples) people who are marginally overweight already view the sporting side of cycling as being just for the ‘skinny’. This may in part explain the massive growth in popularity of non-competitive recreational rides, without a corresponding growth in the competitive side of the sport as it sends messages about who belongs and who does not.

There is no question the sport of cycling places people’s bodies on display with often just a thin layer of lycra clothing hugging the body. For the many thousands of Australians who don’t fit the lean powerful image portrayed by cycling, riding in close proximity to others with your body stretched over a frame presents a significant hurdle. This may be enough, particularly for women, to determine if people take up the sport. In an event such as ‘Around the Bay in the Day’ body
image (excess weight) is not seen as such a major barrier, there are no massive hills and people don’t have to wear tight fitting Lycra to fit in.

If the sport of cycling is to remain a viable lifestyle choice for people, the sporting body needs to consider the changing shape of Australian bodies and how people perceive themselves whilst complying with the ‘image’ the sport presents. The more people feel out of step or isolated from this ‘ideal’ the less likely the sport of cycling is going to be able to attract them to their sport. Given that previous data overwhelmingly supported the notion that many children are introduced to the sport by participating family members, this has implications for the future growth of the sport at a base and elite level.

The first port of call for many considering the sport is the peak body web pages. Remembering that one visit here may be enough to turn people off (see Appendix B for examples). There is no denying the need to portray the sport as fast, exciting and even a bit risky in order to capture the enthusiasm of youth and the interests of the fit competitive athlete. If this is done however at the expense of generating interest from the majority of the population (female, slightly overweight male, older adult) then the sport could be ignoring a great opportunity. What is recommended is a more strategic and balanced approach that caters and potentially appeals to more people.

Who Browses the CSV Web Page?

Within Australia, there were approximately 13,991,612 Internet users as of Sept/2005, comprising 68.2% of the population, (Nielsen, 2005). In this survey, CSV was interested to know how often and for what reason people visited its web page. Approximately 15% of respondents claimed to have never visited the CSV internet site meaning 75% of the sample had visited at least once. This figure is higher than the national average for internet usage (Sept. 2005) which is perhaps not surprising given the potentially higher SES level of the sample. Competitive cyclists were only marginally more likely to visit the web page than non competitive cyclists.

Of those that did visit the web, only 4% visited at least once per day with the majority visiting at least once per week (21%); at least once a month (29%); or less than once a month (31%). Figure 4 represents respondent’s primary purpose for visiting the CSV Website. The most popular primary purpose for visiting was to obtain event information (at least 50%). Twenty percent of the sample said they were just browsing the site, 13% were interested in cycling news whilst 12.2% were looking for results. Membership made up around 2% of the primary reason for visiting whilst only
1.5% were seeking development information.

Participants were asked to rate the CSV website on a scale from not very good to excellent. This was converted to a score out of ten and a summary of the range of scores can be seen in Figure 5 that corresponds with the following seven questions:

1. The CSV website is very easy to use (7/10)
2. I was able to find information quickly and easily (7/10)
3. The CSV website is kept up to date (7/10)
4. The CSV website give a good introduction to competitive cycling (6/10)
5. The CSV website covers all Victorian cycling events/happenings (6/10)
6. The CSV website layout is aesthetically appealing (6/10)
7. I am generally satisfied with the CSV website (7/10)

Figure 5: Ratings of CSV Website

In general it appears that the majority of the sample appears moderately satisfied with the CSV website although there are grounds for more to be done. A significant number of respondents had some issue with statements 4, 5 and 6 which could be targeted for some improvement work. However an overall satisfaction score of seven out of ten is quite reasonable given the resource constraints of the organisation and those responsible should be congratulated for the work done so far.

In future, it would be well worth spending some time comparing the CSV website with other well recognised and branded sites used heavily by cyclists. Bicycle Victoria could be explored to get a feel for how to capture and introduce people new to the sport of cycling whilst a site like Cycling News might be viewed to see how it appeals to the more competitive sport cyclist interested in news, information and results.

What Messages Do Cyclists Give About Cycling?

The following section will only briefly introduce a broader discussion that will be presented at a later point on the imagery and messages that the sport of cycling sends to people, and how this impacts upon individual’s decisions to take up the sport or continue recreationally cycling.
discussion began with data from the focus groups (see ‘Real cyclists don’t race’, 2006) and a snippet of quantitative data will be presented here.

The researchers were particularly interested in what competitive cyclists said about competitive cycling. This is particularly relevant to the sport of cycling when one considers that the majority of cyclists are introduced to the sport by other cyclists (approx. 45%). Whilst the focus group data reported earlier spoke to a number of relevant qualitative factors, a few key pieces of data in this part of the study reveal some interesting points of discussion. It is also worth considering the barriers to cycling (particularly for females and beginners) relate to perceived risk, perceived fitness, technical ability and a notion of ‘fitting in’.

It appears that cyclists in this study tended to project what they do as indicative of what ‘all people’ need to do in order to be a competitive cyclists. This means that if you are an A-Grade cyclist, you reflect ‘A-grade level’ speeds, distances, equipment and competencies as indicative of competitive cycling. On top of this is a phenomenon in which individuals tend to artificially inflate, or at least recall what they perceive as the most impressive figures when asked about how many kilometres they do and at what speed they travel at (see Café Culture in Ride Magazine and the message this presents to aspiring cyclists). An example of this may be a C-Grade cyclist who, over six months, may train between 150km and 250km per week but when asked, state they do at least 250km per week. Now consider an individual acquaintance of this C-Grade rider who is thinking about taking up the sport and is asking the questions about racing/training. They currently can fit in 150km per week and in comparison to the 250km needed it would be easy to perceive competitive cycling as an unattainable goal.

Of most interest in this data was the stark contrast between what people claimed you would need to be able to do in order to be a competitive cyclists and what they actually did themselves. Early in the survey participants were asked to describe how many kilometres they cycled (m=255km; SD122km); how long they cycled for (70% between 61 and 120mins); and the average speed cycled at (80% between 26 and 35km/hr – See Figure 6). When asked at a later point at what average speed you would need to be able to cycle at to be a competitive club cyclist, 76% reported a need to be able to sustain 31-40km/hr (see Figure 7) with 62% reporting a need to do at least 200 to 400 km per week of training. When considering most clubs have D and even E grade events at competitive level, these figures appear to be a gross over-statement of the physiological requirements needed to be a competitive cyclist.

Figure 6: Actual vs required average speeds as reported by competitive cyclists

![Figure 6: Actual vs required average speeds as reported by competitive cyclists]
Through perhaps reflecting their own situation without knowing what happens in the lower grades, the message from many competitive cyclists is that unless you are doing 300km per week and can average 35km/hr then the sport of cycling is not for you. The bar is indeed set high. Couple this with the imagery of fast bikes, the figures reported from the Tour de France and even popular press like Ride Magazine, shaved legs, expensive gear and suddenly the sport looks very unattainable. It is little wonder then that the focus group data indicated that whilst interested in competitive cycling, recreational cyclists (who are more than capable of mixing it in the lower grades) could indeed be put off by the thought of not being fit enough, not having enough time to train and not being able to ride fast enough.

It is unlikely that the sporting body or clubs can do anything to change the inflated figures presented by individuals as necessary to becoming competitive. However in its own media/information and at club level (membership info, press releases, reports of racing), more can be done to dispel the myth that competitive cycling requires you to give up your full time job in order to train or that you need the physiology of Lance Armstrong to ride D-grade. Again this comes back to how the sport is being presented, what is being privileged (elite messages) and how people considering taking up the sport perceive this. There is a yawning gap between people thinking they would like to try competitive cycling, their perceived fitness/ability level and the level they perceive they need to be at in order to be included.

What do cyclists think of CSV?

Whilst over 90% of the respondents surveyed were CSV members (note mailout was through CSV database), 45% were also members of Bicycle Victoria. 5% of respondents categorised themselves as Ride It members and 2.4% were Audax Australia members.

The length of time of membership was hugely variable with the average sitting at 8.9 years. The standard deviation however was 11.65 years meaning 68% of the group were somewhere between 1 and 20 years membership. 95% of CSV members indicated they would rejoin in 2006 which is indicative of the churn rate. Without comparison to other sporting organisations, at least for this sample the figure seems high. Note that the people who took the time to fill out and return this survey are more likely to be passionate about cycling. 92.2% of the 49% that indicated they were BV members indicated they would re-join this organisation in 2006. Of the small number of Ride It and Audax members, around 60% indicated they would rejoin (small numbers makes it difficult to draw conclusions).

On a ranking of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent) Figure 7 presents scores obtained when participants were asked to rate how well their organisation had achieved on the following issues:

1. Insurance
2. Advocacy/Lobbying
3. Bike paths/facilities
4. types of events
5. frequency of events
6. promotion of cycling
7. listening to members needs
8. addressing local issues affecting my cycling needs
9. information about where to ride
Recommendations

Based upon data collected in phase 1 and phase 2 of this study, the authors recommend the following:

A Broader Market:

Participants who cycle differ markedly in the meanings and understandings they bring to this activity and this divergence complicates the provision of programs, facilities and advocacy. Administrators of cycling need to consider the diverse needs of their membership in order to make strategic decisions regarding the provision of programs, resources, and future directions.

Cycling draws upon a fairly narrow band of the community and in order to expand its appeal it needs to tackle ways in which it can draw an audience from a broader cross section of the community. A more equal representation from both genders, different cultures, all ages and socio-economic status will serve to expand the sport of cycling in Victoria at both the grass roots and as a consequence elite level. A more detailed investigation into targeted groups that appear to be underrepresented would be a worthy investment. The different needs of these groups should lead to targeted approaches to appeal to them and specific programs to address barriers. As an example, some success has been had in attracting women to cycling through programs that focus on their skill-, knowledge- and confidence related barriers to cycling. From this it would appear that programs such as Skill Cycle for adults and J-Cycle for juniors have significant potential to make an impact in attracting more participants to club cycling. The Ride It licence provides an avenue that is non-competitive and yet readily transferable once initial barriers have been overcome. It is the author’s opinion that this program needs significantly greater resources to reach its potential impact and that at the club level committee’s of management remain either oblivious to, or too overwhelmed to consider its successful marketing, implementation, and realise the program’s potential.

The following is taken from Garrard, J (2005) Promoting Cycling for Women.

Constraints included lack of confidence about the mechanical aspects of cycling; lack of cycling skills (especially cycling in traffic and in groups); lack of fitness and speed; adverse traffic conditions; driver aggression; and obtaining appropriate advice in a male-dominated
environment. Programs that tapped into the motivating and sustaining factors for female cycling, and addressed the principal constraints, were well-received by women. A balance of theory and practice was important in introductory cycling programs, as was a supportive, friendly and patient learning environment that enabled women to learn at their own pace. Provision of on-going activities such as training sessions, social rides and cycling events matched to women's cycling abilities were important for sustaining cycling.

Image Makers

In addressing this issue the presentation of the sport of cycling perpetuates a narrow elitist focus through use of imagery, wording and provision of events that automatically exclude potential participants. Without ignoring the image of the young, fast and fit, a more considered and balanced approach to the presentation associated with the sport of cycling is required. A balance that is representative of the people involved in the sport of cycling will dispel many myths about who can and who can’t be a competitive cyclist.

In conjunction with all state bodies and Cycling Australia, it would be worth considering market research to determine a consistent media approach for the diverse and inclusive ‘image’ associated with the sport of cycling. This can form a template or set of standards for marketing across all of the state and national competitive cycling programs. Currently there appears to be no consistent approach to representing the sport of cycling. Contrast this to the way Bicycle Victoria represents itself in all of its media forms. Done centrally this would save time, money and deliver a consistent message that is appealing to potential members across genders, cultures, ages and sizes. Whilst the imagery is consistent, it should remain individualised depending upon who is seeking what information (see below for how this can be achieved).

The following provides an example for where more diverse presentation could have an impact and it involves the CSV Website: The use of imagery, layout of information and accessibility should be reviewed regularly. It may be worth CSV exploring how they can better capture the individual needs of the diverse range of people who make up the cycling community. A sliding scale near the entry point of the website in which individuals can choose their entry point (based on an indicator of perceived ability) could deliver tailored imagery, programs, events and messages that best appeal to that person’s position in the cycling typology.

This ‘sliding rope theory’, builds upon work of Mosston and Ashworth (2005) who describe how people feel more comfortable choosing a point of entry into sport/activity that best represents their perceived ability. A more considered and individualised approach would allow a beginner female (or male) cyclists to enter the webpage that presents less competitive, intimidating and technical information, as well as providing information on beginner programs, Full Cycle, come and try activities and the like. At the same time, an A-Grade female (or male) can go to a place that presents more elitist imagery, competitive and technical information. Just as this would work for a webpage and its associated imagery, it should also be the same for entering events/races. Having some control over your entry level is important in breaking down the very powerful “there is no way I am good enough to race” barrier.

Racing

Clubs should be encouraged to offer a diverse calendar of racing that strongly considers catering to the foundation of its membership. The data revealed that A to E grade cyclists present different needs when it comes to racing and clubs that focus events around the needs of the vocally dominant A-Grade / B-Grade cyclists do so at the risk of alienating its base. Clubs should be encouraged to point more elite cyclists towards open events and a higher standard of competition in order to meet their needs rather than over stretch their lower graded cyclists by making circuits too hard, too long...
or too fast. Clubs cannot forget that cycling is a social sport and participants need space and time to do this. The success of bunch rides over club racing in centres like Bendigo and Melbourne (Beach Rd) are testimony to the power of a social setting for cycling over a competitive one. Running more than one type of race also appears important as this data revealed there is no one preferred race style.

Summary

It appears that creating an experience within a positive social environment that makes the individual feel they are progressing or achieving (not necessarily winning) is at the cornerstone of club cycling. To belong to something that is healthy, refreshing, invigorating and connected to a positive lifestyle makes cycling an obvious choice for people seeking out a sport. Whilst there are many reasons why someone would want to join and continue in the sport of cycling there are many reasons why someone would not.

Without doubt the sport of cycling can build upon many of the ideas discussed in this report. Through addressing the barriers and opportunities presented the sport can hope to see a real spin off in a broadening membership which can only be a positive for an elite program that continues to deliver world class athletes. Further research is needed to explore junior and female participation and a follow up survey is required to test the broader efficacy of many of the points raised in this report, particularly with regard to the potential to tap the growing recreational cycling market. This issue of the weekend warrior is well worth further investigation as well as the concept of an entry standard that is perhaps perceived to be too high.

Above all it is hoped that this research can stimulate debate and discussion about future directions for the sport. The next stage of the process is to use the focus group data as a platform for capturing a comprehensive amount of data to inform future decisions. This will take the form of a widely distributed self-complete survey and should be implemented following input from stakeholders within the next six months.

References


ABS (2001) Source: ABS Cat. 2015.0

Contacts

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Appendix A

Cycling Imagery Sample

Welcome to Cycling Australia
Oenone Wood,
Kathy Watt
&
Sara Carrigan
Commonwealth
Games
Women’s Road
Time Trial
medallists

Cycling Australia web page 7/7/06

WOMEN & GIRLS
TRACK CYCLING
’COME N TRY’ DAY

Cycle sport Victoria web page 7/7/06 – What messages does this send? - Elitist, expensive bikes, high level of technical difficulty, lots of riders on track, dangerous, scary no helmets? Remember, this is a come and try day.

Photo representing cyclists of all ages, shapes and sizes (Queensland Cycling web page, 7/7/06)