

The Skinny on Cycling
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“Know Thyself” said Thales, one of the seven sages of Greece around 600 BC.

Three years ago, when I weighed over 300 pounds and was in the worst shape of my life, I felt that I knew myself pretty well. I didn't like myself and I was afraid that I was destined for an early grave, but I felt like I knew myself. Although this was not the best time of my life, it was very important that I understood myself in terms of body, mind and spirit. At that point, I felt like my body was sort of a wreck, but the mind and spirit were strong.

These days, I feel very differently about my mind, body and spirit. My body is over 100 pounds lighter than before. It is stronger, more balanced, flexible, and people still routinely comment about how “You look so nice now, Wade”. This body carried me through a successful completion of the Ride Across Indiana just a few weeks ago.

My grandpa always said that “We're every age that we've ever been.” In our minds, we're a six-year-old learning to ride without training wheels; we're a fifteen-year-old yearning to dump the bike for a car; we're a twenty-five-year-old realizing the world is bigger than we ever imagined; we're a thirty-five-year-old rediscovering some of the joys of childhood that exist only on two wheels.

This morning, I enjoyed the Quaker Meander, a very well put together CIBA ride through Hendricks County. Gene and Kim Valanzano did a great job putting this ride together and I was pleased when I saw that the cue sheet included many roads that are part of my normal rides near my home. I was also lucky enough to share several miles with a 66-year-old man named Larry who has been cycling for years. We talked about equipment and some of our favorite Hendricks County rides. We talked about our jobs and families. However, once I mentioned my weight loss and the fact that I was proud to have met many of my cycling goals, he said to me, “Wade, you just keep riding that bike and everything else will be just fine. It all seems to work itself out.” Now I'm sure that riding my bike won't pay my bills or get my daughter to piano lessons on time, but there is a nugget of wisdom in that statement that rings true with me.

I was awarded a cycling grant last week, and I'll talk more about that in an upcoming column, but part of that grant allowed me to spend some time with a very talented bike fitter named Frank Radaker at Bicycle Garage Indy. Prior to that afternoon with Frank, I felt like I had learned a lot about cycling. After all, I recently pedaled my way from Terre Haute to Richmond in one day and lived to tell the tale. But after about three hours with this man, I walked away with a different perspective of myself on the bike. I learned that much of what I was

doing was correct. I learned that some things needed improvement. Frank taught me that the way I rotate my elbows, the way I think about pedaling and minor adjustments to my saddle height and cleat position can make significant improvements in how hard I have to work to move myself and my bike down the road.

At the end of my fitting, I asked Frank if the fitting would have gone differently if I were to weigh one hundred pounds more than I do now. He said that it would and indicated that with an additional hundred pounds, my flexibility would likely be reduced which affects the pedal stroke and that I'd certainly have to deal with the extra bulk of a larger gut. While these things are true, I think there's more to it than that. When I weighed one hundred pounds more than I do now, I would never have invested my time and resources into a bike fitting. When I weighed one hundred pounds more than I do now, a professional bike fitting, along with a ride across the state of Indiana, was complete fiction to me. For years I played mind games to justify my weight, my waist size and the many, many reasons I was too busy to exercise and improve my health. In many ways, I feel like a completely different person both in and out of the saddle. The person I know now feels differently, acts differently, walks differently and has a new lease on life that is worth more than all the gold in California.

"Know thyself," said the old philosopher, "improve thyself," saith the new.
Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803 - 1873)

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Wade Wingle, the author of "The Skinny on Cycling" is the father of one adorable little girl, the husband of a beautiful & talented librarian, a Yogi and an avid cyclist. His web site, www.HowILost100Pounds.com features common sense advice on losing weight without suffering and improving your cycling through healthy living.