

Pedal power

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Being part of Dubai Roadsters can take care of two of your needs — a fabulous workout and good friends



Cycling in Dubai at the peak of summer on a Friday morning (considered by many as a day meant purely for some serious sleeping), just for the heck of it, might not sound like an appealing proposition to many. But while watching Dubai Roadsters' cyclists troop into the Lime Tree Café in Jumeirah, cheerfully calling out breakfast orders and looking totally invigorated, one point becomes clear — sacrificing a few hours of sleep (even if it's on a Friday) can go a long way.

Dubai Roadsters, an informal group of cyclists, was formed almost nine years back, by Wolfgang Hohmann, when he started his bike business in Dubai and was looking for someone to go cycling with. "Through my business, I came in touch with many cyclists. There were a few cyclists who were already cycling, but I formed the Dubai Roadsters in the format it is known today."



Here, cycling is not just seen as physical exercise. It is a workout and social event, all rolled into one — something that is important to the cyclists, explains Hohmann. "It is so much fun to ride is a group," he says. "Years later, it became a mission for me to get more people into this."

The cyclists meet at the Lime Tree Café every Friday morning at 5:30am during summers and 6am during winters. After a 45-minute ride towards the Dubai Academic City, the group stops to take a small break to replenish their water supply. Then, cyclists split into three groups, based on the distance they want to cover on their cycles. Those looking to cover 80kms cover Nad Al Sheba and Ras Al Khor. Cyclists up for the 120kms ride head off towards Al Aweer while the rest, geared up for the 140kms ride, head off to Mirdiff. Fitness is a must before a cyclist can join the tough Friday morning rides. They are asked to bring their fitness up to a certain level by attending the Sunday and Tuesday evening rides in Nad Al Sheba.

Hohmann remembers a time when the group had just about 10 members, with one or two female cyclists. "Today, we have as many as 150 to 160 riders coming in for the Friday morning rides."



However, with around 10 to 15 female cyclists in attendance, the group is still a male dominated one. When asked to guess as to why scores of women in Dubai are yet to discover cycling as a great way to workout, Martina Rohner, one of Dubai Roadsters' female cyclists, says that it might be because of the level of fitness one has to achieve before being allowed to go cycling on Friday mornings. "Or, they could have kids back home to look after," she ventures another guess.

"This is my favourite activity in Dubai. It's my highlight of the week," remarks Emma Dickie, from Australia. "It's social, with a good workout and good food afterwards," she says, beckoning to her half eaten plate. Talking about how torturous waking up earlier than one would perhaps on a weekday, she exclaims, "You can't start to think about it. You just have to ignore the voices in your head that ask you to stay in bed... everyone thinks that we are insane — we probably are!" she laughs.



Rohner explains that cycling works just fine for her as she is an "outdoorsy person" and that the gym is a "horror" for her. "I used to go mountain cycling before in Switzerland but since there are no mountains here, I switched to roadside cycling," she explains. Crissy Harris, another Roadsters cyclist, seems to share her sentiments. "What sets cycling apart from working out in the gym is the change of scenery. I mean, you could work out on your treadmill and watch a film ... but that can get really boring."

Though group cycling is fun, it calls for some amount of co-ordination and communication amongst the cyclists while on the road. "It is very important to learn how to behave in a group and safety," explains Melanie Smith, from New Zealand. "We drive 2 by 2, behind each other and if there are any objects on the road, you show signals to indicate that to the other cyclists. When group riding, you are so close to the person in front of you that you need to know the sign language." This is something that is taught to beginners during the training sessions at Nad Al Sheba. The cyclists' safety, a key factor, is taken care of as the support cars that follow the cyclists have first aid kits in them.



Complete advantage is taken of the cooler months, as Dubai Roadsters organise extra activities during winter, like one-day trips to the Al Aqah beach in Fujairah. "The cyclists ride up to the beach, have some food at the resort there and then take a private bus back to Dubai," explains Hohmann.

The oldest member of the group might be around 60 years, says Helen Rodd, from Holland. "I am nearing 50 myself," she laughs. "But this has got nothing to do with age," she points out. Rodd cautions other cyclists that they should not look at the support car as a means of transport in case they decide to not go further. "You should not come with the intention of not going, which is why we insist reaching that certain level of fitness," Rodd explains.

So what do these female cyclists have to say to other women who are on the lookout for a fun and more 'social' way to lose weight? "Come and join us!," grins Rohner.