Easy Rider

November 1, 2000 By Erika Rasmusson

Taking part in an AIDS Ride is life-changing, say many of the devoted, otherwise-ordinary 45,000 folks who have completed one of the 26 treks held since 1994. But biking through all five in one year -- that's a way of life. At least it was for Joe Ede as the last ride of the year came to a sweaty, teary close in Dallas in October. The 36-year-old pedaled more than 2,500 miles in five months to raise money for AIDS groups through Pallotta TeamWorks events (see "Magical Mystery Tour" below).

He's no solitary cyclist. Ede is a "Spokebuster," one of 33 people who took part in all five 2000 Rides and grossed over $425,000 for various Ride beneficiaries. Ede himself collected $15,000 in donations. Then he went the extra mile -- plus 509 -- for the first Alaska AIDS Vaccine Ride in August.

But six years ago, he couldn't even pull himself out of bed, much less bike for five days straight. Out of a job and down in the dumps, he spent the better part of a month sleeping and crying before finally starting therapy. "It was my rock bottom," he says, "and it was time to get help, or I would end up dead."

In early 1997, Ede saw a sign for the AIDS Ride near his home in downtown Minneapolis. He had friends who were positive, he had just completed three years of therapy with a psychologist, and it seemed like a good way to celebrate his progress. He plunked down the $45 registration fee, raised the $2,300 minimum from friends, sweated through spinning class (intensive, instructor-guided indoor cycling) once a week and set out for Chicago on a $100 mountain bike he'd bought at Montgomery Ward. "It never occurred to me to open up my ride guide or even check the training ride schedule," he says. "I didn't know what it was all about."

Although he had signed up to honor his own personal achievements, Ede hadn't expected to ride the 500 miles to Chicago virtually solo. But because he didn't know anyone and self-consciously remained in his shell, "that ride was the hardest, loneliest, most humbling thing I've ever done in my life." Still, despite the bout of hypothermia and constant knee pain, he vowed to repeat it. "I saw people helping and supporting each other," he says. "That really represents what community is about. That's what inspired me to come back." As an employee at the Regency Athletic Club and Spa in the Minneapolis Hyatt Hotel, Ede began a free spinning program for other participants.

Then, in October 1997 while prepping for his second ride, he tested positive, an event that no amount of training made any easier. Although certain elements helped that ride be a better

experience -- he knew people and had worked hard -- he was full of shame and anger over his diagnosis. He watched the HIVers of Positive Pedalers whiz past, identifying orange flags snapping in the breeze, and knew he wasn't strong enough yet to make that statement to the world.

Then two things changed his mind: His best friend, Todd, died of AIDS, and Ede signed on as a crew member for the first Texas AIDS Ride. Cheering riders into the first pit stop, his thoughts turned to Todd and at that moment, he says, "All the fear, anger, guilt and shame lifted right out of me." In June 1999 he joined Positive Pedalers at the DC AIDS Ride. "I made that statement: I'm healthy enough to participate," he says. "And I thought, if I can ride two, maybe I can ride five."

After watching three friends sink into depression after testing positive, Ede made a decision to take care of himself physically and emotionally. He takes Viramune and Combivir twice a day, right before and right after his practice sessions, and says he's more conscious of his body's well-being because of the training regimen. And keeping track of the close-knit crowd of riders is itself a workout. Every couple of months, he throws a party and invites all of his ride buddies.

Like so many riders, Ede passes countless miles on his bike thinking about friends who are no longer around to attend those gatherings. On days when the humidity is nearly unbearable, when he's tired and his butt aches, he says it is memories of his friends -- not his own HIV status -- that keeps him pushing the pedals.

So he rides on, teaching spinning and, once the cold Minneapolis winters give way to spring, putting in as many as 100 miles daily, four or five times a week, on his bike. "I'm doing my part for something I believe in," he says. "I'm doing it because this is what I'm supposed to be doing with my life, regardless of how I got here."

Magical Mystery Tour

Joe Ede can ride the ride. His 2000 record speaks for itself.

California
June 4-10
570 miles

Washington, DC
June 22-25
330 miles

Twin Cities-Chicago
July 10-15
500 miles

Boston-New York
September 15-17
275 miles

Texas
October 12-15
325 miles

Alaska AIDS Vaccine Ride
August 21-26
510 Miles

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.