



Once a cyclist...

Multiple sclerosis stopped **Robert Wright** cycling in 1993. Yet he was still a cyclist on the inside. And there was, it turned out, a way back

The sales assistant approaches: 'Hello. Can I help you, sir?' I'm looking at a Trek Madone 5.2 Compact Road Bike in JE James Cycles, Sheffield. Captivated by its smooth seamless curves, I reluctantly shake my head, replying 'No, I'm okay, thanks.' It's not that I've spent quite enough already on some framed cycling pictures for my apartment, rather that I can't ride a bike anymore. I have multiple sclerosis. I haven't cycled since 1993. Can you still be a cyclist if you can't ride a bike anymore? I think you can. Once a cyclist, always a cyclist. It's just that these days I'm cycling on the inside.

I continue to go into the bike shops to admire the latest machinery. I watch the Tour de France on TV avidly. For the three-week duration, I eagerly tune in each evening to watch race highlights with superb commentary and analysis. The aerial pictures showing the race pass through the rich scenic beauty of France never fail to impress. After its exciting climax on those long straight roads of the Champs Élysées amid the great buildings of Paris, it's over for another year.

There's a sense of loss, connected perhaps to memories of my own rides. I was always getting out on the bike, whatever the weather. Living in the west side of

Sheffield, so close to the hills and dales of the Peak District, this was serious biking terrain. I had several different racing bikes. Buying the latest equipment and accessories for them, although expensive, was all part of the fun. Riding often with a stopwatch, the motivation here was always to improve on my previous best times. Over those years I must have pedalled thousands of kilometres.

Today, thinking back, I suppose it did all get a bit too serious. I don't particularly recall stopping to admire the wild scenic beauty. Some people might call it an obsession – a kind of addiction, if you



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like. They're probably right in some way; to me it was just a way of life that was so enjoyable.

And I'm convinced that the dogged determination and ambition that I gave to the bike has continued to drive me in other ventures. I have since discovered new challenges. I now have an honours degree and three other post-graduate master's degrees. I'm currently learning to speak French, getting personal one-to-one tuition. My tutor, aware of my passion for cycling, has incorporated the Tour de France into my programme of learning.

I think that cycling can shape your character as well as your body. It can be fascinating even if you don't take part in it personally. It's a great spectator sport and some of today's specialist machines are aesthetically beautiful, certainly more than just a mode of transportation. I think, moreover, that cycling opens doorways into the world that never close afterwards.

Editor's postscript: This article was going to be called 'Cycling on the inside', and look at the idea that you can define yourself as a cyclist even if you're no longer riding. Yet during our correspondence and Robert's article revisions, he came into contact with CTC's Cycle Champions. And the ending changed. Here's an edited excerpt from an email Robert sent me.

Just to let you know that CTC's Steve Marsden has been to see me for a chat and I have now bought a Mission Di Blasi R32 folding tricycle. It's surprisingly neat and compact, with a quality build and components. I've even started upgrading it – new SPD pedals, a new chain etc. – a sure sign that the cycling bug has, once again, got me!

I've booked my place on a Cycle for Health course in a local park in Sheffield. I've also met up with Caroline Waugh in Sheffield who wrote an article for you not so long back. The benefits of cycling again in the light of my MS have been profound.