

CYCLING IS THE *new money-spinner*

Pedal power is helping to keep workers healthy and happy – and charities are reaping the rewards, writes **Margaret de Silva**

The push bike is enjoying a resurgence as cycling emerges as the sport of choice for Brisbane's corporate elite. As large companies come under pressure to provide better health and wellbeing policies to encourage staff loyalty, firms are turning to pedal power like never before. The big end of town is investing heavily in the sport, even providing discount branded lycra gear, purpose-built facilities and on-site linen services for employees.

Charities, too, are reaping the rewards, with the number of fundraising rides doubling in the past decade. There are now at least 20 events on Brisbane's cycling calendar and already this year the BDO Brisbane Coot-tha Challenge, MS Brissie to the Bay and Ride for Relief, which featured Lance Armstrong, have raised a combined \$643,000 for The Endeavour Foundation, MS Queensland and the Queensland Premier's Disaster Relief Appeal.

Up to 100 corporate teams will contest Brisbane's newest event, the goa 7 Pillars Ride to be held on 4 September, and organisers hope to raise up to \$100,000 for the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital Foundation.

Emily Davies from Corporate Health Events Management (CHEM), which is organising the event, says cycling has overtaken fun runs and golf days as the sport of choice for fundraising. Already, she has been approached at least 10 times this year by charities and companies keen to host new events – and she's had to turn down some ideas. However, the 7 Pillars Ride, hosted by goa billboards, is not like previous events. Teams will be given the route only two weeks ahead and will have to find their way to seven checkpoints (or "pillars") across the city. There will be no designated cycle route or road closures and only teams of experienced riders with road bikes will be eligible to enter.

One company that has already signed up to start in the race is construction giant Laing O'Rourke. Its people development manager, John Wood, is in charge of the organisation's health and wellbeing program and is an avid cyclist. He rides from his home at Coorparoo to

his city office five days a week, regularly joins the company's social early-bird River Loop on Fridays and goes mountain bike riding on weekends.

Wood, 44, started riding to work after the company moved into city offices when the flood shut down its Moorooka base in January. "Traffic and parking in the city can be an issue...and now we have facilities to change and for our bikes," he explains.

He estimates that about 10 per cent of the company's city staff uses the on-site facilities, which were recently upgraded and include lockers, showers and a free linen service.

Laing O'Rourke isn't alone in offering such a set-up – for instance, Santos Place at South Bank has more than 300 secure basement bicycle parks, while Leighton Contractors has space for about 100 bikes at its Wickham Street headquarters and

even includes an on-site service centre operated by 99 Bikes.

City workers who don't work in cycle-friendly offices can still access facilities, such as the cycle2city facility in the King George Square Station complex. Membership includes Monday to Friday access to secure bike parking, a fresh towel, locker rooms and showers. The scheme currently has more than 400 members.

Bicycle Queensland manager Ben Wilson says businesses offering cycling incentives will reap the rewards. "People don't want to just sit behind a desk all day," he says. "It's an added reason for someone to want to work for you." He says the nature of cycling, with riders often together in packs, makes it ideal for networking and team-building. The fact that a ride may only take an hour before work adds to the appeal.

Emily Davies says there is often strong internal rivalry within companies. "There's a lot of talk about what bike you ride," she adds – perhaps not surprising given a quality road bike can cost between \$1000 and \$10,000. Serious racers may add racing wheels for an extra \$4000, while shoes and helmets can each cost \$300 and lycra kits up to \$250 – and that's not including the leg warmers, arm warmers and wind breakers needed on chilly winter mornings.

Registration for the goa 7 Pillars Ride closes 5 August. Call 3161 8600 or see www.7pillarsride.com.au for details.



The goa 7 Pillars Ride will raise money for the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital Foundation



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