

MURRAY DICKINSON

This article was written by VRWC member Heather Carr and was published initially in the Victorian Masters Assn newsletter Footprints. Thank you Heather for allowing me to add it to our VRWC archives...Tim Erickson...August 2014

Murray Dickinson is a remarkable man, as you will quickly discover! Never one to allow grass to grow under his feet, Murray has lead a life full of adventure, escapades and excitement.

Murray has competed in athletics for many years now, but his early years were dedicated to cycling. At the very tender age of 14, Murray was influenced by his peers to join the Northcote Amateur Cycling Club. He quickly became addicted to the sport of cycling, racing on both the track and the road. Murray's racing bike consisted of a 3 speed close ratio gears (completely different from models available today!) One course for competition began in Plenty Road Preston, to Bell Street, to Heidelberg, onto Manningham Road, to Doncaster Road, across to Eltham, Greensborough, Bundoora and then back to Preston. Can you imagine riding that course now, along with the thousands of vehicles that frequent these spaces - certainly a most dangerous proposition. Knowing Murray's competitiveness, I'm surprised he only had one serious crash during that era. This incident occurred in a bunch of thirty riders, and the legacy? Murray removing gravel from all parts of his body for months afterwards.

Murray's desire for an active, stimulating life resulted in purchasing a car at 18 whilst completing a Motor Mechanic Apprenticeship. Murray must have shown a lot of aptitude for racing, as he was 'head hunted' by Austin Miller, a local car dealer, who raced a Formula 1 Cooper Climax. Austin's partner was Stan Jones, a well known identity in racing circles. Murray was crucial to Miller, being responsible for driving the car to Bathurst, as well as preparing and maintaining the Cooper Climax. In the meantime he worked assiduously on his own high speed FX Holden, racing at Phillip island, contesting hill climbs, and ultimately 'fixing' damaged parts in the middle of the night, so the car could be raced again the following day! (Usually whilst his mates were thoroughly enjoying themselves at the local pub!!) Fortunately Murray's boss supplied all the tyres, fuel, oil and other necessary components to make racing viable. Simultaneously, Murray began his own business as a Motor Mechanic in Reservoir, eventually moving to Coburg, then finally moving to Eltham, where he owned and managed his own automotive business. A very busy, productive and successful stage of Murray's life.

Not content with cycling and motor car racing, his next foray in sport was snow skiing! A man of considerable talents! During the early 1960's, a group of friends gathered together and formed a ski club at Mt Buller. The club, Coonamar Ski Club, still claims Murray as a member, a founding member. Again, that same powerful competitive spirit shone through, with Murray competing in Victorian Championships, in a variety of disciplines including Slalom, Giant Slalom, Downhill, Cross Country and Jumps - whatever competition was going Murray was into it! Quite a few injuries occurred including tearing ankle ligaments and breaking a leg, but Murray survived all this to pursue his interest; skiing at all the Australian ski resorts, as well as Japan, the USA and Europe.

In 1967, Murray married the gorgeous, calm and patient Marlene. Together they had three children, Joanne, Danielle and Justin, who shared Murray's passion for snow skiing and spent many many seasons together as a family at the Coonamar Club.

Never one to be content with the above mentioned sports, Murray has also dabbled in water skiing! He began by building a runabout ski boat and camped with the family at Lake Eildon. Not content with 'regular' water skiing, Murray began barefoot skiing, as regular skiing was 'a bit tame'!! This time he managed to only break a few ribs. Windsurfing was also on the cards, with Murray describing the experience as a 'real buzz'. Concurrent with all these pursuits Murray was running a lot, competing in 24 marathons including New York, Hawaii, Rome, Puerto Rico, and the very first Melbourne Marathon in 1978.

Amongst Murray's talents is his persuasiveness! He 'talked' Marlene into running and competing in the World Veterans Athletic Championships in Puerto Rico in 1983. Murray had already competed in the 20km walk, and the following day they ran the marathon together. It was exceptionally hot and humid, and at the 30km mark, Marlene decided she'd had enough!! Whilst sitting in the gutter, feeling completely miserable, Marlene was convinced by Murray that there would be a very high attrition rate for women, so Marlene 'got up', struggled onto the finish, had to do one lap of the track, refused, got going again, and came in 3rd in the 40 year age group! Marlene couldn't believe what had eventuated. Hopefully by now, she's forgiven Murray!! All I can say is congratulation Marlene, you must be a remarkable woman to manage Murray so well!

Despite all Murray's amazing intentions, he was discovering that his body was not as invincible as he would like. Problems with his achilles occurred, so running was put on the backburner. The notion that racewalking would be a suitable alternative to running was suggested by a fellow Collingwood athlete. This advice proved advantageous, and resulted in a wonderful new career for Murray. This led to competition around the world in many of the Veteran / Masters World Championships, resulting in many wins and several World records. Much to Murray's disgust, (necessarily tongue in cheek, as Andrew is bigger), these records have fallen to a fellow Australian racewalker!

In 1987, the VII World Veterans' Athletic Championships were held in Melbourne, and Murray played a significant role. Firstly as a member of the Committee, and secondly becoming race director for the marathon, the cross country, and the road walks. The marathon course was from the city to Elwood and return; the cross country, beginning at Royal Park, consisting of hay bales, a bog and sand trap to provide variety and interest for competitors and finally the road walks; along Alexandra Avenue, down St Kilda Road, around the Shrine finishing with laps of Olympic park. Men competed in the 20km and women in the 10km. The start line for both the 20km and the 10km were at different points, which became a logistical nightmare for Murray and other organizers.

Murray's first international success was at Olympic Park in the M45 5km track walk at the VII World Veterans' Games. Willi Sawall, an iconic Australian racewalker, literally flew around the track, eventually being disqualified halfway through the event, leaving John Smith from Australia, Bob Dobson from Great Britain and Murray to contend the places. In Murray's ironic way, he stated the 'last 200m was very hectic'. Murray took Gold finishing in 22:59, Bob Dobson Silver in 23:02, and Smith Bronze in 23:11. A thrilling conclusion to a sensational event.

Following the frantic and hectic schedule of organizing the out of stadia events for the Melbourne World Championships, Murray, to repair and recuperate, took his family trekking in Nepal for 2 weeks, completing the Annapurna circuit and onto base camp at 18000 feet. Annapurna is a section of the Himalayas in North Central Nepal, a well known trekking region. The treks offer incredibly diverse scenery with both high mountains and lowland villages. The area also offers unique cultural exposure and experience; 'pure magic' exclaims Murray! The family continued their 'holiday', continuing onto India as the next port of call.

One of my more powerful memories of Murray is following the 5km track walk in Turku, Finland. Murray completed the walk, totally and utterly exhausted, flat, face up on the track, countenance very, very grey, whilst his son, Justin, stood above him videoing whilst his father lay prostrate, gasping like a fish out of water! Before Murray had time to recover, he was hauled away by a sturdy, Finnish female for a drug test. These and other memories contribute to athletics being so compelling - the human drama displayed for all to see.

Murray has many, many friends through racewalking. Dario Rameriez from Columbia, 'no English me, no Spanish' for Murray! Despite this huge gap in communication, both men had an incredible respect for one another over 25 years, with Dario habitually 'out in front like a rocket', with a 'try and catch me' attitude. Sadly Dario has passed away, and is missed tremendously by fellow athletes. Murray continues a friendship with an American athlete, Jim Fisher, and regularly travels to the USA to enjoy snow skiing with Jim in Colorado. The list grows; Jack Bray, the 'tree lover', is also a unique and distinctive personality favourite of Murray's.

Murray returned to the cycling circuit in 1982, joining the Northern and Eastern Veterans Cycling Clubs, competing in both criteriums and road races but with limited success. Murray discovered that when racing and training, hill exertion and endurance slog suited his body type, making cycling and racewalking appropriate for him. However with the march of time, Murray now rides recreationally with 'a few ex racing mates.....who look after old warriors'.

More recently, Murray, in 2008, visited France, with Marlene and his new bike. The highlight of his French escapade was the Pre Tour or the L'Etape du Tour (stage of the tour) of the 'Tour de France'. He and many other riders would set off early in the morning to ride the course that the professional riders were actively involved in. Riding up the mountains with the crowds lining the route was exhilarating and thrilling, producing a 'real buzz'. A very supportive Marlene was either at the start, the feed station or the finish. The experience was so memorable that Murray did it all over again in 2010! This ride is an organized mass participation 'cyclo sportive' event that allows amateur cyclists to race over the same route as a 'Tour de France' stage. It is usually held over mountain roads in the Pyrenees or the French Alps. Thousands of riders participate and the event takes place on roads closed by police to other traffic with feed stations and medical support provided along the route. The ride was undertaken the day before the professional riders rode, culminating on the summit of Col du Tourmalet, one of the highest peaks in the Central Pyrenees. This strenuous three mountain effort of 184 kilometers saw 10,000 riders involved, with 3000 riders unable to complete the course, it was so arduous, gruelling and hard.

A couple of years ago, Murray was involved with a bunch of cyclists who stopped suddenly (didn't want to compete with a car) whilst out on their training ride. Unfortunately, Murray came off the worst, breaking the top of his femur. Despite an operation repairing the break with a dynamic hip screw, the damage was done, leaving Murray with a loss of flexibility and lack of strength in his left quad. Despite this setback, Murray is working overtime to get back to pre accident strength. Of course, this catastrophe has left its 'scar', and Murray can be subjected to running foul of the race walking judges when competing, however, he refuses to ever 'give up'.

Murray loves racewalking, now competing in the M70-75 age group, and really enjoys his involvement with the Victorian Race Walking Club. He and Marlene have travelled extensively and met many interesting athletes and co-competitors, making friends around Australia as well as many countries around the globe. Murray's Motto 'DON'T EVER STOP' are golden words of wisdom. Having an attitude that is so positive is a tenet we could all do well to live by. We wish Murray success in his efforts to compete in the World Championships in Brazil in a few months time. Keep flying that flag for Australia, and continue with that amazing, optimistic attitude to everything you approach in life. I'm sure there will be many other areas as yet unexplored that you will eventually be involved in. You've hardly scratched the surface yet!