

“Leave all the afternoon for exercise and recreation, which are as necessary as reading. I will rather say more necessary because health is worth more than learning.” **THOMAS JEFFERSON**

## Cyclist rises to challenge of randonneuring

Anthony Gilbert could see just 100 feet ahead of him as he cycled through the darkness in the French countryside. He rode mostly nonstop for four days and four nights



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— getting 5 ½ hours of sleep overall — before completing the 1200 km (745-mile) Paris-Brest-Paris brevet, the premiere event in the sport of randonneuring. It rained for 71 of the event’s 90 hours.

Randonneuring — a French term for unsupported, long-distance cycling — is about self-sufficiency and pushing oneself physically and mentally on a bicycle. It is a long trip, not a race. The longest rides — or “brevets” as they are called — in the series are 1200km, and to qualify for those, the rider has to complete brevets of 200km, 300km, 400km, 600km and 1000km.

Sports massage therapist Anthony Gilbert is founder of The Athlete’s Edge in San Mateo ([www.theathletesedge.com](http://www.theathletesedge.com)), and an

accomplished randonneur ([www.rusa.org](http://www.rusa.org)). He specializes in hands-on therapies for sports injuries.

**Q:** When and how did you get involved in the sport of randonneuring?

**A:** Having worked with athletes all of my adult career, I have been very motivated by them. I also have a history of riding two or three centuries (100 miles) a year for the past 20 years. One of my clients, an ultra-endurance cyclist, encouraged me to move up to the double-century distance of 200 miles. I had never done more than 150 miles, but my first double-century ride was in Solvang in November of 2006, and I was hooked.

**Q:** What appeals to you about randonneuring?

**A:** Ultra-endurance cycling is a metaphor for life. All my life I have searched for ways to push back my limitations — which I have discovered are mostly self-imposed. In working with top athletes, I’ve been motivated by their dedication to excellence and focus on

performance — and the idea that discomfort, pain and weather conditions are all temporary. If you can let go and disassociate, you can train and perform right through them. I’m also certified to teach firewalking, and have done it over 80 times. It’s the same sort of thing, and lets me move through discomfort and fear. So if I have an interview with a new facility, doctor or corporation to treat clients (for my work), I can say to myself, “I walked on fire, or I rode days and nights on my bicycle, so I can do this.”

**Q:** What have been the challenges of the rides you have done?

**A:** When I rode the Paris-Brest-Paris (PBP) brevet in August of 2007, it was the hardest ride in 50 years because of the rain. We started in Paris, went west across Normandy to Brest and then turned around and went back via 38,000 feet of climbing. During the day you see people waiting by the road in medieval villages — and you feel like a rock star. But at night you just see what’s in your headlights, and everything to either side

of you is pitch black.

**Q:** What does it require of a person, fitness-wise?

**A:** You need to have a good base of riding centuries and double-centuries, and have experience riding throughout the night with lights on the bike. Other important things include knowledge of nutritional requirements and finding the proper combination of which foods, liquids, electrolytes, and caffeine work best for you. Mentally, you need a positive attitude, to be flexible with anything that comes up during rides, and have complete focus.

I’ve had to reach deep, but anybody can do this.

**Q:** What is your goal in randonneuring?

**A:** I plan to do the Sidney to Melbourne 1200km in November of 2009, the Paris-Brest-Paris in 2011, and numerous brevets all over the USA. I want to keep riding as long as this form of expression speaks to me.

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