

# Grandfather on cross-Canada trek to promote DARE program

By **WILMA BLOKHUIS**  
Special to *The Champion*

Why would a 60-year-old grandfather who has cycled across Canada twice cross this country again on two wheels?

It can be said Stan Wawzonek is cycling across Canada on a dare. Not only is the father of four and grandfather of eight crossing the country by bicycle as "his way of seeing Canada," he's doing it for the Drug Awareness Resistance Education (DARE) program.

He will travel 8,935 km across Canada, cycling a combination of roads and trails and stopping at more than 90 communities along the way.

He stopped at the Milton police station Saturday morning and was headed Sunday to Brantford, his hometown. There Mr. Wawzonek, known as 'The Chip Man', has been in the French fry business for 52 years.

Cycling across Canada for DARE is his way of saying thank you to the uniformed officers who teach grade 6 children in 14,000 schools across Canada "about the evils of drugs, tobacco, alcohol and bullying."

"My oldest grandson went through DARE and I attended five DARE graduations," said Mr. Wawzonek. "I'm completely sold on it, and you meet the nicest officers in DARE."

The 17-week DARE course is the largest and most widely-implemented drug and violence prevention program worldwide, stated a release from DARE Canada to promote Mr. Wawzonek's ride.

DARE was launched in the United States about 20 years ago and is currently taught in 26 languages by some 50,000 police officers in 51 countries.

Mr. Wawzonek initially hoped to raise \$1 million for DARE, however the fundraising aspect of his trek has given way to creating awareness.

In Halton, seven officers are assigned to DARE. About 5,000 grade 6 children in 105 elementary schools graduate from the DARE program each year in the region. The DARE program is reinforced in grade 8.

"We owe it to our children to give them help in resisting the temptation to experiment with cigarettes, drugs and alcohol," said the marathon man who's cycling about 100 km a day. On "good days" he rides up to 160 km.

"My experience of bringing up four children and watching them raise my eight grandchil-

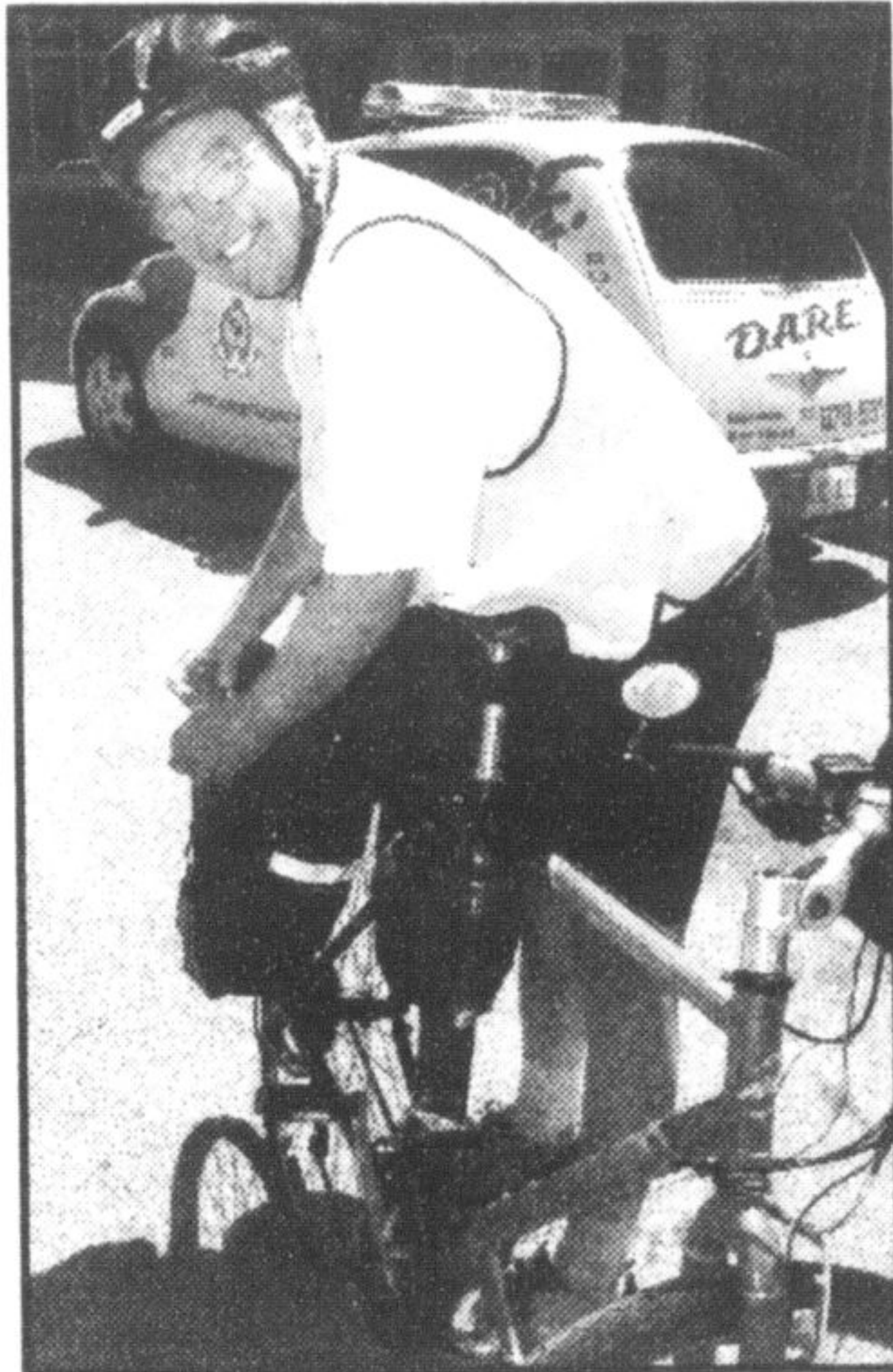


Photo by PETER McCUSKER

**Stan Wawzonek made a stop in Milton Saturday.**

dren tells me we have to make sure the program is made available in more schools across Canada.

"I feel very fortunate," continued Mr. Wawzonek. "My kids never did the drug thing and I hope my eight grandchildren won't. On my ride across the country, I want to increase awareness of the benefits the program can bring. I plan to meet with volunteer groups and dare them to set up DARE programs in their communities following my visit. DARE is a great program. Nothing compares to it."

Mr. Wawzonek said he hopes to complete his ride in Victoria, BC July 31. He began the trek in St. John's, Nfld. April 30.

His well-worn 27-speed mountain bike has stood up well, said Mr. Wawzonek.

"I had only three flats on the road, and on Thursday (last week), my day off, I got new tires and four new brake shoes put on."

The weather hasn't been as favourable. "I've had miserable weather — snow, ice and cold winds," said Mr. Wawzonek.

"But, I don't complain about the weather because nobody's making me cycle across Canada."

He cycled solo through Oakville, Milton and Burlington, having given his crew a break.

Long-time friends George and Mildred Markle, who will both celebrate their 69th birthdays on the road, have been following Mr. Wawzonek in their motorhome. "They just celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary."

In 1997 and 1999, he cycled across Canada to promote his Thank-a-Vet program, and personally thanked veterans for their war-time contributions.

"And, in between my cross-Canada rides, I've been on my bike only six times," he said.



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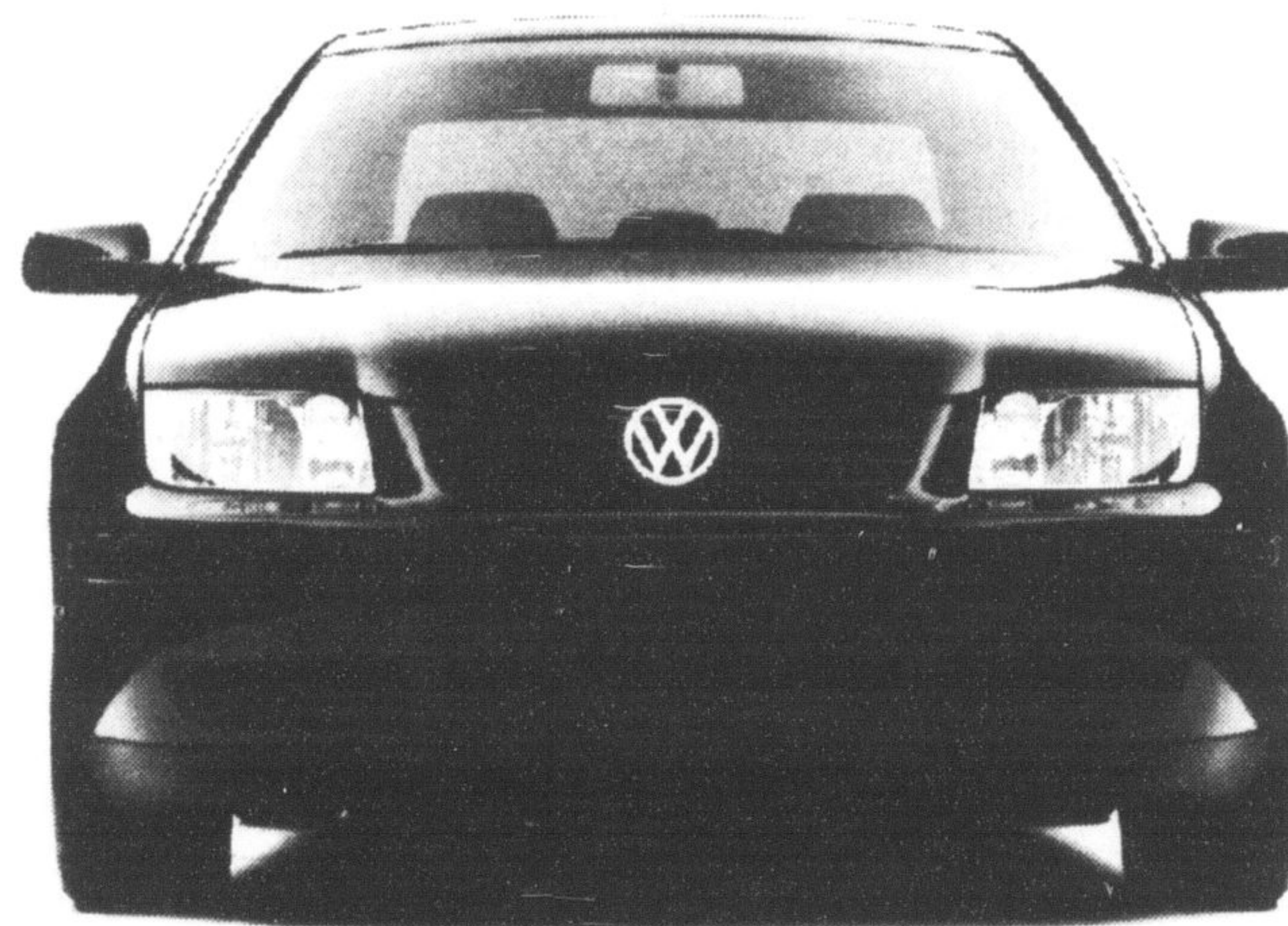
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