

# LEISURE

## Setting the wheels in motion

For fun or for fitness, cycling is the ideal family activity

BY DAWN LIERSCH  
Staff Writer

**B**efore you meet Les Suter, the Volvo in his driveway with the bicycle rack on top reveals two of his passions in life.

As a licensed mechanic with Volvo Villa in Unionville, his choice of vehicle is no surprise. And where that won't take him, his bike will.

"Cycling is a whole package — a lifestyle, a culture. It fills a lot of voids in my life," said Suter, an avid cross-country mountain bike racer from Newmarket.

"Sometimes, when I come home from work, my wife takes one look at my face and tells me to go for a ride."

While cycling is a huge stress buster, it also heals him physically.

In fact, Suter first took up the sport 12 years ago when he was told vigorous exercise might help the asthma that had plagued him all his life. He began cycling merely to get into shape, but soon joined the thousands of riders across Canada who are hooked on the sport.

The Ontario Cycling Association boasts 2,000 direct members and another 3,000 members through 90 affiliated clubs.

According to Ralph Neumann, the association's treasurer, cycling really took off a few years ago and has remained strong.

He attributes the boom to people becoming more health conscious and the fact that cycling is such a convenient sport.

For Suter, the desire to ride extends even beyond that. The challenge of competing, plus the thrill of the wind in his hair, have a permanent hold on him.

"I love racing because it's an all-around rush. There's an adrenaline rush and it's a huge personal challenge," he said.

Although he was never competitively involved with athletic sports before, he now dedicates 10 to 15 hours a week training for races. He uses a stationary bike at the gym in bad weather.

Suter is mainly a cross-country mountain bike racer, placing in the top 10 in a past national competition, but he also does some road racing and touring. His favourites are the 24-hour races that he calls the "Woodstock" of cycling.

Aside from the rush of competing, cycling is a great form of entertainment for his whole family.

Wife Shelly often accompanies him on rides. Bike tours to and around Manitoulin Island and through England, Scotland and Ireland gave her a new-found appreciation of cycling.

"You see so much more than you ever would driving your car," she said, recalling the smell of the wildflowers at the side of the road and fresh-cut hay in Manitoulin Island or the scent of the ocean in Ireland.

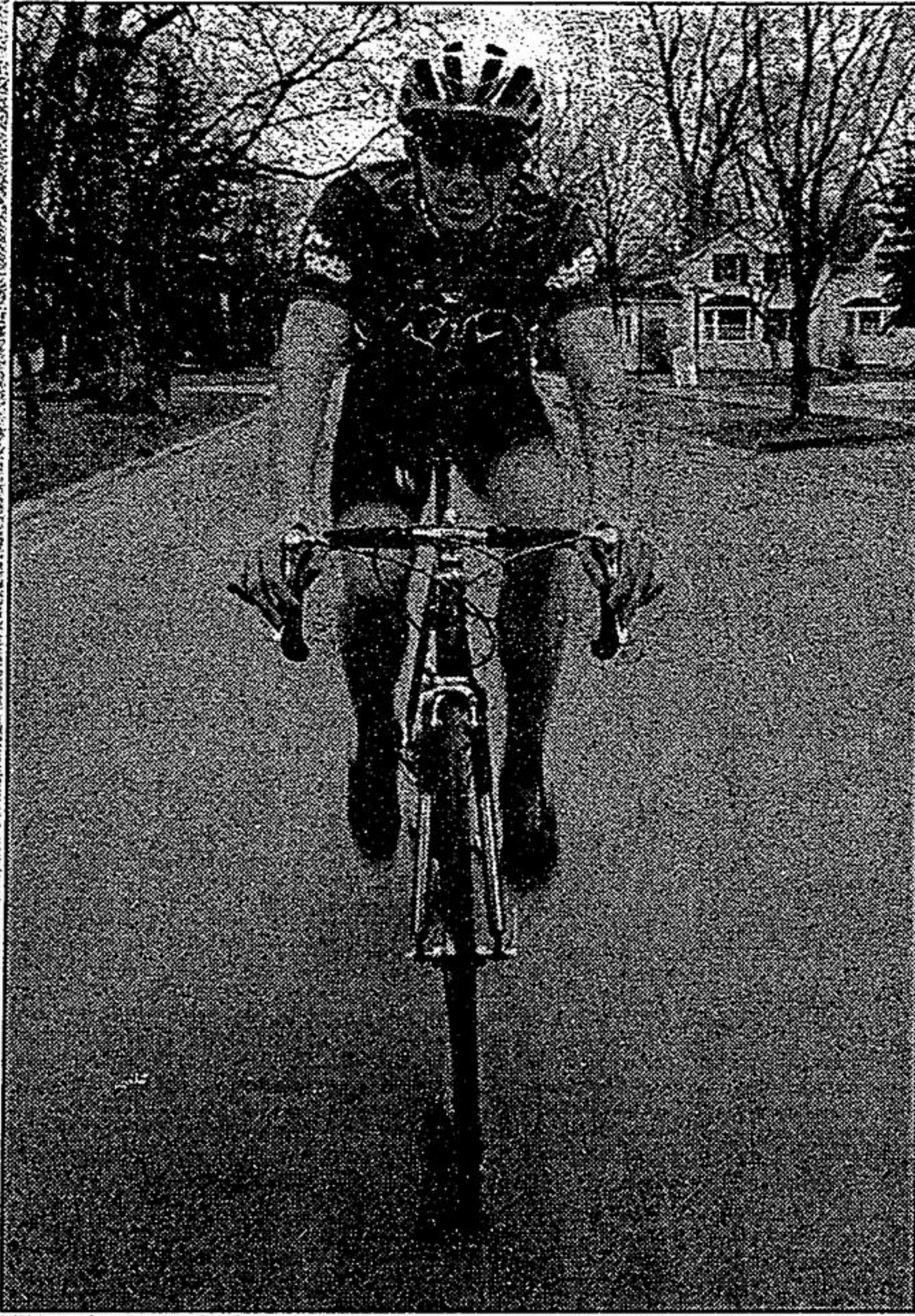
The Suters' four-year-old son, Travis, holds his own on a small two-wheeler. And their baby daughter, Justine, is often in tow on a trailer attached to the back of a bike, providing the "ultimate workout," according to Suter.

He has even persuaded his 56-year-old father, Jim, to accompany him on spring training tours of Utah each year.

"The really exciting thing for me will be the three-generation race team," he said.

"I hope the kids will pick up on it. I don't know how they'd avoid it — it has taken over our lives."

James Heaver has seen the cycling craze firsthand. A former employee at Cyclepath in Newmarket and president of



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Cyclist Les Suter says biking is a way of life.

the Ellsworth Mountain Biking Team, he has seen people of all ages and all walks of life buying bikes — and the wide range of equipment and paraphernalia that goes with them.

"We have everything from those buying bikes because they have lost their driver's licences to those who are really serious about it and want the top equipment and those who just have a lot of money to spend," he said.

### THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS

One can buy a bike frame for \$100 or spend \$200 to \$500 for some of the popular names. Heaver once heard about a fancy \$25,000 frame in Los Angeles, CA.

"You can compare it to computers. The prices are coming down because the market is saturated with companies," he said.

For instance, a derailleur for shifting gears can range from \$11.99 to \$250.

Even a simple bell starts at \$6.99 and works up to \$100 for a pressurized one that sounds like a fog horn.

Then there's the style of bike.

There's the freestyle bike for speed and the BMX bike for dirt races that are usually popular with the younger crowd.

ESF See MOUNTAINS, page 23.

## Bikers unite in cycling clubs

Those bit by the cycling bug might want to check out the following resources:

• The Newmarket Eagles is a cycling club that draws riders of all ages and skill levels from across York Region and beyond.

President Tony Osborne said the 12-year-old club has been growing over the years and now boasts about 60 members from Newmarket, Stouffville, Bradford and more.

The club has a strong focus on training, practicing timed events Tuesday evenings and training rides Saturdays. Social rides are held Sunday mornings and a ladies' ride is slated for Wednesday nights.

On Aug. 8, the Newmarket Eagles will be hosting the provincial road race championships north of Bradford, between the 5th and 10th Side Roads and the 11th and 13th Lines.

For more information, call Osborne at 895-8567.

• The Ontario Cycling Association has 90 affiliated clubs across the province. The association provides members with a list of clubs, a calendar of events and information on safe cycling clinics. For more information, call (416) 426-7242 or check out its website at [www.ontcycling.org](http://www.ontcycling.org)

• The Canadian Cycling Association can be reached at (613) 748-5629 or check out its website at [www.canadiancyclist.com](http://www.canadiancyclist.com)

• A map of York Region bike trails is still in the works, according to Ralph Neumann, treasurer of the Ontario Cycling Association. In the meantime, he suggests checking out a new book *Mountain Bike Here* by Sue Lebrecht.

### SAFETY FIRST

Whether you're hitting secluded trails or major traffic arteries, safety should be a prime consideration.

"Never assume anything," warns James Heaver, president of the Ellsworth Mountain Biking Team, the biggest mountain biking team in Canada, based out of Kamloops, B.C. and Newmarket.

Heaver points out that the most serious riders are usually heavily padded. But, even if you don't get out the heavy armour, there are a few basic tips to keep in mind:

- Those younger than 18 are required by law to wear helmets. Ensure yours fits properly to avoid injury.
- All bikes should have one working brake and a bell or horn.
- Keep your bike clean, ensure there's adequate air in the tires and the handle bars and wheels are secure, to prevent mishaps. Annual spring tune-ups through a bike repair shop are recommended.
- A good lock will help prevent thefts.
- Wear bright clothing and ensure you have reflectors on your bike at night.
- Handy items to carry in your tool bag include money, a patch kit, a spare tube, a multi-tool kit, your health card and a cell phone. Heaver suggests placing your cell phone inside a water bottle with the top cut off for extra protection.

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