

# 91 years old and still pedaling

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ANN ARBOR, MI. — Joe Datsko has come a long way since he became a serious long-distance cyclist in 1992 — the first year he crossed America.

“I put my back wheel in the Pacific in Bellingham, Washington,” recalled Datsko. “I spent 12 weeks, riding with a group, riding six days a week for 12 weeks, over 5,200 miles. Then, we rode right into the Atlantic Ocean at Portland, Maine.”

That was four Presidents ago, when he was only 71 years old. Datsko, now 91-years-old has pedaled enough miles to circle the globe five times. He has survived much, including his bike getting rear-ended, by an automobile, a decade ago. He was up and riding again in a few weeks after that incident. Today, he is still going — just not quite as fast.

“In ‘93, I went with a group of about 30 people from Portland, Maine, down to Orlando, Florida,” said Datsko. “We went through New York City, Philadelphia, where we spent the night in a hotel

across from the Liberty Bell and that took about five weeks. We had a police escort through New York City.”

The following year, Datsko crossed the country from west to east again, starting in Oceanside, California and finishing up in the Atlantic Ocean at St. Simon’s Island, Georgia. In 1995, he and one other rider did the West Coast route, riding down from Vancouver, B.C. to the Mexican border in southern California. If that wasn’t enough, Datsko did the Oregon Trail ride in 1997 from Independence, Missouri, all the way to the West Coast.

Ask Datsko why he would take on such a challenge and his answer simple and direct.

“Because the rides were there,” he said.

The real reason, however, may be a little more complicated than that — especially coming from a family where cycling is such a tradition.

“My daughter went from the Pacific coast to the Atlantic coast in 1976, the year that they celebrated the 200th anniversary of America,” said Datsko. “In

1992, they were celebrating 500 years since Columbus. I figured, ‘If she could do it, I could do it.’ I had five kids and we had a family reunion, every year, since 1970. It all started with a bike ride from Columbus, Ohio down to Portsmouth, Ohio on the TOSRV (Tour of the Scioto River Valley.) When the grandkids came along, a few years later, we extended it to a full week, but without bikes.

Not everyone in the Datsko family has wanted to spend their vacation pumping pedals.

“When I did my first cross-country, all of my kids were out of college and it was just my wife (Doris) and I at home,” said Datsko, who served with the Navy Seabee during World War II on Oahu. “When I would do a ride, my wife would go on her vacation to places like Belize, Portugal and Germany. When I went down to New Zealand for a ride, she went to Thailand and Cambodia and did an elephant ride.”

Datsko, a long-time member of the Ann Arbor Bicycle Touring Society, plans to take part in the 36th Annual One Helluva Ride on Saturday, July 14. This tour will take riders through the tree-lined, paved roads in Washtenaw, Ingham, Jackson and Livingston counties. Along the way, the riders will be routed through

the town of Hell, Michigan, from which the ride derives its name.

Being a member of the host bike club, Datsko will be busy working one of the food stations that weekend. Old habits, however, die hard and Datsko plans to get back in the saddle as well.

“I’ll do a shorter ride,” said Datsko. “We have distances from 100, down to 15 miles. I’ll work at the food stop from seven to 10, and then I’ll ride 15 or 30 miles.”

While Datsko doesn’t do the big rides anymore, he is still active. In the last two decades, he has rolled up enough mileage to get him more than halfway to the Moon.

“I still do day rides near Ann Arbor,” said Datsko. “In the last five years, I haven’t done anymore than that, but I’m still getting miles. I have over 120,000 miles. I was the first one in my bike club to get to 100,000.”

In the past few years, Datsko has also given up winter riding, but he will be back on the road again this month.

“The last ride I did was in early January, but I put the bike away for the winter,” said Datsko. “I am still a ride leader for the Friday morning bike ride, starting (this month.) I generally ride

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three to four days a week, generally 15 to 40 miles on each ride.”

As for the future, Datsko, who lives in a retirement community, is set to keep biking as long as he can.

“My attitude is: ‘I’ve been there and I’ve done that,’” said Datsko, whose 90th birthday present was a step-through bike, which is easier to mount. “I’ll just keep riding as long as I feel that I am safe and able to do it.”

Online registration for One Heluva Ride will be available through July 1, 2012. Mail-in registration must be postmarked by July 1, 2012. For more information go to the Ann Arbor Bicycle Touring Society’s website at [ohrinfo@aabts.org](mailto:ohrinfo@aabts.org).