

The Littlest Racer...Brandon Cross

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The end of the summer is drawing near, and I thought it was high time I devoted an article to one small, very talented, energetic boy. It is not often that we take the time to speak about who is riding, as we tend to focus on where to ride, how to ride, and how to maintain your two wheeled friend. So, this week's article dedicated to extolling the virtues of cycling in Muskoka will focus on the district's smallest cycling enthusiast...Brandon Cross.

It is really quite astounding to see Brandon zipping through the trails at speeds that often leave adult riders in the dust. He rides with inspiring skill for a child of his age, and Brandon seeks the largest jumps and some of the most technical trail in the region. You see, Brandon is only eight years old and rides right along side with some of the best riders in the province. But the one asset that shines through above all is Brandon's sportsmanship.

Brandon can be found weekly on the start line of Buckwallow's Thursday night race series along side his father, full of smiles, and bubbling with bicycle questions. Brandon competes in the pewee division, and is by far the youngest and smallest rider. He rides the same course that the adult racers do, and always crosses the finish line with a smile and tonnes of spirit (not something many racers can attest to after many kilometres of gruelling terrain). And it was there that I caught up to Brandon, and asked him about his already lengthy cycling career.

Young Brandon Cross first started riding a "two wheeler" at the tender age of three, and by the age of five was raring to go on his first major mountain biking expedition. Yes, I said expedition! Brandon and his family rode a total of 50 kilometres of trail between Barrie and Orillia...something most adults would not even attempt.

When asked if mountain biking was in fact his favourite sport (as Brandon also plays hockey throughout the winter and is currently enrolled in a youth triathlon program), his answer was clear, "Oh Yah"! Brandon noted that his favourite part about mountain biking is the "biking through the trees", and his father, Les Cross added that Brandon really thoroughly enjoys the airborne parts of his cycling adventures. Brandon gives his personal stamp of approval to two of his favourite trails at the Buckwallow Cycling Centre, "Moose Mayhem" and "Show Time" (where Brandon really takes flight).

Brandon is one of many, many youngsters across the province spinning into the cycling scene. In fact, mountain biking seems to be one of the fastest growing sports world wide. It is however a rather non-traditional sport that many parents overlook. As parents seek to enroll their children into summer time activities, cycling often doesn't make the list. But it is something you might want to keep in mind for next season. Mountain biking offers many of the same attributes traditional summer sports such as soccer and baseball promote. Sportsmanship and teamwork just to name a few. While mountain biking and racing appear to be a solitary push for the finish line, it almost never is, particularly at the grass roots, local level. Riders experience mechanical difficulties and the sport has always promoted stopping to aid other riders, and accepting help from a lending hand. In addition, the sport offers great flexibility. You can always opt to participate along side your child, just as Brandon and Les Cross. Also, parents and children can pick and choose which events to participate in, there's no cut and dried schedule to follow. Should your child be truly taken in by the sport, there are numerous easily accessible opportunities for your kids to compete at the provincial or national level.

Additionally, youth cycling programs are popping up around the region, based on a day camp style format. For more information about youth cycling programs stop by Ecclestone Cycle and talk to Ian about who has, or will be offering programs in the future, or drop him an e-mail at purplebike@sympatico.ca. The opportunities are endless and very economical.

As for Brandon Cross, keep your eye on the news, as he aspires to one day compete at the Olympic level. In the mean time, if you see a tiny body with a chrome tinted helmet flying through the trails of Muskoka, you can guarantee it's Brandon!