

■ The graceful curves and sweeping views of the Atlantic from Newport, Rhode Island's Ocean Drive is what hooked professional sailor Andrew Palfrey to cycling. He was coaching at the 2006 Farr 40 World Championship and needed to put in a few hours of cardio for his Star class campaign, so one day he grabbed a rental bike and hit the pavement for some sight-seeing. "I had no plan, but I ended up doing that loop, and I was hooked," he says. "The combination of exercise and a view of the waters we were sailing on was awesome."

He's never looked back, he says, apart from the fortune he's spent on bikes, clothes and bits ever since. Like a lot of cycling enthusiasts, he says, he got into cycling fairly late in life, at 39 years old, as a means of losing weight for sailing. "My knees and shins were no longer up to running, and I never really gravitated to doing long cardio sessions indoors at the gym," he says. "There was a strong cycling culture at the time in the Australian Sailing Team, and we were lucky in that we all got properly fitted to our bikes by the head cycling mechanic for the Australian Olympic cycling

team. This was important, as I have never suffered the aches and pains that seem to affect some of my friends."

He confesses to having owned all sorts of bikes and indulging in cycling gear, but lately he puts most of his miles on the road between and during regattas. "I cycle primarily for mental health," he says. "I find the balance of something else going on in my daily routine is important. Particularly in an intense competitive environment at a grand-prix sailing event. That, coupled with being away from family for long periods can lead to troughs in

mood and motivation. Cycling really helps me get my head out of the sailing and work routine and keep things in perspective, particularly after a rough day on the water, results-wise."

While the obvious benefits include fitness and weight management, the most important draw is the friendships he's forged over the past few

Andrew Palfrey (at left) swaps his sailing shoes for cycling shoes to conquer one of three ascents in the 2017 Haute Route Ventoux in French Provence.

PHOTO:
RICHARD CHAULAND-LOTTET

Changing Gears

Sure, cycling is good for fitness, but it's an even better way to get away from the regatta and explore the places we sail.



years while clipped in, during early morning rides in exotic locals with fellow sailors. "There is something about those shoulder-to-shoulder chats away from marina," he says. "You learn a lot. There exists a strong bond within the sailing peloton. Making a plan to meet someone is what you need sometimes to get out of bed early and on the road."

He admits to once considering opening a bike shop after the 34th America's Cup in San Francisco, but sanity prevailed, and he remained a sailor. And while he's never formally raced, he commits to one cycling goal per year, "as motivation to stay active when time is short and excuses are easy to find."

His highlight event is the Haute Route in 2011, from Geneva, Switzerland, to Nice, France, 770 kilometers in seven days, and nearly 19,000 vertical meters. "It was a test of survival and my first event," he says. "I did it with four other sailors, all of whom have become very close mates. Lots of great meals, coffees and lies told."

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In 2017, he conquered Mont Ventoux, in France, covering the three ascents of this iconic mountain over three days, but best memories in the saddle aren't always monumental rides. He brings a bike to every regatta, as he's done for the past 10 years. "My travel bike dismantles into a case only as big as the wheels," he says. "It's actually steel. It's wonderful to ride, being a perfect geometry for me, and I secretly love being the 'old guy on a steel bike' and keeping up with the younger fellas on their latest carbon frames with electronic gearing."

This trusty steel Ritchey Break-Away, purpose-built to split in half and fit inside a travel bag, has been stolen (in Long

Beach) and returned, signed by cycling legends and recently rewelded. "I love that bike," says Palfrey. "It's hard to single out the most memorable regatta ride, but if pressed, it would be riding up to the peak of Mount Vesuvius during the America's Cup World Series in 2012 in Naples. It was nice to look at the same mountain when I was out in the RIB later that day."

Palfrey says he's closer to the Flintstone than Facebook generation, so his social media presence is limited. He is, however, all over the popular fitness app Strava, which is where he finds out where in the world his cycling friends are and what challenges they're conquering. ■

Professional coach and sailor Andrew Palfrey, of Australia and England (right), and bowman Matteo Auguadro enjoy a morning ride before racing at an RC44 event in Cascais, Portugal. "Cascais has lots of cool views and climbs," says Palfrey. "The regular ride is to a lighthouse up the coast at Cabo de Roca, which marks the most western point of mainland Europe. On this day we stretched it out to visit the lovely old town of Sintra in the hills. But each day we make time to stop at a little local cafe for a quick coffee and a Portuguese custard tart. It's all about the coffee, really."

PHOTO: NICO MARTINEZ

