



Positive outcome follows tragic death of local cyclist

Mikic Foundation to foster safe riding practice

The late Ben Mikic in action... a promising career tragically brought to an end in a local accident

The Ben Mikic Foundation, recently established in the Southern Highlands to educate young cyclists and schoolchildren to adopt safe riding practices, has joined forces with the Amy Gillett Foundation to reduce the incidence of death and injury caused by the interaction between cyclists and motorists.

And the local foundation – which had its genesis in the tragic death of 15-year-old Mittagong boy Ben Mikic after he and friend Alex Tomlinson were struck by a vehicle in Bessemer Street last month – has also quickly built its bona fides by establishing partnerships with the NRMA, the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Illawarra Academy of Sport.

The Gillett Foundation – itself established following the death of champion Australian rider Amy Gillett, 29, when a motorist collided with the Australian road cycling team during a training ride in Germany in July 2005 – has a similar charter to the Ben Mikic Foundation.

Mikic Foundation spokesperson Michele O’Byrne said the principal

purpose was to educate young cyclists and schoolchildren to adopt safe riding practice.

It would also encourage and support promising young cyclists, such as the late Ben Mikic, with the potential to make a career in the sport. Only two weeks before his death, the young Mittagong cyclist had been accepted into the Illawarra Academy of Sport, to further develop his competitive cycling potential. According to Michele O’Byrne, “Ben’s hero was (Tour de France champion rider) Lance Armstrong, whose biography is called Every Second Counts. Ben also had this outlook on life. He made every second count”.

The Mikic Foundation will work with governments, motoring organizations, the police and cycling organizations to ensure that cycling lanes are incorporated into existing and new roads commonly used by cyclists.

Part of its charter is to see that policies, practices and laws are effectively framed, implemented and adopted by all road users – particularly car drivers – “to ensure that cyclists are able to safely share the roads with truck and car users”.

And it will seek to promote safe car driving practice, and to identify those drivers who disregard the rules.

The tragic Mittagong accident saw Ben Mikic become part of a dreadful national statistic, whereby an average of 35 cyclists are killed and over 2500 seriously injured on our roads each year. The majority of these collisions involve a motor vehicle, and according to the Mikic and Gillett Foundations, most are preventable.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that, for the past seven years, as increasing numbers of road users turn to bikes for health and transport needs, bike sales (in excess of 1.1million per annum) have exceeded car sales – meaning that the potential for fatalities and injuries on our roads has not yet peaked.

While endeavouring to get cyclists themselves to acknowledge their responsibilities for safe road practice, a website to be established for the Mikic Foundation will identify and list vehicles reported in breach of driving regulations, and impacting adversely on cycling road users.

Says Michele O’Byrne: “Now we have the opportunity to honour the memory of Ben Mikic by channeling

our sadness and loss into something positive, that will help Ben’s energy and spirit live on. The Ben Mikic Foundation for Young Cyclists has been established at the request of Ben’s family to ensure that Ben’s passion for cycling and life should continue through the education of all road users and support of young cyclists in pursuing their dreams.”

Eighteen months before his death, Chevalier College student Ben Mikic took up the sport that was to become his greatest passion – cycling.

During his relatively short time in the sport, Ben made a name for himself in the cycling world for his impressive achievements:

- 2006 Hillclimb Champion for the Southern Highlands Cycle Club;
- Southern Highlands Cycle Club Summer Cup A grade champion;
- Second place in the Wingello 8-hour event’s teams section;
- Member of winning team, Yarramundi Mountain Bike meet;
- Second place in the Southern Division roadrace;
- Acceptance into the Illawarra Academy of Sport

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