

# WHY RIDE? THE MIKIC FAMILY



With Australia's stocks in the European peloton rising every year, talented young cyclists continue to die on the nation's roads. It's simply unacceptable. Ben Mikic's death in April emphasised the need to continue fighting for riders' rights to prevent more tragedies occurring...

LESS THAN SIX MONTHS AFTER THE DEATH OF PROMISING Australian rider Scott Peoples, the cycling community mourned the loss of another talented young cyclist. Ben Mikic was killed when he was hit by a car during a training ride in Mittagong, NSW on 27 April.

The oldest of three children, 15-year-old Mikic had shown promise as a junior and rapidly progressed to become a member of the Illawarra Academy of Sport. He began road cycling almost two years ago after he was introduced to this discipline of the sport by close friends Alex Tomlinson and Josh Ewan. Mikic's mother, Andrea, explained that her son's athletic ability had developed at a tender age.

"Darren [Ben's father] and I would run every day and from the age of two Ben was there, trying to keep up with us. He was just one of those kids you couldn't stop. People would look at us as if we were pushing him, to which we could only reply, 'He follows us himself!' During his primary education he was winning races at athletics and cross country running carnivals and showed that he was a talented athlete. That continued into his high school years where he excelled at any athletic pursuit."

Despite his overall sporting prowess it was Mikic's passion for the bike that shone the strongest and when his parents decided to buy him a second-hand Trek 1000, he made the most of the opportunity. "He worked at it so hard, training every day after school," said Andrea. "He did the local bunch rides and was one of four young riders that could keep up with the older guys."

Mikic's father illustrated the talent his son possessed when he recounted over lunch that earlier this year Ben had started a club handicap race just four minutes ahead of Ride Across America participant Richard Vollebrect. A seasoned rider, Vollebrect also holds the record for riding across Australia

and began from the 28-minute mark while Ben took off at 24 minutes. It was an example of the young man's incredible progression that looked likely to continue when he was offered a place in the Illawarra Academy of Sport's junior cycling development program. It was a huge step in what promised to be a career on the bike.

"We got the paperwork from the academy on the Tuesday before he died," began Mikic's mother. "The following day he went for his first official ride with the other members of that squad and the coaches were so impressed with his ability that they mistook his riding for that of a cyclist who had been involved in the sport for a lot longer."

And like Scott Peoples before him, Mikic maintained the dream of becoming a pro rider. He knew what it would take to get to this level and trained with this thought constantly in his head. In both cases the chances of them achieving their goals were high due to the combination of natural talent and drive. That has been wasted by the actions of two motorists. "Ben gave up an awful lot of things to cycle but he just loved it so much," explained Andrea.

It's the scenario every parent dreads, as Mikic's mother recalled. "On the day of Ben's death I received a phone call when I was at work saying that there had been a terrible accident in Mittagong. They knew Alex was involved but they didn't know who the other rider was.

"I realised immediately that it was Ben because the two boys rode together every afternoon. I rushed from work to where the accident had taken place and although the police tried to stop me entering the scene I eventually managed to get through. That's when I saw him covered on the road. It was the worst day of my life." The process of informing other family members and grieving for the lost young life began, and Andrea is quick to thank those around her.



**CARRYING ON...**  
Andrea, Daniel and Darren Mikic (above) have been forced to deal with the death of their son and brother Ben. There's a bond that has been strengthened by the tragedy and they're adamant they'll remain involved in the sport. Andrea says that the cycling community has been a big factor in the family coping with the loss.  
Ben was introduced to the sport by Alex Tomlinson (left) and the two boys rode together every day. He was with Mikic when he was killed on 27 April and has recently returned to riding.

For more information, visit [www.benmikicfoundation.org](http://www.benmikicfoundation.org) or contact Michele O'Byrne on 02 4878 5078.

**ANOTHER TALENT LOST...**  
In the two years since he began road cycling, Ben Mikic quickly progressed to become an excellent rider. Just days before he was killed he had been accepted to ride with the Illawarra Institute of Sport cycling squad. His great form on the bike (below) was an indication of his natural ability.



As in Shepparton following the death of Peoples late last year, the local cycling community came together to assist at this difficult time. "The support from the Southern Highlands Cycling Club has kept us going," said Andrea. "The cycling community has been amazing."

One of those that has helped in creating a lasting legacy of Ben is family friend Michele O'Byrne, who quickly initiated the Ben Mikic Foundation, a non-profit organisation that aims to develop the skills and awareness of cyclists and motorists. Darren Mikic explained that both he and Andrea had barely finished the funeral wake than O'Byrne had started making plans for the charity.

The board of the Ben Mikic Foundation has been assembled and includes prominent members of the local cycling community such as Paul Hillbrick. Brad McGee, James Williamson and Ben Kersten have already agreed to be patrons due to their presence in the Southern Highlands of Sydney. The aims of the foundation include:

- Educating young cyclists on correct practices when riding
- Promoting awareness of cyclists through changes to the RTA driver knowledge test
- Enhancing facilities for young riders on and off the road
- Improving road conditions in 'black spots' when cyclists are most vulnerable

THE DEATH OF BEN MIKIC HAS BEEN A REMINDER OF THE legacy left by Scott Peoples. Although Scott's father Shane admits that there are still many wounds to heal in relation to his death, he's confident in the ability of organisations to make a difference and ensure that these type of events don't occur in the future. The hardest lesson from Mikic's fatal accident is that the fight will be a long and hard battle.

Peoples told *RIDE* that a memorial race to honour Scott will be held on 9 December. The local council has approved the route and the Victorian police will support an event that could be golden in promoting the cause for cyclists' safety on Australian roads. Plans are under way to make it a notable inclusion on the racing calendar in addition to its status as a charity ride, possibly attracting the likes of Team Milram rider and Olympic gold medallist Brett Lancaster plus other European-based Australian professionals.

Andrea Mikic hopes that the foundation honouring her son can assist in achieving the common goals of safety and awareness. On a personal note, however, Ben has left a gift that remains with her every time she's on the bike.

"Ben inspired the rest of the family to get on a bike. I took it up at the age of 42 after a long time without riding, and both my husband and I now race. It took over our lives and we love it! On the day Ben died I did a bunch ride in the morning and as I was having coffee with the people I rode with, I said how happy I was to have discovered cycling because there are so many role models. It helps young guys to focus on what they want to achieve."

And while some parents may discourage their children from taking up cycling as a sport, Andrea and Darren Mikic continue to support their younger son Daniel in his pursuits on the bike. Although he may not harbour the same aspirations as his older sibling, he's keen to keep competing and continue what Ben had started. Darren admits that it's difficult to train some days but the work they can do to prevent other parents sharing their experience is motivation for his entire family.

"I just don't want another family going through what we've been through, or what Scott's parents have had to endure," says Andrea. "Here were two dedicated young men simply out on training rides when they were both tragically killed. We know that they were accidents and the drivers involved in each didn't mean to kill them, but we've got to do something to protect the rest of the cycling community." ■ LES CLARKE