



raising a cyclist

We ask Heather and Paul, parents of 2012 Olympic cycling bronze medallist Simon van Velthoven, what it was like to raise their cycling-mad son.

1. When did Simon start cycling?

Simon started biking 4kms to school and back each day from around the age of 8 years. He then got into mountain biking; building jumps at home in the paddock and riding around the district to visit his school friends. He first showed his natural ability on the Tour de Manawatu as an 11-year-old when he left his father and older brother behind. He became fascinated in all things bike and at one stage had a road bike, an old BMX bike, a mountain bike, and he also built himself a downhill bike. He first rode a track bike at age 15.

2. What age was Simon when he started competing?

He started competing when he reached Palmerston North

Boys High School. The school had a school cycling programme where he started training twice a week at first. When he turned 15, training started in earnest and he trained most days.

3. Did Simon have time for other sports/hobbies?

Early on, Simon enjoyed triathlons - he always shone on the bike leg and, being a strong swimmer as well, he won many local age triathlon competitions. He played rugby at high school and was also a Manawatu Under-12 soccer representative for two years. His hobbies included reading, building huts on the farm and he loved Lego. At around age 15, he developed into quite a mechanic and he rebuilt old cars for a few years.

4. Who were Simon's role models?

His most important role model [apart from his father] was his coach, Mike McRedmond. Mike took on Simon as an athlete from age 15 and has coached and/or mentored him ever since. Mike has a unique ability to connect with his young charges by getting the best out of them through self-belief, hard work, commitment and enjoyment.

5. What aspects of Simon's personality do you think helped him become so successful?

Simon's most important traits to his success are his tenacity, determination, and courage when racing. Simon is relaxed by nature and he seems to be able to soak up the pressure of the situation and turn that into performance. He is not fazed by the big stage and he has a positive attitude. Simon also has a good balance in his life and enjoys himself away from the sport, with a wide group of friends.

6. In what ways did you support Simon in his sport?

We encouraged Simon by supporting him in all his sporting endeavours. As a young family, we spent a lot of time playing cricket or soccer on the front lawn. Simon is the second of four children, so he was not given any special treatment. Cycling was not the number one activity in the household; his sisters were competitive horse riders.

7. What things did you enjoy doing together as a family?

As a young family, we enjoyed the space of our lifestyle block so that every weekend we had a project, a job to do together or a place to visit. When the children were older, Saturday sport and horse competitions ruled the house. Each year, we went on a group father/son weekend, and did things like fishing, surfing, swimming, building bonfires on the beach, biking and being slightly disorganised. As a family we did lots of camping trips, bush walks and many excursions to visit family in the South Island.

8. What are the qualities you think are the most important to instill in your children?

Some of the qualities we believe are most important are to be respectful, polite, disciplined, empathetic, humble and appreciative. We believe children should be encouraged to challenge themselves and set goals, always do their best and enjoy what they do.