

Headline	Bonding over biking		
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Two's company!



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Bonding over biking

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On the ride track: Every week, Nilam Masri Jaafar (second from left) and Ahmad Hairi Shamsulkamar (in white) enjoy an hour or two riding in a tranquil park in Shah Alam, Selangor, with their four children. - IZZRAFIQ ALIAS/The Star

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Thrillson wheels

By LEE MEI LI

ALIGHT breeze circles the trees; in the background, there's that constant humming of the cicadas. It's bright and early on a Sunday morning, but the families, some with really young children in tow, are already up and about – all ready for a recreational, and healthy, experience in the outdoors.

Amidst the lush woodland of the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) in Kepong, Selangor, visitors engage in light chatter as they file out of their vehicles towards the nearest clearing.

At a distance, Loong Kok Foong gives a small wave and swoops over on his mountain bike; trailing behind are his sons, Mun Wei, 10, and Mun Liang, seven, and wife, Soo Yoke Lan, 43. All four are clad in sleek cycling jerseys, shorts and a helmet each.

While Loong and Soo, a finance executive, have always enjoyed being in the outdoors, the couple have never been able to share their passion with the kids until cycling became a part of their weekends.

"The two of us used to do a lot of trekking and jogging. But when we got to our 30s we realised that jogging wasn't doing our joints any good. After we dropped that, I moved on to cycling," says 43-year-old Loong, a draftsman.

When Mun Wei turned three, Loong's interest in the sport intensified – his RM10,000 bicycle was proof. That, and how he would always count the days till the next biking jamboree with his fellow cyclists, scaling 50km-plus from the Orang Asli Museum in Gombak, Selangor, to Genting Sempah in Bentong, Pahang.

Inevitably, Loong soon found himself struggling to make time for the family. At one point, it was either "give up" or "get going" – the man chose the latter.

"I managed to convince my wife to take up cycling. After that, it was just a matter of bringing along our two kids," he says.

In October last year, the family embarked on their first serious bike outing together, exploring the streets of Kuala Lumpur as participants in the inaugural OCBC Cycle Malaysia 2011, the largest cycling event in the country. Most roads were closed off to allow the partici-

pants, both adults and children, to traverse the city centre safely and in a group.

"My sons really enjoyed it – they were actually dead serious in going for the big prize!" Loong says.

Since then, the family has been to FRIM every other month, zig-zagging their bikes through the trodden paths framed by age-old trees in the forest reserve. Soo has taken over Loong's RM3,000 folding bicycle, while the kids have their own RM400 and RM800 mountain bikes respectively; the former was a second-hand purchase from a shop in KL.

The Loongs have all signed on for the upcoming OCBC Cycle Malaysia 2013 – organised by Spectrum Worldwide – from Jan 11 to 13.

"What I love most about cycling is the bit about exploring nature. I think I've managed to pass that on to my kids. When you bring them outdoors, children become more in tuned with the environment. My sons are not afraid of bugs, and they'll be more than happy catching a caterpillar with their bare hands," says Loong as his boys, who were earlier seen rummaging through the bushes in search of a lizard species, now scrutinise an army of fire ants with the help of a fallen twig.

"My belief is: If you have kids under 12, spend whatever time you can with them now. Once they become teenagers, you'll have a hard time getting them to go anywhere with you," Loong adds.

Sharing experiences

To father-of-two Simon Molyneux, a manager at an oil and gas company, a "family activity" isn't one unless everybody is getting something out of it.

"That's so you won't get a situation where the parents are resentful of their children doing something, and vice versa," the 40-year-old Briton opines.

To this end his family will go on a cycling outing in FRIM or Putrajaya once a month – a family of four on just two bikes; one strapped to a baby carrier and the other a tag-along trailer bike, which transforms Molyneux's bicycle into a tandem

to accommodate his elder child, Alex, six. Essentially, the tag-along sprouts a third wheel, along with a miniature saddle, handle bar and pedals, allowing children to ride in sync with an adult upfront.

"My wife and I, we like to keep reasonably fit. When we lived in the UK and before we had children, we'd go mountain biking two or three times a week. When the kids came along, at just six months old, we'd pack them into the back seat and take them with us on our rides. We continued with this when we moved to Malaysia in 2009, cycling in the outskirts of KL," says Molyneux, who lives here with his British wife, Louise, 37, a homemaker, and their children, Alex and Isla, four.

Beaming with pride, Molyneux reveals that Alex recently "graduated" from cycling with the help of training wheels. But unlike Loong's children, who took to pedalling the two-wheelers like fish to water, Alex is still a wee bit wobbly, and in confidence as well.

"After seeing some friends biking without training wheels, Alex came home and told us that he wanted to do that too. It took us four or five weeks to get him comfortable with the idea of riding on his own. It was quite a challenge – I had to be really patient."

What Alex had a hard time understanding was that he could no longer steer the bicycle anyhow he liked, Molyneux adds.

"When you're on training wheels, you can steer left and right and it won't matter. When you're riding on two wheels, the smallest of movements will make a big difference. Alex just had to learn to be steady. After that, it was all about practice. When he finally managed on his own, he was very pleased but also a little scared – 'Where's dad gone?' he went. He still wants me to be close by."

The Molyneuxes are fans of Wheelie Sundays at Publika in Solaris Dutamas, KL, a weekly event where visitors are given bicycles for free use when the inner roads of the shopping area are closed to cars from 7am to 10am.

"It's a brilliant concept. But since the roads in KL are not really conducive to cyclists we have to

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pack our bikes in the car, drive to Publika, and cycle around there. It sounds quite ridiculous but that's all we can do for now," Louise chips in.

The family, who had a blast during the OCBC Cycle Malaysia 2011, have signed themselves up for a scenic 24km community ride around town in the 2013 edition next month.

"The big thing about cycling is that it's a way of keeping fit and also a way of getting from A to B, although not so much in KL – when we were in the UK we used to cycle to work. If I can give the children a love of doing that, then maybe when they're older it'll become a skill that they can use – they don't have to rely on a car at all times,"

Molyneux shares.

"One of the jobs we have as parents is to give our kids experiences. They might not share our passions, which may be disappointing at times, but it's a part of life. If you don't give your child a range of experiences, it'll be that much more difficult for him to move out of his comfort zone when he grows up. If your child has never been involved in sports, it'll take tremendous effort for him, as an adult, to walk through the doors of a gym," he adds philosophically.

Making time

Just four years back, Nilam Masri

Jaafar, a senior vice-president of a local bank, wouldn't have given two hoots about bike trails, or cycling for that matter.

Now, the sport has taken root as a weekly indulgence for the mother-of-four, who has grown fond of biking with her husband, service engineer Ahmad Hairi Shamsulkamar, 43, and their children – Amelia Najwa, 17, Ahmad Irman, 14, Ahmad Iqmal, 12, and Ahmad Izham, nine.

"When my husband's friends introduced him to cycling four years ago, he started doing that every weekend. I wasn't too happy with the idea and I'd kick up a fuss about being left with the kids alone at home. That's when he said: 'Why don't you join us?' Nilam, 43, recalls.

Brushing the idea off as absurd initially, Nilam, however, inherited her husband's used bike when the man got himself a spiffy new thing. Little by little, she began cycling around the neighbourhood and soon found herself enjoying the refreshing perspective it gave her.

After a wee bit more cajoling, Nilam joined her husband on a cycling trip to the Rubber Research Institute (RRI) in Sungai Buloh, Selangor. The experience, as she puts it, was far more exhilarating than expected. Cycling began to rule the household and before long, the excitement spread to the children as well.

"My husband started buying one

bike after another. Now our house looks like a bicycle showroom," Nilam quips.

Every week, the family will spend an hour or two riding along the grassy meadow-framed asphalt roads in Taman Pertanian Bukit Cahaya Seri Alam in Shah Alam, Selangor.

"Sometimes, we'll bring along *nasi lemak* and other snacks and have a picnic there," says Nilam.

The park, accessible via an entrance fee of RM3, also has a public swimming pool – the main draw for the children.

Indeed, the six of them whizzing past is a sight to behold – the camaraderie they now share, sons locked in a friendly race with their father, is as infectious as peals of laughter.

In about three weeks, the family will enjoy their first experience capturing the KL skyline in a flurry on two wheels each, at the OCBC Cycle Malaysia 2013.

While her family is enthusiastic about cycling, Nilam feels that a family activity, any kind at all, is the key to bridging the gaps that form in a relationship.

"As working parents, the weekdays are quite busy for us. The kids, too, have tuition and classes, so we're left with only the weekends to do something together.

"Cycling has really brought us closer. It may be just once a week, but at least we all get to do something that we like, together as a family."

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They say families that do things together stay together. For these three households, 'cycling' is the magic word.

Ride on: Loong Kok Foong (back) managed to convince his family to take up cycling. Now, they cycle around FRIM every other month.

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Nilam Masri Jaafar (second from right) and her family taking a break from their favourite activity in Taman Pertanian Bukit Cahaya Seri Alam in Shah Alam, Selangor.



Simon Molyneux took almost five weeks to get his son Alex, six, to feel comfortable riding without his training wheels - a challenging task but a worthwhile one nevertheless.

Cycle with children: Simon and Louise Molyneux out biking with their two young kids.