

# The ride of his life: Local cyclist races across the country to benefit Stanford Cancer Institute

Michael Claeys on June 17th, 2014

Menlo Park businessman John Tarlton is on the ride of his life, attempting to bike 3,000 miles across the country in 12 days. He's competing in the Race Across America (RAAM), one of the world's most extreme endurance events. RAAM originated in 1982 as four cyclists raced from the Santa Monica Pier to the Empire State Building.

"I have dreamed of competing in RAAM since childhood," Tarlton told me by e-mail prior to the race. As of this post, he is more than halfway through, having biked more than 1,800 miles in about six and a half days.

Tarlton, 45, a lifetime cycling enthusiast, has been preparing for RAAM for several years. The RAAM course is nearly 50 percent longer than the Tour de France, though completed in about half the time. And unlike the Tour de France riders, who rest and refuel at their hotels each night, most RAAM riders can't afford to sleep more than four hours a day, since every minute counts against the 12-day time limit. Eating presents an interesting challenge: Tarlton, a lean vegetarian, estimates he'll need to consume 16,000 calories per day (and no, that's not a typo!) during the race.

Like many RAAM riders and teams, Tarlton is using interest generated by this event to raise awareness and dollars for a cause – in this case, cancer, which has affected both his and his supports team's families. Donations made in honor of Tarlton's effort will support the Stanford Cancer Institute.

Since I mostly ride an indoor stationary bike with a TV screen affixed, I had a few questions for this ultra-driven athlete. Below are Tarlton's answers provided by e-mail and lightly edited:

## Describe your typical training day.

There really is no "typical" training day for me. Some days I only ride the bike for one hour, spend another hour weight training and then two hours doing recovery activities. Other days I will be on the bike for 14 hours straight.

## What is the biggest challenge during the race?

It is hard to predict. Some years, there have been lightening storms that require riders to hide inside cars, while other years there are strong headwinds for extended periods of time. Our biggest challenge will be to adapt to whatever nature throws at us, in addition to any unexpected equipment failures, while sticking to our plan.



## Besides finishing, what's your goal for the race?

We hope to raise quite a bit of money for Stanford Cancer Institute. In all honesty, the goal of completing the race within the allotted 12 days is such an overarching goal, that any other athletic goals would pale in comparison.

## Why did you choose to benefit the Stanford Cancer Institute (SCI)?

SCI is at the forefront of the cancer treatment effort, from cutting-edge primary research to new ways of focusing on the patient during recovery. My professional life revolves around building for life science research and commercialization. The partnership between Tarlton Properties and SCI seems a natural fit.

My family has been deeply affected by cancer and has strong ties to Stanford. My parents met in the Stanford Choir in 1954, and my father is a past president of Stanford Associates. My wife, Jenny Dearborn, graduated from the Stanford Teacher Education program; her father attended Stanford and her grandfather was a professor there.

Finally, Stanford doctors were central to the care of my mother and sister, as well as my crew chief's wife, during their battles with cancer.

## What advice do you have for amateur cyclists and weekend warriors who want to improve their fitness and health?

Our tendency is to try to make up for the lack of time we tend to devote to our athletic pursuits by "going all out" when we have the chance. This is natural, but unfortunately it is often counterproductive, leading to injury.

Instead, try making small and incremental changes to your workout routine.

Follow Tarlton's progress on the RAAM website's leaderboard.