

■ SPORT



Stuart McCreadie

Wheelchair athletes to battle it out in George

STUART McCreadie broke his back in a motor vehicle accident in 1992. At only 24, he suffered a severed spinal cord at level T8 (eighth thoracic spinal vertebrae). Undeterred, McCreadie, now 44, is leading a full life.

After the accident, he studied at CPU and is now the creative director at J Walter Thompson, an advertising agency in the city.

McCreadie has been active throughout his life, with swimming being his main source of fitness.

“In September 2007, I rode my first handcycle and was hooked. The outdoors, exercise, the speed, the ease of movement when compared to a wheelchair and the social nature of the sport all colluded to fuel my addiction,” he said.

Cycling first became a Paralympic sport at the 1988 Summer Paralympics in Seoul, South Korea.

McCreadie has represented South Africa on several occasions. He won a bronze medal at the 2014 UCI World Cup in Segovia, Spain, and placed fourth at the UCI Para-cycling Road World Championships, in Greenville, South Carolina in the US, later in the same year.

He competes in the H3 category which includes athletes “with impairments corresponding to a complete lesion from T1 to T10”. Athletes in this category compete on a handcycle with a rigid frame in a recumbent position.

McCreadie is a long-time supporter of the Outeniqua Cycle Challenge, winning the 42.2km event in 2016 in a record time of 1:07:41. In spite of windy conditions, he improved his time by almost two minutes the previous year when he was beaten into third place by Ernst van Dyk.

Last year, he shaved another four minutes off this time, winning the handcycle event in a time of 1:03:45.

In an interview with Guts2Glory in 2013, McCreadie was asked what was the strangest thing a spectator had said to him, to which he replied: “Don’t fall asleep, hey!”

A perfect day away from work and cycling for McCreadie would be lying on a couch under his feather duvet, eating chilli pizza, drinking red wine and listening to Bob Marley.

“Don’t worry... about a thing... ‘cos every little thing’s... gonna be alright.”

That said, the 17th Outeniqua Cycle Challenge, a wheelchair race that attracts athletes from all over the world, will take place in George on September 14, starting at event host Halfway Toyota George.

A wheelchair race exclusively for disabled athletes, it is getting bigger and better every year.

The number of entries has increased dramatically with disabled athletes and other persons in wheelchairs flocking to the annual event.

The challenge is not only unique for being the only event exclusively for the disabled in South Africa, but it is staged in the picturesque town of George, in the heart of the spectacular Garden Route in the Western Cape, at the foot of the Outeniqua mountains.

Athletes using racing wheelchairs, adapted bicycles, handcycles, basketball chairs and ordinary wheelchairs have made this into the premier sporting event for the disabled on the South African sporting calendar.

It undoubtedly has the potential to develop into one of the best events of its kind in the world.

Apart from the George Municipality, Lancewood and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport are supporting the event. | Supplied