

FreeWheel's fun all in the family

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After a long absence, a repeat rider gets to experience the cross-state trek with his son.

McALESTER -- Many riders in a cross-state bicycle ride going on this week are family, not only on a fraternal level because of relationships made along the 400-plus mile route, but also in a literal sense.

Kent Tallakson, a resident of Keller, Texas, decided to bring his 14-year-old son Caleb to FreeWheel this year.

"It was a birthday present," Tallakson said Tuesday, the third day of the weeklong ride.

"We decided that we were going to spend money on biking gear and getting him all set to ride. And it seemed like a fun thing to do."

Tallakson said they decided to train about three weeks before FreeWheel, which began Sunday and continues through Saturday.

"So we practiced about 30 miles a day," he said. "And we hit it!"

Caleb said he is enjoying the ride, but that it's not easy.

"It's tough," he said. "It's fun, but it's tough. It is worth it."

Tallakson said he and his son's ride began on a high point but has been more challenging each day.

"Our first day was really good," he said. "The second day was not so good, and the third day was a little bit worse. So we're going a little bit downhill," he joked.

The two said they make it a point to maintain good timing throughout the route.

"We always seem to be one of the first ones in, so that's a good thing," Tallakson said. "We're real competitive; we see another bike, and we just try to pass it."

Tallakson has not participated in FreeWheel since 1985. He said getting married, raising kids, not having time to train, and other responsibilities have kept him from participating.

But Caleb claims that he is the one who's responsible for bringing his father back.



"I drug him back into it," he said.

His father said this year's ride might be the first in regular participation in future years.

"Now that the kids are old enough to ride and life's kind of coming around full circle, we're going to probably do a lot more" FreeWheels, he said.

Tallakson hopes that next time, it won't be only him and his son. He hopes other family members will join in.

"We may bring more kids," he said. "I've got another son that we're going to try and talk into it; also my wife and my daughter."

Caleb is excited about continuing the route, even though he endured some unexpected troubles Monday: "I (sun)burnt my face," he said.

From McAlester, riders will head Wednesday for Wetumka. Successive stops are in Drumright, Ponca City and Caldwell, Kan., where the ride will end.

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