

## THE NEXT ACT / LIFE STORIES

## THE CYCLIST

Robert Marchand, 105

Pedal  
pusher

THE FRENCHMAN SET HIS LATEST WORLD RECORD IN JANUARY, THRIVING IN A SPORT THAT HE HAS LOVED SINCE HE WAS A CHILD

If life is about adventure, I've done pretty well. Between the two world wars, I was a fire fighter in Paris, then a prisoner of war. In the late 1940s, I crossed the Atlantic by ship and got as far as Venezuela where I worked as a lorry driver. I was even married – though that's another story!

But together what has always remained constant is my love of physical exercise and particularly cycling, which I first discovered when I was 14.

I took it up after school and competed in several races but then stopped for more than 50 years after my coach told me that I was too short to become a professional. But even after he told me I didn't have a future as a cyclist, I always did some form of training. It makes me feel good and it makes me feel alive.

That is why I was able to return to the sport in my late 60s – and why I have been able to set new world records and open up new age categories.

In January, when I set a new record in my age group for the furthest distance cycled in one hour



(22.6km). I did it to show the world that a person of my age can still get on a bicycle and ride.

Five years ago, to mark my 100th birthday, I rode just over 24km in an hour – a time that I bettered two years later. I also hold the record in my age group for cycling 100km: four hours, 15 minutes.

I don't have any particular philosophy on ageing, and I don't have any special secrets other than that I love cycling and I still like to push myself. In 1992, for example, I cycled from Paris to Moscow. That was a real adventure!

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A few years ago, I took part in a study where they wired me up to computers to measure my oxygen intake during exercise. The first year I did it, when I was 101, the scientists concluded that I had the capacity of a 55-year-old. The following year, they said that I had the capacity of a 45-year-old.

I have never smoked and I don't eat much. In the mornings, I have a small cup of coffee and a banana before doing some training. For lunch, I eat whatever is around – vegetables, fruit, and not much meat. In the evenings, I eat very little. If I drink some wine now and again, I drink one glass and never two. It's been like that all my life. I go to bed at 9pm and wake up at 7am.

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As long as I'm still alive, and until the good Lord takes me, I'll always do sport and continue to cycle. There's just something I love about getting on a bicycle and pedalling.

I imagine that is why I am often asked whether I intend to break my world record in the future. In January, when I set the one-hour record, I could have gone faster. The reason I didn't is because I failed to see the 10-minute warning sign and so didn't push harder in the final minutes. But I'm also waiting for some competition and, when it arrives, I'll be ready.

This is the last in a series of profiles of individuals who are redefining later life that will appear in FT Weekend Magazine. Read the whole series at [www.nextact.ft.com](http://www.nextact.ft.com).

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