



Feature Story

“Are you crazy?”

Kevin Thomson has fielded this question one more than one occasion. When he ran cross Canada in 1999, that was often the first thing people would ask him.

This spring he and four teammates will attempt to break the world record for human powered travel across Canada by rowing from Halifax to Canada in less than 10 days.

That's right *rowing*

He doesn't get asked that question much anymore. Its now just assumed that he is crazy. Crazy and loving it.

As far back as 1995, Thomson wanted to do something dramatic to express his love for Canada, “I was watching the outcome of the referendum and I started to feel very sad. The possibility that Canada may no longer be a united country made me want to do something but I didn't really know what.”

Thomson had always wanted to explore Canada and his newfound passion for long-distance running seemed to be the perfect vehicle. In 1998, plans began for a trip across Canada by foot. He planned to run across Canada at a leisurely pace, collecting memories of a strong united Canada in celebration of the new millennium. He planned to run 8,078 kilometers from Vancouver to St. John's arriving in time to celebrate the new millennium in Newfoundland. He called it Running into 2000.

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Creative Crossings Society of Canada

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“I wanted to celebrate the future, explore my potential,” says Thomson, “and also I just wanted to do it.”

Running without an entourage, he needed to devise a way to make the journey unassisted. He, along with BMX bicycle manufacturers, Yess Products designed an aluminum cart to shield him from the elements and carry his gear. The Roadrunner, as it was dubbed, weighed 12 kilograms and featured twin v-brakes, front and rear running lights, four solar panels, a cassette deck and radio with external speakers, an odometer, a weather dome, and a cooler.

“The Roadrunner was very cool,” says Kevin “I was able to carry all my camping gear and be completely self-supported. It also gave me my nickname.”

Thomson became known to his friends as Coyote Kevin, a reference to the Wile E. Coyote cartoon character that chased a roadrunner of his own.

The journey was not without problems, “Let’s see,” recalls Kevin, “I was bit by a dog in Manitoba, I had a moose follow me little too closely in Banff and I was refused access to a 5-mile stretch of road near Hope.”

He planned to liaison with the mayor’s office of each town he visited to refresh supplies and make contacts in the city. Some were more helpful than others, “Vancouver’s mayor didn’t make it out to our launch but the city of Moncton put me up in a hotel.”

Needless to say, running across Canada gave Thomson plenty of time to think. He

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Row For the Record



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began to consider the different ways one could cross Canada. More specifically, he began to contemplate the fastest way one could travel across Canada using human power.

“I wasn’t sure how exactly but I knew it would utilize the row stroke.” Kevin is not a rower and the row stroke is only 40 per cent as efficient as the bicycle.

Row for the Record was born.

With Running into 2000 completed, Thomson was both exhilarated and exhausted. He assembled his small logistics team for one last meeting. Instead of disbanding however, the Running into 2000 Society retooled. The Creative Crossings Society was founded.

Creative Crossings, It was decided, would exist “to conceive, design and implement unique methods of crossing bodies of land, water or ice to explore the human potential through adventure travel challenges.” Its first project: Row for the Record.

“We first had to figure out if this was physically possible,” explains Thomson, “Bill Narasnek holds the current record. He bicycled across Canada in 1991 in 13 days and nine hours. That was an incredible achievement but I think as a team, we can do Halifax to Vancouver in about ten days.”

Thomson and Creative Crossings’ next task was to assemble a team. He needed rowers, a support crew and engineers to design and construct such a vehicle.

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“The RoadBoat is a much more complicated undertaking than the Roadrunner was,” emphasizes Thomson, “We have now went from an aluminum cart to five-man vehicle that is part rowing machine, part bicycle and part complicated gearing system.”

According to designs, it will resemble a huge peanut. The chassis will be about the size of a full-size pickup truck. Its shell: a wind resistant, fiberglass pod.

“You can’t exactly look in the Yellow Pages for a RoadBoat manufacturer. Even getting someone who can weld this grade of aluminum has not been easy,” laments Thomson, “but it will be done. It has to.”

The RoadBoat is scheduled for completion April 22nd just 30 days before takeoff at 12:01am, May 22nd, 2001.

To beat the record, the rowers will have to row at least 15 hours a day for 10 days straight in the very close quarters of the RoadBoat. Team members, consequently, were selected very carefully.

“Qualities I looked for were endurance, fitness, positive attitudes and the ability to believe in the incredible. But mostly,” Kevin stresses, “I needed a team that would be able to function under extremely stressful conditions. “

Obstacles seem to be Kevin’s *forte*.

“Conflicts are bound to happen,” he explains, “but with sufficient preparations, team-building and training we will be able to anticipate these conflicts and conquer

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them.”

Thomson’s infectious enthusiasm managed to recruit a team of one driver and six rowers, two of which are training as alternates should someone succumb to injury.

One of the first people Thomson enlisted was U.B.C. rowing coach, Craig Pond.

Pond was intrigued by the challenge and agreed to take the role of coach, “Take six men who have never rowed, either on the water or on the land, and prepare them both technically and physically to row across the country in their road boat? No problem!”

Pond may seem a little overconfident. For this undertaking, however, that is a prerequisite. Confidence, or at least the appearance of it, seems to be the thread that ties together the Row for the Record team of otherwise diverse personalities. Despite mounting odds, nobody seems to have any doubts that the record will be broken come June 1st, 2001.

The team has been training on stationary rowing machines. “At first, even a few minutes on the machine was uncomfortable,” says Pond, “but everyone is moving up to longer distances.” Longer distances indeed. It’s about 6000km from Halifax to Vancouver. So far, with about two months to go the team are up to 100km rowing sessions. They’ll need to comfortably triple that to have any chance at the record.

Traveling with the RoadBoat, are two recreational vehicles containing the support crew. The crew of seven will be responsible for, among other things, nutrition, physical therapy, traffic control, and navigation. The team will break every two hours for 15

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minutes at which time the support crew will refuel them. The rowers will burn approximately 900 calories per hour.

The team will sleep, whenever possible, in the R.V. Otherwise, camping or motels offer brief rest. “The first couple of days will probably be real tough,” laughs Kevin, “but its not going to get any easier once we hit the Rockies.”

At this point Thomson and therefore, Creative Crossings aren’t looking much further past the row. “Let’s just get through this adventure,” he says, “then we’ll talk about the next one.”