

TEACH YOUR KID TO RIDE



What happens when two kick butt woman mountain bikers join forces? Easy, a kick butt Kids MTB Academy!

Meet Kate Slegrova and Katja Steenkamp, two dynamo mountain bikers who have spent countless hours in the saddle, taking names at races in South Africa and abroad. Very close to their hearts is the development of the next generation. We found out more about Kate and Katja, and the awesome kids-specific skills workshops and mountain bike holiday camps they've been running for the past three years.



MEET KATE

Kate was born and raised in the Czech Republic. She shared her dad's passion for cycling, who inspired and coached her, thus her racing career started at a very young age. Kate competed in the Czech XC

MTB as a junior and took part in a few triathlons and MTB marathons. After graduating from a three-year degree in Sport Management, she decided to spread her wings and left her beloved home country to study Personal Training in Cape Town. Kate soon fell in love with all Cape Town had to offer – friendly people, the active lifestyle, great climate and beautiful landscapes. It also presented her with the ideal opportunity – being able to cycle and benefit from the sunny weather

throughout the year, to support both her professional coaching career as well as her passion for racing. Kate says, "Cape Town has become my home away from home, and settling here has been one of the best decisions of my life!" Since 2011, she's been combining her professional expertise with her personal cycling and racing experience to support and guide her clients in achieving their unique cycling and training goals. A few of Kate's achievements include 1st place Mixed Team (with her

partner, Martin McCabe) in the Garden Route 300 in February 2011; several podium positions in a variety of distances and terrains; completing numerous stage races such as Cape Epic (twice), Cape Pioneer Trek (twice) and TransAlp, as well as the 70.3 IRONMAN in East London in 2012. Kate gave birth to her daughter in April 2015, and returned to racing soon after, with the focus shifting to one-day events in order to balance her life as a young mom and athlete.



MEET KATJA

Katja was raised in the baroque town of Dresden, in East Germany. In her early 20s, in 2006, she moved to Cape Town, met and married a South African man and has lived here ever since. Before venturing into mountain biking, Katja worked as a market research manager for a global

research business. In 2015, she started BreakAway Rides with her friend Chris Chase, a mountain biking lifestyle brand that specialises in mountain bike tours, day rides and skills development. Katja is an avid mountain biker and has been racing competitively for the last five years, with several podium finishes to her name. She's competed in a number of categories, including XCO, XCM, multi-day races and enduros. More recently, she found her calling in ultra-endurance and adventure racing. Last year she won the Tour D'Afrique, a 12 000km race from Cairo to Cape Town, and was 10th overall to finish the Munga, a non-stop 1 100km race from Bloemfontein to Cape Town. Pushing her limits and the seemingly impossible is what inspires Katja to race long distances. She loves the unforeseen, new experiences and connecting with people from different walks of life, old and young. Giving back to the community is an important aspect of Katja's life, and she works closely with Qhubeka, with a share of BreakAway Rides' profit going to this non-profit organisation.

AN ACADEMY IS BORN

In 2013, when Katja decided to do her African trip (Cairo to Cape Town), she knew she needed a proper training program. After hearing about Kate's achievements and great methods to squeeze an effective program into a workaholic's schedule, Katja connected with her. It was this same year that Kate started the kids' MTB workshops, offering skills training to kids in Cape Town's Deer Park during the school holidays. She felt that kids don't get time in the trails or even to ride around their neighbourhoods, and she saw an opportunity to help busy parents by taking their kids out on to the trails, and at the same time developing fundamental MTB skills.

A few years later, while Katja was trying to find her feet with

launching BreakAway Rides, Kate slowly wheeled her into the kids' workshops as she became increasingly busier as a young mother. Their combined passion for the sport and their love for children is what created the magic during the workshops and is the reason for their success. The holiday camps proved hugely popular, and so they decided to introduce weekly kids' training sessions, every Friday for two hours.

They soon realised the need for a more formal business structure, to account for the demand and possibility to grow, and so in October last year The Kids MTB Academy brand was born and is now run as a kids-specific program under BreakAway Rides.

The two have become close friends, spending many early



PHOTOGRAPHS SUPPLIED

morning hours slogging away at the gym or on the bike, and many nights drinking red wine while philosophising about life and business opportunities.

A fully female-run operation by business women, coaches, wives and mothers requires a certain amount of flexibility that doesn't affect the steady flow of the programs. Kate and Katja love the power of collaboration and so it was a no brainer when the opportunity arose to partner with Hannele Steyn. Besides offering a wealth of experience

as a professional athlete, Hannele has been a skills and fitness coach for many years, and is also a qualified nutritionist. Her skill set and professional background adds a special flavour to the programs, where she assists with coaching, the continuous improvement of the skills programs, bike setups and nutritional advice to parents.



WORKSHOPS FOR WINNERS

Children that join the Academy show tremendous improvement in their skills as they benefit from the fine-tuning of their riding techniques through repetitive practice. The weekly sessions are based on a progression program, with a specific set of techniques taught each week. In the earlier part of the term, the fundamentals are addressed – correct gear selection, braking, weight distribution and bike mechanics. Then they move on to various cornering

techniques on different terrain as well as obstacle riding through rock gardens and rooty terrain. Towards the end of the term they focus on wheel lifting and riding drops and jumps. Currently, the Academy accommodates two different skills levels, however there is a growing demand to add a “fitness” component, and they are looking to introduce an additional group for the “racing snakes”, to ensure adequate preparation for XC racing.

The vast network of trails in and around Cape Town leaves much space to play, but Kate and Katja prefer Meerendal and

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Bloemendal, as these are child-friendly areas with accessible vicinity during the week. They also offer a shuttle service to assist busy parents. Safety and a professional, personal approach is very important, and there are never more than six kids per instructor, with each instructor being first aid-certified.

The Academy also offers a three-day holiday workshop which is structured very differently to the weekly rides. It touches on all areas covered during the term but it is less in-depth. Over the three days, they incorporate strength and core exercises to improve mobility and coordination, and add their own mobile course to simulate trail features (e.g. obstacles and ramps). The combination of coordination exercises off the bike and skills training on the bike is a great spectacle for the kids as each child is timed to complete the course.

Kate and Katja see every one of their young riders as special, and reiterate how incredibly rewarding it is to witness how each of them improve over time. Of course, there are those that seem to pick up skills in a

blink. One of their young girls, Kelly, is only eight years old but has won several Spur races and kicks ass amongst the boys that are three to four years older than her. She has strong little legs and loves riding up hills. Another youngster, Ethan, nine years old, recently started competing in XCO events. He is very new to mountain biking but already on fire when he sees trails. And there’s nine-year-old Jamie who’s been with the Academy for over three years and has a knack for the downhills – he is fearless and Kate and Katja can imagine one day seeing him amongst future Enduro and Downhill champs.

The MTB Kids Academy is thankful for their affiliation with well-known brands that share the same vision – Spur, Enjoy Fitness, Hammer Nutrition, Passion4Wholeness and G-Form. Each kid receives a goodie bag filled with carefully selected items, including a cycling jersey, health muesli, water bottle and more. This year, there are additional sponsors lined up to live up to the Academy’s promise to offer exceptional value with their programs.

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