

55 miles, 13 hills, 1 BC3 prof and his artificial hip

Sixty-year-old to attempt Pittsburgh bicycle race featuring “savage” climbs

Nov. 20, 2017



Denton Dailey, 60, of Butler, is shown Friday, Nov. 17, 2017, on the main campus of Butler County Community College, where he teaches electronics and robotics courses. Dailey on Saturday will attempt to become only the second bicyclist with an artificial hip to compete in the Dirty Dozen, a 55-mile, 13-hill Pittsburgh race that incorporates the steepest climb on a public street in the United States.

(Butler, PA) A 60-year-old Butler County Community College associate professor on Saturday will become only the second bicyclist with an artificial hip to compete in a 55-mile Pittsburgh race that incorporates the steepest hill on a public street in the United States, Dirty Dozen founder Danny Chew said.

Denton Dailey, who teaches electronics and robotics courses at BC3, will also be among the only 2 percent of bicyclists age 60 or older who have attempted the Dirty Dozen since its inaugural race in 1983, according to Chew.

The public street competition, with 13 hills from Highland Park to Hazelwood and with two crossings of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers, has drawn 1,657 cyclists in 34 years – including a record 382 in 2016.

Paul Salipante, 69 in 2014, was the oldest bicyclist to finish the race and John Brockenbrough, 58 in 2016, was the oldest to score points awarded to those whose times are among the Top 10 on the 13 hills.

Gene Nacey was the first to compete in the Dirty Dozen with an artificial hip in 2011, Chew said.

Canton Avenue hill “a killer,” prof says

It’s not just the challenge of finishing the 35th Dirty Dozen that motivated Dailey to compete with a titanium and ceramic hip that in late May 2015 replaced a left ball-and-socket joint ruined from years of accumulated sports injuries.

Rather, it’s also a chance to repair a recently broken heart.

“One of the reasons I needed concrete and fairly all-consuming goals this summer was to help to get over a breakup with a woman I really liked a lot,” said Dailey, a BC3 instructor for 37 years. “For whatever reason, I was really having a difficult time with it and the intense physical training was a productive and positive way of coping.”

It was from her, a fellow competitive road bicyclist, that Dailey learned of the Dirty Dozen, created to showcase Pittsburgh’s most daunting hills.

“She planted the seed in my mind,” said Dailey, of Butler.

To train for the Dirty Dozen, Dailey has been riding up to 75 miles a week around Butler, North Park and Moraine State Park – and on hills in Lyndora.

“Over and over again,” he said. “They aren’t as bad as the ones in Pittsburgh, though.”

Not as bad as the Canton Avenue hill, in Beechview, the ninth on the course, one with a 37-degree grade along 71 yards and widely reported to be the steepest in the United States.



Denton Dailey, 60, of Butler, trains Saturday, Nov. 4, 2017, on Canton Avenue in Beechview, which features the steepest hill on a public street in the United States and which Dailey calls “a killer.” Dailey, who teaches electronics and robotics courses at Butler County Community College, will attempt to become only the second bicyclist with an artificial hip to compete in the Dirty Dozen, a 55-mile, 13-hill Pittsburgh race.

“It’s a killer,” said Dailey, who on consecutive Saturdays in November has trained on the course.

“It is one of the hills I like the best,” he said of the Canton Avenue climb. “It is the shortest hill. I can do anything for 30 seconds. It is steep and intimidating but it is over pretty quickly. I am more of a sprinter than a distance guy, so I do better with short, intense hills than long grinders.”

Race founder: Prof’s effort smacks of being “Six Million Dollar Man”

Competing in the Dirty Dozen with an artificial hip would seem to be more difficult for a racer, Chew said.

“You are dealing with something that is not part of your body,” he said. “Unless he is ‘The Six Million Dollar Man,’ and Steve Austin, where the guy can run 60 miles an hour, the artificial ones are usually slower than the natural ones.”

Many of his fellow riders are unaware Dailey has an artificial hip, says Alexandra Shewczyk, marketing and communications manager for BIKEPGH, a nonprofit organization that focuses on community, education and advocacy for bicycling.

“Surprisingly, you can’t tell,” said Shewczyk, who with Dailey and others has been training for her first Dirty Dozen to get a “taste of how savage the hills can be.”

Dailey “keeps up with the best of us,” Shewczyk said. “He has the courage to attempt the hills, the willpower to get up them and he is really pushing as hard as the rest of us.”

Prof: Hip pain from injuries unbearable

Nacey, of Pittsburgh, was 56 when he competed in his first and only Dirty Dozen in 2011. His right hip was replaced in 1997 and his left, in 2007.

His best advice for Dailey, Nacey said, is to have practiced on three hills, then six, then eight, “so that by the time the race comes, you know you have been able to complete at least 10 of the 13. Because when you train, you don’t have people you have to wait for, you don’t cool down at the end of each run, which can be a problem during the race because you have to wait for so many people. At least you know from your training ride that you can complete it, because on the day of the race, it’s a little harder.”



To prepare for Saturday’s Dirty Dozen, a 55-mile, 13-hill Pittsburgh bicycle race, Denton Dailey, 60, of Butler, who teaches electronics and robotics courses at Butler County Community College, has been riding up to 75 miles a week around Butler, North Park and Moraine State Park – and on hills in Lyndora. He has also trained on the Dirty Dozen course three times this month.

Dailey took up mountain bicycle racing at age 40 to replace his longtime sport of motorcycle racing, which left him with numerous injuries, including one to his knee. He gave up running in 5K and 10K events in 2013 because of his deteriorating hip.

“It just hurt too much,” he said, adding that physical therapy, steroid and rooster-comb injections failed to alleviate the pain. “And it was starting to interfere with other things.”

Like lecturing to his classes at BC3, writing on the white board and ascending stairs.

“It was getting too bad,” he said. “It was interfering with everything.”

After his May 2015 surgery forced him to quit mountain bicycle racing, Dailey in July bought his first road racing bicycle – an 18-pound white Trek Emonda SL5, its frame, and wheels composed of 100 percent graphite – which, like his artificial hip and stamina, he put to the test on Canton Avenue hill during three training runs this month.

The gear he chose among the bicycle’s 22 to attack the cobblestoned climb during training with 20 other riders?

“The lowest possible,” he said with a laugh.

“More climbing than you ever thought possible”

On Friday night, Dailey will “load up” on complex carbohydrates and before Saturday morning’s 9 a.m. start, don a helmet, cycling gloves, preferably without fingers – “that makes it easier to shift gears and operate the brakes” – shoes that clip into pedals, long spandex pants and a spandex shirt with pockets stuffed with energy gels.

He’ll secure two 16-ounce bottles of water into brackets on his bicycle’s 56-centimeter frame, check his tire-repair kit bag and prepare for hills from Aspinwall to the South Side that are so steep, Nacey says, that they “blow people away, even in cars.”

“The best way to describe it is to think of the steepest thing you have ever been on, then consider it steeper,” Nacey said. “And that’s what you have to do, and you have to do it multiple times. The other thing people don’t realize is that between the 13 hills, to get there, you ride your bike there. And you are in Pittsburgh. So guess what? You are climbing hills to get to hills. And the hills you climb to get to the 13 hills don’t count (in calculating Top 10 times for points), but they still put a toll on your legs. It’s just more climbing than you ever thought possibly could be done.”

It’s not the hills that concern Dailey, but the weather.

“It’s unpredictable,” he said of conditions on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, when the Dirty Dozen is held. “You never know what it is going to be like, freezing cold, or snowing or raining, or nice.”

Saturday's forecast calls for 46-degree temperatures at 9 a.m. toward a high of 54, and a 90 percent chance of showers, which, Dailey said, won't affect his titanium and ceramic hip.

"It's just horrible to ride in bad weather," he said.

However, his goal of passing Brockenbrough and reigning as the oldest points-scorer is within reach, Shewczyk said.

"When we were training on the hills, (Dailey) was in middle of the pack," she said. "He was definitely pushing through and powering up those hills."