

Getting ready for the
2008 Bearclaw Invitational III
at Mount Washington
August 23, 2008



FLYING ON TWO WHEELS DARREN BERRE CLOTH



BY DAVID MORRISON

“I wonder to myself: how is this all going to play out? As I always do, I pray that all will end well and safe. I put on my goggles and when the wind fades, I take a last deep breath. I visualize what I have to do from the top to the bottom. And with the crackle of my radio, I announce to my crew: ‘Dropping.’ Away I go.”

Taken from his website blog, these dramatic words describe the heart-pounding moments experienced each time free-riding mountain biker Darren “Bearclaw” Berre cloth sets off to undertake another challenging course.

An undeniably dangerous pursuit including disciplines like “Cliff Huckling” – when riders launch themselves off (manageable) cliffs to descend often near vertical, hazard-strewn slopes – free-riding is something Berre cloth does extremely well. So well, in fact, that many fans and experts on the sport consider the 26-year-old Qualicum Beach resident the very best there is.

Enter Berre cloth’s name into a search engine and the results will include plenty of jaw-dropping footage of this man at work/play, usually accompanied by a pumping rock soundtrack. You’ll see him in locations as varied as the Gobi Desert and Utah – or his own extensive backyard, where he’s constructed an extraordinary course.

When witnessing the extreme nature of his chosen recreation, especially for the first time, reactions may range from unbridled admiration to questioning the state of his faculties. But in any instance, you most certainly would not be the first. Kevin

Arnold of *Outside* magazine, for example, speaks for many when of Bearclaw’s cavalier approach to free-riding he says: “One man’s lunacy is just the logical next step for Berre cloth.” And when I asked him how often he’s called ‘insane,’ he told me (from the French Alps – where else?), “Well, almost every day.”

Born in Prince George, Berre cloth has been riding bikes since he was six years-old. “I was always on a bike,” he says, “but when I originally started mountain biking I couldn’t afford it because I broke too many parts! So I got into BMX, then a long time later came back into mountain biking.”

His breakthrough came when coming third as a precocious, relatively unknown quantity in 2002’s Red Bull Rampage event in Utah, a part of the world he loves and has recently spent a month in filming in forty-plus degrees. Since that placing, he’s risen to the highest echelons of his sport, developing outrageous tricks and founding his own event.

Berre cloth’s Bearclaw Invitational III takes place at Mt. Washington on Saturday August 23rd and features the world’s most skilled and radical riders, hailing from the UK, Spain, Germany, Norway, Canada and the USA. Apart from Bearclaw himself, of course – who was defeated by a flat tire last year – one particular guy to watch is crazy Californian Cam McCaul, winner of the first two Bearclaw Invitationals.

Needless to say, McCaul, Berre cloth and their fearless ilk are adrenaline junkies bent on ensuring their time on earth is

as exciting as possible. Of his pursuit of thrills, Berre cloth simply says: “You name it: if it involves fun, I’m there.” So when not mountain biking, he might be seen tearing around in an All-Terrain Vehicle (or Quad Bike) or other means of transport usually reserved for off-road activities. But these guys remain fully aware of the risks involved and there can be few that have escaped accidents in their lust for speed and adventure. Berre cloth’s response to my inquiry concerning how many bones he’s broken was simply, “Lots!” Though not for the faint of heart, his website bears a graphic account of his most serious injury to date – a punctured lung while snowmobiling last winter.

These risks come with the territory, but remember that despite its apparent surface foolery, this is a sport – like surfing, say – where an addiction to it forms from the opportunities for strong expressions of individuality it offers the participant. Berre cloth puts it well when he says: “I love bikes and the freedom of being your own energy.”

Regardless of how you view what he does, whether folly or courageous, there’s a lesson we can all learn from the philosophy Bearclaw applies to his sport – one I feel should become a mantra for anyone striving to reach the top of their particular game. “Enjoy what you do and the rest follows,” he says in simple explanation of what it takes to become a great. So now you know, just get on your bike and ride... ~

For more information:
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