

## LIFE &amp; ARTS



Jim Dannis and Sandy Dannis train for long-distance tandem bike rides. They also cut and stack wood to train. Mr. Dannis does pull-ups, too.

WHAT'S YOUR WORKOUT? | JEN MURPHY

## A Seriously Committed Tandem

JOE KLEMENTOVICH FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (3)



**RIDING IN THE REAR** seat of a tandem bicycle with your partner piloting you up and down a mountain might be a recipe for divorce. For Jim Dannis and Sandy Dannis it's the ultimate show of trust. The couple has powered a bike together for 32 of their 35 years of marriage. "People think the person in the front seat does all of the work and the back-seat passenger is on for a joy ride," Mr. Dannis says. "But it's a team effort. If Sandy stops pedaling even half a stroke, we fall down. There's an art to reading each other's body language and movement, so we can shift weight and pedal in sync."

Mr. Dannis, 62, and Ms. Dannis, 58, are retired from their finance careers and live on an 1,825-acre working farm in Dalton, N.H. Ms. Dannis says she never tires of seeing people's reactions to the bike. "Cars chase us for photos," she says. "Sometimes I take my hands off the handlebars and that always gives them a chuckle."

Last summer they competed in the Mount Washington Auto Road Bicycle Hillclimb, a 7.6-mile ride with an average 12% grade and 4,650 feet of vertical gain. "We came in first in the tandem category, because nobody else was crazy enough to race the mountain on a tandem," Mr. Dannis says.



This summer they're training for the Natchez Trace 444, a 444-mile ride from Nashville, Tenn., to Natchez, Miss., in early October. Mr. Dannis has completed solo ultra-endurance rides, including one race over 800 miles, but this will mark Ms. Dannis's first ride longer than 100 miles. "This has been a bucket list thing for me," she says.

### The Workout

The pair trains on single bikes and tandems. Mr. Dannis says he averages 10,000 to 13,000 miles each year. That includes up to 60 miles or eight hours on some long indoor winter training days and 100-mile rides outdoors. (He shared data from his Strava ac-

### A Rare Free Pass on Fast Food

A burger and fries sound like a posttrace reward, not a training snack. But when you're logging extra-long distances, fast food isn't the worst choice of fuel, says Rachelle Pojednic, an assistant professor of nutrition at Simmons University in Boston.

"I joke that what I eat when I'm out riding my bike four hours is not what I'd eat for lunch on any given Tuesday," she says. "When your body is working that hard, you need to shift your nutrition to meet your energy needs."

While she wouldn't recommend fast food for day-to-day meals due to its lack of fiber and nutrients, and high fat and sodium, she says it is a surprisingly good choice for ultra-endurance sports of four hours or more.

"It's high in calories, has a significant amount of salt, and it can be absorbed quickly with minimal ef-

fort," she says. "Typically, we want to eat high-fiber, nutrient-dense foods, but those take a long time to digest."

Katherine Zeratsky, a registered dietitian nutritionist at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., says muscles run off carbs and fat, so in an endurance situation, fries and burger buns equal fast energy.

Dr. Pojednic cautions that not everyone's stomach can handle fast food, and bars and gels are more convenient to eat on the go. "If you haven't trained on Filet-O-Fish, it's probably not the best choice to make on race day," she says. "Your race fuel should mimic your training fuel."

Ms. Zeratsky says it's important to remember that endurance training puts a lot of stress on the body. "An overall balanced diet of antioxidant- and nutrient-rich foods is essential to protect and repair your muscles," she says.

count to verify this claim.) Ms. Dannis says she rides between 5,000 and 7,000 miles. Ahead of the Natchez Trace 444, about 75% of their training is on the tandem.

In a typical week their long ride might include a circuit around Mount Washington starting at the Vermont border, riding to the east almost to Maine, then back to the south of Mount Washington. This is a 109-mile ride with about 5,500 feet of climbing. They might do two shorter 30-to-75-mile rides north into the Connecticut River Valley, then one or two solo rides. Ms. Dannis is logging 700 to 900 miles a month, while her husband is averaging 1,200.

To cross-train, Mr. Dannis hikes around his property with their three dogs. He and his wife split and stack wood. He also does pull-ups and push-ups. "I'm stuck in a middle-school calisthenics routine," he jokes. The couple uses a

30-pound granite rock to do functional exercises like squats and lunges. Ms. Dannis has silks hanging from a tree in the yard to practice aerial yoga. "It's like floating meditation," she says. "Jim is too type-A to try it."

In the winter, they cycle indoors: riding a trainer and a Peloton bike. They also snowshoe.

### The Diet

Like most endurance athletes, Ms. Dannis fuels her rides with energy bars, protein shakes and electrolyte-spiked drinks. Her husband prefers fast food. "Jim knows where every McDonald's, Burger King and ice cream place is along his training rides," she says. "It's his excuse to eat double cheeseburgers." Mr. Dannis counters that it's the best way for him to replenish the 600-plus calories he burns each hour on rides.

When he's off the bike he re-

verts to a healthy diet. He has sugar-free cereal with a banana and almond milk for breakfast, while Ms. Dannis prefers avocado toast topped with an egg. Lunch is light, often cheese and crackers. Dinner is typically a salad with beans, vegetables, grilled steak or chicken and a light dressing or a homemade bean-based soup.

### The Cost and Gear

The couple own three tandems. They ride their Cannondale tandem mountain bike (\$2,000) in the muddy early season. They use their Co-Motion Macchiato (\$8,000) for training on hills. They purchased a titanium-carbon frame Santana Synergy tandem to use as their main racing bike. "We could have bought a small car," says Ms. Dannis, noting it was a \$15,000 investment. Mr. Dannis spent around \$17,000 on the three Specialized bikes he uses for solo training, and Ms. Dannis spent around \$7,000 on her two Specialized bikes.

"We know people think what we spend on bikes is totally ridiculous, but cycling is our main form of exercise and recreation," Ms. Dannis says. "We don't take vacations. We don't belong to gyms or have any coaches. We've reallocated what many people would spend on exercise and discretionary fun to our cycling."

When it comes to clothing, the couple believes in safety over style. "We wear bright neon orange or yellow and put multiple lights on the front and back of our bike so we're visible to drivers," Mr. Dannis says. During the winter, the couple trains on their Peloton bike, which cost \$1,995, plus \$39 a month for unlimited classes.

### The Playlist

They avoid music. They must hear oncoming traffic and are in constant communication. "My job in front is to tell Sandy if a bump is coming so she is not surprised, and she is responsible for traffic," Mr. Dannis says.