



COURTESY JAY ASQUINI (2)

## GDI

### Celebrating decades of adventures with Mike “On a Bike” Dawson

→ Plenty of avid cyclists celebrate their birthdays by riding one mile for every year they’ve orbited the sun, and Mike Dawson is doing the same for his 80th birthday this year.

“I ride about 40, 50 miles a day,” he said. “Thanks to that and eating right, I feel just like a kid when I get on the bike.”

If you catch Dawson on the phone, chances are that he’s either about to head out on a ride or just back from one. After a long ride, Dawson comes home and treats himself to a single pint of Molson’s lager and some honey-mustard pretzels.

He doesn’t talk himself up much, but he comes highly endorsed by an enthusiastic friend.

“He’s a great guy,” said Jay Asquini, another Adventure Cycling member.

Asquini remembers well the day he was on a bicycle tour in 2016 and

caught in the rain in a small town in Michigan. He pulled his bike over and found a bit of shelter on a bench outside a grocery store while waiting out the storm. A friendly older cyclist pedaled up to him.

“This cyclist rolls in, all excited, and asked me if I’m traveling by bike,” Asquini remembered. “He asked me all about my trip and where I was staying. I ended up staying at his place and we became friends.”

That’s how Asquini met Dawson, a longtime Michigan resident and bicycle traveler. Dawson, who turned 80 this November, is a quiet guy who doesn’t talk himself up much. Asquini called up Adventure Cycling to share his appreciation of his friend.

“He’s a GDI, a ‘goddamn independent,’ which was his nickname in the army,” Asquini explained. (It’s

“MIKE ADOPTED A SECTION OF BIKE TRAIL NEAR HIS HOME TO DE-LITTER,” ASQUINI SAID. “IN TYPICAL GDI FASHION, HE DOES THIS UNOFFICIALLY, WITHOUT RECOGNITION, BUT PATROLS IT DAILY.”

hard to imagine the soft-spoken Dawson as a tough-talking draftee now, but I’ll take Asquini at his word.)

Asquini describes a GDI as a type of person who doesn’t take much guff and isn’t interested in the limelight. “Mike has also adopted a section of bike trail near his home to de-litter,” Asquini said. “In typical GDI fashion, he does this unofficially, without recognition, but patrols it daily.”

Dawson introduced Asquini to Adventure Cycling and taught him a lot about map reading — one of Dawson’s specialties from his days serving in the army.

After his service in the army, Dawson switched careers, teaching special education classes in Michigan public schools. He says he was lucky to have worked with small class sizes of about six to eight students, where he could really get to know the kids.

Dawson retired in 1997 and has devoted his days to tirelessly touring around Europe, the U.S., and particularly his beloved home state. In all his years and 300,000-plus miles of riding, his biggest bike wreck was a time he hit a deep pothole, went flying, and broke a collarbone. He strives to make sure that cars can see him.

“Of course, I dress like a clown with all kinds of bright colors and blinkers and daytime running lights to make sure cars do see me,” he said. “You gotta be smart about it.”

He rode every county in Michigan in the '80s and '90s, and he and his wife, Laurel, are still planning a trip together to ride around the Upper Peninsula. They both have custom-built Bruce Gordon bikes for touring, and like to camp out as much as they can. Over the years, he's seen the riding season grow longer as climate change brings more warm, dry days and less snow to the region.

After completing more rides around Michigan, he hopes to travel back to Europe, where he enjoys the small towns and bicycle-friendly infrastructure. “I'm a Lewis and Clark kind of person, I love to explore, see what's out there,” he said. He recently treated himself to a new road bike: a Giant with disc brakes and tubeless tires. He hopes it'll last him another 100,000 miles.



Dawson says it's hard to pick a favorite out of all his bike trips, but his first visit to Europe in 1999 felt pretty special.

“All the castles, and the friendliness for bikes over there,” he said. “We rode through these little tiny French villages, and all of them have bakeries. That was pretty special. But there's so many nice places we've been to. Just to get out and

see the world, there's no better way to do it than on a bicycle.” **AC**

*Kate Whittle is Adventure Cycling's Community Engagement Manager.*

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