



# Four Wheels



# and a Wedding

Photo: melanekratovil.com

By Sheryl Bennett-Wilson

What do you call 46 cyclists, a four-day cycle tour from Ottawa to Kennebunkport, Maine, and a distance of 614 kilometres? For Brenda Oatway and Grant Bird, it was a wedding procession!

After four days of intense cycling, the cyclists and ten additional guests watched as Oatway and Bird said their 'I do's'. It was a precious moment for everyone there, and marked the beginning of Oatway and Bird's married life after a relationship of over six years and a few thousand kilometres of cycling together.

Both Oatway and Bird are avid cyclists, and staying fit is important to them. So it's no surprise that they met on one of the same Ottawa-to-Kennebunkport cycling tours run by Manny Agulnik of OK Cycle Tours. Bird had been on many of the Ottawa-to-Kennebunkport tours before, always alone. Agulnik got to know Bird and realized he was a great guy but rather shy.

Enter Oatway. In May of 2006, she did the OK Cycle Tour for the first time. Agulnik says that most of the participants do their own thing, but he encourages them to join in on the daily hospitality suite and dinner. Oatway and Bird hit it off. By the end of the tour, Oatway had Bird's phone number and was praising Agulnik as a "matchmaker extraordinaire."

Bird was obviously smitten, too. He invited Oatway on an Ottawa Bicycle Club ride to Vermont. Things were pedalling along nicely until she fell and broke her arm. Bird made sure that Oatway was well taken care of while in hospital, and his caring attentiveness cemented the relationship for them both. By 2008, they were talking marriage.

For four years, on every OK Cycle Tour, they talked marriage. This past March, Oatway and Bird unanimously decided to finally do it and have the wedding at the end of the OK Cycle Tour in May. With only two months

to organize everything, and with Agulnik's help for incidentals like flowers and the hotel in Kennebunkport suggesting who could perform the ceremony, they pulled it off. "I was so pleased to be part of this," says Agulnik. "It was very special."

Rick Hellard and his wife Nancy agree. "If the ride was twice as far, I'd still do it," says Hellard. "We all knew we had a wedding to get to; that's what kept us going." A local triathlete and sports coach, Hellard has done the Ottawa-Kennebunkport Cycle Tour four times. He says Oatway is like a beacon of light when she walks into a room and Bird is down-to-earth friendly. Hellard is like a brother to Oatway so when she needed a Maid of Honour, she asked him. For the occasion, Hellard says he was resplendent in his shorts and sweater — and casual dress shoes.

It was Bushtukah, not Birks, for the happy couple's gift registry! No china or crystal there. Instead, with all the gift cards, Oatway and

Bird bought a fork-mounted, high-end bike stand for doing their own bike maintenance. The cycle tour participants took a collection and bought the couple a Picton-area cycle tour from OK Cycle Tours. About the only thing Oatway and Bird received that was close to traditional was a teapot from Agulnik. But even that was unusual — it was custom-made and had on it caricature likenesses of the couple riding a tandem bicycle.

These days you'll find Oatway in training for the 2013 Ironman Lake Placid triathlon. When she runs, Bird cycles alongside. "It's cool that they met on one end of the tour and it all ended up in a wedding on the other end of this last tour," says Hellard.

Cool indeed.

HWO

*Above photo: Good buddy Rick Hellard (on the left) kids around with the love "Birds"*