

Sean Kelly ride in Thailand

Gary Corbett introduces the iconic sportsman and details his 'legendary' status



In the world of professional sport there are a number of iconic individuals who have captured the collective imagination of generations of fans.

While 'the greatest ever' tag is a hotly debated subject amongst sports aficionados, there are a handful of sporting greats including Michael Jordan in basketball, Rod Laver in tennis, Jack Nicklaus in golf, Juan Manuel Fangio in Formula One motor racing, Edson Arantes do Nascimento – universally known as Pele – in soccer, Muhammad Ali in boxing and Sean Kelly in cycling that transcend all such debate.

Through their years of sporting brilliance all in their own way helped to shape the future of their respective sports, with many dyed-in-the-wool fans flatly refusing to even entertain the thought that their sporting idol's individual brilliance has ever been – or ever will be – bettered.

Given the 'legendary' status afforded to all of the above mentioned sports stars, who wouldn't want to shoot hoops with Michael Jordan, trade shots across the net with Rod Laver, play a round of golf with Jack Nicklaus, step into the ring with Muhammad Ali or cycle with Sean Kelly.

But that is exactly what you will be able

to do - with Sean 'Hard Man' Kelly at least - when he returns to Thailand in 2015 to take part in the second annual Spice Roads Cycle Tours Sean Kelly Bangkok to Phuket ride from February 13th to 22nd.

It is, without a shadow of a doubt, an opportunity of a lifetime to spend nine days cycling with a true legend of the sport, but more about that later.

Widely acclaimed as one of the finest classic riders of all time, Kelly won nine monument classics, and 193 professional races in total from the time he turned professional in 1977 until his retirement in 1994. While he heartbreakingly failed to win the Tour de France outright (although he did claim four green jerseys between 1982 and 1989) and the World Road Race Championship to put the icing on an amazing career, there were virtually no other major titles that eluded his grasp.

Such was his dominance of the sport over so many years and his sheer determination to win no matter what adversities were placed in his way in either the sprint, time-trial or climb disciplines, Kelly earned the nickname of 'the hard man of cycling'. It was - and still is - a tag that fits the man well given his legendary status of being one of the hardest men to have ever raced professionally.





While clearly these days the hard edge that took the affable Irishman to so many professional cycling victories has worn off somewhat, he is more than happy to have cycling remain his number one focus in life.

The switch from pro racer to commentator may have been a few years in the making, but these days Kelly is more than comfortable watching the action from the sidelines in his position as a cycling commentator with the British Eurosport Channel.

As an aside, many who knew Kelly during his racing days – especially cycling journalists – thought his post-cycling career choice was an interesting one given his propensity to often answer questions with a nod, more often than not on the radio.

But these days he has not only learned to open up more about the sport he truly loves, but is able to give Eurosport viewers an insight into what is really happening within the peloton. While still far from a talkaholic, Kelly's insightful comments are eagerly devoured by race fans.

Beyond working behind the microphone for Eurosport, Kelly in recent years established the An Post Sean Kelly racing team based in Belgium to give young Irish cyclists a base from which to compete. Also, when not following the professional cycling tour, he also regularly participates in charity cycling events and has associated himself

with a select number of companies that he believes in.

As such he will be returning to Thailand in 2015 from February 13 to 22 to take part in the second annual Spice Roads Cycle Tours Sean Kelly Bangkok to Phuket ride, a trip of 924 kilometres.

The ride, which is limited to 30 participants who have road riding experience, will be completed over eight stages on smooth tarmac past quaint Thai villages, Buddhist temples and stunningly beautiful beaches.

Along the way while cycling Kelly, 58, who now admits to being a keen cycle tourist – as opposed to being a racing professional with his only goal to be the first over the line – is sure to regale his fellow cyclists with stories from his time on the tour.

Nights also, as is the case on just about all organised cycle tours, is the time for tour participants to relax, share experiences from the day's cycling and more importantly on this particular tour, to get to know the 'real' Sean Kelly.

Now that he is a leisure rider likes countless millions of riders worldwide, Kelly freely admits that he enjoyed taking in the scenery of the Thai countryside and beaches during the 2014 ride.

"There was no enjoying the scenery when I was racing, but now that I have retired it is good to be able to take it more

easily and enjoy the ride," he said.

"When you do rides like this you can look around and see the countryside. When you are competing, you don't get the occasion to see the countryside – when you are racing it is not for pleasure."

This time around though there will be plenty for Kelly and his fellow tour participants to enjoy. It is, literally, a tour not to be missed.

The tour starts in the Thai capital of Bangkok and ends at Mai Khao beach on the resort island of Phuket.

The cost of the Ride with Sean Kelly tour is US\$3,000 and will be fully supported by air-conditioned vehicles, with water, sports drinks and snacks provided during the ride. Riders can bring their own bikes, or rent a Trek Domane 2.3 road bike from Spice Roads for US\$250, or a carbon Trek Emonda S5 for US\$350.

Spice Roads is a specialist bicycle tour operator based in Bangkok offering a range of two-wheel tours throughout Asia.

Spice Roads tours cater for every level of cyclist and range from day-trips to complete country explorations. Participants are invited to join tours with fixed date departures scheduled throughout the year, while private or tailor-made tours can be arranged for groups or individuals on request. All tours, including the Sean Kelly tour, are led by experienced cycle guides.

MORE INFORMATION:

TOUR:

Ride with Cycling Legend Sean Kelly

DATES:

13th February - 22nd February, 2015

DISTANCE:

924km over 8 days of cycling

VISIT:

www.spiceroads.com/tours/sean_kelly

