

## **Media release - Keagan Girdlestone takes on Le Race and mental demons**

Young Christchurch cyclist Keagan Girdlestone will be using the 2019 edition of Le Race to tackle his post-traumatic stress disorder head-on while raising awareness and funds for mental health issues.

At 16, Girdlestone was the youngest winner in the history of Le Race back in 2014 and destined for a great cycling future until a major crash during a race ride in Italy in 2016 nearly took his life and started a long road to recovery.

Two years later, that recovery took a huge setback when the mental trauma of the accident reared its ugly head in June during a training ride in France.

“Suddenly, the artery in my neck, which had been repaired after my accident, started to spasm while I was riding, and I thought my artery was going to burst and I was going to die,” says Girdlestone, who thinks that riding back in Europe may have triggered the post-traumatic stress panic attack.

After years of single-minded focus on building a cycling career, that same mind had suddenly convinced the 21-year-old that getting back on his bike would kill him. “I was too scared to go riding, but without cycling I had no balance in my life, which made me depressed,” says Girdlestone.

“I never realised how big the impact of mental health can be on your life, until it happened to me.”

The depression and lack of motivation severely impacted on key relationships in his life, until school councillor and fellow cyclist Mike Greenslade helped Girdlestone make a “180-degree U-turn” in his life.

The South African-born cyclist started focusing on other areas of interest, like photography and acting classes to broaden his perspective on life.

He is also in the gym most days and is fixated on fattening up his tiny frame. Girdlestone lost 16kg while in a coma in Italy, and never managed to put that weight back on when he resumed training after the crash.

Only a few weeks ago, Girdlestone finally gathered the courage to get back on the bike, after doctors had tested his heart and artery under maximum physical stress to show the young rider that he had nothing to fear.

Girdlestone is now cruising the streets around Christchurch on small rides and wears casual shirts instead of lycra to remind himself that he is not training or racing, but just riding for fun.

He has decided to sign up for this year’s Le Race from Christchurch to Akaroa, on March 23, to raise funds for mental health charity Changing Minds, “even though most 15-year-old girls will beat me”.

“Despite a few months ago being paralysed by fear and anxiety that made me nearly put the bike away for good. I can now say I’m going to be getting back on the horse, pinning a race number on my back,” Girdlestone announced on his Facebook page. Girdlestone is inviting friends, supporters or any unfit rider who wants to do Le Race in a fun and casual manner, to join his group by signing up with the promo code KEAGAN, so \$20 of their entry fee will go to Changing Minds. Other riders and supporters who want to go a bit faster are also encouraged to donate to the charity. “Hopefully a few people will tag along,” smiles Girdlestone who hopes to have at least 20 riders by his side on March 23.

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## [Le Race](#)

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