

SA solo adventurer, Riaan Manser

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Internationally recognised South African solo adventurer, Riaan Manser, pedalled his way into fame by cycling around the African continent, completing the gruelling 36,500km trip in two years, two months and 15 days in December 2005.

He topped this achievement, which won him the Out There adventurer of the year award in 2006, with another world first last year. In July 2009 he succeeded where others had failed by completing an unsupported 5,000km paddle around Madagascar in a little specialised 5.5-metre kayak.

His journey around the fourth largest island, paddling in an anti-clockwise direction, took eleven months. This feat, as simple as it sounds on paper, puts him amongst the top adventurers of the world.

Battling waves, relentless winds, hot sun, a foot infection, and many blisters, the Pretoria-born Manser had to brave sometimes treacherous beaches to land each night and set up camp. ((

As a solo adventurer there was no back-up crew with a hot cooked meal and a cold beer waiting for Manser as he paddled ashore. Fresh water, food, and safe shelter were things he either had to carry, find, catch, or barter for.

((A far cry from his previous job as an account manager for health care company Prime Care, Manser paddled through cyclones, was detained on suspicion of being a mercenary, was robbed at gun point, spent two nights in a Madagascar jail, and is currently working hard at recounting the journey and getting his second book to the publishers and on the shelves by April of this year.((

Around Africa on my Bicycle was Manser's first book, sharing his first epic journey through 34 countries, which took more than twice as long as expected.

((Manser, a human relations practitioner by training, says he started his solo adventurer career when he set off on his trip around Africa on September 9th, 2003. "I left the [Cape Town] Waterfront to the applause of my five sleepy friends and a dog. It was not the glitz and glamour people think it was," says Manser.((

Simply put, adventuring, especially solo adventuring, is not as glamorous as it sounds. "Solo world's first adventurers automatically have death and failure as the major risks. It's not fun having to accept death for an exercise that few appreciate through the madness of normal rushed life."

Manser says he enjoys going to places that not many people have been to, as well as the feeling of personal achievement. The downside of adventuring for Manser is the loneliness, the financial problems he had before Windhoek Lager offered him sponsorship, and not being able to fulfil normal life goals like having a family. But Manser says he's not complaining.((

Manser turned to adventuring in 2002 when he realised that he was "way, way off track" in pursuing the dream of being simultaneously happy and successful. "At the time I didn't know or dream that I'd end up where I am now. Others who read my story are impressed. If only they knew how chuffed I am with myself that for once in my life I employed action and changed, rather than just sitting and complaining," says Manser.((

Manser, who says he drives his Jeep Wrangler conservatively, bar using the pavement crawling options too often, currently pays the bills through public speaking engagements. (As a youngster growing up in Richards Bay Manser dreamt of becoming a fireman. "I mean, which primary school kid doesn't think a shiny fire engine is the coolest ride in town?" quips Manser. "Then I really wanted to be a vet above anything else. Geez, I'd still like to see that happen one day. It probably will.")

The other goals harboured by our home-grown down-to-earth adventurer who likes to snack on a good boerewors roll or an extra hot bunny chow, he would like to be a father one day, and aims to establish his No Food For a Lazy Man sports trust.((

No Food for a Lazy Man was his motto and "number plate" while cycling around Africa. The aim of the sports trust is to bring about positive social change for children in South Africa by encouraging investment in sport infrastructure and equipment.((

Manser, who admits to being a top performer at school until hormones and sport interfered with academia, hinted that there might be a new adventure on the horizon, but could not be pressed into giving more details.((

When not adventuring, Manser likes to spend time at home with his dogs, cats and pig, Russell. "Because my work has me away from civilisation for extended periods, I cannot wait to watch a full S14 season on TV," says Manser who is also a fan of SA's Got Talent. This article was written by Sharon Davis for Absa's eizine for Platinum clients

