

# ***Tempt Yourself Thin***

BY LISA MARSHALL

**The best way to get lean just might be to give in to temptation—to tantalize yourself with the reward of new clothes, a special getaway, even a new bike. Meet six BICYCLING readers who shed a total of nearly 650 pounds with the promise of a big payoff, discover their secrets for transforming into fit cyclists, and learn about the intriguing science of incentive-based weight loss.**

# JEFF BURRESS

Wilmington,  
Delaware

**REWARD**  
A bike ride  
around Lake  
Tahoe

**POUNDS LOST**  
**113**



Photography by Chris Sembrot

**J**eff Burress was kicking back on his couch, remote in hand, watching a mountain stage of the Tour de France in 2010, when he witnessed something that would change his life.

“All of a sudden this guy just comes out of nowhere, all by himself, and closes the gap [to the lead group],” Jeff, 33, recalls. The metaphor was not lost on him. “Watching someone be so strong and come from behind really motivated me. I said, ‘I am going to do that.’”

He was hardly in racing shape. Years of grinding out long shifts as a restaurant chef and indulging in late nights of booze and cigarettes had transformed the once-slim hockey player into a flabby guy he barely recognized. A few months earlier, he’d stepped on a friend’s scale and been shocked to find he’d gained nearly 100 pounds over eight years. He had vowed that morning to quit partying and go on a diet. But his motivation just wasn’t there.

Inspired by the fit cyclist on TV, Jeff went to the local bike shop right away and told the owner he wanted a road bike. “He literally laughed at me,” Jeff recalls. “He said, ‘I think you might be too big for a road bike.’ He was just being honest. I shook it off and bought one anyway.”



Instead of parking himself at the bar after hanging up his chef’s whites for the evening, Jeff started slogging out 5-mile rides under the glow of streetlights, clad in basketball shorts and sneakers. His back spokes snapped under his weight more than once. At one point, an angry driver nearly ran him off the road, then threw a soda bottle at him. Undeterred by it all, Jeff started getting up at 5 a.m. so he could do longer rides before work. He could see his body changing. “I’d look in the mirror at these big leg muscles. It was addictive.”

## Jeff’s Tips

### 1.

“I quit smoking, drinking, and eating junk food cold turkey. That was the only way I could do it. No excuses.”

### 2.

“You cannot work all the time. You have to have a personal life. I started using cycling as a way to get away from all the hours and all the stress.”

### 3.

Stop complaining and go after what you want. “A lot of people like to sit around and wait for things to come to them. It’s up to you to make it happen.”



By February 2011, riding 25 miles three times a week, he had gained fitness but still hadn’t lost much weight. A woman he was dating told him about an event coming up that June: America’s Most Beautiful Bike Ride—72 miles around Lake Tahoe in California and Nevada, with 4,000 feet of climbing. He made a deal with her: If he could lose 50 pounds, they’d ride it together for his 31st birthday.

He cut out junk food and began eating several small meals a day, rather than three supersized ones. He also started clocking a 70- to 80-mile ride once a week with as much climbing as possible. “I trained hard for that trip,” says Jeff. “After that the weight kept coming off.”

Today Jeff is a trim 172 pounds, and cycling has become a way of life. “This isn’t something I ever thought would happen to me,” he says. “It’s an amazing feeling.”

This past July, he entered his first race—the Liberty Criterium in Malvern, Pennsylvania—and earned ninth place in his Category 5 division. His reward for finally being lean enough to compete? A limited-edition Cervélo S5 Team, just like the ones ridden in the Tour.

The guy at the bike shop isn’t laughing anymore. “We’re friends now,” says Jeff. “Every time I go in he’s like, ‘Hey, where’s the rest of you?’”



## TRISH PAGE

Vancouver,  
British Columbia

POUNDS LOST

60

**REWARD**  
A jersey from  
every gran  
fondo  
she rides



Photography by Stephen Wilde



**T**rish Page remembers her aha moment in vivid detail.

In January 2012, on a trip to Arizona with her teenage son's hockey team, the group had decided to hike 1.5 miles to the top of 2,700-foot Camelback Mountain. Trish had always been athletic and outdoorsy. It should have been easy. But when shortness of breath stopped her well below the summit, it hit her. "I was one of those moms who could not make it to the top of the mountain," the 44-year-old pediatric nurse recalls. "I found that really hard to take."

Back home, she looked at a photo from that day and hardly recognized herself. She stepped on a scale and the truth stung. She had gone from 133 to 188 in just a

few years, thanks in part to overnight hospital shifts that made sticking to a healthy diet nearly impossible. "I always thought, I've put on a little weight but I'm not that unhealthy," Trish says. "I was wrong."

A former runner who had long been intrigued by the idea of doing a triathlon, Trish signed up for a training course. But the running hurt her knees and made her feel awkward and unwieldy, and she was bored by the endless laps in the pool. Riding, however, was a revelation. "I could go 20 or 25 kilometers right away and I didn't feel heavy."

She bought her first road bike, dropped the triathlon class, and—on her first ride with a friend—dangled a powerful incentive out

## Trish's Tips

### 1.

"I eat my salad first." That way, by the time you get to the main course you're already filling up. "I also always eat my dinner off a smaller plate." It looks like more food, she says, so it feels more satisfying.

### 2.

"I map out my riding schedule at the beginning of each week, anchoring it around my long ride on the week-end, with smaller rides during the week."

### 3.

"I put fenders on my bike and bought decent rain gear. I hate the idea of riding indoors."

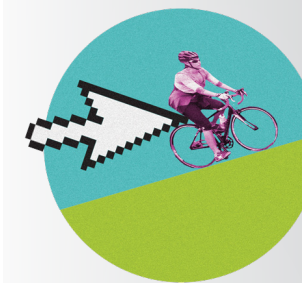


ahead of herself. Her riding buddy was headed to the RBC GranFondo Banff that August in Alberta with a group from work. "I very jokingly suggested I join them," she recalls. "They were all fit and healthy. I was neither." But her friend encouraged her and, on impulse, she signed up.

She began keeping track of her weight loss on MyFitnessPal, and her mileage and pace on Strava. "I wasn't about to go all the way to Banff and not finish in front of everyone I work with," Trish says. The more she lost, the faster she got and the easier climbing became—a positive feedback loop that kept her motivated. By the day of the fondo, she had lost 50 pounds, a victory she rewarded with a sleek new jersey from the event, and an entry into another (the RBC GranFondo Whistler) a month later.

To keep herself on track when the cold Canadian winter set in, she put three more fondos on her calendar for 2013—both Banff and Whistler, plus the Campagnolo Gran Fondo New York. "I didn't want to wake up in April and have all that weight back on," says Trish. "I told myself that if I kept it off, I'd buy a jersey from each of the rides."

She lost another 10 pounds over the winter and now has five jerseys in her collection—and counting. And instead of taking an extra large, she now fits into a medium.



## Digital Assistance

Apps and websites that help you drop pounds and reap rewards

### DietBet

Join or create a four-week challenge online or via a free app by kicking into a communal pot. Lose 4 percent of your body weight by the end and split the cash. [dietbetter.com](http://dietbetter.com)

### Fatbet

Get a group together, sign up for a free online account, and wager who can reach their weight-loss goals. Losers pay winners, and it doesn't have to be money—the threat of singing karaoke, for example, can keep you on track. [fatbet.net](http://fatbet.net)

### GymPact

Use this free app to commit to how many days a week you'll work out and how much you're willing to pay if you don't. Meet your quota and get paid by those who don't. [gym-pact.com](http://gym-pact.com)

### HealthyWage

Groups of five compete online against other teams for \$10,000 to lose the greatest percentage of weight in 90 days. [healthywage.com](http://healthywage.com)

### stickK

Set a goal via an online commitment contract, and donate to an organization or person of your choice if you fail. [stickk.com](http://stickk.com)—Jenn Miller





## John's Tips

### 1.

"I avoid white food. White equals sugar and starch. This makes it easier to choose healthy foods without having to read labels or count calories."

### 2.

"When I first started, I wrote down my daily habits from the moment I woke up until bedtime. It made me realize all the routines I had to break."

### 3.

Once you've reaped your reward, use it as incentive to keep the weight off. "I work hard to prove every bike is worth all the money I paid for it."



## Eyes on the Prize

Why it pays to reward yourself for dropping pounds—and how to do it right

If the promise of fending off diabetes and heart disease, or being around to play with your grandkids, isn't motivation enough to step away from the Krispy Kreme and go for a ride, consider this: Would you do it for a new bike, an exotic vacation, or a pile of cash?

Chances are, the answer is yes.

"People are hardwired to make choices in their short-term interest," says Steven Driver, MD, an instructor of preventive medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. Research dating back decades shows that people often choose immediate gratification (\$10 today) over a benefit they have to wait for (\$11 next week), even if it's not rational. Blame evolution. When resources like food were scarce, it made sense to gobble up whatever was at hand rather than bank on an uncertain future, says Driver.

Now that few of us face such a scenario, we need different motivations. At a time when more than two-thirds of American adults are overweight or obese, mounting research suggests that tantalizing dieters with material rewards (and the threat of material losses) helps them lose weight and keep it off. Many employers now offer insurance premium discounts or cash bonuses to those who kick unhealthy habits. "Trying to motivate people based on long-term consequences can be more difficult than focusing on short-term gratification," Driver says.

"We have solid evidence that as things get more expensive people do them less, and when things get cheaper they do more," says Dean Karlan, PhD, a behavioral economist at Yale University and cofounder of the weight-loss website stickk.com (see "Digital Assistance," page 43).

In a study that Driver worked on as an internal medicine resident at the Mayo Clinic, researchers tracked 100 obese volunteers as they tried to lose four pounds a month for one year. Half could win \$20 each month if they met their goal; if they didn't,



## JOHN ESGUERRA

Northridge, California

### REWARD

A series of new bikes

### POUNDS LOST

100



Photography by Mathew Scott

As an average-build kid growing up in Manila, Philippines, John Esguerra would meet his buddies after school to pedal the dirt roads and vast rice fields near his neighborhood. "It was about freedom and the chance to explore new things," says the 44-year-old IT systems administrator.

But after his family relocated to Los Angeles when he was 17, he traded bike rides for late-night partying and home-cooked meals for Carl's Jr. And—despite having lost his father at age 46 to lung cancer—John began smoking half a pack a day. By his 18th birthday he'd gained 25 pounds. By his 30s, he was pushing 300.

On the eve of his 40th birthday, John awoke with severe heartburn that lingered for weeks, burning his throat with every swallow. "Until that point," says the father of two, "I thought I was invincible."

he was hammering out 40 to 60 miles up to four times a week. Meanwhile, he swore off soda, replaced his beloved white rice with more nutritious quinoa, and traded unhealthy snacks like Doritos for raw almonds.

By 2010, he'd lost 60 pounds—a milestone he celebrated with a new Marin Alpine Trail 29er mountain bike. By 2011, he'd shaved off another 40 and rewarded himself by buying a superlight carbon road-bike frame on eBay. For keeping the weight off, he hit a Fourth of July sale last year and upgraded from his first mountain bike to a Giant Trance X 29er 2.

After work, he now dons a headlamp, switches on his handlebar lights, and joins a new group of friends for night rides. "Yeah, it can be expensive, especially when you get hooked on it," he says. "But unlike my previous expensive habits, this is contributing to my life, not my death."





they'd have to fork over \$20 instead. The other half received no such promise. The incentive-group members lost nearly four times as much weight on average as the others, and 62 percent completed the program. Only 26 percent of the control group stuck it out all year.

There are few immediate benefits to trying to slim down, and plenty of costs—huffing and puffing on those first rides, desperate cronut cravings. A decrease in blood pressure or a lower number on the scale often take time to materialize, but material rewards offer something tangible. While most research has looked at cash incentives, when a reward has particular value to you (hello, new bike), it can lead to a host of intrinsic benefits—a sense of accomplishment, camaraderie with other cyclists—that can keep you motivated long term. Here's what to consider if you plan to tempt yourself thin.

**SIZE MATTERS** >> “The larger the incentive, the more likely it will lead to behavior change,” says Jeffrey Kullgren, MD, a research scientist at the Veterans Affairs Center for Clinical Management Research. But don't put your reward too far into the future or you'll run out of motivation. Instead, establish mini rewards on the way to the big payoff. Say you've promised yourself a \$1,000 bike for losing 50 pounds. Put aside \$100 for every five pounds lost.

**UP THE ANTE** >> “People are motivated the first week or two,” says Robert Jeffery, PhD, a psychologist at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health. “But as time goes on, it's harder to maintain self-control.” If you have a lot of weight to lose, consider making your rewards incrementally larger.

**RECRUIT OTHERS** >> Recent research published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* concludes that incentive-based weight loss works even better in an office-pool-type scenario. In the study, some individuals received \$100 a month for losing one pound per week. Others were put into teams of five and told that those who met their goals could split a \$500 pot. Six months later, the group dieters had lost 11 pounds on average, while those going it alone lost an average of just 3.7. “It can be very motivating to know that if you don't meet your goal, your incentive goes to someone else who did,” says Kullgren, who was the lead study author.

**ADD A STICK** >> Rewards are more popular, but for many people penalties are most effective, says Driver. If this sounds like you, find a friend or website to keep you accountable and make you pay up if you fall short.

**DEVISE A MAINTENANCE REWARD** >> The hardest part of weight loss is keeping it off, says Karlan. Once you've reached your target, set an incentive-based goal that helps you stay there. —L.M.

## GET LEAN NOW!

Go to [BICYCLING.com/getleannow](http://BICYCLING.com/getleannow) to purchase our exclusive eight-week weight-loss training program. You'll receive daily workouts, detailed ride descriptions, fitness tips, and more.

## ANNE FARAWILA

Richland,  
Washington

**REWARD**  
A new  
Specialized  
Roubaix

**POUNDS LOST**  
**110**



Photography by Andy Reynolds



**A**s a scientist with three kids under the age of six, Anne Farawila hardly had time to fret about her size. She'd rise at dawn to pack lunches and shuttle kids to day care, snack her way through a 10-hour workday, tackle dinner, tuck everyone in, and collapse in front of the TV. She had always been heavy, weighing 200 pounds by age 14.

For most of her life, her weight didn't bother her. “I always thought I could do anything no matter what,” says the 38-year-old. But by her mid-30s, work stress and three pregnancies had pushed her to an unhealthy 265. She couldn't even play with her kids. When they went roller-skating, the pain in her ankles kept her on the sidelines. Taking them to soccer practice wiped her out. Even a

flight of stairs became a struggle, Anne says.

She started logging her food intake using an app called Tap & Track, and was stunned when it revealed that she was eating 4,000 calories a day, twice what she needed. “I always assumed I was fat because of my genes or my hormones,” she says. “I had no idea how much I was eating.”

She began substituting olive oil for butter, skipping her bedtime snack of bread and Brie, emphasizing vegetables and lean meat, and cutting back on carbs—and she dragged her husband's clunky cruiser to her office at a sprawling research campus and rode it to meetings. To her surprise, simply feeling the wind in her hair was exhilarating, and she started riding more frequently.

Within six months she'd dropped 70 pounds. Then she hit a plateau. “If you're really big, it's easy to lose weight at first,” she says. “But then your body starts to fight you. I needed something else to look forward to.”

So Anne made herself a deal: Once she lost another 30 pounds, she'd treat herself to a new bike. “I'd be climbing a hill thinking, if I had a better bicycle, I'd be a lot faster,” she says. It was a powerful incentive: Six months later, she became the proud owner of a Specialized Roubaix. And today, she is a chiseled 5-foot-9 and 155 pounds. She not only transformed her body, but her priorities as well. “I cut my work hours to 30 a week,” she says. “Late afternoons and Saturday mornings are ‘me time’ to ride.” She typically gets in a combined 150 to 200 miles a week, and finished a century this past summer in which she averaged a strong 19 miles per hour.

The family is also reaping rewards. “We are all so much happier,” she says. “I have the energy to play soccer with them and take them for bike rides. I couldn't do that before.”

## Anne's Tips

**1.**

“Don't put work first. Put yourself first.”

**2.**

“Instead of two big plates of pasta with meatballs, I now have a small plate with a couple of meatballs, a little pasta, and a big salad.”

**3.**

“Even when I was on the most strict diet, I still allowed myself one little piece of chocolate a day. You can't deprive yourself too much.”



## DONALD & KELLY SORAH

Wise,  
Virginia

POUNDS LOST

260

Combined

REWARD

A new bike  
(him) and  
charity ride  
(together)



Photography by Jonathan Robert Willis



**S**eventy-five miles into the Bike MS Breakaway to the Beach ride in the Carolinas this past September, Donald Sorah had a surprising thought. It was his first 100-miler, but he felt so strong he wanted to sign up for a second century scheduled for the following day. His only hesitation: Could his wife, Kelly, make it? Her longest-ever ride was 65 miles.

Before he could bring up the idea, she said, “Am I completely crazy to think that we can do the 100 tomorrow?”

A few years earlier, the thought of either of them riding even just a few miles seemed impossible. Donald, 40, a college music professor, had ballooned to 315 pounds. Kelly, now 30 and a school music teacher, weighed 265.

Both had been big since childhood and had tried to lose weight before. When they met, in January 2007, Donald had recently dropped 85 pounds on the low-carb South Beach Diet (on their first date, he took Kelly out for salad) and invited her to try it, too. Six months later, on their wedding day, they’d

each slimmed down, but once Kelly got pregnant, they both started eating for two.

Put off by the thought of returning to a restrictive diet, Kelly started pedaling around on her old hybrid. When she got bored riding alone, she bought Donald a bike for his birthday in June 2011.

He struggled to stay upright during a test ride in a parking lot. But on an 11-mile trail ride, with Kelly pulling their young son in the trailer behind them, he had an epiphany: “It was the first sport where I could burn calories and enjoy myself at the same time.”

In just a year, Kelly was running races and competing in triathlons, and Donald entered his first race, the 40-mile Guest River Bicycle Rally,

## The Sorah’s Tips

1.

“You have to be in it together,” says Donald. “If one person brings home doughnuts, it’s harder for the other one to resist.”

2.

Sign up for a charity ride. “It really motivated me because I knew I was doing it for other people,” says Kelly.

3.

“Surround yourself with like-minded people—either in person or online,” says Donald. It’s motivating when they comment on your progress or share their own successes, he says.



in Coeburn, Virginia. “I bonked so hard I had to stop at a convenience store midrace to get a Gatorade,” he says. “But I was ready for the next one.”

He began to dream of a new, lightweight bike with all the latest gadgets. But at 230 pounds, he felt he still hadn’t earned it. “I told myself if I reached 199, I’d go for it,” he says.

In March 2013, Donald got his new bike, a Specialized Roubaix, and by fall he had put more than 3,000 miles on it, slimming down to a svelte 163. Kelly has since gotten a Specialized Ruby to celebrate losing 100 pounds. On those bikes, the duo ultimately completed the 200-mile weekend. “It’s incredible to think that one decision to buy him a bike changed our lives so dramatically,” Kelly says. **B**

## ➔ You Lose, You Win!

Tell us why you want to slim down and we’ll help one lucky winner get started. Submit one paragraph (100 words max) that explains your goal and your commitment to losing weight. The reader with the most compelling story will receive a consultation and regular check-ins with BICYCLING’s own Fit Chick, Selene Yeager, author of the upcoming book *Bike Your Butt Off!*, and a free eight-week training plan. If the winner meets his/her goal at the end of eight weeks, he/she will be eligible to receive a brand-new Raleigh road bike worth \$2,700. To enter and for official contest rules, go to [BICYCLING.com/youloseyouwin](http://BICYCLING.com/youloseyouwin). No purchase necessary. Void where prohibited. Contest runs 12/10/13 to 1/11/14. Must be 18 or older and a legal resident of the US or DC (excluding AZ and PR) or Canada (excluding the Province of Quebec). Sponsor: Rodale Inc., 400 S. 10th St., Emmaus, PA 18049.