



"HELLO, YOU DON'T KNOW ME but my name is Cadel Evans."

So begins a conversation with the man whose first name alone has been spoken with the kind of reverence reserved for the likes of Bradman, Makybe Diva and Lillie in the pantheon of Australian sport.

On July 24, 2011, the 34-year-old cyclist seared himself into the public consciousness with a performance ripped straight from an X-Men film. If, of course, mutants shaved their legs.

Evans's challenge was clear-cut and it came down to the numbers. Over the 42.5 kilometres ahead of him, he had to reel in the 57-second lead held by rider Andy Schleck of Luxembourg. Beat this mark and he would become the first Australian to win the Tour de France. Fall short and he would place second, just as he did in 2007 and 2008.

What happened next is the equivalent of Shane Warne's "ball of the century" delivered six times in a single over. It's Phar Lap waking up late, missing the start of the Melbourne Cup but running the field down anyway.

Within 34 minutes of setting out to the town of Créteil, Evans had Australians rubbing their eyes in disbelief as they planned the next day's sickie excuse. He was now leading the race. Over the remainder of the stage, he proved that his 67kg frame was made up mainly of guts and heart as his lead eventually blew out to one minute and 34 seconds. He'd done it. In a sport where time's measurements need to be broken into fractions, he had obliterated all that lay before him. On only four occasions in the previous 50 years had a rider come from behind to take the Tour in the final time trial.

Back home, the magnitude of the boy from Armidale's achievements was beginning to click into gear. While many described Evans as a hero, several media personalities rankled the public by claiming he didn't deserve the accolade. In a way, the knockers were right. Evans wasn't a hero just yet; that title would be withheld until Australia saw how he dealt with his success. He was undoubtedly a star of the highest magnitude. To become a hero would take grace, humility and gratitude in the face of victory. And in the days and weeks that followed his magnificent triumph, it became clear that Evans was all three wrapped in Lycra.

With his mentor and trainer Aldo Sassi — who passed away in 2010 — on his boy's shoulder, Evans made his victory about the people who

CADEL EVANS
IS THAT ALL TOO
RARE BEAST: A
FREAKISHLY GIFTED
ATHLETE WHO'S
ALSO A DECENT
HUMAN BEING.
SO WHEN GLORY
CAME, HE HANDLED
IT GRACIOUSLY.

believed in him back when all of Australia was asking "What's a Cadel?" It was for his family, his wife Chiara Passerini and his teammates (the latter were crucial in tactically positioning him in a road race Evans describes as "a game of chess on wheels").

Evans cites experience as the foundation on which his victory was built. "Having come close on several occasions, you learn what to expect of yourself: when to pace yourself, when to be aggressive and when to give it everything you've physically got and then some more. But the one thing I value most is the ability to stay calm under tough conditions."

At least until he's off the bike. Evans was overcome by tears during his presentation on the Champs-Élysées and a subsequent parade in Melbourne. "It was only afterwards that I became aware of the amazing Australian interest in how I was doing in the race," he admits.

"I drove out of Melbourne airport and there was a three-storey billboard of me on it! It was such a warm welcome and something I'll never forget. I'm still taken by surprise that someone will come over while doing their shopping to congratulate me."

With the two near misses, the recently deceased mentor, the beautiful Italian wife and the ultimate dramatic triumph, Evans's life is the stuff Hollywood dreams are made of. Surely, one of your Spielbergs, Camerons or even Tarantinos would have approached him with a biopic offer by now? "No," he laughs. "But someone did put together a bootleg DVD of me racing, called *Yell for Cadel*. I don't know if my story is worth a movie, but as long as a good-looking dude plays me I'm not fussed."

As both the oldest rider to win the Tour since 1923 and the youngest-ever winner of a World Cup series mountain bike championship (aged 20 in 1998), life has come full cycle for Evans. But aside from finding time to rejuvenate at his base in the Swiss town of Stabio, he's showing no signs of slowing down. He has his eighth Tour in 2012, along with a packed calendar of races in the regions of Europe where cycling is a religion and alpine regions its cathedrals. In his words, it's all about "keeping doing what I've always done."

What many people don't realise is that what he's always done is more than racing. In 2007, he donated

\$50,000 prize money to the Amy Gillett Foundation, named after the Australian cyclist who was killed in Germany in 2005 when she was struck by a car. He also supports Ian Thorpe's Fountain For Youth charity, which treats illness and disease in people under 20, inspired by the fact the Aboriginal commune of Barunga, where Evans lived until the age of three, was one of the areas in need. Then there's the outspoken support for Tibet, eloquently stated in a cycling undershirt bearing the country's flag, which millions of spectators glimpsed on him in 2008.

In his own quiet way, Evans has lifted the bar for what it means to be — there's no other word for it — a hero. Rest assured Cadel, we all know who you are now. ☺

SPORTSMAN OF THE YEAR

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
SYDNEY FC

words DAVID SMIEDT illustration GABRIEL MORENO



ONLINE NOW!
TO SEE THE
PRIDE OF
AUSTRALIA
MAKE THEIR
ACCEPTANCE
SPEECHES GO TO
GQ.COM.AU