



welcome to sutherland



As a young boy growing up in Canbarra, Australia, Rory Sutherland was selected from a talent pool by showing he had the ability to be a cyclist. Rising through the ranks in Australia he made the jump to Europe and raced for Rabobank, gaining valuable racing experience. However in the 2005 Tour of Germany, Sutherland tested positive for clomiphene, a drug

that helps women become pregnant and is claimed to help reduce muscle damage in endurance athletes. After an investigation it was determined that Sutherland had taken the drug by accident and there was no misconduct. But Sutherland was suspended for 15 months. After his suspension was served, he relocated to the United States in 2007 and has been racing for

Health Net presented by Maxxis every since. *ROAD* spoke to him while he was relaxing at home and contemplating chasing the tornadoes that had touched down in the Boulder, Colorado area that day. Luckily for us he decided to stay inside and watch “Terminator 3” instead. That was the tone of our interview; serious comments followed by tongue in cheek humor.

What's your background and how did a boy from Canberra get into cycling? My mom is a P.E. teacher and cycling has gotten bigger in Australia. In 1995 Australia got the Olympic Games they figured out that there were a lot of sports Australia could get a medal in, but didn't have the infrastructure. So they started a government-funded program to get school kids and test them to see who were the best athletes suited for a sport. It was called the Talent Identification Program. It was for the Olympics and the future. I did the testing at my mom's school and was chosen for road cycling and rowing due to my running test and endurance. It was a cool way to start.

Several strong riders are from your area of Canberra in Australia. Michael Rogers is only three miles away from where I grew up. Michael's older brothers were professional and his other brother was Junior World Time Trial Champion when it was in Colombia (1995). Stephen Hodge, Neil Stevens, Matt Heyman. There are quite a few of us.

What is the terrain like there? We have 20 million people in the country which is the same as the US so there is plenty of room I guess. Where I'm from it is the capital of the country and is a planned city. There is an infrastructure with wide shoulders and I think there are only 300,000 people. It has good rolling terrain. It's not mountainous, but up and down.

Phil Zajicek was considered the GC guy, but has been sidelined with Crohn's Disease, now you've stepped up. It was tough in the beginning. Every team goes through a similar thing; you go into the season with high aspirations on how things are going to go and in a perfect world that is great. But I think if you look back at last year with our team, Toyota-United, and other big teams is that things change. Riders get sick or injured. You can't predict what will happen. So it is a big shock every year that it happens that you don't have your full squad and it's funny because everyone is shocked, but it isn't really a shock. I missed Phil in the beginning of the year. We had a few issues in Redlands which isn't anything against the guys on the team. It's about missing a guy that is integral in helping you to be your best at the finish line. Tour of California and Georgia I learned that it is important to have a great team, but it is a lot easier to play off of other teams. It's a lot easier to be a small fish in a big pond. You have opportunities like the Brasstown Bald stage where I can sit on a wheel all day as teams burn-out riders, like Chris Horner. He was pulling before the climb and so was Tom Danielson. That was great. We didn't have to do that since it wasn't our responsibility. You find it easier to just race the race and not worry about specific riders. Having Phil would be great, but it doesn't make or break the race. And the same goes for me if I was in that situation. It was great to have him back at Mt. Hood and at the Joe Martin stage race. You can see that the season is progressing and their form is coming. It has been an interesting start of the season.

How have you been enjoying the stress of leadership? It comes down to me directing Tim (Johnson) around. That is the highlight of my life so far.

There are a lot of other great moments, but that is the pinnacle [laughing]. Leadership is a very difficult thing to get into and getting used to that certain amount of pressure. It is quite easy in cycling to pass it on to someone else. All you have to say is that you are not feeling good on the road and pass it on to someone else. Then the stress is gone. But I think this year I have been put into the position with people becoming sick or whatever and I found out that it is something I can handle and that makes me race better.

You recently won Mt. Hood and the Joe Martin stage race. What were the critical days where you think you won those races? I think you can look at those stage races and see through individual performances that you get up on GC to a certain extent. In both tours I took the leader's jerseys in the time trials. Then you have days like in Joe Martin where I spent maybe 200 meters at the front the whole race and at Mt. Hood one lap of the criterium on the last day. That goes to show what the team does and how they work for you. It is an amazing thing. Joe Martin was a little more controlled. There weren't as many big teams, so the train was more manageable. We had a lot of strong guys that could sprint and are real power guys. At Mt. Hood it was a little different. On the Saturday stage that went up to the ski resort, that was tough. It was 95 degrees and out in the middle of nowhere with rolling terrain. A few of our guys had a collective bad day, so it was a little bit of concern. There was a great throw-down from other teams and it was real racing. That wasn't even the worst day of the race! I wasn't sure of being able to hold onto the lead until the last 400 meters of the last stage. That's pretty scary. This was a different scenario than what I am used to. That's what I mean about the leadership thing and having a bunch of teams riding against you. The mental concentration that I had to have has taken its toll on me more than travel or racing. I think that anyone going for GC there is added stress that is put on you because you have to be alert every day at every moment.

That all falls on your shoulders. Exactly! Especially in crits that finish the tours. That is a scary thing because you can lose it in the last 3 kilometers. You know how it is with crits here; it is a very stressful scenario and both tours finished with crits. There are no processional stages here.

Every day is an opportunity for a team to take victory. Sure and that's racing. I love that as much as the next guy who might have a leader's jersey. There is a procession stage and you don't need to worry about it. But that's not the way things are done here. You have to deal with it.

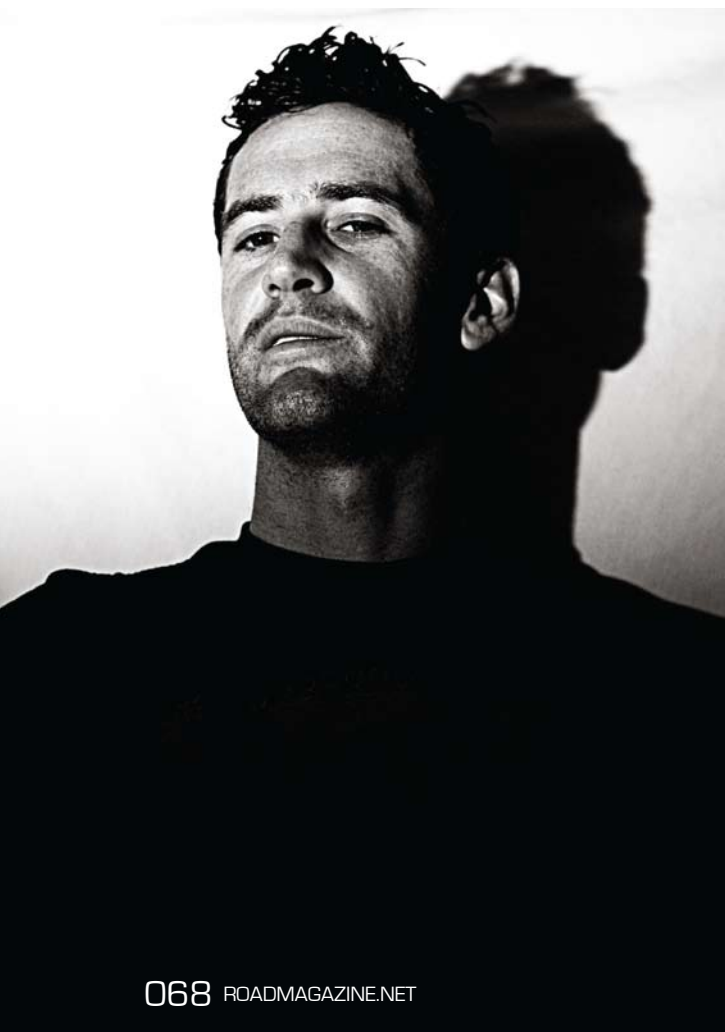
Fourth place on the Brasstown Bald stage. Take us through that stage. It is one of the stages that is most remembered in US racing because it is such a good stage. It is a true mountaintop finish. You see some of the Grand Tours overseas, but you don't have the opportunity to see it here at that level. It's a tough day. Like I said, we have the opportunity as a smaller team to play off the bigger guys and let them try and win the race. Anything to us is a bonus. Sure you want to win a stage or do well in GC, but if it doesn't go as planned, it doesn't go as planned. It's not the end of the world. Basically that day I felt that things were going well. I recovered from my red-eye from Sea Otter [Monterey, California] and things were going well in the team. It was a wait and see type of day. I was going well and felt good on the bike. It could have been easy to say I was happy where I was instead of racing the finale. It could have been easy to say I can't



race with those guys. With me specifically, I'm a 170 pound guy going up with 120 pound guys. It's a tough thing mentally to switch. That day I just wanted to try it and see what I could do. If it worked out, it worked out. There were no problems.

It looked to us at the finish line that if the climb had been longer you would have caught them. Did you feel you were catching them? I rode my climb and planned on doing that. And that's how I race anyways. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn't. I'm fairly strong minded about what I think will work out for me, and like I said sometimes it doesn't work out. You make mistakes. That day I felt like I could do this and could climb that climb. I can't climb it the way they can, so I found my tempo at the bottom and went with that. I went as hard as I could for 5 kilometers and when it gets really steep it will hurt me more. But with my size I can back it off and when it flattens off I could pick it up again. From the turn at the bottom I was 7th or 8th wheel and I was one of the first guys in that group to get dropped. By the top I was watching those guys who went with the attacks get popped. It doesn't really let up that much. I just rode my own race. It's weird to say that the stage was one of my best days on the bike, not necessarily feeling wise or whatever, but mentally I did what I had to do and I'm really happy on how I played it myself. I didn't win, but it is one of my best days on the bike. When the opportunity to have a go comes along you have to take it.

Four days in the Most Aggressive jersey. How did you do that? Did it just fall into your lap? Nothing like that falls into your lap. It takes a lot of anger.



You don't strike me as an angry type. I'm not [laughing]. I can be if people do stupid things. The Aggressive Jersey wasn't a goal, but with the domestic teams it's that or the climber's jersey, or any jersey, and to get on the podium is huge for the sponsors. It's not something we go for specifically. I'm just going to race the race and if the press decides then the press decides [The press is asked to vote on who should win the Most Aggressive Jersey before the conclusion of the stage]. I was there to race and it was just a bonus. It's something that the sponsors get excited about.

You are leading the NRC. I know it's not a big goal of the team, but will you try and defend it?

It's not an absolute goal. We can see from last year how the season shapes up. Toyota and us had a great season last year with a lot of wins in different places and the NRC was won on a bit of luck and a bit of injury. That was the way it went last year. It's great to be leading it right now, but I'll be f*!ked if I just give it away to someone. We don't go to certain races to get more points, but you win races and the points come. That's the attitude we had last year and that's the attitude we have this year.

You started your career in Europe with Rabobank.

Do you miss racing in Europe? I have tough moments. I really do. I know at some level I know I can do it. I've done it before. I'm stronger and racing smarter these days, and getting more experience under my belt. There are some Classics that it hurts me a little bit that I'm not there, but it does go away. I love it here and it's not a necessity. I've been lucky to do a Grand Tour [2005 Giro] before. When you are growing up, that is a pinnacle. All of those are aspirations, but I don't need it to survive, and at this moment I don't think I'm willing to make the sacrifices to do 11 1/2 months in Europe.

So you're happy to race here? For sure. But you don't know what will happen in a year or two. It depends on opportunities with contracts here or there. But at the end of the day I found somewhere where I like to be. It wasn't that I didn't like the people overseas, but the ones I have here are the ones that really appreciate racing. I really appreciate my teammates and there is more camaraderie. It's tough to be in a sport that isn't really recognized. We all know the US pay rate for racing and it's not like you can retire after a few years. There are a few small shitty races you have to do and you may not get as much credit as the guys do overseas, but I like it here and I'm happy. That to me is more important than being in a race like the Tour de France.

Wikipedia says you keep a blog which includes "antics." Can you elaborate? I don't know where the antics come from. Isn't the Wikipedia site just run by people who can add stuff? We don't get up to mischief. We don't get into any trouble. Maybe it's based on the fact that there is enough racing crap on the internet and I write about stuff that people actually want to hear about.



Like this conversation. Exactly! It's a lot more relaxed.

When you and teammate John Murphy sword fight in Wal-Mart who usually wins (check out Rory's blog for video footage)?

That was actually the first one and we might make that a tradition, an Arkansas tradition. We might make it more around the country. Murphy is a powerful guy, so that's a tough one. It all depends on if he's been on the front all day.

Maybe something you would determine at the end of a Tour? I'd like that because I'm a bit older than John and my recovery might be better. That would give me an advantage. We could make this a whole series that becomes bigger than the sport [of cycling].

How is it being Tim Johnson's roommate on the road? We like to room together. Tim and I are very different in what we are good at and how we approach people. We have a good relationship. He keeps me calm and cool on the road. Stuff that he has to deal with and worry about is what I don't have to, and vice versa.

Can you confirm or deny that Tim Johnson leaves behind a brown eyed mullet in the hotel rooms?

I can't because I'm out of the room first because he is usually slower. We could make some calls to the hotels and talk to the maids. *R*

Check out Rory's blog: justrory.com for up to the moment shenanigans, antics and various Australian slang words.