BMX Racing

by Bill Gutman

1 BMX means “bicycle motocross.” If you like riding a bicycle fast, and if you like a good challenge, BMX racing may be the perfect sport for you.

2 You have to be an outstanding rider for BMX racing. You also have to be in top physical condition. You can’t worry about an occasional bump or bruise. You are going to fall—usually when you and another rider collide.

3 Some riders prefer freestyle BMX—doing jumps, wheelies, and other tricks. There are freestyle contests, but a freestyle rider performs alone. He is judged only on his skill with his bike.

4 In BMX racing, you are going head-to-head against your opponents. It’s a race to see who can cross the finish line first. You have to give everything you have for the whole race. You have to be competitive. You are racing to win.

How BMX Racing Got Started

5 BMX racing began in the early 1970s in California. Young bicyclists wanted to do more than just ride around on their bikes. So they began racing and doing tricks.

6 In 1970, a motorcycle movie called On Any Sunday showed motorcycles riding over rough terrain and flying high into the air. The movie gave some young riders the idea to make tracks with bumps and hills for bicycle racing.

7 The young riders quickly learned that their bikes just couldn’t take the pounding. There were bent rims, broken spokes, and cracked frames. The riders had to try something different.

The BMX Bicycle

8 Soon bicycle manufacturers began to make a new kind of bike—the BMX bike—just for racing. With 20-inch (50-centimeter) tires, the bike was smaller and lighter than a regular street bike.
The BMX racing bike also had a very strong frame. The new bike was strong but light, and could go very fast. It could take the pounding a rider gave it, whether racing on a BMX track or doing freestyle tricks.

BMX bikes cost from about $100 for a basic model to $600 or more for a racing model. A bike that you buy at a shop is called a stock bike, no matter what the cost. Some racers like to customize or “trick out” their bikes. That means changing the bike to make it faster and better.

If you want to race, a good rule is to buy the best bike you can afford. Learn about it. If you want to make it better, buy better parts when you can. Before long, you will have a great racing bike.

The Track

BMX racers run on dirt tracks that are 800 to 1400 feet (240 to 420 meters) long. Most are level, but a few of the longer ones run downhill. The dirt on the track should be packed hard for better traction.

Even level BMX tracks aren’t flat. They have jumps, bumps, and turns. A good track usually has one big jump and several smaller ones. Turns to both the right and left are called S-turns. Banks on the turns are called berms.

Most tracks also have a series of rounded bumps placed close together. These are called whoop-de-doos or whoops. Some big jumps have flat tops, called tabletops. Racers fly off the tabletops during a race.

It takes real skill to speed over these BMX tracks, especially in a close race.
The word “collide” comes from a Latin word meaning “strike together.” Based on this information, what is the meaning of “collide” in paragraph 2?

A. bump into with force  
B. hit with an object  
C. injure by bruising  
D. swing against

Which paragraph does the photograph of the racers best help the reader understand?

A. paragraph 1  
B. paragraph 2  
C. paragraph 3  
D. paragraph 4

The information in paragraphs 7 and 8 best supports the idea that manufacturers develop

A. equipment to introduce a new sport  
B. equipment when there is an existing need  
C. products when the old ones are not safe  
D. products when the old ones are not purchased

As they are used in paragraph 10, what do the words “trick out” mean?

A. The rider adds fancy trim and wheels.  
B. The rider spends a large amount of money.  
C. The rider adds parts to improve performance.  
D. The rider makes changes that create a unique appearance.
Read these sentences from paragraphs 2 and 11.

You have to be an outstanding rider for BMX racing.

If you want to race, a good rule is to buy the best bike you can afford.

What can the reader conclude from these sentences?

A  Tricks and expensive gear make BMX racing appealing.
B  BMX racers need practice and money to be successful.
C  Skill and good equipment are important in BMX racing.
D  BMX racers will win with the right preparation and tools.

Which of these is more important to BMX racing than to freestyle BMX?

A  danger
B  difficulty
C  expense
D  speed

Based on the information in the passage, how would freestyle BMX best prepare a rider for BMX racing?

A  by helping the rider develop more skills
B  by helping the rider stay in good condition
C  by helping the rider escape serious injury
D  by helping the rider avoid harmful crashes
Directions
Read this article. Then answer questions 23 through 29.

Road to the Red Planet

by Tyrus Cukavac

1 It takes me 17 hours and 5 different airplanes to get from New York City to the spot on Earth that's most similar to the planet Mars. I finally arrive on Devon Island, in Canada. It is about 900 miles from the North Pole. Now I have some idea of what it's like to be on the Red Planet.

2 Humans are many years away from being ready to go to Mars. But some scientists are already getting ready for the trip. Every summer, 25 to 30 experts gather on Devon Island. They are part of the Haughton Mars Project. Through this project, the scientists do research to prepare for future space exploration.

Much Like Mars

3 National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) scientist Pascal Lee started the project in 1997. He's come to the island every summer since then. Lee tells me that he chose Devon Island partly because it has an impact crater. That is a large hole in the ground caused by a meteorite. The surface of Mars is filled with such craters. With its frigid desert environment, Devon Island's Haughton Crater comes closest to the craters on Mars.

4 However, Devon Island isn't exactly like Mars. For example, on Mars, temperatures can drop to as low as -200°F. That's about four times as cold as it ever gets on the island. But like Mars, no one lives on Devon Island.

5 For most of the year, the island's terrain is covered in snow. That means people can work there only during the summer months, when the average temperature is about 34°F. (In fact, the island gets 24 hours of sunlight most days during the summer!)

6 At Haughton Crater, I watch the scientists perform experiments to practice working in a Mars-like environment. Some wear spacesuits as they walk across the terrain. Others test how well their robot rovers collect rock and soil samples. The scientists even set up a greenhouse. This is to see how plants might grow under mostly lifeless conditions.

7 "We're giving ourselves tasks that are very similar to what humans on Mars would have to do," Lee tells me.

No Help From Outside

8 The scientists must also be able to get by without any help or additional supplies from the outside world. That is just as it would be if they were on Mars. For much of the time,
cell-phone and Internet service is very limited on Devon Island. But this actually helps the scientists. How? It lets them figure out what they would need to make human explorations of Mars successful and safe.

"This is what the earliest pioneers must have experienced when they started building a town," says Lee.

**A Future on Mars**

Scientists have been studying Mars for decades. Recent robot missions there found possible signs of frozen water. This suggests that life may have once existed on Mars. It might even exist there now. (Experts say that such life would be tiny, probably no bigger than a single cell.) Human exploration of Mars could help provide answers about whether life was ever there.

NASA officials have said that they hope to put astronauts on the Red Planet by 2030. Until then, the scientists I have met at Haughton Crater are working to make sure that humans will be ready for such an adventure.
23. What does the word “terrain” mean as it is used in paragraph 5?

A. bodies of water  
B. plant life  
C. surface features of the land  
D. area with small amounts of rain

24. Which detail best reflects the main goal of the Haughton Mars Project?

A. “Now I have some idea of what it’s like to be on the Red Planet.” (paragraph 1)  
B. “That means people can work there only during the summer months…” (paragraph 5)  
C. “Others test how well their robot rovers collect rock and soil samples.” (paragraph 6)  
D. “Recent robot missions there found possible signs of frozen water.” (paragraph 10)

25. Which sentence best supports the main idea of paragraphs 3 through 5?

A. “It is about 900 miles from the North Pole.” (paragraph 1)  
B. “It lets them figure out what they would need to make human explorations of Mars successful and safe.” (paragraph 8)  
C. “Scientists have been studying Mars for decades.” (paragraph 10)  
D. “NASA officials have said that they hope to put astronauts on the Red Planet by 2030.” (paragraph 11)

26. Which evidence best supports the point the author makes in paragraph 11?

A. Scientists are practicing tasks they might perform on Mars.  
B. Scientists work on the island during the summer months.  
C. Scientists have gathered on the island since 1997.  
D. Scientists are limiting phone and Internet use.
27 The **main** reason no one lives on Devon Island is because the island

- **A** is difficult to reach  
- **B** has no Internet service  
- **C** is cold most of the year  
- **D** has continuous sunlight all summer

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28 How have recent robot missions to Mars affected future exploration by humans?

- **A** The missions determined when humans can safely travel to Mars.  
- **B** The missions suggested that humans will be able to survive on Mars.  
- **C** The missions discovered proof of life on Mars that only humans can confirm.  
- **D** The missions raised new questions about life on Mars that humans may answer.

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29 Why does the author quote Dr. Pascal Lee throughout the article?

- **A** Dr. Lee is the scientist on the island who has the most information about Mars.  
- **B** Dr. Lee was hired by NASA to be the next scientist to explore Mars.  
- **C** Dr. Lee started the Haughton Mars Project and has remained involved since its beginning.  
- **D** Dr. Lee lives at the research site on Devon Island and conducts experiments throughout the year.
I gasped when my friend dangled a meal worm between her thumb and index finger and offered it to me as a mid-morning snack.

I could never, I thought . . .

Even though Supphatra and I speak different languages, we find that we can talk in smiles. She showed up at my door this morning with two large cloth shopping bags and a timid grin. I grabbed a bag, nodded, and we walked to Chatuchak market. I was glad to have a friend in Thailand.

Since our family moved to Bangkok six months ago, I had learned many things. In Thailand, all parents give their children a nickname, a chue-len, and it is often cute or funny. Supphatra’s nickname is Kitty. My name is Anna, but Kitty calls me “Lek Lek,” which means ‘very small.’

We wove our way through the bustling Thai marketplace. Supphatra clutched a grocery list from her mother. Her other arm was locked around my elbow in a protective grasp. Canopies and awnings extended out from all the stalls, making me feel like I was being led around a maze of underground tunnels. It was so exciting! We dodged people, potholes and pools of murky water. Busy shoppers laughed and haggled over prices.

Every now and then, Supphatra would stop and buy something from a vendor. I only recognized a few of the foods: fruit like Rambutans and several herbs like sweet basil and mint. Rambutans look like small red and green apples covered with strange bristles. When Supphatra peeled off the shell, the fruit inside was white and sweet. We giggled as we ducked in and out of narrow aisles. She also picked up some meats, curry powder and some very unusual looking vegetables. I’ve never been very brave when it comes to trying new foods. I hoped that my mom was making spaghetti for dinner tonight.

All of a sudden, Supphatra picked up the pace and flashed me a playful smile. She led me to a small cart deep within the maze of vendors. I smelled something both sugary and smoked. It was different from the pungent smells of curries and the sweet aroma of steamed rice that had crossed our paths earlier. I cringed when my eyes came to rest on an assortment of roasted bugs atop the cart. I could see grasshoppers, crickets, meal worms, bumblebees and beetles. Supphatra giggled.
“Aloy Maa!” she exclaimed. My Thai teacher had taught me that this meant "delicious!" although I wasn't too sure of that. I stepped back as Supphatra selected several insects which the vendor placed in a small paper bag. Then, I watched in shock as Supphatra lifted a small grasshopper to her mouth. The insect made a popping sound as she bit down. She closed her eyes and smiled contentedly. I felt queasy. I didn't try the meal worm that she offered me either.

On our walk home, Supphatra turned to me. She motioned a spoon nearing her mouth, pointed at me, then at her house and asked, “Lek Lek, dinner?” Her eyes took on a pleading expression as she waited.

Images of all the unusual foods that we'd just bought came rushing at me—not to mention the bugs. I looked down at my feet. “I... I... have to ask my Mom, Kitty,” I stammered.

I raced home. Of course my Mom would say yes, but what would I possibly tell Kitty? I couldn't speak Thai well enough to explain that the dinner menu terrified me. And I hated the idea of lying to her. I paced back and forth across my bedroom floor. I looked out my window at Supphatra and her brother kicking a soccer ball in their yard. I headed towards them.

“Kitty, my mom said ‘no’...” I lied. Supphatra’s shoulders sank. A pained expression came over her face, but she forced a smile.

I slowly walked back towards my house. I'm a terrible friend, I mumbled. I thought back to when Supphatra and I first met. We couldn't speak to one another, but we spent hours riding our bikes together in the neighborhood. I loved being her friend.

I knew what I had to do. After getting permission, I ran towards her house and knocked on the door. Supphatra opened it, throwing her arms around me.

The rest of Kitty's family was already seated at the table. I smiled weakly at my friend. A large bowl loaded with steamed rice was passed around first. Timidly, I scooped a little onto my plate, followed by some curried meats and vegetables. Next, a papaya salad and a clear noodle dish called *Yam Woonsen* came around. A trickle of nervous sweat made its way halfway down my forehead before I soaked it up with the back of my hand. My heart thumped wildly in my chest. When I looked at Supphatra, she smiled at me encouragingly. I took a deep breath and let the air out again very slowly.

I scooped up a giant spoonful of curried vegetables and rice and popped it in my mouth. The flavors made my taste buds jump! To my surprise, the meat curries were only a little spicy. The papaya salad was both peppery and sweet, with a hint of lime. It was my favorite.

“*Aloy Maa!*” I exclaimed out loud. Supphatra's family laughed.
When Supphatra offered me a beetle after dinner, I politely shook my head ‘no,’ but grinned ear to ear as I watched her and her brother gobble down the insects.

“How about dinner at my house tomorrow, Kitty?” I asked her, making accompanying hand gestures. She suddenly stopped eating, and her eyes grew as wide as Rambutans.

I was sure that she had never tried spaghetti.
In paragraph 7, what does the author’s use of the phrase “picked up the pace and flashed me a playful smile” indicate?

A  Anna and Suphatra need to hurry to finish their shopping.
B  Anna has difficulty keeping up with Suphatra in the unfamiliar place.
C  Suphatra enjoys the time she spends shopping with Anna.
D  Suphatra expects that Anna will be surprised by what happens next.

Which word best describes how Suphatra is feeling in paragraph 12?

A  confident
B  confused
C  disappointed
D  friendly

How does paragraph 14 fit into the structure of the story?

A  It resolves the conflict that is presented in paragraph 13.
B  It explains a problem that is solved in paragraph 15.
C  It introduces the feelings of the narrator.
D  It adds mystery to the events.
Read this sentence from paragraph 15 of the story.

Timidly, I scooped a little onto my plate, followed by some curried meats and vegetables.

What does the word “timidly” suggest?

A  unhappiness  
B  uncertainty  
C  friendliness  
D  bravery

Which sentence best supports the theme of the story?

A  “Since our family moved to Bangkok six months ago, I had learned many things.” (paragraph 4)  
B  “I’ve never been very brave when it comes to trying new foods.” (paragraph 6)  
C  “She closed her eyes and smiled contentedly.” (paragraph 8)  
D  “My heart thumped wildly in my chest.” (paragraph 15)

Why does the author most likely include both paragraphs 16 and 17?

A  to contrast for the reader Anna’s earlier fears and her enjoyment of the food  
B  to explain to the reader why Supphatra’s family thinks Anna is funny  
C  to help the reader understand the different flavors in Thai dishes  
D  to show the reader how delicious Thai food is
What does the narrator's description in paragraph 18 most likely suggest about Anna?

A  She is relieved that the dinner has ended.
B  She accepts that her friend is different from her.
C  She is determined to try unusual foods.
D  She is curious about her friend's actions.
How to be a Smart Risk-Taker

by Steven R. Wills

If the key to becoming a pioneer or a trendsetter is to be a smart risk-taker, then how can we learn to become smarter risk-takers? Some people figure this out by accident, or stumble on the secret of success—but most of us have to take charge and make these things happen for ourselves. If you want to be a smart risk-taker, you need a plan. Here’s one:

STEP 1: Learn how to evaluate yourself.

How do you feel about the word “risk”? Does it make you think of danger, of anxiety, or of losing something? Or does it make you think of possibilities, of excitement, and of adventure? We aren’t all the same, and we need to be honest about it.

How do you feel about yourself? Sure, we all feel lousy about ourselves sometimes (although usually more than we have reason to). But when you think you have done well, what traits do you think made you succeed? Stanford University professor Dr. Carol S. Dweck discovered something interesting about the praise we receive when we do something well. She found that, if students were praised for being “smart,” they were less likely to take risks than students who were praised for “working hard.” Why? It seems that, if we think we do well just because we are smart, then we are less willing to try things where we might fail. However, if we think we are hard workers, then we are more willing to try things where we have to work hard—after all, that is what we are good at, right? Next time you succeed at something, recognize the work you put into it and the risks you took—don’t just figure it came to you because you were “smart” or “talented.”

Do you need to have things “all set” before you do something? Are you afraid of being rejected, and need the approval of others? Do you have to always be right? Are you unwilling to take the consequences for your actions? Do you look to others to solve a problem because you don’t believe you can do it? Do you need to play it safe? These are all ways of thinking that will get in your way if you want to be a smart risk-taker. If they describe you, then you know what you have to work on first. Remember, the way you think now can be changed—so get started.

On the other hand, are you willing to be vulnerable? Can you accept the consequences when things don’t work out? (Keep in mind that we are not talking about dumb risks.) Are you able to do things even though you aren’t likely to get the approval of your friends? Can you confront a problem and not blame it on someone else? These are the traits of a smart risk-taker. On to STEP 2.
STEP 2: Learn how to evaluate risks.

Evaluating a risk isn't really difficult—although it can take some effort to do well. Think of it this way: A smart risk is one where the potential upside outweighs the potential downside. For example: Should you ask ___ to hang out with you? Best potential upside? He/She says “yes,” you have a great time, and maybe you get together again. Worst potential downside? He/She says “no,” and you are embarrassed for maybe a whole day. If that's the worst that can happen, you would be crazy not to ask, right?

Of course, sometimes it's more complicated than that. However, you can always write down the risk and make a list of upsides and downsides. Be thorough—you don't want to miss anything—and then examine your list. Which side carries more weight? (Remember, it's not the length of the list that matters, it's the importance of the items on the list.)

As you become more practiced at evaluating risks, you will be surprised to find that many risks have very limited downsides, but potentially awesome upsides. Clearly, those are the risks you should go for. This seems so obvious, yet we don't usually take these risks. Why not? One reason might be that, in your list, the downsides are all immediate and the upsides are all long term. Keeping long-term goals in mind will also help when your work doesn't seem to be paying off. Sometimes you just have to slug along. It's the old “no pain, no gain” thing.

STEP 3: Learn how to “make the move.”

Remember the slogan for Nike® shoes, “Just do it”? Well, there you go. You can only stand on the end of the diving board for so long. Sooner or later you are either going to have to climb back down (feeling lousy every step of the way) or you are going to have to dive. There is no third choice.

If you seem stuck on this step, don't give up. There is a reason, and you need to find out what it is. Brainstorm for a bit. Are you stuck because you don't really want this? Are you stuck because you think there is a better way to reach your goal? Pull out some scrap paper and make some lists. List alternative solutions. List reasons for not taking a risk in this case. List ways your life would be different if you didn't take a risk. The answer to your dilemma is in there somewhere.

STEP 4: Try it out.

Try some small risks first. Try joining a club in school (the drama club?). Try learning a new skill (Piano? Lacrosse? Cooking?).

Once you get the idea, the only thing left is to be on the lookout. Smart risks (also called “opportunities”) come up all the time. Be ready to be a smart risk-taker.

Nike® is the registered trademark of Nike, Inc.
According to the author, what is the value of being a smart risk-taker? Use two details from the article to support your answer.
The Young Man and the Sea

by Zac Sunderland

1 I sailed around the world. Alone. At age 16. Here’s the amazing tale of my 13-month adventure.

Inspiration Leads to Action

2 Extreme sleep deprivation was just one of the challenges I faced on my journey that took 13 months and 28,000 miles to complete.

3 I got the idea for my trip after reading “Dove” by Robin Lee Graham, a teen who sailed the world alone in the 1960s. I started sailing when I was 4 and loved it. Sailing is such an extreme sport. It’s such an adrenaline rush. I bought my boat for $6,500 and my dad (a shipwright), my friends and I worked on it for four months to get it ready for the trip.

4 I was 16 when I left Marina del Rey, Calif., on June 14, 2008. Reaching Hawaii, the first stop, took longer than expected—23 days—because the winds were mostly light. When I passed the continental shelf, Pacific rollers—tall swells like super-long mountains in deep water—jostled my boat. Seeing the Hawaiian Islands for the first time, I felt elated because I had just crossed an ocean alone.

5 It was so amazing that I just started laughing.

Challenge After Challenge

6 In the early days of my trip, I slowly got used to the loneliness and lack of sleep. It was not unusual for me to stay up for 48 hours. It is weird how you can fall asleep standing up.

7 As I continued across the Indian Ocean, the Intrepid was accosted by strong winds. I was rocking and rolling on turbulent seas one morning when I found about 200 flying fish swept onto the deck. I hoped they would wash away so I wouldn’t have to pick them off.

8 Then I found the lighters on my stove had all died and my matches were damp. I counted 32 left and rationed them so I could keep heating my food.

9 Keeping my matches dry, it turned out, was the least of my problems. I was still on the Indian Ocean one night when I was awakened by a loud, crashing sound and felt the boat being slammed around. I ran on deck and saw the tiller, used in turning the rudder to steer, had broken. The boom, which holds down the sail, had crashed to the other side of the boat and cracked in two pieces.
My main sail was sagging, but I managed to secure the boom. I was lucky the winds and current were in my favor as I maneuvered between two reefs to reach Home Island, a tiny island where I found a carpenter who made me a new boom from a chunk of teak.

One blistering hot day, I was working on deck and thinking about taking a swim. Then I saw a white shape moving under the water. Looking closer, I saw it was a shark. Not just one shark, but a school of them. These dangerous creatures were not like the dolphins in the Pacific that play around the boat. I was glad I hadn't taken that swim.

Every day I got closer to home. Approaching Grenada, an island in the Caribbean Sea, I was trounced by a 20-foot high rogue wave at 2 a.m. When I saw the massive wave, I grabbed the mast and held on. It knocked the boat sideways, swamping it with water. I lost my electronics for four days. My parents were very relieved when I was finally able to call and let them know I was O.K.

For the Adventure

On July 16, 2009, I returned to Marina del Rey. I had celebrated my 17th birthday (eating a microwave cake) at sea. At the time, I was the youngest person to sail solo around the world and the first to do it before age 18.

I could not have made this voyage without my parents, who let me do it. When I started my trip, I was doing it more for the adventure and experience of it than for the record. I am glad to have the record because it shows that young people can accomplish much more than what is expected of them and what they expect of themselves.
How did the author’s reasons for making the voyage change over the course of his adventure? Use two details from the article to support your response.
"The Young Man and the Sea," what lesson can be learned from the author’s trip around the world? Use two details from the article to support your response.
How does Zac Sunderland from "The Young Man and the Sea" demonstrate the ideas described in "How to be a Smart Risk-Taker"? Use details from both articles to support your response.

In your response, be sure to

• explain how Zac Sunderland from "The Young Man and the Sea" demonstrates the ideas described in "How to be a Smart Risk-Taker"
• use details from both articles to support your response