

## Freakonomics

The Hidden Side of Everything



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### A Q&A With *Amazing Race* Host Phil Keoghan

By [Linda Jines](#)



New Zealand native Phil Keoghan is best known as the host of CBS's reality show [The Amazing Race](#), each episode ending with Phil at some exotic international finish line, solemnly informing each team where it has placed in the day's contest.

Phil himself has a thirst for travel and adventure: he broke a world record for bungee-jumping, wrote a [book](#) encouraging readers to live every day as though it's their last, and renewed his wedding vows underwater while hand-feeding sharks.

The following interview took place two days before the end of his [40-day, 3,500-mile bicycle trip](#) across the U.S. to raise money for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. He had already

ridden 50 miles that morning and had 50 more to go; but he was kind enough to squeeze in a few questions.

**Q**

In a word, the final episode of this season's *The Amazing Race* is:

**A**

Frantic.

**Q**

*The Amazing Race* teams logged 40,000 miles this season — who gets all those frequent-flier miles?

**A**

(Laughs.) Not them. But many of the miles we do are on airlines that you've never heard of, and on airlines you never want to fly again, and on airlines that are using old airlines' planes that have gone out of business.

**Q**

Do you ever get "player envy," where you just want to leap off the mat screaming, "Move over, you idiots, and let Daddy show you how it's done"?

**A**

Absolutely not. I've spent my entire career doing ridiculous, crazy, wild things, and at this point in my career I'm very happy to watch ordinary people doing extraordinary things. I get a big kick out of it.

**Q**

What one characteristic do all successful racers have in common?

**A**

I would say curiosity, and respect.

**Q**

How do you think the game would change if *Race* upped the prize from \$1 million to \$5 million?

**A**

I don't think it would change it all. I think at the end of the day, people aren't racing as much for the money as they are for the opportunity, and the opportunity is worth more than \$1 million. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that even with the \$1 million — or \$10 million dollars — you could not buy.

**Q**

Do you think the H1N1 Swine flu virus will have any impact on next season's race?

**A**

It could. Do I think it will affect what we want to do? No. We're very aware of challenges that are faced by travelers, and we always have been; we've had to make changes because of political situations and medical situations, and so I think we can take measures to be able to deal with anything.

**Q**

Let me turn the tables a bit and ask you three questions straight from *The Amazing Race* contestant application:

What famous person most reminds you of yourself?

**A**

Oh, boy. Well, let's put it this way: the famous person that I wish I was most like would be **Clint Eastwood**. He doesn't remind me of myself; I guess I would just like to emulate him in some way. I have tremendous respect for his abilities as a director, producer, actor, writer ... I think he is amazing.

**Q**

What most scares you about traveling?

**A**

I don't really get scared by travel. I guess getting sick — becoming incapacitated and not being able to enjoy the experience.

**Q**

What is your primary motivation for being on *The Amazing Race*?

**A**

Curiosity. New experiences. Testing my limits. Facing new fears. Getting outside my comfort zone. Meeting new people. Trying new things. To me, it's all about exploration, and if I had been born a few hundred years ago, I would have really aspired to being some kind of explorer.

**Q**

In my dream version of *Amazing Race*, who would win: Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Eleanor Roosevelt, or Dr. Phil?

**A**

(Sings) One of these things is not like the other, one of these things is not the same. I'm gonna say Phil would probably have the ability to manipulate the relationships so that he'd convince them it was a good idea to let him win. He'd tell the Dalai Lama to just chill, and I think the Dalai Lama would just take a backseat and be so Zen ... Mother Teresa's only motivation for winning would be to give the money away, anyway, and she'd probably get sidetracked along the way wanting to look after somebody. I'm going to say Dr. Phil.

**Q**

Now that you've been on the road biking for 39 straight days, what's worse — the loneliness or the chafing?

**A**

I'm not lonely because I've got my dad with me. But chafing, let me tell you ... The first time I tried [bikers' anti-chafing butter], I was quite tentative — I sort of dabbled with one finger. But

after I realized the benefits of stopping the chafing around the nether regions and everything that we're all blessed with down under, I now use a four-finger application. I dip right into the bucket, and I shamelessly apply it.

**Q**

You took a horrible fall from your bike on Day 32 on some railroad tracks in Ohio. On this trip, have you ever thought for as much as one nanosecond, "Enough already with this bike-riding bull crap"?

**A**

Well, not in those terms. But there was a day when I got really sick [from dehydration] and I ended up in the hospital. I got out of [the hospital] about 1:00 in the morning, and I had to get up and ride the next day.

I rode myself better and got stronger and stronger, but one of the things that kept me going was I met a man [with MS] — Michael — and he had got out of bed for the first time in six months to come and see me, and he could barely stand up. That was a huge motivator, because no matter how bad any of us think we have it, there are people who show tremendous, incredible physical and mental strength. I kept thinking about how hard it was for him just to throw his legs out of the bed, just to get out of the bed.

I really wanted to test myself on this ride, and I definitely went to a place mentally and physically that I had never been to before.

**Q**

So far you've raised about \$100 per mile for MS during your ride. How do you feel about the ride, quantifying it in those terms?

**A**

There's no way to put a figure on the media value of what we've done. So while we've raised a tremendous amount of money — I believe we'll get to \$400,000 by the time we get to New York — I don't know how you could measure the hundreds of stories and radio interviews and TV interviews and good will and awareness that have come from this.

**Q**

Where was your best hamburger?

**A**

At Kewpie's, in Lima, Ohio.

Here are a few quick questions that we ask many famous people we interview:

**Q**

Paper or plastic?

**A**

Paper.

**Q**

London or Paris?

**A**

That's tough; I love 'em both. I'm gonna say London.

**Q**

Better Morrissey song title: "Someone Is Squeezing My Skull" or "I Have Forgiven Jesus"?

**A**

(Reluctantly) "Someone Is Squeezing My Skull."

**Q**

And my final question: As someone who's traveled professionally for over 20 years and who's been to 100 countries, what is your favorite place on earth?

**A**

Anywhere where I'm with people I love.