Photo by Sam Arevalo

With the demands of a part-time job and his senior year at Grafton High School, Alex Docter hasn't been able to log nearly as many miles on the road lately as he would like.

That changed in a big way, as the 18-year-old Docter graduated two weeks ago and fully embraced the Tour of America's Dairyland bicycle challenge. The series, which is sponsored by the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, features competitive racing at 11 locations around the state from June 16 to 26.

"So far this year, I only entered three races but I'm planning on entering all of the Dairyland events," he said last week.

If there is such a thing as home-course advantage in cycling, Docter may have had a leg up on the competition during two of those days of local racing.

The bike shop where he works, Extreme Ski & Cycle, was the corporate sponsor of the series of races held in Thiensville last Friday, and Saturday's Giro d'Grafton was held in his home town.

"It can be a real rush when people are lined up along the street — friends, family and team members — cheering for you," Docter said.

“I love the competitive atmosphere, like when you are in a pack and there are other riders within two inches of you, leaning into the curves. That gets your heart going. I also like the camaraderie of racing against guys that you know.”

Docter has been committed to bike racing for the past three years, riding as a member of the Nova IS Corp Cycling Team from Mequon.

He started as a junior rider (a category 5 competitor) and has performed well enough to enter category 3 races. That is about halfway to the pro level.

“The big difference in being a member of a team is the quality of the equipment I have access to,” Docter said.

“The bike I am racing on now weighs about 16 pounds compared to the 30-pound bike I used to ride. The carbon frame is lighter and a lot more flexible, yet stiff where you need it to be.”

His Trek Madone bike equipped with Ram Rival components is worth about $4,500, although Docter said state-of-the-art racing bikes can easily top $10,000.

Working at a high-end bike shop exposes Docter to much of the newest biking technology, which he characterized as a blessing and a curse.

“I love the job because of the discount we get on gear. But, I easily end up spending half of my paycheck on bike stuff,” he said.

If Docter has his way, that dilemma may eventually be resolved — if he earns a pro sponsorship.

Even at his novice level, he said accepting the $70 prize for winning his divisional race at the Downer Avenue race in Milwaukee last year was satisfying.

“That more than covered the entry fee,” he said.

Docter said his parents support his fascination with cycling, which is a good thing considering his long-term plans.

“They like the fact I have something to focus on, although I would prefer it if racing was the only thing I had to focus on,” he said.

Docter has natural athletic ability, but wasn’t drawn to the traditional sports that Grafton High offered.

“I wrestled and ran in middle school and went out for wrestling for half a season, in high school. Then, I got interested in cycling. It didn’t take long for me to figure out that as long as you kept your bike upright, cycling wasn’t much of a contact sport,” he said.

Like any dedicated cyclist, Docter has had his share of crashes — displaying the “road rash” scars with pride.

He has also made a bit of a meteorological discovery.

“I’ve ridden during a hail storm, which was painful, but also learned that if you wipe out during a rain storm you don’t get hurt as badly because your body tends to skid on the water,” Docter said.

In Docter’s best-case scenario, he will race his way onto the pro circuit. “I would like to get to the point where I didn’t have to work for a living, just train,” he said.

If that doesn’t pan out, Docter has a backup plan.

He intends to study mechanical engineering at Milwaukee Area Technical College.

“My dream job would be to design bike frames, components and accessories,” Docter said.

“In a lot of ways, designing bikes has become the equivalent of designing a Formula One racing car. The difference is that cycling requires the racers to use stock equipment. You can walk into a bike shop and buy a top-end bike, but you can’t buy a Formula One car.”

Until he lands that design job, Docter will be content to push himself to the limits on his Trek.

“What I like most about racing is how it constantly challenges you. You always enter a race planning on winning, and then push yourself beyond what you think are your limits,” he said.

“There comes a point where you get in your rhythm and numbness kind of settles in. Cycling is all about who can stand the most suffering.”