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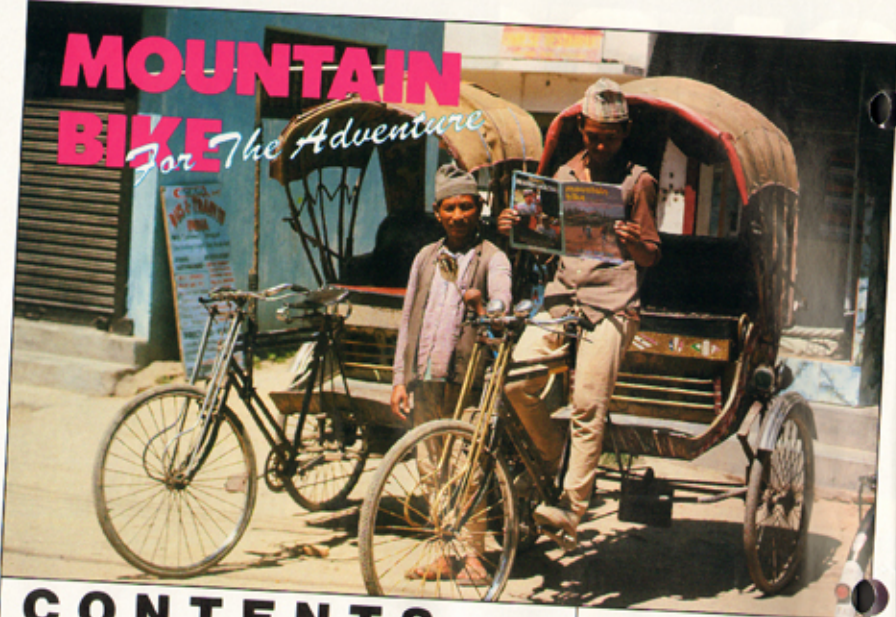
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MOUNTAIN BIKE

For The Adventure



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Nov. - Dec., 1987
Vol. III No. 3

Cover: Dana Hooper on the Petit Balcon Sud. This trail leads to the beginning of the Mont Blanc circuit. John Lapiad photo.

Above: Mountain Bike Magazine adds the rickshaw peddlers of Asia to its readership. Greg Vann photo.

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Editor's Note

by Hank Barlow



WHAT DO ORGANIC gardening and mountain biking have in common? Not much. One is about growing food free of chemicals while the other is about recreating on cutting-edge equipment that is anything but organic. But on a purely philosophical level, perceiving them as two sides of one coin is not so far fetched.

A desperate grasping for straws by an editor barren of subjects to write on? Not at all, the coin of which they can be considered two sides is personal well-being. Sure, well-being can be attained through careful shopping at health stores and joining an athletic club but in reality, that doesn't cut it. Man is a spiritual animal with a soul that needs nurturing. We have this driving — sometimes even desperate — need to periodically immerse ourselves in the natural world.

Sinking fingers into the rich loam of an organic garden is one way to feed that need. So too is passing through the backcountry on the back of a fat tired flyer.

So what's this really all about, you ask. MOUNTAIN BIKE MAGAZINE is now part of Rodale Press, the same folks who bring you *Bicycling*, *Runner's World*, *Cross Country*, *Ski*, *Prevention*, and — naturally — *Organic Gardening* plus a host of other publications.

Our purchase by Rodale is tremendously exciting. Since the premier issue in the summer of '85, we've been frustrated because of all the things we've wanted to do but were unable to do because of limited resources. Now we can kick out the jams with more photos, more adventure, more travel, more technical information, and more environmental and land access updates. The new and improved MBM, starting with the January/February issue, is going to blow your socks off.

I've always said MBM is not about mountain bikes; it's about the experiences we have with them. These wonderful bikes are simply tools to get us into the backcountry.

tools to strengthen and condition our bodies, tools to challenge us into expanding our preconceived notions of what we can do and maybe even of who we are, tools with which we can reestablish relationships with the backcountry. I do not hesitate to state that mountain bikes can change the world nor am I alone in this thought.

No, cycling over a faint desert track or a meandering Forest Service Trail won't stop the cold war or put a stop to crime and hunger. But what it can do is provide relief from modern life, cleansing our minds and bodies of accumulated stress while renewing our relationship with the natural world. If all a ride through the woods does is refresh a person's enthusiasm for life (a guaranteed result), that individual's world will change. The ripples generated by those returning from backcountry forays on fat tired flyers may be slight — like tossing pebbles into the ocean — but at least they exist and that in and of itself is an improvement.

Think of an MBM subscription as a prescription, one small antidote to the world's ills. The more people we can turn onto these wonderful bikes, the more impact we'll have on the world, the more ripples we'll generate. Rodale Press gives us the ability to get into the hands of ever more readers.

Admittedly, the sale generates a touch of sadness. MBM is no longer my baby, I'm now answerable to others and no doubt that will cause changes that I on my own might not have advocated. But the pluses overwhelm any momentary twinges of sadness. At last we can start doing all the things we've wanted to do — new departments, new writers, more event sponsorship. Like a long, challenging ride through the hills after

sitting in front of the computer all day and answering phone calls and taking care of business, joining Rodale Press has infused me with new energy and enthusiasm for the task at hand.

Compounding the excitement of selling MBM to Rodale Press was the conclusion of the Second Annual Colorado Grand Tour. Five incredible days of riding over Colorado's rugged and beautiful mountains got me totally jacked up. Why? Because the folks who undertook the tour proved that what we've been saying all along is right, that events don't have to be designed for the lowest common denominator, that not everyone needs to be taken by the hand and led through the labyrinths of adventure, that the Disneylandization of American backcountry adventure hasn't been completed.

FOR FIVE DAYS, I WATCHED thirty-six perfectly normal people tackle long, arduous routes over terrain most bikers wouldn't even consider riding. Not only that, they were on their own; all we did was show them the way and they went, knowing that to ride out of town was to commit themselves to completing the passage to the next town and that if they faltered, no sag wagon would come along to carry them into town.

They loved it — maybe not every minute but that's the nature of mountain biking. The average age was 35-plus. They rode and pushed (sometimes for longer than they really wanted to) their bikes over one pass after another for five days without a break. All returned with new understandings of what this sport of ours is all about. They even learned that sometimes a proposed route doesn't work out, necessitating a quick divvying of and switch to Plan B. And therein lies the source of adventure: pressing into the unknown beyond our society's accepted comfort zones.

The standard line coming out of the most of the bicycle industry is that some 80% of the people buying mountain bikes never ride off road and of the 20% who do, their idea of going off-road has little in common

what the folks in places like Crested Butte, Moab, and Point Reyes have in mind.

Well, I've got great news for the bike industry: they're wrong. Going off-road is in fact what these bikes are all about and people from Florida to Indiana, from Maine to Texas, from Kansas to Alaska are pedaling into the woods. We aren't looking for some watered-down, sanitized version of mountain biking either; we want to get down and get dirty and have one hell of a good time doing it. The evidence surrounded me during the 1987 Colorado Grand Tour. I just wish representatives from the bike industry had been along; the five days would have been a revelation.

So between Rodale's investment in MBM and the Second Annual Colorado Grand Tour, 1987 wrapped up with a bang for us. I can hardly wait to see what the '88 season brings.

MOUNTAIN BIKE

For The Adventure

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Letters

Editor:

Enclosed is check for \$12.00 for one year subscription to your magazine. I want you to know I have a love-hate relationship with your magazine. I love to get each new issue but I hate to read it because I just want to get on my mountain bike and ride off into the sunset. Keep up the good work!

Ronald Runtelli
Placerville, CA

Editor:

My name is Seth Neiderberger. I am writing this letter to see if I could order the May/June 1986 Vol. 1, No. 6 edition of Mountain Bike Magazine. I address this letter to you because I was one of the teenage boys you saw on the top of the grade between Mill Valley and Corte Madera.

Tonight is the Thursday night ride and I plan to be there. It is the ride we still do you about and was misprinted as the Wednesday night ride. I remember that night very clearly and every time I read that article, a sense of pride runs through me. In that edition there is a section on Steve Potts and Mark Slate. I now own along with my brother a Steve Potts tandem mountain bike that is outrageous. If you're ever in the area, drop by and we'll go for a tandem ride.

Seth Neiderberger
Larkspur, CA

Thought you might like to see what's happening in Santa Barbara. This is one giant step for the sport of mountain bicycling! You might publish this in your next issue to show everyone all is not lost! If you guys are ever in Santa Barbara, give me a call. I'll take you on a ride that will knock your socks off!

Scott Switzer
Goleta, CA

Reprinted from newspaper:
Bike Restrictions Lifted on Trails in Los Padres

Bicycling on trails in the Santa Barbara of Los Padres National Forest is no longer restricted, Ranger Patrick Pontes announced.

A study by Ray Ford, a UCSB environmental teacher and his students found that "mountain bikes" on the trails pose no threat to the safety of hikers and horseback riders, Pontes said.

Mountain bikes have thicker tires, stronger brakes and sturdier frames than other bikes to allow for riding in the rougher terrains away from the roads.

The study, which was commissioned by hiker, equestrian and bicyclist groups, surveyed more than 1,400 trail users and found that:

Bicyclists present no safety hazard.
Trail bicyclists do not cause serious injuries to other users.

A much lower than expected number of bicyclists uses the trails.

"The problems experienced by hikers and others in the past have been due to a very small percentage of bicyclists who are irres-

ponsible," Pontes said in a press release. Opponents of the bikes expressed disapproval.

"We're very disappointed," said Anne Van Tyne, a spokeswoman for the Sierra Club. "We don't feel the study showed sufficient concern for safety."

She said the study may be inaccurate because many surveys were done in the afternoon.

The Sierra Club may appeal the decision, Van Tyne said.

Editor:

I appreciate your obvious concern for the environment, building trails and keeping existing trails open for mountain bike use. I don't know whether or it has been considered, but I'd like to offer a proposal.

For more than 30 years, I've been a wilderness backpacker, an ardent jumper and a 3-speed bicycle commuter. I've done a little horse packing. I'm just now buying a mountain bike, but for several years I covered 20-30 miles a week on old roads in the Sierras on a klunky Korean 3-speed, until I bent the frame. I think if you scratch any type of outdoor person, you will find that whether he or she is a wilder, biker, rancher or backpacker, each has a strong interest in protecting "his" outdoors, which I believe ultimately is the same environment for us all. If we didn't like it, we wouldn't fight for it so strongly.

I haven't recently been a member of the Sierra Club, so I don't know their reasons for wanting to exclude mountain bikes from pedestrian trails. (I do know that members on the Eastern slopes of the Sierras enjoy mountain bikes.) But I suspect that rather than impact on land, they are concerned with literal impacts on people.

From a hiker's point of view, a bicyclist bearing down upon him:

- is coming at a greater speed than the hiker is walking
- has more weight
- has wide-spread metal handlebars
- with lever brakes on them derived from motorcycles

Having experienced similar ideas as a city pedestrian on a sidewalk or path generally wider than a forest trail, I developed the practice, when I rode my bike near a pedestrian on a bike path, of dismounting to pass.

I assume that getting off and on a mountain bike loaded for touring is a lot more work than dismounting from a 10-speed on an asphalt path. But it puts both bicyclist and pedestrian on the same footing, so to speak. It removes the real or imagined danger, of whatever degree, of physical impact. And it might help restore mountain bikes to National Park and Forest Service trails.

I don't yet know how difficult it would be to push a mountain bike past a hiker, let alone a packtrain, going in the same direction on trail. If bicyclists showed courtesy, however, it's likely that hikers and horsepeople would let us "play through."

J. Martin
Tonopah, NV

Mountain Bike Magazine Nov.-Dec. 1987

Editor:

I am planning to start college this fall and before I really get started in the school studies; I was wondering if you might be able to get me in touch with any schools that specialize in the area of frame building or companies that take on apprentice frame builders.

Rick McDonald
Peachtree City, GA

We don't but perhaps a reader does.

Editor:

Enclosed is my check in the amount of twelve dollars for a one year subscription to your magazine. You put out a neat magazine with great photographs.

If you are taking suggestions for future articles, I have one. There are a lot of mountain bikes being ridden hard by a lot of people and a lot of components that fail. I would like to see interviews with custom builders, test riders, racers and enthusiasts where they give their personal opinions about the brand names and models of specific components that they have used with success.

My friends and I ride both road bikes and mountain bikes. We keep our bikes maintained. Headsets and free-hubs last years on our road bikes but we all go through free-hubs on our mountain bikes at an alarming rate. My first freehub lasted one month. I am now on my third in two years. My wife's on her second. One of my riding partners goes through one a month. A few of my friends have gone through headsets in a short period of time. I have seen people on rides carrying crescent wrenches and using them several times during the day to tighten loose headsets. Bullet proof products may not exist yet but the experts must have their opinions of the best. Thank you.

Brian Curry
Seattle, WA

Editor:

This is the first time I've ever written to a magazine. However, I am compelled to do so at this time. I received my second issue and am extremely delighted with the articles and advertisements and am delighted to say that my overall knowledge on this fantastic "sport" (after all, it is a sport isn't it?) has increased a hundred fold!

I am a devoted enthusiast who has been seriously mountain biking for the last four years. Since your magazine is somewhat "slanted" towards the western area of the U.S., we Easterners get somewhat short-changed. A look at your advertisers is a good indicator. Most are western advertisers.

How about some articles on eastern riders, places to ride, advertisers, etc.? I would also like to see a Tech Questions (or something like that) Department where readers can ask tech questions. You could even make up an answer for these questions like the car magazines do! Perhaps this could be the first question.

Dear Such & Such:

I am a serious MTB rider who mostly rides sand trails here in southern New Jersey. The sand at times is very loose and on some

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downhills, the front end will wash out quickly at a high speed. After a rain this loose sand packs hard and the problem then is non-existent.

My bike is a Ross Mt. Ranier sporting 26 x 2.25 Specialized Stampjumper full knobbies. I usually put about 20 lbs PSI when riding in deep sand and 30-40 PSI on harder sand services and use plenty of "body english" maneuvering some of these trails. What is the best overall tire to use for this type of terrain? So far my best success has been with the old time 2.25 balloon tire with a street tread. These tires work fine with low pressure but are easily punctured by thorns and small twigs. What PSI should I use?

By the way, I would really need some advice on the above question. I have been experimenting with tires for about 3 years now.

Keep up the good work!

Mike J. Ruggiano
Vincentown, NJ

P.S. So far I've spent over \$200.00 with your advertisers!

No doubt our advertisers will love seeing your letter. As far as a western bias is concerned, a look through our past issues will show that we've had more articles about eastern riding than Californian riding despite the fact that only a small percentage of our readers are easterners. Also, we can't print information we don't have. As far as tires are concerned, sand is a bear for all tires. But, we've had pretty good luck with Fisher Fat Trax, IRC X-1 Racers, and Specialized Hardpacks. Like you, we run them soft. The trick to cornering in sand is applying enough pressure on the front wheel to carve but not so much that the tire digs in too much.

Editor:

Enclosed is a copy of a letter I just sent to the Sierra Club as a response to your editorial in the July/August issue of Mountain Bike.

As you can tell from the letter, I am in complete agreement with your ideas on mountain biking and the need for a national organization to combat the silliness of groups who seem to think that because we're on WHEELS, we couldn't care less about our impact on good ol' Mom Nature.

If they didn't try to ban us from trails that are as natural to a mountain bike as streams are to a trout, then we could just laugh off their silliness. But they are dead serious. And you are so right — they are a national organization, we're a trout out of water. We just don't stand a chance against a group as streamlined and ready-for-legal-action as the Sierra Club.

Well, maybe my letter to them will have some impact. After all, as a 45-year-old female I can't possibly be thought of by them as representative of the "totally rad" cyclist. But I am representative of what I am sure is a growing number of cyclists — someone who as a kid learned to ride on a one-speed, adult-sized, fat-tire bike, who rode the gravel roads to school, who found out early on how FREE she felt skimming down those roads and trails and who is overjoyed to be able to DO IT

AGAIN on my wonderful, lightweight Rock hopper.

If there's anything I can do to help get an organization going, please let me know. It's "speak now or forever hold our peace" time.

Suzanne Vannell
Troy, MI

Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund
2044 Fillmore Street,
San Francisco, CA 94115

To Any and All Officers and
Whoever Else Will Listen:

I am appalled and upset by what I just read (copy enclosed) in Mountain Bike magazine regarding the Sierra Club's inclusion of mountain bikes with motorized ORV's in its battle to protect land(s).

I am a 45-year-old woman (a birder and nature photographer) who has ALWAYS been an environmentalist. I'm a member of the National Audubon Society, the Nature Conservancy, Friends of the Sea Otter, the Save the Redwoods League, and the Sigurd F. Olson Environmental Institute. Have also belonged to the National Wildlife Federation, the Coastwise Society, and the Wilderness Society, one of whose former presidents, Sig Olson, was a long-time friend of mine.

Ever since I can remember, I've been very concerned about the tremendous responsibility we have as stewards of our planet to protect and preserve our wild (and even not so wild) places. In addition to contributing money, I have written many letters to my government representatives in support of protecting and preserving our natural heritage.

Canoing, camping, backpacking, cross-country skiing — all are loves of mine, and I do them responsibly, practicing "reduced-impact," "go-lightly," methods of living and traveling in the wilds.

I AM ALSO A MOUNTAIN BICYCLIST! TOGETHER, my bike and I weigh less than 145 pounds. Or another way to put it, my bike weighs about what my fully loaded backpack does. I have observed that the indentations left by the tires of my bike, WITH ME ON IT, are LESS deep than those left by lugged soles on some a hiking boot and are CERTAINLY LESS DEEP than those left by horses.

I DO NOT EVER ride irresponsibly! I don't slide the bike or run over turtles or smash wildflowers or side off-trail. I'm safety-conscious and give hikes and horseback riders the right of way. I wear a helmet and ride with appropriate caution since I cannot afford to fall onto my right leg which suffers from chronic tendonitis. I don't want to hurt myself or anyone or anything else.

Mountain biking is like canoing — it's a WAY TO TRAVEL through the wilds, a way that makes me feel FREE and ever closer to nature. Like canoing (and unlike horseback riding), it's CLEAN. Canoes must travel on rivers and mountain bikes must do it on trails. Canoes can't take off through the bush and mountain bikers can't get very far without a trail (not, in most cases, without excess stress and strain on the part of the rider, anyway).

therefore a mountain bike simply isn't capable of tearing up the turf like a motorized ORV can.

There will always be irresponsible hikers, canoers, cyclists and so on who couldn't care less about how much damage they do. The majority of people who canoe and mountain bike LOVE the out-of-doors, are "environmentally aware," and do all they can to protect it.

To lump mountain bikes with motorized ORV's is like categorizing canoes with cabin cruisers, and then deciding that if cabin cruisers would damage a certain river, then canoes would too; therefore, all canoes and all cabin cruisers should be banned from the river. And this without first testing to see if indeed they both damage the river with the same force and in the same way. Ridiculous in the extreme, isn't it?

Mountain bikes MUST NOT be categorized with motorized ORV's (nor even with such bikes as the BMX whose sole purpose is mad-cap racing.) Land-use restrictions simply cannot be pronounced the same for human-powered bicyclists and motor-powered ORV's. Their impact on the environment is not even close to being similar — it's like saying that when a bird lands on the ground, the earth trembles in the same way as when a 747 touches down.

Come On!

My own two feet, my canoe, my cross-country skis, and now, my mountain bike, all ways to get out there, to look, to listen, to absorb the spirit-cleansing calm of nature, to come back renewed, refreshed and even more committed to the preservation of our precious, sacred, irreplaceable wild places.

So, please — THINK — before you ban the bike from areas they are AS MEANT FOR AS IS

the canoe on a river
the ski on snow
and feet on a trail.

Thank you for listening, and for... I hope... responding.

Suzanne Vannell
Troy, MI

cc: Hank Barlow, Editor,
Mountain Bike

Editor:

I am a new member to the enjoyment of mountain biking. I have bought several of your magazines at a local mountain shop in preparation for purchasing my first mountain bike. I find your magazine very helpful in aiding me in making a selection and also I was impressed with your environmental emphasis. I also read with interest your Editor's Note, "It's Time To Organize," in the July/August issue. I would strongly support your efforts to proceed and would be willing to donate (financial) toward creating such an organization.

Enclosed is my check for a year's subscription to your magazine.

Oh, I purchased a Mountain Kitten Elite Trail and I'm really enjoying it.

Don Bouman
Yakima, WA

Mountain Bike Magazine Nov.-Dec. 1987

Mark Slate

Are We Having Fun Yet?



Roy Rivers riding for WTB/Trek at the Ross Stage Race 1987.

HAVE YOU EVER RACED your mountain bike? I mean, started with twenty or fifty or three-hundred other riders ready to go as hard as they can when someone says the word? I bet a majority of you readers have and that the majority of the others have seriously considered it.

Mountain bikers are just naturally a competitive bunch. You've got to be at least a little bit competitive to go out and tackle the kind of elevation gains and losses that give mountain bikes their name. If you go on group rides, inevitably you'll find yourself comparing your skills and training. And if you've been putting in the miles lately, you may well be tempted to prove the superiority of your conditioning, this may or may not mean you are ready for formal competition.

Arriving at a specified time and place and fully prepared to perform at your peak level on previously unseen terrain can be trying. It's been three years since I've shelled out to start a race. I don't miss it much. I remember well the anxiety I experienced just getting to the starting line at the specified time. Race promoters inevitably start late, which just means you'll have the pre-race fitters longer. Once at Whiskeytown in 1984, they started the race ten minutes early! I was in position to start with only fifteen seconds to spare. I never got a chance to warm up until the race was well under way, and even then I felt I was going slower than I should have been. I certainly wasn't performing at my best.

I don't feel the least bit guilty that I'm not racing anymore. I suppose that if I had the speed that the top Pro Am racers have, I might be inspired to compete. Those guys

are really fast and staying competitive with them demands hard core training. And with that comes the possibility of tiring riding into something resembling work. And if it's not fun... don't do it.

A CLASSIC EXAMPLE of this is my pal Joey P, an excellent bike handler with skills and experiences honed in motocross racing. He has an incredible will to compete and improve. I used to be able to beat him uphill then he started riding consistently and placed well in an early Rockhopper. After that, he got seriously fast.

The '85 season started and Joey was ready for the pro circuit. He did well, usually placing in the top ten. He finished the season with a 10th at the '85 Nationals. The season has been fun; he thoroughly enjoyed his constant improvements and traveling to races with friends and teammates. But for the '86 season, he vowed to train harder and get faster... which he accomplished. Only everyone else got faster too. All the weight training, running, and swimming, along with regular training rides, wasn't paying off. The fun of riding and racing was diminishing... it began to feel like work.

Joey decided at the end of the season to quit mountain bike racing while he still enjoyed his bike. He hasn't regretted it. We were touring the course for the '87 Nats when I heard a female racer ask Joey why he wasn't riding. His reply was "I am riding. What does it look like I'm doing here?" She could just as well have asked him why he wasn't out there gracing in determination while bordering on oxygen debt instead of enjoying himself as a spectator.

For some, racing is fun, for others, watch-

ing the race is fun. Racers need encouragement and support. And sponsors require spectators. There's no doubt competition can help mountain biking grow... with the right visual presentation, racing could become immensely popular. But racing also may not help the sport's reputation with the general public. There is already far too much emphasis on the macho "Gonzalez" aspects of off-road cycling.

I RECENTLY READ A very detrimental and biased report in the 9/28/87 issue of Newsweek, a report that seemed to twist every fact and phrase to the negative. I suspect there are some influential people in positions of power with mainstream media publications who have decided that mountain bikes are not a good thing. These people can't afford to present a balanced view. Instead, they give overblown examples of the dangers of mountain biking to offset any positive feelings people may have. They want mountain biking banned. They'll try to damage our credibility no matter what we do. So we should do what we do best: have fun and promote off-road cycling in a positive light. More energy should be expended on events of a non-competitive nature, such as orienteering and poker runs. Racing will continue, as it should, but there are other activities that are as much or more fun.

If I sound anti-racing, I'm giving you the wrong impression. I think racing is a tremendously healthy activity to be involved in but it's also really the only organized event currently available. We should expand our horizons. There's more to mountain biking than speed. Fun is the bottom line and racing isn't the only way to have fun.

Off the Road

Along The Mogollon

by Dennis Coello

(An Arizona route suggestion, and reminder that mountain bike touring is an all-year sport)

I FIRST SAW THE RIM IN 1974 during the final leg of a world ride on skinny tired touring bikes. A friend and I labored up a twisting asphalt ribbon, steadily climbing higher and higher, happily leaving Arizona's low deserts behind and entering the northern high plateau country. To the south in the distance, we imagined could see Mexico through the shimmering heat. The views, when we could see them, were beautiful. Later, I heard about a dirt track running along the drop off's edge for a hundred miles, the Rim Road. I knew some day I'd have to ride it.

Dennis Coello



Dennis Co.

Six cow elk bounded into the woods on my right, angling away from me as they jumped around trees and ran gracefully over rocks and logs. A half mile further on I was thinking of a place to camp when once again my eye caught movement. Two hundred yards ahead of me a large black bear ambled across the road. He walked slowly, in what appeared an almost absent-minded shuffle of hairy legs and shoulders.

What is the Rim, or the Mogollon Rim to use its proper name? It's the southern edge of the Colorado Plateau, a 130,000 square mile plateau stretching from southwestern Colorado and northwestern New Mexico across eastern and southern Utah and northern Arizona and down through which the Colorado River carved the Grand Canyon. The Mogollon Rim marks the boundary between northern Arizona's plateau region and the low deserts to the south. Standing on the Rim amidst green conifers, the world drops dramatically for thousands of feet.

A dozen years passed before I finally fulfilled my promise. A friend dropped me off in Springerville, 150 miles southeast of Flagstaff. It was late fall and storm clouds were gathering at the mountain peaks but I didn't care. I was outfitted for bad weather and had a mountain bike with which had already successfully gotten me through snow.

My plan was to follow Arizona State Hwy. 260 from Springerville to the beginning of the Rim Road just south of Pinetop. Residents told me the best views from the trail were on the last forty of the hundred-mile dirt road but I remained determined to ride its entirety.

Though Springerville is high (almost 7000'), the route west over State Hwy. 260 gains another two-thousand feet of elevation over the first twenty miles. The grades aren't steep but they are long.

I BEGAN THE RIDE IN LATE AFTERNOON, hoping to reach the summit and bed down in the pines. Though only three hours of daylight were left when I started out, that seemed more than adequate for my day. Immediately a stiff wind blew in my face. Halfway up the first leg I caught the smell of rain. The air cooled, the wind picked up, and when I neared the top, I saw blue-gray clouds, like long rows of infantry, stretch out to the horizon. Above me floated the lightest shades while stretched out to the horizon. Above me floated the lightest shades while stretched out to the horizon. Above me floated the lightest shades while stretched out to the horizon. Above me floated the lightest shades while stretched out to the horizon. Above me floated the lightest shades while stretched out to the horizon.

These shiny black ravens rode the winds over my head, their saucy cries warning of the storm they were escaping. By the time I took the second grade, the rain had reached me but I'd already suited up. It's impossible not to get a little wet in storms on tour but if your tent and sleeping bag and panniers are in rain covers or waterproof stuff sacks and if you don your rain gear soon enough, a comfortable passage can still be brought about, I pressed on.

The deluge arrived with a vengeance. I slipped on my goggles, bent low over the handlebars, and took the Arizona Hwy. 373 turnoff for Greer. The narrow band of asphalt through the conifers dipped and tilted past a steep-walled river gorge and in two miles led to a small general store. The owners — a couple in their fifties — kept me entertained with hunting stories while I momentarily escaped the rain. Their season was only days away. But it wasn't rack size or dressed weight I heard about. The tales were of city-slicker Phoenix hunters gone Dan'l Boone for the weekend, the fellow who can't load his gun, the woman who leans her rifle against the rack of a deer she's only knocked unconscious (it rises to run off with her weapon dangling from a hand), and of course the one of a proud hunter who presents his kill to the ranger, only to find he's begged a two-point goat.

A mile further on came a campground turnoff. The road surface of cinders crunched beneath my fat tires and rain-increased weight. An Abert squirrel stood on his haunches like a prairie dog, cocked a tufted ear to inspect the noise, then turned two deep-brown eyes toward me. A pale, shallow lake appeared, looking melancholy in the fog and drizzle which turned her tranquil surface into a thousand smoke rings. Another quarter mile of crunching cinders and I came upon a stolid herd of dairy cows grazing methodically in the rain and staring dumbly in my direction. They looked like workers in the Thirties with the beaten expressions of those who have accepted their fate.

I WOKE TO AN ELK BUGLING REVEILLE NEARBY. It was barely

dawn, and the weak light took on a pale green shade as it filtered into my tent. Raindrops pattered softly above my head, while the fragrance of moist pine needles lay heavy about me. Perfectly alone, the world at peace, these are the moments one recalls years after a tour. But unlike backpacking, where a fire would have been necessary to make coffee or a stove and pot and cooking gear for breakfast, I quickly broke camp and rode into Greer. From woods to town, from solitude to society in minutes. Remove the top-heavy, dead weight of backpacks, add mobility and the option of riding almost anywhere, and you have the beauty of touring by mountain bike.

Greer, and "Pappy's" cafe in particular, turned out to be such a friendly place that I spent several hours enjoying myself, not leaving until warned of a storm heading my way. I pedaled back to State Hwy. 260 and turned west. The summit was soon attained (a bit above 9,000'). The fresh, clean smell of rain was strong but the air was colder than only an hour before. Once more the sky resembled a venetian blind, the darkest shades reserved for those bands lowest to the ground.

I had just crossed onto the Fort Apache Indian Reservation when the snow began. Within an hour, the flakes stood three inches high, with millions more settling quietly to the earth every minute. A pickup went by as I was photographing my bike — black frame and red panniers mangled in white. In a few minutes he was back, window rolled down, a strong face and thick neck in view.

"You okay? How 'bout a lift?" I yelled my thanks (staring around in all that slush had surely not been easy) and waded appreciation. But no, I preferred to ride. A flash of puzzlement darted across his face, followed by a wide, good-looking grin. He understood that I was having fun.

Twenty miles later the enjoyment was wearing thin. In snow I prefer terrain which is slightly uphill or at least level, coasting is too cool. But it was a gradual downhill for most of the way to Show Low (nearly three thousand feet lower than the summit), and the heavy precipitation of the last two days forced me to pass the beginning of the Rim Road. It seemed the Fates had decided I would never ride that stretch.

I SPED OVER THE CONIFER-LINED, PAVED HIGHWAY to Pinedale, Overgaard, and Heber where I resupplied and met a waitress, an attractive, modern-day Annie Oakley poured into a light-blue muslin dress. She told me she'd killed a bear the previous week.

"Not just for fun," she said, her face becoming serious for a moment, "we eat them."

I pulled the long hill west out of Heber, rolled across a series of dips and decided that no matter what, I'd run the final forty miles of the Rim Road to Highway 87. The rain and snow had stopped, the road would dry quickly, and besides, I was told this was the most scenic part of the Rim. I veered off at a sign saying "Woods Canyon Recreation Area."

The route is paved at first then changes to hard-packed dirt and much later to a far rougher surface. After a few miles of intense concentration avoiding ruts, I glanced south between the trees. The view was that of a green Grand Canyon. The earth dropped straight for a thousand feet, then rolled another half mile lower in successive levels. Blue mountain ranges stood off in the distance and I looked out over evergreens and oakies, fall-colored oak and grayish skies.

I RODE THE FIRST HALF OF THE FORTY MILES on a Sunday afternoon with the forest resounding with gunfire. Although unsure which creatures were in season, I guessed it was the Abert squirrel. Then a three-wheeled ATV came roaring down a side road. The wire mesh front basket was a mass of white tails, gray fur, and anguished faces; a Ruger .22 rifle lay strapped across the top. The grinning mustached rider slowed and we exchanged a pair of Western "Howdys."

We talked a while of guns and squirrel hunting and of the route ahead. "By the way, my name's Ed Lockey," he said, offering a mus-

costume than some wild ursine form and I recalled with pity what the waitress in Heber had told me: "Bear meat in a crockpot is delicious."

A perfect place to camp lay near where the bear had crossed. I would have preferred to be more distant from his trail but I couldn't pedal much longer in the failing light. Others had camped there before; a small tent hurriedly, walked several hundred yards into the woods to wash my hands (they still had squirrel blood on them, and I didn't wish to attract the bears with the scent), then returned to camp in time to watch the day burn to its close. Huddled in my jacket against the growing cold, I set and marinated the elk sausage Ed's wife had made me pack. My legs around me, and twenty miles to the south the lights of little towns blinked into life.

I knew I was in for it the moment I woke up. A strong wind, the fresh smell of rain again, and a temperature cooler than the morning before were all evident. But on the bright side of things, it wasn't raining yet and I hadn't been eaten during the night. (I'd gone to sleep with an image of myself fleeing from a bear in the wrong direction — over the edge.) Determined to get as far as possible before the storm, I packed and pedaled off.

I got naked. First rain, then hail when it grew colder, then beautiful, fast-falling snow. Fortunately the road now had a hard rock base beneath the dirt, and though it became a roller-coaster ride of hills, it was passable. The miles rapidly disappeared behind and I soon turned away from the Rim.

I camped that night at Mormon Lake on the Mogollon Plateau and awakened in the morning to a winterland of white frost and a chill of thirteen degrees. It was time for a motel break in Flagstaff. I'd finally seen the Rim, and beyond that had learned once more the versatility of AT touring. Whether that's interpreted as "all-terrain" or "all times of year," it's cycling at its best.

I walked slowly, in what appeared an almost absent-minded shuffle of hairy legs and shoulders. I watched my first wild bear sighting with pure abandon. There wasn't time to bother with a camera so I tried engraving it in memory. He looked more like an old man in a bear

costume than some wild ursine form and I recalled with pity what the waitress in Heber had told me: "Bear meat in a crockpot is delicious."

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OFF-ROAD MEETS PAVEMENT WHERE DWELL THE



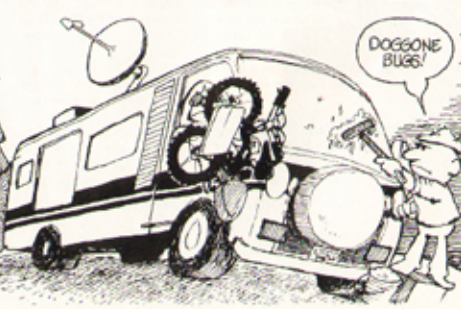
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Wheels

by Gregg Morin

WHEELS ARE probably the most important and least understood bicycle components. Though simple and elegant in appearance, a wheel is in fact a complex network of matched elastic elements whose extreme lightness is particularly dramatic compared to the weight that wheel can support, even at high speeds over rough surfaces. The reliability of modern bicycle wheels is such that they tend to be taken for granted and end up on the short end of the maintenance stick. Nevertheless, like the rest of the bike, they require periodic care. Wheelbuilding itself is an art deserving of a column devoted solely to the subject: it's also something few riders will ever attempt.

A wheel consists of rim, spokes, nipples, and hub. Each has distinct design features and materials, affecting cost, appearance, ease of assembly, durability, and performance.

Spokes are made of plated or stainless steel in various lengths and thicknesses. Double-butted spokes are thicker at each end and thinner in the middle for increased strength with less weight. Most wheel builders use Swiss D.T. stainless spokes in a 14 gauge (straight) or 14/15 gauge (double-butted). Different spoke lengths are required for different wheel sizes, rim types, hub flange types, and spoking patterns. Keeping track of all the variables is all but impossible, there are too many; ask at your local bike shop if in doubt about your spoke length.

Nipples are made of brass or aluminum. The latter are one third as heavy but care must be taken not to round off the softer edges of the alloy nipple when tightening spokes. Brass is recommended for mountain bike wheels unless they are on a set used for racing only.

Rims are made of aluminum alloy because of its superior strength to weight ratio plus brake pads work well on it, even when wet. Some rims, recognizable by their gray metallic finish, are heat treated or hard-

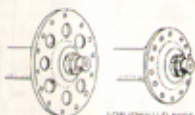


diagram #1

anodized for additional resiliency. The most popular performance rims are the Araya RM-20 and the Specialized GX-26. Additional companies with mountain bike rims are San Metal Products with its Mistral line and Trek Components with its Matrix models. In the realm of esoteric are rims from Bontrager, modified road rims.

MOUNTAIN BIKE RIMS, like the frames themselves, have been getting thinner, losing weight, and gaining strength (see graph #1). Various hole patterns are available but the most common has 36 holes. Rims with 32 holes are generally only used by racers or lighter riders; 40 spoke rims are for touring with heavy loads or for heavy riders.

No matter how fancy a rim is, it's still fragile and requires very little to destroy its roundness. For proof, next time you're in a bike shop, buy a spoke of any size. Take it in your hands and bend it. Think how easily you bent it compared to the stiffer rims and spokes absorb. The fragility of spokes and rims can't be over-emphasized, even on mountain bike wheels. That's why it's so important to keep wheels true; that's their only source of strength.

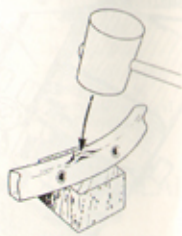
Aluminum is the preferred hub material. It's light and strong yet soft enough so the spokes can "seat" into the flange. Hubs come with either small (low) flanges or large (high) flanges (see diagram #1). Small flange hubs are generally lighter and have a softer side because of their longer and thus more elastic spokes. That elasticity also produces a more durable wheel. Though large flange hubs are usually best reserved for the demands of track racing, they've been successfully used off road by a number of racers. High flange proponents feel that the wheels' superior strength outweighs any

potential disadvantages and that any excess harshness is absorbed by the fat tires.

NOW ON TO YOUR WHEELS' CARE. First, before pedalling off, always check to make sure your rear derailleur isn't bent in toward the wheel. If it is, your first shift onto the biggest cog will jam the derailleur into the spokes, resulting in broken spokes, a broken or bent derailleur, or possibly a bent or broken dropout. Another common problem is over-shifting onto the largest cog so the chain drops between the freewheel and the spokes, resulting in chewed up spokes that will need to be replaced. Fortunately this is easily remedied with precise derailleur adjustments.

Spokes can also be damaged by rocks, ditches, sticks, etc. On extended tours, it's a good idea to carry along a few extra spokes for your wheels along with a spoke wrench. Remember, the rear wheel has two different spoke lengths because of its dish (offset). You'll also need a freewheel tool if the broken spoke is on that side. (Pocket Pro makes a small and light (2 oz.) freewheel removal tool that easily fits into a tool pouch.)

Imagine the following rather typical backcountry scenario. You hit a large rock and break a spoke on the freewheel side of the rear wheel, ding the rim, and laterally (side to side) distort the wheel. Sit down and relax. You're properly prepared for exactly this situation but doing all you need to do is going to take some time. Remove the freewheel and re-lace with the proper size spoke. If you can't replace a spoke, you should still be able to true the rim enough to limp back home. But first, pound out the



Repairing a dented rim
diagram #2

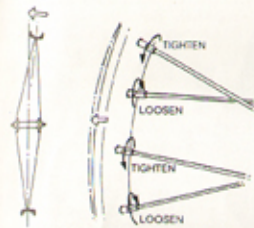
Popular Rim Weights (Each)

graph #1

Specialized X-26	— 425 grams
Specialized X-22	— 450 grams
Araya RM-20	— 485 grams
Araya RM-25	— 546 grams
Specialized X-28	— 590 grams

ding as best as possible with available rocks. You can do a better job later with a mallet backed by a wood block. (Diagram #2)

To true the rim in the field, leave the wheel on the bike. Use the brake pads as guides and find where the rim is out of round. If the hop or bump in the rim is to the right of center, (see diagram #3) tighten the two spokes directly across from the hump (left side). Spin the wheel again and check its roundness. Loosen one or two spokes on the right side if necessary but if possible, only tighten spokes instead of loosening them. Make small adjustments of about 1/4 turn of the nipple at a time. All spokes should have approximately the same ten-



CORRECTING LATERAL DISTORTION
diagram #3

sion. Don't forget all you want to do is fix the wheel enough to get you home so make your adjustments conservatively. When a wheel is out of round more than 2" to each side, or is out of round up and down, it should be taken to a skilled wheel builder. Also, a shop has the tools to properly "dish" the wheel, or align the rim with the hub.

Once you've got your wheel reasonably straight, turn around and head for home — carefully. Your wheel is no longer operating with a full deck of cards so ride as gently as possible. Take your wheel directly to a qualified mechanic and have it properly repaired and while they're at it, have them check your front wheel too. If you have the time, ask if you can watch what he or she does. Feel the spoke tensions yourself. Ask questions. Your bike's ride is entirely dependent upon your wheels so the more you know about them, the safer and longer lasting your wheels will be.

ONCE YOU'VE GOT AN IDEA of what kind of tensioning to look for, make a habit of regularly checking your spokes' tension. Strumming your fingers over them before a ride takes only a minute but can save you much time and expense. Check that your tires are inflated adequately to keep you from bottoming the rims on rocks. Learn to ride with discretion, avoid smashing your wheels into rocks and sharp edges and watch for sticks lurking in the grass that can leap up into your spokes. Keep your derailleurs properly adjusted. In short, stay in tune with your bike.

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Chamonix, France

I didn't come to Chamonix, France, to fall in love. Sure, it's the classic alpine resort, all right. Plenty of wonderful people. And a history of romance going back over two hundred years. But I wasn't interested in any of that. Neither was John, the photographer. Not this time, certainly not now. We were here for the big mountains. At over 15,700', Chamonix's Mt. Blanc is the highest in Europe. In the alpine imagination, it's even higher.

We'd been here before. We knew what we were doing. Some old friends, some new climbs, some skiing, maybe some pictures. A loose schedule this year in Chamonix; falling in love was not on it. Looking back, I guess it was the mountain bike. You can stand only so much romance then, there's something that drops you off the edge. Like a Muddy Fox.

We weathered out three days in a high mountain hut near Mt. Blanc, a point where the Alps of Italy, France and Switzerland meet. Seven dollars a day including breakfast and dinner. The hut was packed; the warden in a foul mood. A moderate ice climb, the Tour Ronde, was melting, running past the hut and out onto the summer ski slopes. Our larger objectives, the chutes and gullies leading to the summit of Mt. Blanc sent salvos of loosened rock, deadly mountain artillery, hurtling down the climbs toward the hut. Everything was melting.

The first climb, a warm-up, started to look a lot more serious than fun. We packed up our titanium ice screws, foot fangs, and pterodactyl ice hammers and headed off the mountain. With no success to buoy us, we were beat by the time we climbed off the glacier.

A system of trails is thrown over the Mt. Blanc Massif like cargo netting. We headed down one of them with a sheer granite fortress, called the Aiguilles (needles), at our backs. Six thousand vertical feet below, the village of Chamonix. Heart of the Savoy. Frighteningly convenient. A ten minute tram ride takes you from Chamonix to the Aiguilles ringing the village at nearly twelve thousand feet. If you did well, you rode the tram back down. If you copped-out, you disciplined yourself with a walk. We walked.

That time of year, the trails are heavy with summer tourists, holiday hikers, adventurers, climbers, skiers, and some of the toughest, most congenial local mountaineers in the world. The locals are idolized. But, with a typical French gesture, why not? The ice axe, the piton, the alpine downhill ski, the mono ski, and the rock boot were all invented here. There's a reason. The locals call it the "Spirit of Chamonix." You come to see the highest mountain in Europe, the first one climbed for sport (1786). Then you catch it, the fever. Then, live it. And finally, if you're like us, you work it.

That's the business we were here for. Ski, climb, take pictures. I'm still reminding myself.

I followed John's pink and teal Karrimore alpine climbing pack. Lavender and pink rope tied over the top. A stop at the tiny alpine chalet restaurant at the tram's mid-station had taken the edge off hunger. But, all I could think about was getting back to the Avalanche Ranch, Bar le Brevent, for the best Mexican food in France. We could be certain that the Avalanche Ranch and the geniality of our Swedish hosts would soon revive our downcast spirits.

Besides, Pelle Roegind, who could ski down frozen waterfalls that we could hardly climb with our ice gear, and his Avalanche Ranch partners "Big Barrio" Beckman and Jorgen "Gascamolund," would have a scheme, probably a ski adventure hairy enough to take a mind off any disappointment. In a self-indulgent funk, I pounded headlong down this lavish trail surrounded by the most spectacular alpine scenery on Earth.

Rounding a hairpin bend in the trail. Boot toe to boot heel, I followed John mechanically as I had over a dozen years and four continents.

And there she was. Standing on her pedals, leaning over a knobby front tire as she snatched it sideways. A woman on a white bike, far, far above the valley floor.

Somehow, reality shifted a bit. Like a long climbing fall arrested on a solid belay. Somehow you just never quite recover.

by Nick Giustina

BRITISH EXPATRIATE Martin Green noticed mountain biking in England two years ago. During his winters in Chamonix, he was constantly amazed at the volume rental business realized in ski and climbing gear.

During the last ski season, American skiers began arriving in Chamonix with mountain bikes carried as airline luggage. In neighboring Verbier (Switzerland), photographer Ace Kavale began running his Stumpjumper over cobblestone streets and up traditional alpine trails.

Around town or on the trail, it was obvious to Green that mountain bikes and the Alps naturally go together.

For North Americans, this isn't surprising. Probably the greatest attraction for mountain biking the French Alps: it's allowed.

In France, sporting activity is not restricted by regulations to protect the environment or you from yourself. For skiing, snow, rock or

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ice climbing, hang gliding, parafloiting (parachutes and cliffs), kayaking or even golfing, hiking, camping and tennis, French Napoleonic law limits liability.

Similarly, while the environment is protected from gross violation, individual responsibility requires individual consciousness. In France, you are responsible for what you do. If you can do it, do it. If you can't, don't. No interference, no liability.

What this means for mountain bikers is that wherever you can take a mountain bike is where it's allowed. In Chamonix, this freedom is overwhelming.

So, during this last May as the ski slopes were closing, Martin Green leased a ski rental shop, normally vacant during summer, near Chamonix's center. Featuring the Maddy Fox mountain bike, which retails mid-to upper-range in Great Britain, Green's business boomed.

"Once we've introduced mountain biking here," explains Green, "we'll begin selling bikes. For this first season, though, we're content with a successful rental program. With this kind of terrain and volume of visitors, we feel confident of success."

Hiking and climbing trails accessing the world famous mountain here are natural and spectacular with five star hotels and multi-course gourmet meals waiting at the ride's end. Cable cars servicing the greatest vertical relief in the world whisk bikers and their bikes to glacier's edge for 6,000 vertical feet and hundreds of miles of unmatched trail riding.

And, for the more ambitious, the famous Tour de Mt. Blanc... on mountain bike. This foot trail encircling the entire Mt. Blanc Massif passes through three national borders: Italy, France, and Switzerland. The trail ranges between two and six thousand vertical feet elevation along the valley walls. The Mt. Blanc Tour features overnight accommodations in a variety of classic alpine mountain huts and small hotels, each a piece of Alpine mountain history. Some huts are even complete with a St. Bernard dog. Hikers can cover the distance in an easy ten days. All you really need to carry is folding money. The Tour du Mt. Blanc's a mountain bikers dream.

The future? The first mountain bike descent of Mt. Blanc (15,700') took place last summer. Look for more alpine mountain descents as well as ascents of particularly perilous foot ways and glacier-scoured granite slabs which abound in the Alps.

For scenery, backcountry potential, luxurious service, open attitude as well as some of the world's most challenging terrain, try a mountain bike next time you plan any adventure in Europe.

Fly to Geneva, Switzerland, then train, bus, or car to Chamonix in just over an hour.

If you're like me, you might fall in love. Luckily, I fell in love with mountain biking. It was something I could take home from that Spring in the Alps.

Four years of riding road bikes made me uncomfortable with the Bullmoose bars on my Fisher mountain bike. It was fun to ride until I couldn't get used to my elbows flapping in the breeze. Then at the Wendell Fat Tire Weekend I saw Jacque Phelan and the drop handlebars on her Cunningham.

To the uninitiated, component swapping is dangerous; to the experienced, pitfalls still abound, especially when switching flat bars for drops. Drops require a cable hanger and the correct bore to fit the bars. Pro mountain bike shops are scarce as hen's teeth here in the east so I called Point Reyes Bikes (415-663-1768) in California for more information on making the switch. They assured me that a Specialized MTB-3 stem would work.

For brake levers, I used SunTour Superbe Pros. Bar end shifters could be used but since I already had SunTour XC thumb shifters, I decided to use them. I tried them above and below the brake levers. Below seemed more comfortable, so I tightened all the bits, attached the cables, and wrapped the bars with tape. I went for a test ride, returned, untaped the bars, moved the levers and shifters then rewrapped the bars. Nobody said it would be easy.

Several weeks later, it was clear that the stem was not right for drop bars. Mountain bikes in the classic Fisher mold have longer top tubes than road bikes and require shorter reach stems. Since mountain bike frames are generally sized two to four inches smaller than road bike frames, their seatpost extension is much greater. In order to position the handlebars at about the level recommended by Bill Farrell's Fit Kit, a tall stem with minimal forward extension is required.

Riding down steep hills with drops and a short rise/long reach stem like the MTB-3 was almost impossible. My weight was entirely too far forward and my hands too low. I ordered a new, custom stem. Nothing else was available at the time with the correct bore, height, and reach. Except my custom stem didn't have an expander at the bottom; instead it needed an extender silver soldered onto the steering tube. I now had the right stem but I couldn't put it on. Point Reyes once again helped out by suggesting use of a Nitro single arm expander. I also needed a cable hanger so I ordered one of those as well.

Finally, I had all the pieces together and mounted on my bike with Grab-Ons for cushioning. Were the results worth all the effort? Absolutely! With my hands on the drops, I'm in a more powerful position for hill climbing. On the road, aerodynamics are vastly better, especially in a headwind, while precise control when picking my way over single-tracks is assured.

Since starting my experiments with drop bars, more products have become available. DirtDrop bars and stems are available from Bridgestone bicycle dealers. The bars are heat treated 2017 T-4 cold forged aluminum in the standard 26 mm diameter. They look

Up-Grading the Bars Are Drops The Answer?



by James Cogran

Dan Hankins of Lakewood, California pushing the drops over the Bear Creek Trail on the Colorado Grand Tour.

like regular drop bars at first but in fact are flared out 12 degrees. The drops are also a little shorter so the bar end shifters are closer to the hands for easier shifting. The stem is about 5 inches tall with a reach of about 2 inches with an expander at the bottom. A cable stop is drilled in.

Ibis Cycles also has custom stems and a standard drop bar. Made of heat treated aluminum, the bars have a 7-degree flare and are modeled on Cinelli track bars. Ibis is also working on an index system bar end shifter. The stem is made of 4130 steel and requires a single expander or extension brazed on the steerer. Call them before you make up your mind about the size. A complete Ibis drop bar package retails for \$175 and includes bars,

stem, bar end shifters, and SunTour Superbe Pro levers. Bars alone are \$45 and the stem is \$85.

Wilderness Trail Bikes has the widest looking bars. They have less drop and reach than normal drops and are flared out 25 degrees. They are the same heat treated aluminum with thicker walls as the others. Their diameter is 26 mm so all the bars fit any of the stems. Their two piece stem is cromoly and made in custom dimensions. Mark Siate says they have single expanders so you can get everything at once. They also have a very slick adapter system for SunTour XC shifters so you can brake and down shift at the same time. Bars cost \$45, the stem is \$120, and the shifter adapters are \$20.

Gearing and Climbing

by Turner Brown

You can't mountain bike and not climb hills. We've said that before but it bears repeating. Whether your playground is Florida, Iowa, Arizona, or Colorado, sometime, somewhere, you'll find yourself sweating up a hill.

YOU CAN CONSIDER hills as challenges to look forward to or as bummers best avoided but either way, they'll still be there. And since they aren't going to go away, you might as well get into climbing them. For more time is spent going up than coming down so why not increase your grins per gallon of sweat expended? Besides, hills also provide excellent ego-expanding opportunities for aggressive riders.

Successful hill climbing requires appropriate gearing; unfortunately, appropriately geared off-the-floor mountain bikes are rare. Even worse, the more money you spend on your bike and the higher the bike's purported performance, the stronger the likelihood you'll end up with gearing that is too high. If you have years of road riding experience, it's all but guaranteed that you'll underestimate your gearing needs. Roadies get a kick out of the huge clusters typically found on mountain bikes and since our egos detest being laughed

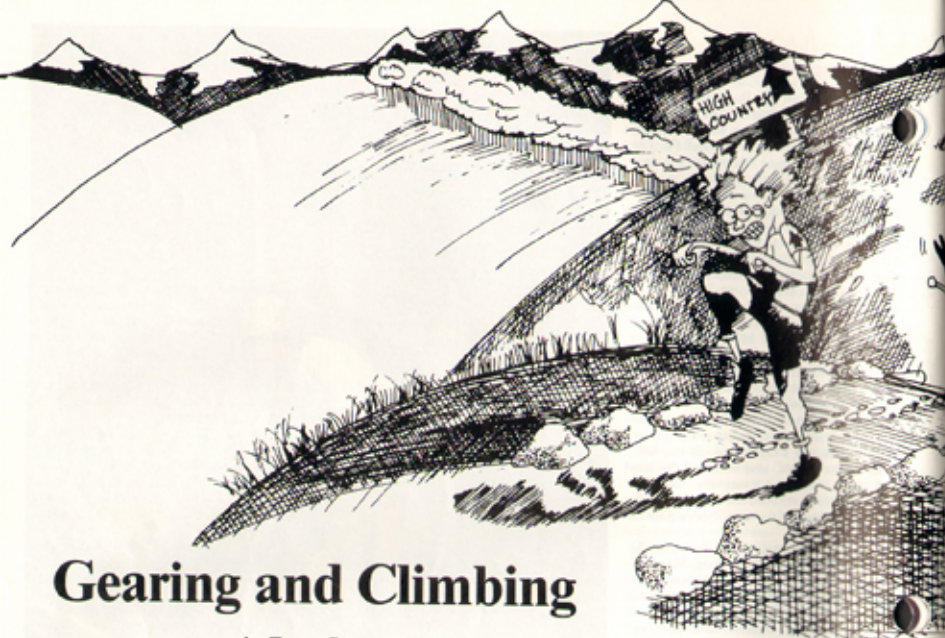
at, the inevitable drive is to accept unacceptable gearing. Not helping matters is the tendency too many bike mechanics have of proving their studly qualities by recommending the same gearing they ride, almost always a one to one ratio (granny chain ring and biggest cog equal in size).

Ignore all that cock-eyed male strutting! Go for the inches — or rather lack of inches. A low of 22 gear inches or less is strongly advised. What's a 22-inch gear? If your bike is a so-called race bike, it probably has a 28-tooth cog in back (the largest cog on the freewheel) and a 28-tooth or 26-tooth granny chainring in front. (Gear inches are vestiges from the days of high wheeler bikes with their direct drive system of forward motion.) A 26/28 combination yields a 24.1-inch low gear. A few high performance bikes come equipped with a 26-tooth granny ring and a 30-tooth cog for a 22.5-inch low gear. Replacing the 26-tooth granny ring with a 24-

tooth ring for a 24/30 combination will yield a 20.8-inch low. Combinations as low as 24/32, a 19.5-inch low, aren't out of line either.

GEAR INCHES ARE THE RESULT OF dividing the number of teeth on the chain ring by the number of teeth on the cog and multiplying that by the diameter of your bike's wheels (24 divided by 32 times 26 equals 19.5 inches). To translate gear inches into forward motion, multiply gear inches by 3.14 (π); 19.5 gear inches times 3.14 equals 61.2 inches of forward movement during one complete revolution of the crankarm.

How advantageous can two gear inches (the difference between the 26/30 combo and the 24/30 combo) be? A lot. During one complete crank revolution, a bike with a 26/30 low gear will move forward 70 inches; a 24/30 will advance 65.3 inches. In sixty revolutions (per minute, a slow cadence), the 26/30 combo will have moved 27 feet further than the 24/30.



John Crane Drawing

Look at the figures for a 28/28 combo (28/38/48 chainrings with a 12-28 freewheel are pretty standard on high performance mountain bikes) compared to the 24/30 combo. Again we'll assume a cadence of sixty revolutions per minute. The 28/28 combo will cover 408 feet while the 24/30 will only cover 326 feet. Having advanced 82 feet further in the same time span, the 28/28 combo will attain the summit long before the 24/30 combo but at great cost. Pushing that kind of gearing is exhausting. Sure, racers like Joe Murray can and do hammer up hills with impressively high gear ratios but for the rest of us, go low is the rule.

The higher the elevation at which you ride, the truer this is. Many a flat-lander has found this to be embarrassingly so when attacking high mountains. Standard gearing doesn't make it. The lack of oxygen becomes severe above 8,000 feet and worse the higher you go. Hills that at sea level are ridden without a thought on the middle chainring turn into demons at 10,000 feet. Your thigh muscles devour oxygen faster than you can suck it in and before you know it, you're wasted. With a 20- or 22-inch granny gear, that same hill becomes rideable — though not necessarily easily.

You've geared your bike and you're ready to tackle that hill you've never cleaned. You rig into it full of enthusiasm and confidence yet fall again. Now what?

Technique, you've got to have technique.

Hills that at sea level are ridden without a thought on the middle chainring turn into demons at 10,000 feet. Your thigh muscles devour oxygen faster than you can suck it in and before you know it, you're wasted.

Cleaning hills is dependent not on how much power you have but on how you apply what you have. Steep climbs are exercises in balance and power; becoming a technically proficient rider takes patience and practice but attaining that degree of proficiency is not hard.

The track is in front of you, narrow, steep, and littered with rubble. Select the appropriate gear (remember, erring on the low side is preferable) and shift gears before you're on the hill. Relax; don't attempt to carry speed up the slope. Momentum will only propel you a short distance while the extra speed might make following your line difficult due to the tires bouncing over the rocks.

The trick in technical climbs is picking the line of least resistance and maximum traction. For example, if presented with a choice between riding over exposed bedrock or loose dirt and gravel, go for the bedrock where traction will be superior — unless it has a veneer of gravel. Pick a route between round, loose cobbles. Avoid loose gravel whenever possible. Dtno with dry pine needles. If forced out of your preferred line, keep going even if that means going over what you intended to go around; make the most of what you've got.

OKAY, YOU FAILED one more time. Don't worry about it. Rarely is a hill flashed when you're operating on the limits of your current skill level. Go back and try it again. Keep on trying until you're satisfied with your progress. Sometimes half a dozen attempts will get you to the top; other times you'll have to leave it for another day. But if you don't keep trying regardless of your results, your skills won't advance.

On particularly steep slopes, shift your

weight forward until you're sitting on the tip of the saddle. (Positioning your saddle forward on its rails can help too, depending on frame fit.) Sitting on the saddle tip lets you keep pressure on the front wheel to prevent wheelies and to maintain steering while insuring rear wheel traction. The position is sort of a cross between sitting and standing in a low crouch over the top tube.

The key in all this is sensitivity to the tires' traction. If out-of-the-saddle, relax your grip on the bars to shift weight onto the rear tire. Don't lean too far forward and consciously moderate your pedaling effort; too much and you'll spin the rear wheel and come to an instant stop.

Stay balanced over the bike. You should be able to come to a momentary stop during a climb without falling over or having to wildly saw the handlebar back and forth to stay upright. You want your weight firmly centered right over the bike. As long as you're solidly balanced, you're free to focus on applying smooth pedal pressure and shifting your weight fore and aft as needed while constantly scanning the surface ahead and picking the easiest route.

Naturally, quite often your plan of action fails and you find yourself off line. Don't panic. Press on. If this happens and you find yourself in particularly gravey terrain, sometimes the best action is to lower your head and pedal as fast as possible without worrying about where the bike is headed. Just hang on and force your way through. You'll be amazed at the obstacles you'll clean at times like this.

Does your bike's geometry affect its climbing ability and, if so, is there an ideal climbing geometry? Sure. That's why trials bike geometry is so different from mountain bike geometry. Steep head angles equal slow speed stability. Short wheelbases translate into maneuverability and short chainstays mean excellent rear wheel traction. But mountain bikes have to be versatile; the hill you ride up will undoubtedly be ridden down while getting to the hill in the first place may have entailed a lot of fairly flat cruising. Consequently, how geometry affects a bike's climbing ability, how you set your bike up has far more influence.

YOUR HANDLEBAR OUGHT TO BE lower than the saddle by about two inches or so, depending upon your body build and the bike's design. If the bar is too high, you'll have



Kathy Pike

One area to clearly have your climbing skills polished is on the slickrock in Utah.

a difficult time transferring weight forward during steep climbs and you'll find yourself performing ill-advised wheelies. If the bar is too low, you may find yourself transferring entirely too much weight forward during downhill. A handlebar positioned slightly lower than your saddle will also help the bike's ability to carve through turns.

The handlebar ought to be far enough away so you don't hit it with your knees when climbing out-of-the-saddle but not so far away that you feel stretched out over the bike. Lots of crotch clearance — at least two or three inches when standing flat footed on a floor — is also needed for unexpected dismounts. Get the smallest frame size you can comfortably ride.

The best climbing mountain bikes have steeper head angles, minimally 70 degrees with 2 inches or maybe 1.875 inches of rake. Even better are 71-degree head angles with 1.5 to 1.75 inches of rake. The trade-off in steep head angles is that such bikes demand superior rider skills; there's far less forgiveness built into their handling. You're either on them or you're not. The reason steep head angles climb better is their superior slow speed stability. Technical climbs are done slowly with lots of course changes and for that you need a bike that's solid even at a stop and that goes precisely where you point it with no wavering.

Any bike with 17.25-inch or shorter chainstays will have excellent climbing traction. It therefore stands to reason that a bike with 16.75-inch or even 16-inch chainstays will have even better traction but, as in all things, there's a trade-off. Tighter rear triangles ride harsher plus they may not accept fat tires. Fat tires provide a softer ride and more traction. An additional consideration is tire/frame clearance, important in the back-country where you're apt to encounter mud. So while short chainstays in theory are one key to climbing steep hills, it's not so much the chainstays' length as it is how much weight is carried by the rear wheel and that is partially a function of wheelbase. For example, a bike with 17-inch stays and a 43.5-inch wheelbase will have an excellent rearward weight bias but at a cost — poor front end handling. You've got to keep weight on the front wheel to maintain steering and that in turn can be generated by a shorter front/center.

Clearly there are a number of factors at work here and no single dimension is the source of a bike's climbing ability. It all comes back to weight distribution and rider skill. So as a general rule, the best climbing bikes have steep head angles, short wheelbases, fat tires, short wheelbases, and steep seat tubes. In summary, your technical climbing skills can make up for any lack in your bike's climbing abilities better than a bike's design can make up for any lack in your technical skills.

Outback Ozzie Style in the Red Center

by Melissa Johnson

In our July - August issue we had the first part of this author's travels through the outbacks of Australia. Here is part two of that journey complete with bull dust, road trains and characters from the movie "Mad Max".



Mark Fretschman

Roadside hood ornament of Cooper Pedy.

An icy headwind was the last thing we'd expected when we headed north across the center of the Australian continent. We'd been warned about the dirt road sections of the Stuart Highway and the long distances between settlements and the lack of water and the heat. But we were mentally ill-prepared for the chilling headwinds that we pushed against from Port Augusta to Alice Springs.

TWO MONTHS EARLIER, we had departed Sydney on our mountain bikes and headed to Port Augusta and the start of the Stuart Highway. Our objective, despite unanimous warnings from our Ozzie friends that doing so was impossible, was to ride the length of the Stuart Highway to Darwin. Many of those who so strongly advised us against the undertaking had never been there and even refused to drive their cars on the Stuart. They'd told about eighteen-inch deep corrugations and, depending on who was telling the story, as many as five hundred kilometers of desert. Then there was the "bull dust" that we'd never be able to ride through. Finally, there was the heat, heat of such extreme intensity

that kangaroos would line up in the shade of a telephone pole to avoid the blinding sun!

In short, the Stuart Highway is not a road renowned for its beauty and interesting features. It will never be called a cyclist's dream. Typical of most Australian roadways, it's narrow, sometimes just a single lane, with no shoulders plus there's some two-hundred kilometers of dirt on an unfinished section just before the Northern Territory border in South Australia.

Our first six days after leaving Port Augusta were bleak. We were riding over ancient sea floors where the salty soil allowed little plant growth. We pedaled our way across the barren hills and plateaus with the wind whistling in our ears and it was difficult to imagine water ever having touched this barren land.

THE AREA ON BOTH SIDES OF THE HIGHWAY was a military zone and signs restricting access warned us not to go off the Highway. One night, with no where to camp, we stopped at Pimba, a typical roadhouse up the center with pub, hotel, garage, and a few dilapidated houses. Our map indicated there was camping there.

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We asked the waitress where we could camp and, with a wave of her hand, she said, "Out there."

We turned to look out the window, expecting to see a cleared spot for camping. All we could see was the parking lot with several cars and beyond that the gravel and the hardy scrub of the desert.

We looked at each other. One beer down, we were thinking about another. Mark asked her again, "Where?"

She said, "Out there, behind the tree."
NOW WE KNEW THAT OZZIE BEER WAS STRONG but not that strong. We hadn't seen a tree anywhere. Marc walked over to the glass door and squinted into the distance looking for a tree. Suddenly a light of recognition came to his face. Sure enough, just beyond the parking lot was a knee-high plant surrounded by a car tire. That's when we learned that anything taller than your knee is a tree in Pimba! The wind tore at the poor little thing, bending it and shaking it as if it was the only thing around worth blowing. It seemed to us we would have a worse time of it out there than the tree.

Our spirits were demolished and we were contemplating the situation when up rode a brightly jerseyed, lycra-shorted man name Ivan, a United States Air Force officer stationed at a nearby base. He was out for a sprint on his high tech racing machine when he saw our bikes outside the pub. He lifted us out of our dilemma by taking us home, feeding us dinner, and providing a shower, clean sheets, and a bed. We felt like royalty.

Mentally and physically renewed, we got a late start the next morning because of the Woomers Rotary Club's Sunday doughnut.

Sign along the Stewart Highway marking the Conedeta track.



Mark Freedman

Despite the harshness of the place, we found the people very hospitable and met such Coober Pedy dignitaries as Khan the Greek, Machine Gun Joe, and Crocodile Harry. All lived in dug-outs along a dark tunnel turned into a Greek abode featured in the third Mad Max movie.

We would just barely finish one when another fresh, hot, tender doughnut was handed to us. They made riding out onto that long and lonesome highway tough.

But we were anxious to get to Coober Pedy, a town with a grocery store, still three hundred and seventy-five kilometers away. Our map indicated a water stop at a roadhouse about a day's ride from Pimba; in the midst of unrelenting desert, we relied totally on our map for water sources. Each of us carried twenty-three liters of water, enough for three days, in two ten-liter water bags stashed in the panniers plus three one-liter water bottles on the bikes. The water bags were handy since they could be crushed and put out of the way when empty.

By the time we arrived at the next settlement after leaving Pimba, the stark scenery was changing. Tall bushes were more frequent and the yellowish gravel changed to a bright orange sand. Best of all, we had our first tail wind in several weeks and were finally enjoying the pedaling.

We'd planned to stop at Glendambo only long enough to fill our water bags but ended up spending most of the day there. The bore water in the taps was undrinkable. We'd been warned that we might have to pay for water in some roadhouses but we couldn't believe it when the Glendambo roadhouses said they would not even sell us water! And that with Coober Pedy still a three-day ride away!

Until then, we'd been proud of our self-sufficiency and had resolved that we would always carry enough food and water to make our biking free of worry and dependence on other people. But at Glendambo, we were caught unprepared. There we were with no buses, no trains, and no water.

REALITY STRUCK AND OUR MACHO VENEER was stripped away. But we quickly discovered that passing motorists were very willing to help when we asked and begging for water actually became fun. We were never refused a portion of water from anyone. One motorist even got out of her car and helped us fill our bags! By the end of the day, we'd gathered enough water for the trip to Coober Pedy.

Too soon, our wonderful tail wind seemed like a wild fantasy. The wind hammered us and the days and miles crawled by. We settled into a set drafting pattern. Marc would pull for five kilometers then we would switch and I would pull for five. By day's end, we would be down to three kilometer pulls and averaging but nine kilometers per hour. The ride to Coober Pedy seemed interminable.

The word Coober Pedy comes from the aboriginal word "Coopa pit" which means "white man's hole in the ground," a fit description for the place. Not only is the town surrounded for miles by shafts and mines but, because of the weather's harshness, many people have taken to living in their mines. Even during summer's extreme temperatures, the underground homes maintain a base temperature of around 72 degrees. Not a solitary blade of grass grows in town yet the residents are not without some recreation — golf. Only in Coober Pedy, they've oiled the golf tees black to define them from the rest of the course!

Despite the harshness of the place, we found the people very hospitable and met such Coober Pedy dignitaries as Khan the Greek, Machine Gun Joe, and Crocodile Harry. All lived in dug-outs along a dark tunnel turned into a Greek abode featured in the third Mad Max movie.

Reluctantly, we left after four days in the underground homes and once again pedaled into the cold bead wind. We set our sights on

Ayers Rock (Uluru) and the nearby settlement of Yulara, some six-hundred kilometers away. Soon we'd be rolling over the dreaded corrugation highway where the pavement runs out and ruts, rocks, and bull dust become part of daily life for twenty-two kilometers.

Deeper and deeper into the heart of the continent we pedaled. Marsh and mulga trees grew denser. We hit the first dirt section of highway about a hundred kilometers north of Coober Pedy. Recent rains proved a blessing in disguise as the dampness kept the dust down while the huge puddles in the road helped to slow the cars, buses, and road trains.

Road trains are unique to the Stuart Highway. Basically, they're Australia's bigger and better version of the American eighteen-wheeler but instead they have sixty-two wheels with not one trailer but three! Sometimes the dust from their passing was so dense it was impossible to breathe or see. We usually heard them before we saw them and had plenty of time to prepare for their frightful passing. We'd stop and brace ourselves and cover our faces as best we could. Our helmets really proved themselves as invariably the trucks passed in a shower of small stones.

BECAUSE OF OUR FAT TIRES, we had no trouble with ruts and rocks and managed to easily get around the huge puddles that sometimes seemed large enough to swallow most cars. The bull dust, a fine pottery sand, we'd heard so much about fortunately turned out to be only a minor problem. Those patches we did hit were small and we'd just get off the bikes and walk a few feet. But our friends had been right; the stuff is undrillable!

What really plagued us from start to finish was the Ozzie fly. They weren't so much a nuisance when we were riding but immediately upon stopping, they became total pests. By the time our tour was over, we'd become quite adept at creating fly-proof head gear from sun glasses and a towel. On the rare day when they refused to be

thwarted, we wore mosquito net hats.

We reached Yulara desperate for something other than carrots and onions, pasta and rice for dinner. That our stove wasn't functioning properly (it only needed to be cleaned) turned out to be a stroke of luck since we had an excuse to buy a pizza and salad for a change of menu. Roadhouses up the center mainly offer pub drinks, beer, and counter meals or "take aways," meat pies or pasties and usually fish and chips. To maintain our moderate budget, we carried pasta and rice for staples, supplementing them with whatever vegetables we could find along the way. Mostly we found carrots and onions for dinner, old apples and oranges for snacks, and always white bread and peanut butter. We never went hungry but our diet remained the same for a long time. The settlement of Yulara was a feast for sore eyes and we stayed for three days to explore Uluru and the nearby wilderness area, the Olgas, on foot.

FROM YULARA TO ALICE SPRINGS TOOK FIVE DAYS with three of them spent retracing our route back to the Stuart Highway. We then entered the rolling foothills of the MacDonnell Ranges. The road crosses ancient rivers and bone dry stream beds that only rarely flow with water. Yet despite the incredible aridity, there was an ever-growing sense of water near at hand. Huge, white Eucalyptus trees lined the edges of dry creek beds while the greenery continued to increase and we saw more and more tall trees. The Pimba "tree" seemed more the product of someone's twisted imagination than something we really saw.

We entered the narrow opening in the rugged hills called the Heavy Tee Gap and rolled into Alice Springs, some one thousand, three hundred kilometers from the start of the Stuart Highway and almost half way to Darwin, our ultimate destination. Though we still had over fifteen hundred kilometers of out-back road to cover, our minds were far from the problems and the isolation of the road. True to the cyclist's legacy, we were thinking of food, not tomorrow.

A typical night's camp in the outback. The towel overhead helps keep the flies off.



Mark Freedman

Enlightened Land Managers

by Gary Sprung

Two fine studies of mountain bikes on public lands have crossed our desks at MBM recently. While Sierra Clubbers are busy reacting emotionally to perceived threats, these land managers have coolly evaluated the problems and possibilities of our favorite recreation device and concluded that mountain biking should be encouraged.

JEFFERSON COUNTY, in the foothills west of Denver, Colorado, has 20 parks totalling 16,000 acres. For one of their newest acquisitions, Planner George J. Maurer of the county Open Space Division has gone so far as to suggest a mountain bike park.

"Hikers and horseback riders should be discouraged or prohibited from using the park," Maurer wrote in his February, 1987 proposal.

Stuart Macdonald, the Colorado State Trails Coordinator, has criticized the proposal but not because he has anything against mountain bikers.

"I think two things are wrong with this idea," Macdonald wrote in a letter to this author. "One, it makes it easy for the Parks Administration to restrict ATBs (All Terrain Bicycles) elsewhere because they have 'accommodated' them in one place. Second, it perpetuates the notion that ATBs are dangerous or 'different' and should be separated from other users." Macdonald commutes to his downtown office on a mountain bike.

Maurer agreed. "Even if it is not the intention, it might create the impression that mountain bikes ought to be segregated," he said. "But there is nothing wrong with designing trails to suit particular uses."

In May, 1986, Maurer wrote a six-page paper called "Mountain Bike Research and Recommendations." He first reviewed the policies and experiences of other Colorado park agencies and user groups. In that survey, he determined that, with the exception of the Boulder Mountain Park System, no jurisdiction was experiencing problems with mountain bikes. Boulder's problems (the lands have since been closed to mountain bikes) are unique, he concluded, because of the immediate proximity of a large urban area with a sizable college population.

The document was intended as a planning tool so Maurer created criteria to judge the problems, or lack thereof:

A. Criteria Supporting Mountain Bike Trail Use

1. Absence of frequent sharp, blind turns.
2. Absence of frequent rock or log water bars, and check dams on the trail.
3. Absence of substantial lengths of very narrow trail with drop-offs.
4. Absence of substantial loose rock on steep grades.
5. Trails that are former logging, mining or service roads, or improved to x-c ski trail standards.

B. Criteria Supporting Trail Closure to Mountain Bikes

1. Trails associated with a high number of complaints against trail bikers because of user conflicts arising from heavy trail use by bikers and other trail users, or high speed cycling.
2. Trails associated with off-trail riding that is damaging the environment.
3. Trails that receive frequent mountain bike use and possess extensive soft, wet soils, or lengths that remain wet and soft from snow melt for extended periods of time.
4. Trails located in a wilderness setting or where the natural surroundings of a trail are the primary focus for the trail use.

He concluded that none of the closure criteria apply in the Jefferson County Open Space Parks. Beyond that, he suggested: "Trail closure should be a last resort. Trail closure should follow only after an evaluation of a trail according to the criteria listed above, an effort to monitor and document the amount of bike and other trail use and complaints, an effort to educate bikers on trail etiquette, and the adoption of appropriate regulations."

One of Maurer's most enlightened conclusions was his observations about user conflict: "Some trail users simply do not like to see bikes on trails regardless of whether conflicts exist or not. Part of this opposition may stem from the fact that mountain bikers are the new member of the trail user family and people aren't used to them yet."

On erosion, he noted, "There is no evidence that mountain bikes are more damaging to trails than other trail uses."

For the proposed mountain bike park, Maurer suggested using the standards for building cross-country ski trails. That would mean wide curve radii, straight runouts at the bottom of hills, ample trail width on steep downhills, and removal or avoidance of hazards.

On the other hand, the trail should not be built too high a standard. Maurer further suggested park trails could "provide riders with a physical challenge by incorporating more steep grades than would normally be desirable in trails planning, by leaving exposed rocks in the tread, by allowing irregular or bumpy trail surfaces in places, and by undulating the vertical alignment of trails."

Maurer reported that no action has been taken on his proposal yet only because of other more pressing county business.

A Forester Seeks Bike Opportunities

The Ochoco National Forest in Oregon has purchased what probably is the first official Forest Service-owned mountain bike. Recreation Planner Gordon R. Hain has published a paper he wrote for a

university class on outdoor recreation management called "Developing Mountain Bike Opportunities on the Ochoco National Forest." Realizing he needed some first-hand "field experience" on the subject, he convinced the Agency to buy him a bike.

He then realized that finding roads for mountain biking "would be no problem. I then concentrated my efforts on trail routes."

AFTER AN INITIAL EMBARRASSING SPILL, Hain discovered the wonders of the sport: "I felt the thrill of the downhill run and the exhaustion of the uphill climb. . . . I pedalled through beautiful natural appearing areas and through heavily logged-over areas; over light snow cover to dry, dusty conditions; over downed trees and through open flats, over water bars, and around obstacles. I found that the bicycle, being challenging, made trail travel exciting. Also, it offered a whole new perspective to the forest. I was amazed at how much more I could see and how many more areas I could access. On forest roads that I have driven in the past, the slower speed of the bike now gave me an opportunity to really look into the country, seeing the trees as part of the forest."

One of Hain's best ideas was to contact the Forest Archeologist. Thanks to an Act of Congress protecting our archeological heritage, all timber sales, road building projects, mines, and so forth must be preceded with an examination of the site to see if the project might destroy some prehistoric ruin or artifacts. That's the job of the Forest Archeologist. In Hain's forest, the archeologist just happened to have a map of the forest dating from 1915. On it were trails that are no longer maintained but still exist.

While Hain's paper was written as a guide to other foresters desirous of providing mountain biking opportunities, contacting the Forest Archeologist need not be limited to officialdom. This could be a superb method for discovering "new" mountain bike routes!

The bulk of Hain's study is a review of existing literature and a report on conversations with leaders in the sport. He writes that some ski areas are now actively promoting mountain biking on their Nordic ski trails. He also writes about a conversation with Glenn Odell, former director of NORBA, in which he learned of bicyclists' bitterness about wilderness closures and the feeling that bikers were betrayed by the Sierra Club. Odell stated he'd been a backpacker and outdoor enthusiast all his life.

From MBM Editor Hank Barlow, Hain reported on the "importance of responsibility in caring for the land and trails." He talked to Jim Paxon, District Ranger for the National Forest lands around Crested Butte, and learned that "Resource damage is virtually nonexistent from bike use. Paxon explained that most bikers will pick up their bikes and walk around steep or muddy areas. . . . Paxon believes that mountain bikes do not damage trails."

Like Maurer, Hain came to the conclusion that "many times resource damage is just a smoke screen for conflict between user types."

Hain noted a zoning system instituted on the Missoula Ranger District in Montana. The Forest Service coordinated a system of routes which were individually ranked by level of mechanization, as follows: A) Four-wheel drives, B) All-terrain vehicles (ATVs), C) Motorcycles, D) Bicycles, E) Horses, F) Hikers, and G) handicapped individuals.

"Routes were designated by the highest type of use allowed. That use and all lower user classes are acceptable and the route is closed to all higher use classes. The district is rating and signing difficulty levels using the ski trail difficulty symbols," Hain wrote.

Hain also discovered a paper from the British-based environmental organization Friends of the Earth which endorsed mountain bikes as a "valuable recreation tool." The group said that mountain bikers ". . . will cause less damage than will a horse and rider, and certainly less damage than a moped, motorcycle, car, or farm vehicle."

Hain wrote that the Forest Service has in general "gone very little to prepare for the demands of mountain bike use on the National Forests" even though the forests offer a multitude of opportunities. Most agency action has been reaction to user conflicts.

HAIN FINISHES THE BOOKLET WITH A SHINING example: He mapped and discussed each mountain biking route in the Ochoco National Forest, including photographs of the beauty and excitement. He urged foresters to promote mountain bicycling through pamphlets and Recreation Opportunity Guides.

"There are many individuals and groups interested in developing routes for mountain biking. Now is the time for land managers and recreation specialists to get out in front of this challenge," Hain concluded.

Gordon Hain's Mountain Bike Trail Guide

	Easiest	More Difficult	Most difficult ¹
Grade			
Maximum Pitch	10%	30%	+30%
Max. sustained pitch	5%	10%	15%
Length	100'	300'	500'
Turning Radius	6'	3'	2'
Length of Trip			
Day	10-20 miles	20-40 miles	40-50 miles
One-half Day	5-10 miles	15-20 miles	20-25 miles
Clearing²			
Width	48"+	36"-48"	36"
Height	6'	8'	Max. 8'
Tread³			
Width	24"+	12"-24"	12"
Surface	Relatively smooth	Sections of Relatively Rough Surface	Varied—Some Portage required

Notes:

1. Upper limit of grade and pitch length depends on soil type, amount of rock, vegetation type, and other conditions affecting stability of the trail surface.
2. Curve alignment to avoid cutting large trees.
3. Increase tread width 6" on switchbacks or where side slopes exceed 60 percent.



Austria

Alexis enjoying the scenery in a woodcarver's garden.

Our fat-tired bikes were an oddity but what really snapped them out of their usual stoicism were our helmets, my wife's bare legs, and our two-year-old Alexis bouncing along behind in a bicycle trailer.

To them, wearing a helmet on a ride would be about like donning a coat of armor to order a Big Mac in McDonald's restaurant. And though we regularly rode past women sunbathing topless in city parks, most women wore pants or long wool skirts while riding their bikes, unless they were serious road

riders.

But it was the bicycle trailer that really got them.

"Super, super," they'd exclaim between their bursts of laughter. "Das is eine kinderwagen, eine kinderwagen."

Being a constant spectacle during a month of riding quickly lost its charm but remarkable mountain bike riding made up for the attention.

Take a look at the introduction to the "Sound of Music" and you'll see why. The



(with a two year old)

by Bob Pratte

Bob Pratte

movie begins with aerial shots of mountains, lakes, and Alpine valleys around the medieval city of Salzburg before finally zooming in on Julie Andrews singing in a meadow.

Those scenes are all connected with ancient dirt cart paths, called wanderwegs, that are now used for hiking and, most wonderfully, bicycle riding.

Though the mountain bike craze has yet to ignite the country, Austrians have been into off-pavement riding as long as they've had bicycles.

Austrians on sturdy three-speed bikes peacefully coexist with walkers on a network of wanderwegs that connect villages, meadows, lakes, and ski resorts. To make the region even more accommodating for wanderweg bike touring, hiking maps called wanderkarts use blue lines to indicate which trails and paved roads are the best routes for bike riding. You simply ride to a tobacconist shop, called a Robak Traffic in the center of every village, pick up a wanderkarte for the area and you're on your way.

The routes rim shores of lakes, roll through meadows and woods between villages, follow the banks of canals and streams, and climb steeply into craggy mountains.

Along the way are inns called gasthauses that usually cost less than \$20 per night. In the high country, fairly elaborate huts also serve meals and provide beds to backcountry travelers. Some of these huts can be reached by bicycle. Just follow the blue lines. "Zimmer Fref" signs hanging from a house indicate that a family rents rooms to travelers, an economical way to sleep, eat breakfast, and meet an Austrian family.

We saw only one walking path, a narrow wooden walkway hanging over a lake, where bicycles were prohibited.

Friends told us we were crazy to take a two-year-old to Europe, especially behind a bicycle. They pointed out the hazards of rain and snow, crazed drivers skidding around curves on narrow mountain roads, and, most of all, spending a month on the road with an extremely active two-year-old.

During an early-morning breakfast toward the end of the trip, my daughter and I were certain they were wrong.

Snow piled up on our bicycles parked outside the rustic Barmhof Gasthaus where we had escaped a surprise spring snowstorm, a hazard of April travel in the Austrian Alps. But the dreaded blizzard did not arrive until the end of our trip and when it finally did, provided one of our best days of riding in Europe.

Alexis and I enjoyed what she called our morning tea party as we watched snow build up on the nylon roof of her bicycle trailer. I sipped tea and she gulped hot chocolate in the Bluntal Valley, a flat-floored, Yosemite-like canyon about twenty-five miles south of Salzburg.

We chewed crunchy semmels, the Austrian breakfast roll that comes with a hotel room, and I thought about how ideal mountain bikes and a bicycle trailer were for a family touring in Europe. Our fat tires smoothly mashed over cobblestone roads and took us down quiet pathways away from traffic. Traveling with our daughter in the trailer turned out to be much easier than if we had dragged her by her hand from hotel to bus to train. We didn't have to worry about carrying a poop-soiled child from museum to church, watching to make sure she did not run away in a crowd, or keep her from grabbing things she might break.

Whenever she would whine into a cranky mood, we'd look at each other then hustle her into the trailer. She'd soon settle down, playing with her Cabbage Patch doll, munching a giant pretzel as she'd fall asleep.

We used Salzburg—the magnificent city of parks, castles, churches, and bike paths—as our base, leaving suitcases behind while riding on three- to six-day trips into the Lake

District to the east and along the Salzach River flowing from the Alps to the south. Like many European cities during the school year, Salzburg has several American college extension campuses and we found plenty of students willing to babysit so we could go out at night.

ON THE ROAD. we stayed two or three nights at a time in lakeside villages, exhausting all the bicycle trails into the surrounding hills before moving on. This saved us the bother of packing each day and enabled us to get to know a little about each village.

We stopped at parks to chat with Austrian mothers and grandparents while Alexis played with their children. We stayed in family-run gasthauses, complete with dogs and children for Alexis to play with plus local drunks, along with a few sober people, for us

to talk to.

Lodging, including breakfast, ranged from \$18 to \$30 per day, for three or four people. A picnic lunch and dinner in a restaurant in the evening usually cost us another \$20 per day.

The riding was as amazing as the Austrian beer. Even the day of snow was fun. It stuck to the ground and on pine boughs, but melted as it hit stream side bike paths that ran across meadows and through thick woods. We rode the paths, pooling through shallow drifts beneath cliffs skyling up into storm clouds. We invented a sport we called meadow dropping. I tried it my first time while descending alone on a hiking trail from Schwarzensee, a high Alpine lake, to St. Wolfgang, a waterfront village in the Salzkammergut lake district.

It was a tough ride, muddied by patches of melting snow until the trail emerged from the

woods where I was treated to a magnificent view of steep pastures of grass drooping to the lake below. A farmer, wearing the green wool coat and tie so many Austrian workers put on every day, chugged by on his tractor surprised to see a bicycle rider high in steep fields. He gave a friendly wave and did not mind if I rode down on his pastures.

I began my descent on a ride that was much like skiing. Centuries of farming had left the pastures smooth. Winter's snowpack had melted and short, tough grass blades were reaching for the sun. I was able to ride down in long, sweeping turns for a mile. From that day, we made sure we worked a meadow drop or two into a day's schedule. We were not destroying pristine backcountry meadows. These were farmer's steep pastures where tractors rolled and cattle stomped.

Another thrill was riding through the narrow, medieval streets of Salzburg's old downtown after midnight. Most of the streets in the center of the city are closed to traffic. One night we waited until all the beer drinkers stumbled home before jumping on our bicycles. We sped on cobblestones through eerily lit town squares, past shops that have done business for hundreds of years, and around churches.

ANOTHER HIGHLIGHT of our trip was an Easter egg hunt in the front yard of a woodcarver's home we found while riding in the hills above St. Wolfgang. His front yard was filled with totems carved into whimsical, contorted faces. When Austrians laughed from neighboring homes we hid colored eggs around the statues as Alexis had a hunt she still remembers. I hope she never will forget.

International flights land in Salzburg and Munich, about ninety miles to the north. If you use Salzburg as a base, rent a car with a luggage rack. This will let you drive to your hotel with the boxed bikes on top. That way you can assemble your bikes and gear at leisure rather than at the airport in a jet lag funk. It's also easier than trying to lift the bulky boxes and your luggage around on public transportation.

A friendly hotel owner will allow you to store your bicycle boxes and luggage while you're on the road. This is very important because boxes are difficult to come by at European airports.

Listing of hotels and gasthauses are available at information centers and train stations throughout Austria. Reservations can be hard to find in Salzburg during the summer months because of the city's excellent music festival but lodging is not as difficult to come by in the countryside.

Be prepared for rain in the summer and the possibility of an isolated snowstorm in the spring or fall. Those are the best times to travel because of the lack of tourists in the countryside.

The Austrian National Tourist Office send you volumes of lodging information no charge. The office's address is 11601 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 2480, Los Angeles, CA 90025.



Riding in the Snow

by Ginny Prince

Ginny Prince

Jan. 15 — New Hampshire. There's a foot of snow on the ground and the forecast calls for rain. Normally I would be depressed because such weather makes for horrible skiing. But this year, I don't mind. Why? My mountain bike is set up for winter riding; I can't lose!

If it doesn't rain, I can ride on the plowed roads, or I can go skiing. If it does rain, the snow will be glazed with ice and the snowmobile trails will be perfect for biking. I know, you're imagining glaze ice and what it feels like when your front wheel skids and the bike flips and your bum slams down on the ground with the resilience of diamond. What's my secret? Studded tires!

We used to use flat head metal screws in the sad old days when we rode road bikes but I'm here to tell you that mountain bikes, knobies, and 13 mm carbide tipped automobile tire studs make an unbeatable combination. You can ride onto a frozen pond (like our driveway) and do a track stand or endo just as if you were on dry land. And in our neck of the woods, the frequent and famous "boilerplate" ski conditions mean smooth, fast, exhilarating bike rides. Just wait

the next James Bond movie will have a winter mountain bike chase scene.

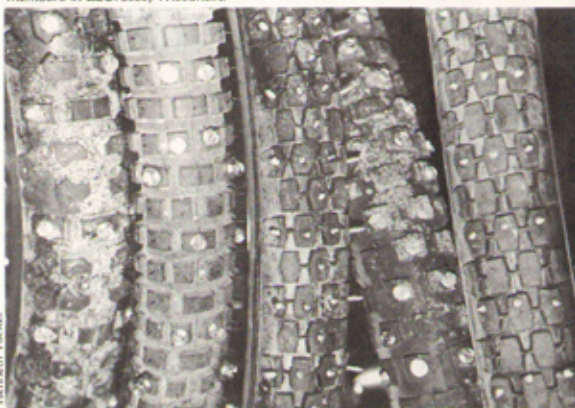
Environmentalists need not worry either. Studs do not enable bikes to chew up mud the way motorcycles do; there's not enough horsepower in the human body. Another rea-

son why skinny tired bikes haven't adopted studded tires is that their extra weight and tremendous rolling resistance create more work than they save unless there's ice around.

Now that we can ride our bikes in the

winter, about the only time we can sit around and get fat is deer hunting season (unfortunately in NH this means most of November). Moreover, riding in snow and ice cuts is great bike handling practice. And if we can do it in

Homemade versions of studded snows. These were the property of Coulee Climber members in LaCrosse, Wisconsin.



Keremeth Tracker

Fat Tire Survival and the importance of:
TRAIL ETIQUETTE

A Fat Tire rider out on a typical afternoon ride:

Going down the road feeling bad, bad, bad... © Charles Wolfeld

SCARE ME will ya! you Two-wheeler Terrorist!

BUT, when he neglects to STOP to WALK around pedestrians

Inconsiderate Riding makes Trail Closure

INSTEAD Be a Mt. Bike Ambassador

Make sure pedestrians feel safe and sound when you pass them

Simple friendly talk: "Yes, ma'am, it IS a nice day."

Then, back to the RIDE:

GOOD TRAIL MANNERS help keep bikes LEGAL!

Chuck '87

northern New England, you pansies down in New Jersey and Ohio can too — no offense intended. But anyway, since I'm writing this article I thought I'd mention some things we've found helpful for comfortable winter riding.

For your body, it's of paramount importance to dress right. Fortunately a lot of cross-country ski wear works well. This means layering — polypro, wool, ventilated wind-proof shell.

Thin ear muffs like the "Swix" ones and a thin knitted hat that fits under a helmet. A helmet is a great idea; you can really go fast and fall hard on the ice.

All kinds of nifty tights are available — the

ones with windproof fronts can be life saving and good for skiing too. I like to wear lycra shorts under polypro long johns and tights, sitting directly on the relatively rough weave of the polypro can cause saddle sores.

Summer bike shoes can be comfortable in cool wet weather with a high tech vapor barrier liner sock such as a used bread bag. When it gets seriously cold, light hiking boots work well if you pick an appropriate tread pattern, sole thickness/stiffness, and toe shape. You may have to get longer toe straps if you use clips and also raise your seat slightly to accommodate the thicker sole.

Cross country skis (polypro liners) have worked well for me because I usually

have to peddle hard enough that my hands stay warm. If you go on a long ride, it's advisable to carry extra warm clothing so you can take a break or survive if your frame breaks just when you reach the Canadian border.

MOUNTAIN BIKES ARE THE TICKET: just get out the studded tires and you're ready to roll. Put hot water in your water bottle and it won't freeze as soon. Be sure to ride the brakes after going through those nearly frozen puddles — it is no fun riding down ski slopes with icy rims.

Enough details — what you really want to know is how to get studded tires. As of this writing, the best bet is make 'em yourself. [See IRC Blizzard tires under New Products, editor.] The local auto parts store should have 13 mm studs. Old tires with large knobs are great. By making your old tires into snows, you have a perfect excuse for buying some new advanced design for summer.

Drill holes through the knobs from the outside of the tire then break your thumbs pushing the studs through from the inside. It's painful, but worth it. Next find a thinish road tire, cut the side-walls off, and use this as a backing to protect the tube from the studs. You're right — this is one heavy tire, but that means few flats, good traction, and one great work out!

As for tread patterns, just use your imagination. A few studs to the sides of the tread help dig in on the corners. The front tire is the most critical and needs more studs — when slips you go boom! When the back wheel slips you just spin a little (usually).

Packed snowmobile trails are ideal for winter riding but it's important to keep an eye and ear out for oncoming machines. Be courteous and yield right of way — after all, the ski-doo clubs went to a lot of trouble to make the trails. Also be ready for some incredulous looks; the sight of a bicycle in the January woods (and that outlandish get-up you're wearing) can be a shock for normal people. It's also considerate to avoid riding when the trails are soft and the tire tracks ruin the smooth trail for snowmobiles, skiers, and bikers alike.

OF COURSE, WINTER MOUNTAIN biking has some drawbacks. It's unbelievable how much your semi-frozen lip hurts when whipped by a tiny frozen twig. Also, when your front wheel strays off the beaten path and sinks to the hub, the bicycle will stop abruptly. At the speeds you'll easily attain, this means you can fly a long way over the handlebars. And be aware that if you put your foot down in unpacked snow and one leg sinks in up to the hip while your other foot is still strapped in the toe clip, you will fall over deep into the snow. Believe me, I'm speaking from experience. Getting back out is hard and it's guaranteed you'll have snow inside your clothing. But if you're truly addicted to mountain biking, try it in the winter; it's a blast.

Thanks for technical assistance from The Greasy Wheel Bike Shop, Tom Moutatt's Bike Shop, and Roger Stone.

BIKE TESTS

American Breezer

The American Breezer was designed by a man who is practically a legend in the world of mountain biking — Joe Breeze. As is well known by now, Joe built the first run of chrome-moly mountain bikes. Those were later followed by what has always been considered one of the finest all-around mountain bikes ever made, the nickle-plated Breezer.

Joe has always believed that the ideal mountain bike can be raced on, ridden to the store, ridden over technical single-tracks, and toured on for thousands of miles. Consequently, while others have rushed off to shorten and steepen their designs according to popular thought, Joe has maintained what can be considered a relatively conservative approach. The American Breezer, an aluminum masterpiece of a bike built by American Bicycle Manufacturing, is almost classic Breezer. A close inspection reveals that Joe has in fact evolved, though subtly.

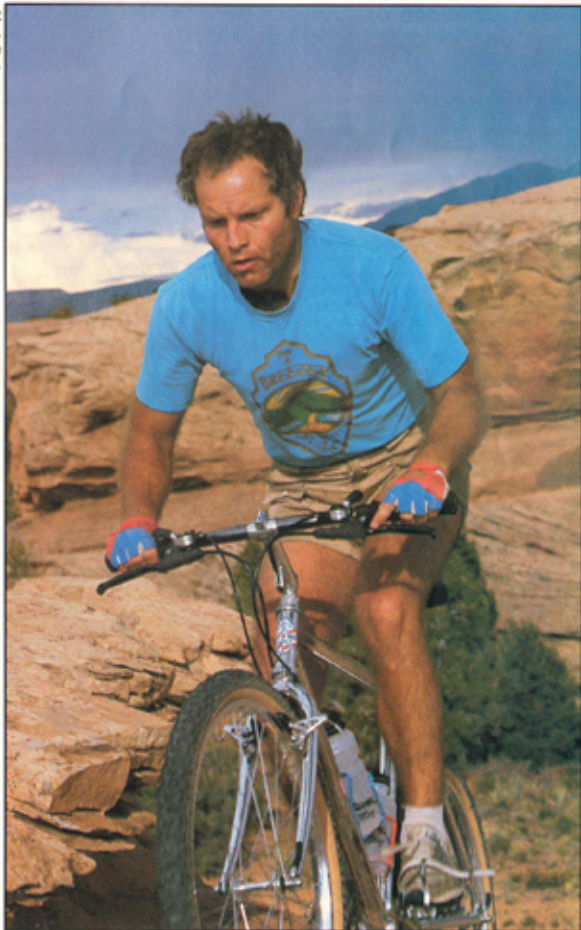
An American Breezer (20.5-inch size) sports 42-inch wheelbase, 17.25 inch mainstays, a 70-degree head angle with 1.75-inch of fork rake, and a 73-degree seat tube angle. Frame material is oversized aluminum polished to a high luster with the welds left unfinished. Though the welds have a raw, even primitive look to them, they're some of the best we have seen, uniform in thickness and size. A gusset has been added to the junction of the head and down tubes for additional strength in this critical area.

Similar to almost every top-of-the-line bike, the Breezer is equipped with a Shimano Deore XT grapple. A specialized alloy handlebar is mated to a beautiful American Manufacturing stem while Specialized Ground Control "S" tires are mounted on Araya RM 20 heat-treated rims. Saddle is a Specialized Lambda S; the seatpost a Suntour XC. The only notable gripe concerned the lack of toe clips and straps, especially on an approx-

Anyone who has ever ridden an aluminum bike knows well the different feel it has and the Breezer was no exception. Somehow it's both stiffer and smoother and rough sections seemed to fly by.

Mr. American Breezer himself, Joe Breeze hammers the slickrock. Don't worry, he was smiling a few seconds later.

Mark Rastrow





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BIKE TESTS

imately \$1,500 bike.

The unanimous reaction of all who rode the Breezer was what a climber it is! The relatively short 17.25-inch chainstays combined with the frame's incredible lateral stiffness plus excellent rider weight distribution are why. All of the energy put into the pedals goes directly to the ground, propelling the bike forward impressively. The Kosi fork kept the front end going where riders pointed it though everyone seemed to feel a distinct pressing down on the front end was necessary for optimum cornering. Otherwise there seemed to be a slight tendency for the front end to wash out on off-camber turns. The fork is a work of art, one that the more experience we have with it, the more we like it.

Anyone who has ever ridden an aluminum bike knows well the different feel it has and the Breezer was no exception. Somehow it's both stiffer and smoother and rough sections seemed to fly by. Laden with panniers for an extended tour, no one doubted that the American Breezer would still be providing an exceptionally comfortable ride even after a thousand miles of touring. And if, at the end of your tour when you're feeling rather fit, you come upon a race in progress, a quick removal of packs and racks and you'd be set to jet, safe in the knowledge that your bike has everything you need to finish in good form. In that, clearly Joe's latest creation fills his stated desire.



Ibis Avion

Famous for building superb custom trials and mountain bikes, Scot Nicol, in partnership with REI, has come out with a "production" Ibis — the Avion. For \$899, you get an impressive package: a frame built with Tange M.T.B. double-butted tubing with Kosi fork, Shimano Deore XT components, Araya RM-20 rims mounted with Specialized Ground Control tires (plus a pair of Dura-Max 1.50 tires for road use), Specialized saddle, and a beautifully finished Ibis stem. Our test bike was a striking Iris color.

Scot has always been known for building short mountain bikes so the Avion's dimensions come as no surprise. The chainstays

What all that means is the Avion has a wonderfully balanced feel, nimble yet not demanding of superior riding skills.

measure a conservative 17.5 inches while the wheelbase comes in at a short 42 inches. The head tube angle is 70 degrees, the seat tube 72 degrees. Fork rake is 2 inches. Obviously, the Avion sports a surprisingly short front/center relative to its overall wheelbase. That in turn means a greater percentage of the rider's weight is going borne by the front wheel. Modifying the potential for the front end to be super quick is the 70 degree head angle with 2 inches of rake.

What all that means is the bike has a wonderfully balanced feel, nimble yet not demanding of superior riding skills. The 70 degree head angle guarantees responsive steering while the Kosi fork and its 2 inches of rake keeps the front wheel well enough in front that inadvertent steering inputs don't create chaos. That front end also delivers a very solid feel on radical downhill plunges with the bike always holding the desired line, accompanied of course with a distinct rearward shift of the rider's weight. The longish rear triangle is partially the source of the bike's wonderfully smooth ride over the rough terrain.

Steep climbs brought out three weaknesses. The combined top tube and stem length was too short for most of our testers though in every other respect, the frame size was perfect. That resulted in either knees hitting the handlebar or an awkward position over the bike. In addition, the Ibis stem clamps to the steerer with a bolt on the back side of the stem. That bolt's sharp edge scared every tester's knees far more often than anyone liked. Climbing traction was better than had been expected considering the longish stays but nevertheless, every tester found he had to consciously transfer weight back to maintain traction on steep, loose climbs.

Had a longer stem been readily available, the size problem would have been quickly solved with what we guess would have been even better handling due to a bit more pressure on the front wheel for carving power. Unfortunately the clamping bolt problem would still have been with us even with a longer stem. That bolt is really too bad for it is a distinct drawback on what is otherwise a fine stem. Another minor peeve were the smooth rubber grips; they tended to become rather slippery when wet with sweat.

In summary, the Avion is one of the nicest bikes available for the money, \$900. The workmanship is excellent, the component what you'd expect (including clips and straps), and the handling superb (assuming your Avion has a stem of the correct length for you).

BIKE TESTS

Fat City Wicked Fat Chance

WOW! That was the first word out of every tester's mouth after taking the Wicked out for a spin. There's something about a Fat Chance, a certain feel of "solidness", that's hard to describe until you ride one. Then you know. It's always been there. The tubing, the angles, and the components mesh together to create a stable, very fast ride. Only in the past, Fat Chances were known for their relaxed geometry and consequent relaxed handling. Many a rider returning from a test spin on a Fat Chance would sigh and wish the bike was available in a tighter geometry. Sigh no more; it's here. The Wicked Fat Chance sports a 71-degree head angle with 1.75 inches of rake.

This is one very tight bike with loads of performance. The bike instilled confidence on any terrain. All of the testers found themselves hammering up hills in bigger gears than usual. The front end went exactly where it was pointed with absolutely no wheel flopping; all a rider had to do was concentrate on

So good was the bike's performance that pinpointing any one area of particular strength was difficult though there was a lighting up of eyes whenever a particularly technical section was spotted.

jamming the pedals with maximum power. The 17.125-inch chainstays kept the power propelling the bike forward instead of spinning uselessly in the dirt.

So good was the bike's performance that pinpointing any one area of particular strength was difficult though there was a lighting up of eyes whenever a particularly technical section was spotted. With its 71 degree head angle, quick maneuvering was a snap. We tried to make the front wheel wash out; it wouldn't! On steep, rough downhills, the bike seemed to grip the ground without bounce around as many bikes with shorter top tubes do.

The components once again consisted of a Shimano Deore XT gruppo with a handmade Salsa stem and very light Fat Chance bars. Ground Control "S" tires come set up on this year's hottest, lightest wheelset — the Specialized GX-26 Rim laced onto Deore XT hubs.

The True Temper triple-butted tubing is beautifully tig welded and then coated with a thick, resistant "Powder" paint finish. Fat Chance will do whatever you want with the paint (for a price). Our test version had white with black polka-dots and fade-to-black rear triangle, worth \$200 of the \$1,300 price tag. The only problem we found with the bike concerned the sealed-bearing bottom bracket; it may be unserviceable except by the most complete shops. Also, a bike with this hefty a price ought to come equipped with toe clips and straps. Other than that, the Wicked was one of the testers' favorite bikes in 1987.



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TENTATIVELY SPEAKING

OR WHAT TO LOOK FOR
IN CHOOSING A
TOURING TENT

Consider the tent, that membrane of synthetic fibers standing between you and the fresh evening air, between you and that clear view of the Milky Way, between you and the rain and snow and the howling wind and the starving mosquitoes. It's your constant burden but it's also your changing room, your storage locker, and your sanctum sanctorum when privacy is nowhere else to be had. Sure, it was priced outrageously for the materials involved and the design is compromised as though the maker had been trying to please others as well as yourself. Yet because you carry it, you can dawdle and detour to your heart's content, assured that, wherever you find yourself at day's end, you will have shelter. Refuge, to some, equates to peace of mind, a commodity hawked by shrewks for considerably more than the price of the average tent.

Next, consider what makes up a tent and what is asked of these mortal flimsies. Upon a tensed frame of pencil-thin connecting rods is stretched a sewn patchwork of gossamer nylon fabric and netting panels. The floor — which you will pitch on thorns and jagged rock and upon which you will toss weighted packs with sharp edges, dangling hooks, and protruding cutting tools — is constructed of somewhat sterner stuff but nothing that a little ingenuity or a modest accident can't ravage. Slash a



well and see what "ripstop" means. Dump your lighted stove indoors and see what "flame retardant" means. Pitch your tent on low ground before a real soaker and see what "waterproof" means.

A tent is a house for the thoughtful, careful person yet it's expected to keep out blasting wind and driving rain without compromising interior ventilation. If you've chosen wisely, you should be able to emerge from it after a couple of days of nature's worst while still several stages of dissatisfaction short of desperation. All that is a lot to ask from rags and sticks and I find it amazing that any products approach the goal at all. Why, with enough of these things, with determined Mongols to fill them, and with a copy of Sun Tzu, a guy could conquer the world.

Consider this hypothetical situation: you're planning to take your trusty fat-wheeler on a long tour, on a route which will take you through a wide range of terrain and climate conditions. The budget is tight so hotels are out and restaurants will be spartan and occasional. Campgrounds will be sporadic, unaesthetic, and overpriced but then much of the world is a free campground once the lights go out. You'll get by all right on the cheap; all you need is a good tent. Which one is the dilemma. There are so many in any given price range and they differ so radically. There are A-frames, Conestogas, wedges, domes, pyramids, Venusian polyhedrons. Some even bill themselves as bicycle tents. Does such a thing exist? What criteria sets it apart from the standard backpacking tent?

A touring tent makes a perfectly good back-



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED
by GARY OLIVER

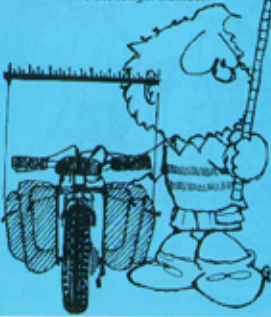
packing tent but the reverse is often not the case. While hikers and bikers both require light weight, the biker should be more concerned with pole length. The tent itself can be stuffed away in an unobtrusive bag or pocket somewhere but those rigid poles are invariably uncoforming to your packing schemes. Strapping too long poles to your top tube is a rattle and a pain, especially if you have to portage, and you'll regret it later if the poles protrude from your aerodynamic luggage bundles. If you compromise anywhere in selecting your tent, don't do it here.

Does the tent you're considering have windows or doors through which, even when the fly is rigged for full-tilt thunderstorm, you can see your parked bike when snapping twigs or stealthy footsteps wake you at 2 a.m.? Is it free standing or requiring only a minimum of stakes (say, 3 or 4; large rocks can be substituted) for those times when the best campsite is on concrete, rock ledges, or gravel? Remember, the more pole sleeves in the design, the longer the setup time, an important factor when making camp in the rain.

Unless you find a terrific deal or plan to do most of your touring in the snow, you'll probably opt for a three season tent. They usually weigh less and have superior ventilation than a comparable four season model. Weight is a depressing calculation (they're all too heavy) with which you'll have to come to terms: more dollars can mean fewer pounds. Cheaper tents frequently use heavy, breakable fiberglass poles (if you go this route, better carry along an extra pole section, just in case), while costlier designs employ lighter,

Pole Size

To determine your maximum acceptable pole section length, take a perpendicular measure across your loaded rear rack from the outside of one pannier to the outside of the other. Subtract a few inches from the figure to allow for light days and later, more efficient packing schemes, and there you are. On my bike that's 20" so I don't consider any tents with pole sections longer than that. Poles that extend past your panniers on the right are likely to snag in the shrubbery in tight squeezes and, on the left, in passing traffic. To assess a tent's maximum pole length from a catalogue or brochure, look for the figures given for "packed size" or "folded size" and take the longer number.



stronger poles of Easton aluminum.

The lightest portable shelters are no-pole coverings like nylon tarps and tube tents offering little protection against wind, cold, and bugs. Next up the scale are bivies and low-bays, made to hold one or two campers exclusively in the prone or supine positions. These coffins often sport large netting windows to up the illusion of open space but the sardine reality is back as soon as weather or dew, or the likelihood of weather or dew, makes you draw the fly. And that horizontal position can get awfully odd should you be trapped inside such a no-sit-up for several consecutive stormy days. Changing clothes is a feat, preparing meals calls for high coordination, and good luck if you get a cramp.

There exist two person tents with sit-up room that approach the light weight of these no-sit-ups and, believe me, the freedom of movement gained is worth that extra pound. You can always shave it elsewhere in your rig by drilling out wrench handles or by carrying less of another item, such as books or food or clothing. Or you can go on a diet. Don't buy a bivy figuring that you can adjust to such tight quarters; on a long tour, it's likelier that you'll adjust to the need to spend valuable road dollars for a more spacious tent to keep from going nuts.

Alongside the manufacturer/merchant's weight claim will be a figure for floor space in square feet. What is not given is a figure for usable floor space. Sloping tent walls produce internal acute angles of diminishing utility toward the juncture of floor and wall; bags and bodies won't fit into these spaces without

Weight

TOTAL WEIGHT is another figure given in the product literature. Sometimes it includes stakes and sometimes not — for the excellent reason that different terrain and climates call for different types of stakes, and the weights are, you guessed it, different. You, however, must compute stake weight into your total poundage, including an extra stake against loss. Then add in the plastic groundsheet, good for an extra 8-10 oz. when clean and dry. After day use, you'll be packing dirt as well as tent and sometimes you'll haul along moisture from rain and dew (early start, y'know). If you plan on carrying a six pound tent, better look for a four pound tent. Two can share the burden if you've a partner, of course, but the community property settlement can be rough should you split up while on the road.



touching the upraised sides and ends of the waterproof bathtub floor. If they touch, there's an excellent chance in most climates of being damp in the a.m. Da goods mean added weight, mildew, and unpacking/drying/repacking time. The walls of hoop designs are more plumb than A-frames and pyramids (plus they have more headroom because of the lack of acute angles in the ceiling) though some Conestoga hoop tents have slopes at the two ends. In computing the length you'll need, don't forget that a person in a sleeping bag is longer than a person not in a sleeping bag. Having the ramfly extend to form a floorless vestibule adds usable space for gear storage at minimum additional weight.

A quick shopper's checklist: weight, apparent strength, pole section length, ventilation, usable inside space. Spring for an upper bracket tent and you can find other desirable features, such as tension adjustments in pole systems to allow for fabric stretch, or a ramfly which can be set up on the poles without the tent for an ultralight alternative to carrying it all. Skimp on a Taiwanese copy instead and you might save enough to lengthen your tour; priorities will surface.

First step, though, is to learn what's available. Visit local shops, check in mail-order catalogues, and write to manufacturers for product lists and information. If you've friends who own tents, get opinions and, if feasible, weekend loans. Once you've reared the field down to a few acceptable models, keep an eye out for sales and another eye out for used deals. Look regularly in the newspaper classifieds and haunt the bulletin boards or card files at cooperative outfitters' shops (while you're there, ask the salespeople if they know of anyone who's selling what you're after; leave your name and number). If near a university, check the student newspaper ads and the post-it boards in the student union, especially near the close of a semester when goods are being dumped for a quick exit. Put up your own card in the Wanted To Buy section. If you live near a manufacturer's seconds outlet, don't fail to visit it; also look for seconds and discontinued models in merchants bargain bins and in mail-order catalogues. If money is a consideration, doing your homework and being patient can either save you plenty or get you more for the same expense.

However much it costs and however splendid it looks when assembled, your tent still will be a delicate, vulnerable object. Excessive sun will, in time, damage its fabric, condensation will form inside, and the best zipper still may stick just as the malarial horde approaches. That's what you get for dealing with products designed by human beings. Think about your tent's failings some evening when the world outside is drenched, when rain is falling heavily on your nylon roof, and you're snug and dry in your imperfect nomadic den. Do you really want your money back?

Geek the fullness. Home is a state of mind.

NEW PRODUCTS



Marin Rockstars

Few riders are familiar with the Marin Rockstar off-road tire; they should be though. Besides having a super name, the tires were designed by Joe Murray and his input is obvious with superb straight line performance. Joe's always been known for his strong climbing ability and that's precisely where these tires perform best. In fact, they might well be the best in a straight line.

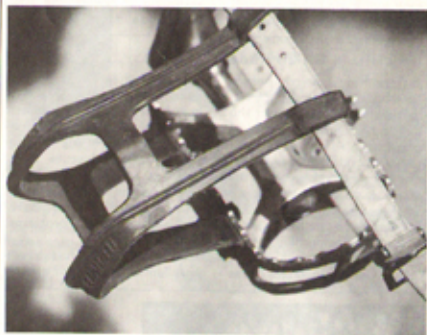
A series of wide but narrow traction blocks are spaced along the tire's centerline. Spacing is open enough for mud shedding requirements but tight enough for maximum traction. Spaced around the tire's perimeter are

small side dams for cornering. The general consensus is that the Rockstar's carving power is less than that of the Specialized Ground Control S for instance but superior to general use tires such as the Specialized Crossroads II and the Ritchey Quad. All in all, the unanimous opinion is that the Rockstars are a heck of a good high performance tire with only one drawback: they wear relatively quickly. That's also pretty typical of high performance tires. Though Rockstars have less air volume than Specialized Hardpacks and Fisher Fat Trax, they're still considered "fat" tires and are fine on rocky trails.

IRC Blizzard Tires

IRC has introduced a new tire designed for those hard core riders who refuse to put their bikes away just because snow is on the ground. We've not tested them yet but they look like they ought to get the job done. The Blizzard has a special tread with 56 steel studs and comes in one

size, 26 x 2.125. Studs on bike tires aren't new — we've seen quite a few home-made modifications — but this is the first time a manufacturer of bicycle tires has produced a studded tire. We'll give you an update on their performance some time this winter when the information is available.



Specialized Toe Clips

Specialized has introduced a new toe clip made out of the same super light but strong nylon material they've used to produce water bottle cages and tire irons. After almost two months of steady use, we've got nothing but good things to say about them.

They're the lightest on the market with lots of toe room, a particularly welcome development after having the toes

crushed by too many previous clips. Mounted on Soutour XC Comp pedals with WTB Toe Clips, the clips are far and away the easiest to get into of any we've yet tested. Still, there are times when getting into the clips is impossible; all that can be done is to pedal with the clip hanging down. We've done so more times than anybody can keep track of and there's been no breakage. Can't complain about that kind of track record.

Pearl Izumi Cycling Shorts

Pearl Izumi has established an enviable reputation for quality cycling clothes for good reason. They're intelligently designed and well made. They're also known for innovative ideas. Some work and some don't but that's how you learn. One of these ideas that really does work is the introduction of Kevlar into the side panels of cycling shorts.

When we first received them, we were dubious. The shorts were stiff enough to practically stand up on their own and heavier than any we'd ever worn. But, typical of Pearl Izumi, they fit great and were quickly accepted as a reasonable cycling alternative. The only complaint about them was how much warmer they were than regular shorts but the difference wasn't enough to stop them from being worn.

But their real selling point was the Kevlar side panels and discovering if they really worked took awhile, no volunteers willing to hit the deck stepped for-

ward. No problem. With a little patience, we knew eventually someone would crash with them on. Someone finally did and the shorts worked. The shorts suffered zero damage and that was after a fall that would have shredded lycra shorts. Skin damage was minimal. The shorts did exactly what Pearl Izumi said they would.

But one serious bummer did surface. When worn with any kind of pack with a waist belt, the front seam between the kevlar panel and the regular lycra could quickly chaff right through the skin. At no other time did this problem come up but unfortunately wearing a fanny pack or back pack is all but inherent to mountain biking. At least it's a problem that shouldn't be too difficult to solve. Then it's just a question of being willing to drop over a hundred bucks on a pair of cycling shorts. All we can say is that we've no doubt they'll last for a long time and will definitely outlast any lycra shorts — assuming of course that you crash now and then.



Specialized GX-26 Rims

Rims from two companies have been the leaders in the off-road field from just about the beginning, namely Araya and Specialized. Araya's RM-20 was pretty much the state-of-the-art rim last year and probably still shows up on more performance bikes than any other rim but not for lack of effort on SBI's part.

In 1987, Specialized introduced the X-26 and GX-26 rims (the GX is hard anodized) and in

many a rider's opinion, the GX-26 is the hottest set-up going. Proving that statement is impossible, when two products are of such high quality, deterring an advantage in one over the other is strictly subjective. Nevertheless, after three months of hard riding on a pair of GX-26 rims, we have to say we have had absolutely zero problems with them.

Braking action has been excellent with smooth power

and no bumps while the wheels have maintained their tinniness throughout a season of abuse. Naturally, a wheel's ability to remain true starts with the wheel builder, no matter how good the rim may be, if the wheel isn't built properly, the rim will suffer. Due to Mark Slate's excellent wheel building skills, we were assured of fine wheels, leaving the rims to stand up on their own. And so far, they've done exactly that and look like they'll

continue doing so for years to come.

The rims are also available in 32-hole patterns for lighter rims looking for less wheel weight. We've had another set of wheels built with 32-hole X-28 rims that are also still going strong after over a year of hard use. They only needed truing once in that time span, an impressive record considering the demanding terrain they were ridden over.

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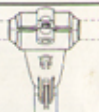
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over rocky trails, around
old mines, rotted timbers,
exhausted dreams.

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my yellow Cannondale and I
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my heart pounding smoother
my gloved hands gripping balance
between the brakes — between gravity
and courage.

Every day
my machine and I tested theories
of ascent
up to intangible fences and signs
found somewhere between gravity,
strength and time.

Every day
finding new skills and traits
while learning no one *has* courage —
we merely use it
whenever it appears.

Every day
I rode those mountains
with their steep descents
and my constant need to explore —
searching,

every day
wanting nothing more than that place
in the mind where there's no
difference in attention
between riding
and where it leads.

by Cynthia Miller

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design—and no need for constant adjustment. Deore XT front cantilevers with even more power than cam-types.

9. WE PUT NO BRAKES ON OUR DESIGNERS.

The Peak and its series companions, The Vision, The Instinct and The Chill, do not follow "The Rules." Built in Seattle at the foot of real mountains, they reflect the thinking of cyclists who care more about motion than they care about marketing.

But why read about imagination, when you can ride it? Now. At your Raleigh dealer.

It's a little conspiracy you might want to get in on.



LEADING THE WAY.



Ned Overend - Schwinn Mountain
Bike Racing Team - 1986 NORBA
Nationals Champion

Current 1987
Point Leader

Defending 1986 NORBA Champion
Outstanding in any field!

Follow Ned and the rest of the Schwinn Mountain Bike
Racing Team at the NORBA National Championships,
September 5th & 6th in Durango, Colorado.