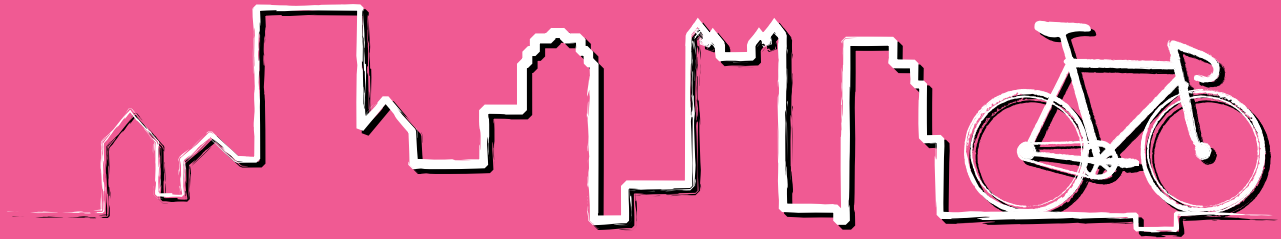


PROLLY IN TOKYO • BIKING IN BERLIN • ORLANDO PHOTO GALLERY



URBAN VELO

Bicycle Culture on the Skids

Issue #16 • November 2009



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URBAN VELO

Issue #16 November 2009



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On the cover: Pretty in Pink on the Streets of London.
Photo by Roxy Erickson, www.roxyerickson.com

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Urban Velo, PO Box 9040, Pittsburgh, PA 15224

Urban Velo is a reflection of the cycling culture in current day cities. Our readers are encouraged to contribute their words and art.

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Tokyo has been invaded by all manner of sea monsters, giant robots, super-sized moths and even vampires. So when John Prolly came to town, the Japanese were ready...



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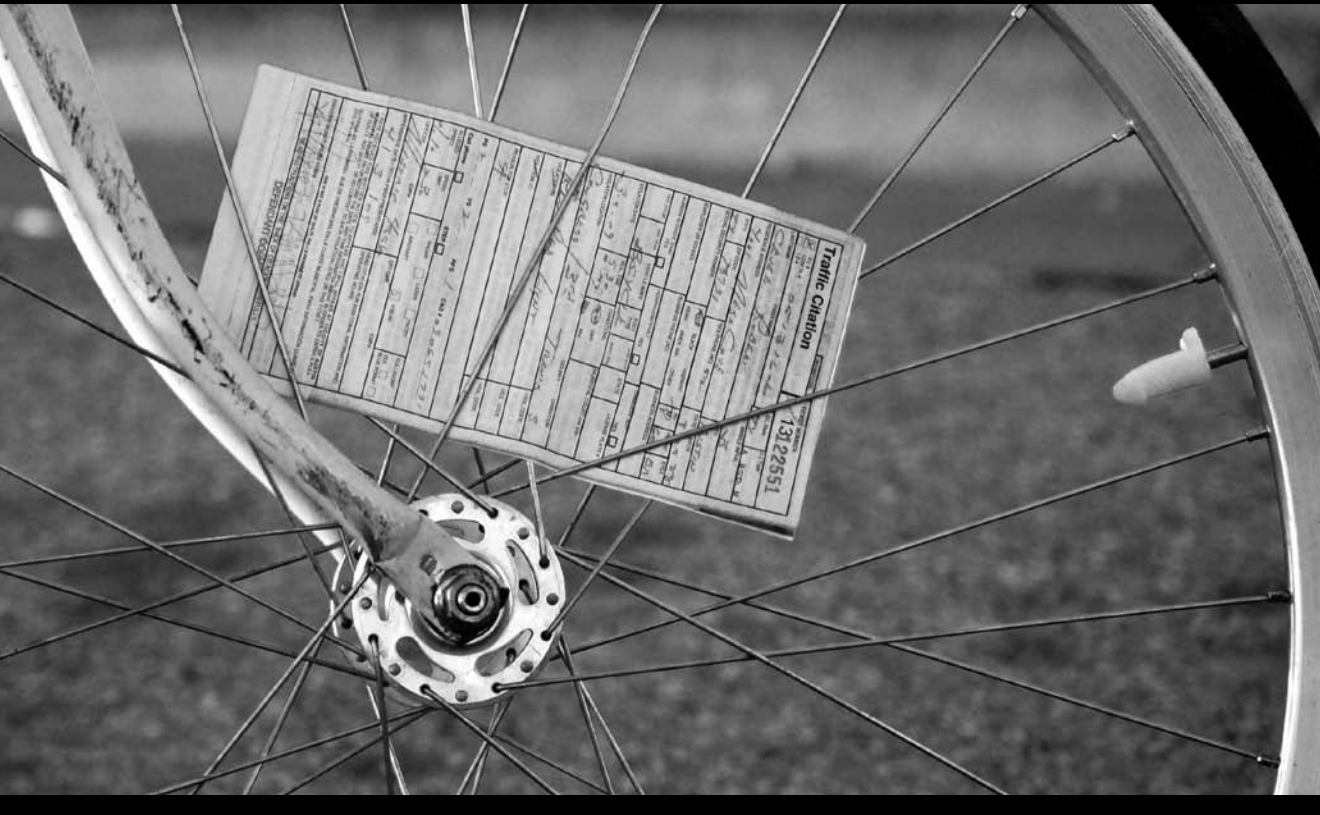


74 **Love Letters Written in Horseshit**

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Walking around with your head in the clouds... It makes no sense at all. Sell yourself short but you're walking so tall... Photo by Julian Birch



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Editor's Statement

By Brad Quartuccio



One thing the bicycle has afforded me in abundance is friends in far off places. The summer season that has just passed truly hit it home, as I couch surfed through at least six cities and had more people than I can remember do the same in my living room. Oddly enough none of the sleeping arrangements were the result of direct, “You travel here, and someday I’ll travel there” type trades but more the overall willingness of cyclists to host others, trading accommodations in a big cloud of secret handshake free housing. One vouches for another, no one breaks anything expensive, everyone sleeps for free.

It happens in every subculture, and it surely feels just the same. This amazing family that you only get to meet through a shared obsession but otherwise end up sharing all manner of experiences with, not to mention tales over dinner.

On the cycling side, getting the inside line on where to

go and how to get there is priceless, and can lead to the kinds of rides like the one pictured above—doubletrack trails winding through the forests that overlook Oakland, all on a completely inappropriate loaner DeRosa track bike. So fun it feels like cheating, but I’m not sure who’s the house.

Far off places seem to be the running theme of this issue, with *I Love Riding in the City* contributions from across the globe and four feature stories about places outside of the borders of the United States. John Proly touching down in Tokyo for the Cycle Messenger World Championships 2009, Gregg Culver declaring victory in rarely aggressive German traffic, Samuel Hester introducing us to Edmonton’s BikeWorks community bike shop, and Julian Birch sharing his *Love Letters Written in Horseshit* inspired from his riding around London. Contributions reflecting no fewer than 12 countries. *I Love Riding in the City* indeed.



We want your words. Send your editorial contributions to brad@urbanvelo.org



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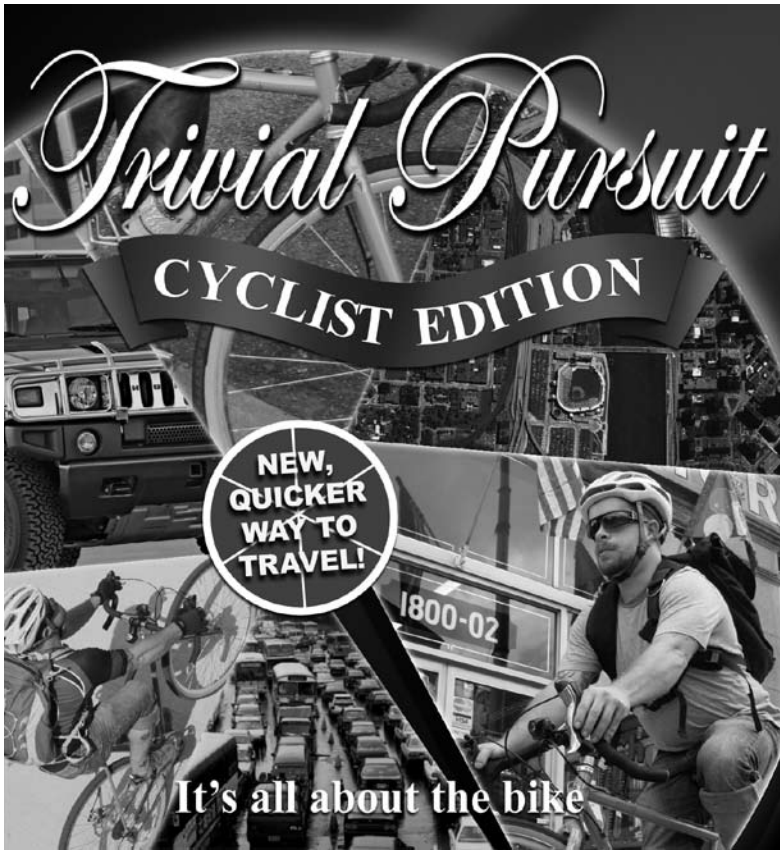
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Publisher's Statement

By Jeff Guerrero



our way—independently and on two wheels—while the rest of the world takes the easy, fossil-fueled route that society dictates.

I thought about this the other evening while riding home from work. Although I could easily ride the North Shore Trail, it's often so crowded with pedestrians that it's slow and almost dangerous to bike on. When there's a sporting event going on, forget about it. So out of habit I just ride the roads around Pittsburgh's multi-million dollar stadiums. The roads are well kept, and most days traffic is light. But on game day the traffic becomes erratic, congested and drivers are irritated, confused or simply feel a sense of entitlement that comes from paying outlandish amounts of money for the privilege of spectating on the banks of the Ohio. In other words, guys driving Hummers don't think they need to share the road with some punk on a Salsa. And so the notion of passing at a safe distance goes out the window, along with a leer and perhaps a few choice words.

Of course it's not hard to win at Trivial Pursuit on game day, and after dodging the valet drivers and narrowly avoiding the jaywalkers, I've put the Hummer in its place—stuck at a red light behind a row of cars trying to enter the parking garage. Maybe it's just that I'm getting older, but I don't even bother to flip the driver off as I pass. I know they see me, and it's satisfaction enough to know that I'll be well on my way to drinking a cold one before they get their hands on a \$7 beer at the ballpark. 

There's a little game that most of us play. I like to call it Trivial Pursuit, though I'm not talking about the board game. I'm talking about the game we play out on the city streets, where we pass and are passed by automobiles. They're seldom aware that we're even in pursuit, and we're seldom conscious of how trivial our efforts are. After all, much like winning the board game, there's no real prize. Even if you "win" all you're likely to get is a little self-gratification. You probably won't even get the satisfaction of seeing frustration on the motorist's face.

So why continue to play the game? Why not just keep to the right, stay back behind traffic and choose the bike paths over direct routes through the city streets? By and large it's pride. And while pride is one of the seven deadly sins, in many ways it helps keep our spirit alive. The notion that we do things

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i ♥ riding in the city



Photo by Matthew Rainwaters

NAME: Annie P.
LOCATION: Austin, TX
OCCUPATION: Accountant

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

I live and love riding in Austin, TX. My favorite thing about riding here is that at any given time I'll almost always run into a big group of other riders and my group will double. There's a constant stream of fun things to do on bikes and a ton of great guys and girls contributing to that stream. Bike geeks unite!

What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?

Chicago must be my favorite city to ride in. I give it a five star rating for being bike friendly. Chicago knows just how to "share the road."

Why do you love riding in the city?

Alleycat races, bike-in movies, critical mass, harvest moon ride... the list goes on and on.



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THE WATTS



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NAME: Sam Sitrin

LOCATION: Philadelphia, PA

OCCUPATION: I help run a drop-in center for chronically homeless people by day and agitate to change the system that makes them homeless by night.

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

I live in West Philadelphia. Whether I'm biking the 8 miles to Kensington midnight or midday; bag loaded with condoms and clean syringes to distribute to ladies doing sex work; or biking two miles, shoulder aching from carrying protest supplies to a rally on AIDS funding; biking in Philly comes with as many cloudless and lovely days as demented dodges past car doors and smiling surprising strangers who don't blow stop signs.

What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?

Tempted as I am to romanticize Philadelphia because of the love I have for its skyline and lack of hills, a good half of my rides are composed of cursing while playing dangerous leapfrog with buses. Yet, there is a particular joy that

comes from navigating through dangerous scenarios on my way to doing HIV prevention. I love getting where I need to go with a little dirt between my teeth and a reliance on no one but myself. Biking in Philly makes me feel even more like the Superhero/Freak I always dreamed of being.

Why do you love riding in the city?

I love that I don't have to worry how I am going to get across town when I am finished with work. When I am done with my paid job at Prevention Point, the syringe exchange site and drop-in center, my ride takes me through the streets where the people I work with live and spend their time. It gives me an intense, uncomfortable and necessary perspective on what conditions are like for a lot of folks.

Or just say whatever you want about riding in the city...

Ever ride through the city at 5am?

The sky above the bridge rises like some lunatic robin's egg, splattered with goose-colored clouds, the blue breaking like a rigid crack against the black river.

Every day when I cross Broad and Spring Garden I dive between food trucks and rush hour traffic and community college students.

At 5am I throw both of my hands into the air above my head, ride with my body stretched out, no need to hover with hands near brakes.

The only shock is an occasional "Attack of the Zombies" flashback, the sudden fear of a dead city, that the silence is permanent, and the stillness a sign of some terminal disease that has been sneaking through darkened windows across the city while we slept...

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NAME: Ipan K.

LOCATION: Kuta, Bali

OCCUPATION: Software Engineer

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

Kuta, Bali. Riding here is hectic. Everyone's driving like hell, especially the motorcycle riders and taxis. They would take any road they can, even a narrow sidewalk. The taxis stop everywhere they can, even in the middle of the streets. But rather than that riding in Bali is heaven. You can enjoy the nature, culture, and the scent of Bali incense in every ride.

What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?

Bali's still the best place to ride for me. The nature's so beautiful, especially when you ride through the countryside or seaside just to smell the different breeze. The changes of scenery can be done in just a few pedals. Riding in Bali gets you free passages everywhere—no charge for entering sites or parking your bike.

Why do you love riding in the city?

I love the rush and challenges in store every time I take my bike out. The city means lots of people and lots of vehicles. But I feel mine is the best, I can slip through every bit of traffic. Rushing in the red light feels like getting ready to burst into the speed, and when it's done, all you can do is just look ahead and pedal as fast as you can. Never mind the car that honks at you from behind.

Or just say whatever you want about riding in the city...

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The breeze
And the pounding heart...
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Cross over every machines,
Rush, rush and pedals away...



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25%
mission

i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: James J
LOCATION: Oakland, CA
OCCUPATION: GIS Mapping

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

Oakland is a great place to ride. Like most of the Bay Area there is a ridgeline of parkland with trails and excellent road rides. The city has a semi spoked road pattern that starts downtown and continues to the hills and into Berkeley. You can ride the waterfront clear to Richmond to the North. The terrain is easy and the streets are fun to navigate because it's not a grid and you can traverse between all the different neighborhoods along interesting routes.

What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?

The biggety O of course, the five and dime, Broakland.

Why do you love riding in the city?

It's just so much faster than being in a car. My commute is short, just over three miles and I get to travel down the quiet tree lined beauty that is Trestle Glen, around Lake Merrit and into Downtown Oakland.



Name: Kritdi Tantirittisak
Location: Bangkok, Thailand
OCCUPATION: Production manager

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

I live in Bangkok, Thailand. In this city there is traffic all day and most drivers don't care about bicycles, but it's fun to ride here. If you can ride here I think you can ride anywhere on earth.

What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?

Bangkok because I live here—it's dangerous but I am very happy to ride in this city.

Why do you love riding in the city?

I love to ride everywhere but because of my job and my life I have to stay in city all the time, riding makes me happy.

Or just say whatever you want about riding in the city... Poetry anyone?

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NAME: Bagus Prakoso Gunawan (thebagso)
LOCATION: Yogyakarta, Indonesia
OCCUPATION: GIS Student

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

I live in Yogyakarta, where a lot of people say time goes by slowly. The bicycle culture here is strong. Here bicycling isn't so boring, because every detail of the city is worth seeing.

What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?

I would like to ride in Magetan, it's a nice city at Mount Lawu's foot. It still has fresh air to breath, nice view to see, and mountainous tracks to train your muscles.

Why do you love riding in the city?

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OCCUPATION:

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?

Why do you love riding in the city?

Or just say whatever you want about riding in the city. Poetry anyone?

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NAME: Ryan Branson
LOCATION: Whangarei, New Zealand
OCCUPATION: Retail Assistant

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

Whangarei, NZ has been home for 15 years now. No cycle lanes and a reasonable amount of driver ignorance makes it interesting but good fun as traffic is congested and stop-start all the time so I am usually first at the lights and can blast past. Cars traveling from the 'burbs are a hassle and make it hard to merge lanes to turn into the city.

What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?

The city of Norwich in England as this was my teen cycle stomping ground. I spent all of my time riding and finding every alley, nook and service lane I could find. Once you have conquered the whole city then you have no fear from her and the traffic within it. The buzz, the noise, the life of the city—it flows through my veins.

Why do you love riding in the city?

Think of the Chili Peppers song "Under The Bridge"—that sums up the love of urban riding for me.



NAME: NeszetiBOR
LOCATION: Budapest, Hungary
OCCUPATION: DPT Operator

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

My home is Budapest. For a beginner it is hard to start riding in this city, but if you do it frequently you can find your place in the traffic. There are only a few bike lanes and they do not connect. City governance has so much work to do, and soon they will have to due to the increasing numbers of bike users. There are so many rude car drivers also, who both disturb your ride and do not care about the pedestrians... Shame.

What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?

I only had the chance to ride in Stockholm, Sweden. The traffic moral is so good, there were so many situations where in Hungary car drivers would honk my head off, but here they were decent.

Why do you love riding in the city?

Riding totally changed my life. Every thought is around bikes, building bikes. I go everywhere by bike, no matter if it is winter cold, raining or summer hot. This way I can be a little bit of an outsider from this gray society. It makes my days colorful.

Or just say whatever you want about riding in the city... Poetry anyone?

When we see a bike friend on our way we yell to each other: RAKD MEG!



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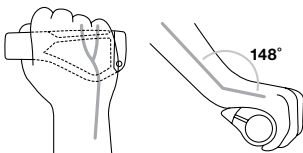
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NAME: Harvey Botzman
LOCATION: Rochester, NY
OCCUPATION: Writer

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

Bicycling in Rochester is a delightful experience. The city is actually divided into five distinct sections. Two sections suburbanites would never even venture into. The other three sections, East/Southeast, Charlotte and Downtown are wonderful areas to bicycle. I bike all over the city, even the most "dangerous" areas at night. I'm a bit fearless.

Most Rochester drivers are respectful towards bicyclists, although it seems that bicyclists are less tolerated in the poorer socio-economic neighborhoods. This is surprising since the percentage of residents in those neighborhoods who use a bike as their primary means of transportation is high.

Over the course of the last 20 years the city has redesigned and reconstructed its major thoroughfares to include an unmarked bike lane. Since the early 1990's all Rochester Transit buses have had bike racks. Stainless steel at that, and they are not removed during the winter.

What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?

Chicago and Toronto are good places to ride due to the implementation of a valid bicycle plan.

Why do you love riding in the city?

There are wonderful places to see and explore in a city. I love to ride late at night (2am-5am), actually in the early morning before sunrise. It is quiet and I can hear the silence as well as the quiet noises of a city. The swish of air rushing through narrow streets; the clicking of sign switches going on and off; and the swoosh of my tires on a street.

Lights and reflections in store windows make everything look different at night.

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NAME: Aaron Semmel & Allison Heutsche
LOCATION: Santa Monica/Los Angeles, CA
OCCUPATION: Hollywood Player/Silversmith

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

Aaron: I live ten blocks from the Pacific Ocean in Santa Monica, CA. Riding in LA is death defiance at every moment. Everyone is driving around too cool for school, talking on a cell phone, playing with their iPod, smoking a joint, wearing sunglasses... No one is watching for bikers, they are too busy looking for famous people.

Allison: I live in the Larchmont area in Los Angeles. Riding in LA is a bit crazy, unless I stay in the immediate neighborhood. People in LA aren't very nice and don't know how to share the road.

What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?

Aaron: I love sweet home Chicago, but my favorite two-wheeled memories are in Eugene, OR where I went

to college. Amazing natural beauty everywhere, great street riding with cool people and some of the best mountain biking. It's like mountain biking on Endor.

Allison: Bedford, OH because as a kid my sisters and I could ride safely up to Dairy Queen and get Buster Bars in the summer.

Why do you love riding in the city?

Aaron: The wind in my hair, not a care in the world and I can't hear my boss calling my cellphone while I'm riding.

Allison: I love riding to work because it is so convenient and I don't have to pay parking tickets when I forget to move my car for street cleaning.

Or just say whatever you want about riding in the city...

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Photo by Giles

NAME: Jazz Jasmin

LOCATION: Columbus, OH

OCCUPATION: 3rd shift poop reader (honest!)

Why do you love riding in the city?

I love the connection. Being in a car cuts you off from so much. I love hearing the birds, or being able to pull over and watch a mink on the riverbank. I love getting konked in the helmet by a duck taking off! (No one got hurt, but I can't say the same for that one chipmunk—so sorry.)

How many people in cars have someone pull up beside them and start talking to them? (And not in a road rage kind of way.) I've had people roll down their windows and tell me about a bike they've had and/or just bought. I've met other cyclists and chatted as we rode. People feel comfortable enough to stop me for directions.

The best time was when I was stopped by a cute old man asking for directions to the hospital. His wife was

being released and he needed to pick her up. He was confused and anxious. I not only gave him directions, but waited for him and he followed me the couple of blocks to the hospital. It is moments like these that pull me out of myself.

I love remembering how it was my Gramma who helped teach me to ride. I love exploring and discovering new and beautiful sites in the city I was born in just a mere 37 years ago. Nothing beats riding the quiet and peaceful streets of downtown at night. That is a part of the city only a few of us are able to experience and appreciate.

Or just say whatever you want about riding in the city...

The pedals have saved my life by connecting me to the world around me and more importantly, connecting me to me.



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NAME: Moshe Cohen

LOCATION: Baton Rouge, LA

OCCUPATION: Grad student and work with Baton Rouge Advocates for Safe Streets

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

So you've never heard of Baton Rouge, LA? It's around where the laces start on the shoe-shaped state. It's flat here, and except for the daily 2pm downpours during the hot and rainy season, the climate is conducive to cycling year round. The mayor just tripled our bike facilities in town, so now we've got sharrows on all of our favorite neighborhood cut-throughs. The parade culture of Louisiana (including Mardi Gras and other festivals) and small-town feel of the city make for friendly neighbors waving to you from their stoops. Just as long as you stay away from the stretches of major thoroughfares that spiderweb across the city. They'd better get used to us soon, cause we're here to stay!

What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?

NYC's grid system makes it easy to get around—riding on marked bike lanes or not. Taking my bike onto the subway—or onto the Max in Portland, OR—is pretty convenient, too. I once got “Yeah, Bike” riding through a

neighborhood in Portland, and no one can argue with their great facilities and culture. The Yellow Bike Project in Austin, TX hooked me up with a great pannier made out of a kitty-litter bucket, but their on-the-street bike facilities didn't make me feel any safer than riding on the streets of Baton Rouge—where I have my biking friends, bike-friendly restaurants/bars, and a growing bike culture that's on the move with advocacy, alleycats, and polo! Let us know when you're dropping by to check it out for yourself, and be sure to pick up BR's monthly bike calendar at a local coffee shop or bike shop.

Why do you love riding in the city?

When I ride in the city, my bike is my destination. It doesn't matter where I'm going or what path I take. People ask me where I ride, expecting me to answer either our great mountain bike trails or the velodrome or River Road where the lycra crew trains. Instead I tell them my bike gets me around. They seem bothered to think that I've gone through “all that work” biking just to get to the bars or the weekly farmers' market downtown, but just thinking about getting in a car bothers me! Especially since that's no way to see a city—speeding by and missing everything interesting.

Or just say whatever you want about riding in the city... Poetry anyone?

Thanks for sponsoring the Tour de Rouge messenger races for Bike Month 2009! Here's a little something I wrote for you guys:

A Eulogy for Bicyclists

*Had we valves for our spirit, a gauge for our soul,
we might better hear it: the calling towards whole.
We'd pump ourselves up to make sure that we'd roll.*

*Had we debonair bike bells for car horns and curses,
we might share ourselves more, stop crying for hearses,
and ring out our sorrow in jubilant verses.*

*Had we shifters and brakes for the ups and the downs,
we might give what life takes with more smiles than frowns,
and coast with momentum, not fearing the ground.*

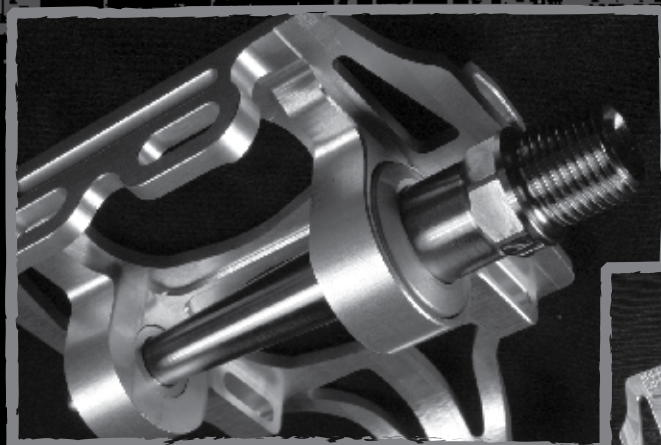
*Had we eyes on the back not the front of our head,
we'd not see the lack, or the loss, or the dread,
but the miles we've traveled together instead.*



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i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: J. Altman

LOCATION: Manhattan, NY

OCCUPATION: I.T.

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

I live below 23rd Street. Pretty much everything that can be said about riding in NYC has probably been said. I'm undecided on which DSM entry might be relevant: Bipolar disorder? Borderline Personality disorder? Or outright Sociopathy? On the other hand, maybe that's the riders. Hard to tell, someday.

But that's the down side. The upside is the variety, which for me is sheer in nature: it's never the same; it's never boring; and it requires an on-your-toes attitude. That means no girl watching.

In my experience, you have to actually ride the bike, if that makes sense. And that's a good thing.

What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?

That would be New York.

Why do you love riding in the city?

I just like to ride.

Plus, it beats walking, the bus, the subway; or deciding to not go somewhere because my choices are the bus, the subway, or walking.

Or just say whatever you want about riding in the city...

Steady on wins it, every time. I've learned that even if I go slow, I still get there way before everyone else. Besides, if I like riding (and I think I do) what's my hurry?

NAME: Stacy Siivonen

LOCATION: Helsinki, Finland

OCCUPATION: Personal Assistant



Helsinki has it all—a fetish for cobblestone streets, trams and tram rails covered in snow, thumbtacks on the bike paths, aggressive van, bus and taxicab drivers and crushed gravel (they spread it in the winter to increase traction, but it mostly destroys tires).

I ride my bicycle anyway because I enjoy freedom of movement and the distinct seasons. When the sea freezes, I will sometimes bike on the sea ice instead of the tire-breaking gravel. Flooding creates challenges. Commuting by bicycle is seasonal, but I am one of the few that ride year round. In winter you can bike in solitude, but in spring, summer and fall the bike paths, which are sometimes referred to as “extended parks,” are full of summer cyclists, scooters, rollerbladers and dog-owners and eternal construction sites. Traveling by public transportation is irritating, it's like being packed between the pages of an advertisement catalogue. Too many people in a closed space causes me anxiety, and the idea that you have to depend on schedules stresses me out. Most of the people that complain about the inclement weather here are the people who spend the least time in it.

I love to bike in Tampere, because I love the city. It lacks some of the nastiness of Helsinki, such as the need for using congested streets and a bus once gave me the right of way—politeness unheard of in Helsinki. Tampere offers good views of the city, yet you can pretty much avoid the hill using the bike path while cars have to negotiate the steep hill. Usually in Finland it's the other way around. Tampere has put forth an effort to make road signs for cyclists. Finnish cities are usually lazy about putting up any signs, and you have to kind of guess your way and study the map well. There is also at least one long bike path for commuters. Usually the bike paths end suddenly or switch to the other side of the road randomly. The size of Tampere is better suited for bicycling than the size of Helsinki.

SOAP

GETTIN' SICK IN HOSTILE CITY!

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i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: Jjay Ali aka Kat
LOCATION: Singapore
OCCUPATION: Service Manager / also part of PEONFX

Photo by Acit Salbini

Where do you live and what's it like riding in your city?

I live in a tiny island in Southeast Asia called Singapore. It's a concrete jungle—one big city with so much to see. The city changes fast, with new buildings emerging every now and then. Here in Singapore, there are no bicycle lanes, so you are practically part of the massive traffic. Despite that, it's easy to get around and the roads are in good condition.

Why do you love riding in the city?

There's so much to see in the city. The traffic is never the same, and there are always new routes to learn. I tend not to notice how long I've been riding as I watch the surroundings (at the same time looking out for the crazy traffic).

I am more aware, my senses are alert and I can just go with the flow when I'm on my bicycle. I absorb the scenery of the city—the skylines, the city lights, the building shadows combine with the sound of horns and the occasional return gestures to rude motorists.

Whether I ride alone or with the usual awesome crowd, each ride is full of excitement and surprises. I have curious bystanders asking about my bike, why do I ride on such hot days, what makes me want to ride when our public transport is good, isn't it dangerous for a girl to ride alone in the city... The list goes on.

Or just say whatever you want about riding in the city...

To me, riding is a form of relaxation. It releases stress. An escape from hectic schedules and daily routines. It's never boring to ride in the city. I don't have to get stuck in a crowded train or in the bus. Or get bored in the taxi. Whenever I'm riding, I know that I am not in a rush to get anywhere in particular.

There are no social or work commitments when I'm out with my bike. Unfortunately, I don't get to ride everyday, so whenever I am on my bicycle, I feel free.

I do hope for one thing though—that motorists would have more respect towards cyclists, and not to think that we are a road menace.

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JOHN PROLLY'S ADVENTURES IN

TOKYO



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TOKYO

It's no secret that messenger and messenger-inspired events are hugely popular. Ten years ago you'd be hard-pressed to find an alleycat, or unlicensed underground bicycle race, in many cities across the United States. Alleycats and other bike-messenger events were mainly held in major cities with a large bike messenger population, and a decidedly underground phenomenon. With the popularity of track bikes exploding over the past few years, these events have started to sprout up in cities all over. Most of the people attending alleycats and other events aren't messengers, just bicycle riders enjoying the newfound cycling scene in their city.

The Cycle Messenger World Championships (CMWC) is one event that has held onto its messenger-only roots, and on the world stage. Along with regional championship events like the North American Cycle Courier Championships (NACCC) and the European Cycle Messenger Championships (ECMC) these events have helped to unify the messenger community. Open forums have been held to discuss the state of the industry and community activists have proposed ways to increase pay and fight for healthcare. With some large companies bleeding messengers dry, people felt these events would be a good place to discuss the continuing salvation of the urban bike messenger.



Background photo by Rip Zinger

These events weren't only there for open forums, but also to encourage a bit of competition and fun. Bragging rights were had and while you were there competing, you were making friends all over the globe. It's safe to say that the CMWC has changed since it first began. Now with cycling more popular than ever, new riders are looking to have a taste of messenger culture. The only question is, is the CMWC ready for non-messengers to be in attendance in such numbers? One thing's for sure, most alleycats in major cities are over-run with city bikers.

All of these thoughts were spiraling through my head as I began to plan for the CMWC 2009 in Tokyo. I had been invited by a few of the organizers and was told that this was going to be the biggest yet. Knowing Japan has some of the most talented fixed freestyle riders in the world, I knew I had to go. It presented a perfect excuse to finally get over to Japan and ride with people. All was going well until I made a post on the NYC fixed boards about my attendance in the event. Someone posted that I didn't belong there and people like me were ruining these events, telling me to take my shiny bike and money elsewhere.

Sure enough, after I made a few posts to my blog about attending the CMWC, I got similar feedback from people. To be honest, it bummed me out. I've been riding a bike in NYC for nearly six years now and have never once felt unwelcome at an event. The bike messengers in NYC hang out with everyone. If there's a party, all kinds of people in the "cycling scene" show up. Compared to other cities, it's a very welcoming scene. I guess I was foolish to assume the world community would embrace the same ethos. It was too late though; I had already purchased my plane ticket.

We boarded our plane and some 13 hours later landed in Japan. On the car ride from Narita Airport to Tokyo, we got in a rather heated discussion about whether or not non-messengers were welcome at the CMWC. Once again, I was discouraged from even showing my face at any of



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the sanctioned events, which I never had any intention of competing in. All I wanted to do was hang out with some of the Tokyo freestyle riders, see the city and meet some people who up until this point I have only interacted with online. After the long flight and staggering traffic, we were in Tokyo. Luckily we had a few days to unwind before the events began, so it gave us all a good chance to meet the locals and some of the people who had found their way to Japan from all over the world.

To say that I was surprised at the Japanese hospitality is an understatement. I was literally blown away at how polite everyone was. Everywhere I went I had people greeting me with stickers and shirts and snapping pictures. It was kind of overwhelming. At the big trick night in Tokyo, Shiba Friday held in Shiba Park, there were at least 300 people in attendance. Kids from all over came to Tokyo to ride with the various visitors. There was no hostility, no jealousy, no competition, just fun. When I travel to other cities, I always got the feeling people had something to prove, or were less than pleased that I was there. Not in Tokyo. It was the warmest reception I've ever had.

The Shiba sessions were a blast. So many talented people, all who seemed to specialize in a specific trick or line—like their fingerprints, each of their styles were different. They were so excited to ride, I had completely forgotten

about any unwelcoming comments others had made. I had found the real reason why I came to Tokyo; community and support. I was so stoked to finally be there, riding with the people I had blogged about and been in projects like Bootleg Sessions with, that I upped my ante on little sleep and bruised my heel on the first night there.

It was a long ride home to say the least. Come the next morning, my whole foot was swollen with black and blue bruises—sprained. The next day was spent icing it down and wrapping it with duct tape that I bought at a corner store. Taking it easy, I spent the last day before the CMWC events riding around in a large group, where we tore around the streets of Tokyo, sightseeing, drinking beer and eating noodles.

The next day was the official beginning of the CMWC. Registration began, as did the open forum. A lot of people rolled in and out of the Tokyo Bicycle Messenger Association homebase. Before too long, the space had filled in with people from all over the world and in turn I ran into some old friends and made new ones. I spent most of my free time that day icing down my bruised foot until the Goldsprints CMWC welcoming party was ready to go. The following morning was the qualifying round for the messenger events. We awoke early and were on our way.

Riding with other tourists in a strange city with no signs

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in English is a sure way to get lost. Our group wandered a good 20 km out of the way as we looked for the bridge to get to the islands off Tokyo Bay where the races were held. Once we got there, I was once again blown away at the number of people in attendance. Companies had tents set up and people had set up blankets to sell off their homemade messenger bags and other items. The TKBMA had to pay for the event somehow, so the easiest way was to offer company sponsored booths. Adidas, Oakley, Fuji and R.E.Load were just a few of the vendors present. It was a little strange to see a big company like Adidas have a fixed gear collaboration with Kalavinka in the works, but personally I welcome new products marketed towards fixed gear riders.

The main course appeared exhausting. The registration line was packed and it seemed every few seconds, some exhausted messenger crossed the line with their packages and manifest in hand. The first day was eaten up mostly by the qualifying rounds, determined who made the cut for the main race to come. By 5pm everyone was beat and ready to watch some rounds of footdown and the track stand competitions. Once they were done, we all were set to partake in some of the CMWC-thrown parties. Some people attended, some didn't, but there was a big group ride back and once we all reached the destination, drinking ensued.

That night was a total blur. Luckily for me, I got a ride to the CMWC events the next day in a car, so I wouldn't get lost again. We were there bright and early to see the final round in the work-simulation. Once everyone was done, the sprints and the skids took place. After a large group photo, the police were getting anxious. The TKBMA had a permit until 5pm and in Tokyo, and rules are rules. Like everything, there is no delineating from protocol. After everyone had all their tents packed up, the event was shut down. We all rode back to Shibuya for the closing party.

Once everything was said and done, it was time for the awards ceremonies. The night club where the party was held was jam-packed. What better way to end a messenger event than with some sumo wrestling? Well, we didn't go to an actual sumo event, they dressed us up in costumes and let us go head to head over prizes. The party was a blast, exactly what a cycling event should be. Everyone was dancing, laughing and having a good time. No animosity, no jealousy over the winners and best of all, no hesitation to make new friends.

Following the events, everyone took some alone time. Groups split off and went on their own paths to tour Japan. I stuck around in Tokyo because I was finally well enough to freestyle ride and there were tons of spots I wanted to hit up. A small group of us went around hitting stair



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gaps, wall rides and ledges. Probably the most fun I had in Tokyo was riding with the Japanese freestyle kids. They each had their own specialty trick that was dialed into perfection—you got the sense that these riders had spent hundred of hours perfecting their style and waited patiently to show off their moves to people visiting.

Just about everything we were doing in the States had been either been improved or at least experimented with at some level. Whatever tricks were popular in the US at the time I left were big in Japan. Bunnyhop barspins were the new fad—everyone was trying them, but only a few people had them smoothly. Like most tricks on a 700c bike, they have to be fluid and smooth. The size of the bike certainly limits this and that being so, it takes a high level of skill to execute them. Watching some of the Japanese freestyle riders do tricks is like watching a performance piece; such speed, such intensity and such accuracy. I ride with a lot of talented people back home and I was shocked at how much Japan's riders had improved.

On my last Friday in Tokyo, I got to head to Shiba Friday once again. The crowd was much smaller than the week before and all the core riders were there in full effect. We rode all night, having a blast until I went to 180 off the same kicker that I sprained my heel on before. Something went wrong with my landing. I'm not entirely sure what, but throughout the week with my heel being bruised, I was in the habit of landing on the palm of my foot. When I did it this time, I dislocated the bone attached to my big toe. I took my shoe and sock off and saw my bone popping up. Re-locating a bone isn't fun, but it's a whole lot less fun when you wait to do it. Knowing this, I stepped on my foot and popped it back in place. Within minutes, my whole foot was swollen and I couldn't walk.



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I knew something was broken. A few of the guys got me some ice and gave me a ride home. I remember yelling “Goodbye Tokyo!” because I knew I wouldn’t be able to ride for the last day I was there. The guys dropped me off where I was staying and I had a long and painful evening ahead of me. Without waking the people I was staying with, I went to sleep. The next day was the keirin races at Keiokaku Velodrome. My housemates left in the morning without me and I spent the last day in Tokyo on the couch watching Japanese fishing shows.

Later on that evening, my housemates came home to find me on the couch with a puffy and blue foot. They woke me up and took me to the hospital. Knowing the US healthcare system and the expenses of such a trip, I was hesitant. They assured me that it wouldn’t cost more than 20,000 Yen or so, which wasn’t bad seeing that it’s roughly 90 Yen to the dollar. Sure enough, we get there and the receptionist confirms that; 10,000 Yen for the x-ray and consultation, 2,000 Yen for the wrap. Post x-ray it was revealed that I fractured my foot—“Take it easy and it will

be healed in 6-weeks,” was the prognosis. It was my last night in Tokyo and I was ready for a hot meal and a cold beer.

A large group of us assembled and did just that. It was the perfect ending to my trip. The next morning we packed our stuff and hopped on a bus to Narita airport. With the ease of public transportation, the Narita to Tokyo trip isn’t bad. We were there before you knew it and on our plane headed back to NYC.

Tokyo for me was the best time I’ve had on my bike ever. The people, the events, the culture and the city was the most amazing experience anyone could ever dream of having. I got to meet so many people from all over and at no other event in the world could you do such a thing. The CMWC may have started as a messenger-only event, but with the changing times and the popularity of track bikes and fixed gears, it’s grown to one of the biggest urban cycle culture events in the world. I’m not a messenger and I don’t intend to become one, but I never at any moment felt unwelcome in Tokyo. For that, I thank you. 

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PERSUASION

A Political Primer – By David Hoffman



Politics. Love it or hate it—if you’re going to get better bicycle facilities built where you live, you’ve got to play.

For some, the ability to be political just comes naturally, making connections and glad-handing endlessly. For others, they find the whole process repulsive, preferring to stay as far away as possible. Wherever you are on the spectrum of loving or hating your time at City Hall, we hope that you’ll be able to take some tips and apply them towards making your community better for bicycling.

If You Read No Further Than This Section

Let’s start with the basics. First and foremost, where there’s political will, the money will follow. This is perhaps the single most important fact to remember. Without political will, there will be no funding, and in turn, no new or improved bicycle facilities. Within transportation planning, the need for new or improved facilities is almost always an entire order of magnitude greater than the actual funding available at any given time. This is one of the reasons that Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) have 30-year horizons, and why it can take years and years to get a project funded, even if it was “approved” years earlier.

The second most important thing to remember is the old adage that you will “catch more flies with honey than vinegar.” To put this in perspective, your local politicians hear from folks all day long who are complaining to them, making demands, and are generally unhappy with the state of things. While that’s to be expected if you’re an elected official, finding people or groups that can be viewed as allies, and have good things to say about you, is always a relief. We’re not saying that you have to be their best friend, merely that an open and positive attitude when meeting and communicating with them—even if things are not going your way—will pay off in the end more times than not.

Finally, make sure that you’re viewed as a person or group that can provide a solution, rather than just shedding light on problems or deficiencies in the system. If you can be viewed as a resource and/or a bearer of trusted information, you get your voicemails and phone calls returned much more quickly, getting meetings scheduled and action taken.



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RIDER: MARTIN MALANA
PHOTO: RUSS ROCA



IMBA's Frank Maguire at the National Bike Summit, dressed for success.

Step 1 – Define Your Issue

What is it that you need? Is it a bike lane along a busy street? Do the police need some sensitivity training? Do you need more bike racks in the business district? Whatever it is, this is your “Ask”. Politicians always expect The Ask. Why else would you be seeing them? This is the time to do your homework, before you see your politician. Be sure to research your issue—if it is more bike parking that you’re after, contact municipalities or bike coalitions in those neighborhoods with the types of racks that you want; to get pictures, numbers of racks, approximate cost per rack, etc. You will be asked for all of this at some point, so the better prepared you are, the better you’ll look. Don’t worry if you don’t have all of the answers during your first meeting—it’s perfectly OK to say “I don’t know, but I will get back to you shortly with an answer.” And do get back to them... we’ll cover that in just a bit.

Do you know which of your elected officials will be most sympathetic to your issue? Unless your issue occurs within a particular Councilperson’s district, you should take the time to find out who would be likely allies and obstacles to addressing your issue. Getting a good lay of the land, understanding what your elected official’s position may be even before you meet with them, will greatly help you to focus your research and resources where they should be spent. For example, if your issue is to extend bike lanes through the entire city and your district Councilperson already is pro-bike, there is no need to spend time convincing them that cycling is a good thing. Instead, spend the time trying to figure out what materials and research should be done to convince others on the Council of this issue.

Once you’ve defined your issue and done your homework, contact your politician’s office. It’s pretty likely that you’ll actually get a staffer, not the person who you’re trying to reach. This is normal, and you should expect it. Unless you’re living in a very small town, most politicians employ a staffer or aide to assist them. Staffers/aides help with the workload, can specialize in particular issues, and are generally the ones that actually do the vast majority of work in the offices of elected officials. If you’re lucky, you’ll be able to talk about your issue immediately, or will be able to see somebody in person in short order.

If a meeting is set up for a future time it is helpful to do two things within 48 hours of the meeting: 1) send a short email confirming that the meeting is still on—things can move/change rapidly for elected officials, and you may not always be notified of their schedule change, and 2) include a short agenda in the note. This agenda should

Even Washington Needs Help

Every year, the League of American Bicyclists (www.bikeleague.org) holds the National Bike Summit in Washington, D.C.—a time for hundreds of bike advocates to come together, bond, ride in the (often) rainy March D.C. weather, quaff beer, and yes, lobby Congress for better bicycling. As folks who attend the Summit are from all walks of (bicycling) life—bicycle retailers, manufacturers, shop mechanics, distributors, local, regional, and state advocates—the level of political awareness varies greatly. Some folks are attending the Summit for their first time with no political experience at all, while others are seasoned pros. To deal with this wide range of experience, the League has Stephanie Vance of AdVance Consulting (www.advocacyguru.com) give a 30-minute crash course on political do’s and don’ts—especially helpful for those who are about to be loosed on the Halls of Congress for the first time.

Practice makes perfect. If bike mechanics and volunteer advocates with no political training can lobby their Senators, you can talk to your local Councilperson to lobby for bike lanes in your neighborhood. The simple message: You can do this.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”

—Margaret Mead

merely restate what you want to cover. If you have any supporting materials that you plan to bring, don’t include those electronically unless the person should review them in advance of your meeting. Sending materials prior to a meeting can often cause a meeting to be rescheduled or cancelled because the other person may think that they have all of the information that they need.

Step 2 – The Meeting

When you first meet your elected official or staffer, you’ll need to establish your credibility. If you’ve ever been to a City Council meeting you may have experienced folks who come up to the microphone to rail on every issue imaginable during open time or public comment periods. You may notice other members of the audience rolling their eyes, or your elected offices busy shuffling paperwork while the person is talking. This person does not have credibility.

So how do you establish your credibility? Easy. Show up on time. Come prepared. Don’t yell or accuse. Stay on topic, and be respectful of the time allotted for your meeting. One final thought while we’re stating the obvious—dress well. If you can avoid showing up in spandex, or are able to change in to nicer clothes (if you bike there), do so. First impressions are everything, and nothing says, “I’m serious about this meeting” as much as being nicely dressed. Sounds ridiculously easy, doesn’t it? Yeah...

During your meeting you may be asked questions that you can’t comfortably answer. Be honest, and don’t make anything up. Tell the person that you’re meeting with that you don’t have the answer, but that you’ll find out and get back to them shortly. This actually works out in your favor, as it automatically gives you a second meeting of sorts with the person. And if you do get back to them within a reasonable period of time, it helps to establish more credibility.

Take notes while you meet. Be sure to capture any significant points and/or action items. You’ll want to send these to the person afterwards. This serves two purposes: 1) it demonstrates that you’re tracking what’s being

discussed, and 2) it helps to provide a framework for the two of you to work from as you move forward.

Step 3 – Follow Up

Unless your elected official is a superhero, you’ll probably need to follow-up for some time with them on your particular issue. This is where the most work will take place, and where your long-term credibility will be established. Within one day of the meeting, preferably less, be sure to do the following:

- Send a short thank you email expressing your appreciation for their time. Keep it short. Do this after every meeting that you have!
- Include the notes that you took in this email. Be sure to point out any action items, both in any attached documents, and in the body of the email, and make it easy to find them! If there are dates associated with the action items, mark your calendar and follow-up with the person if you don’t hear from them within a reasonable period of time after the due date of the item.
- Attach any supporting materials that you may have brought with you and handed out if you have them in electronic form.

The Power of Persuasion

While you spend time scheming ways to increase the friendliness of your city to bicycles, consider this: the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition (www.sfbike.org) was once called out in a major San Francisco newspaper for possibly having too much power. And we’re not talking about the power to climb hills. We’re talking political power, baby! This wasn’t a small Letter to the Editor tucked back in the Opinion pages, instead it was a front page, above-the-fold news item. That was a couple of years ago when the Coalition had perhaps 7,000-8,000 members; now the SFBC has more than 11,500 members! The SFBC is a political machine for sure, but it is by no means the only one.

Bicycle advocacy organizations all over the country are posting information on elected officials and candidates’ views on bicycling and bicycle-friendly environments.

The four Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot Program communities—each receiving \$25 million to change mode share by getting more people biking and walking— that are part of SAFETEA-LU (the current Federal Transportation Bill) was an idea spawned by local advocates (For more info, see: *Urban Velo #7, Bicyclists The Future Is Now.*)

Local Complete Streets policies are often spearheaded by local coalitions all over the country. (For more info, see: *Urban Velo #1, Complete Streets.*)



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Words & Photos by Samuel Hester



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54 URBANVELO.ORG



BikeWorks, one of the oldest community bike shops in North America, has been around since 1980 as a haven for cycling inclined individuals. Run by the non-profit organization Edmonton Bicycle Commuters' Society (EBC), it has grown sporadically to its now flourishing existence. Approached from the alley near the train yards and commercial truck parking the first thing seen is a slightly menacing chain link fence. Behind it is a yard packed with old bikes—good stuff can be found in this bicycle bones yard, and frequently is. That said, to find the real gems all you need to do is walk inside, where volunteers have already gone to the effort to remove and store good components. Recently redecorated with cycling related posters and signs and painted in bright yellow, green and red the shop is inviting and warm. As part of EBC's mission to make cycling as inclusive as possible they have even managed to add women- and trans-specific days for shop use.



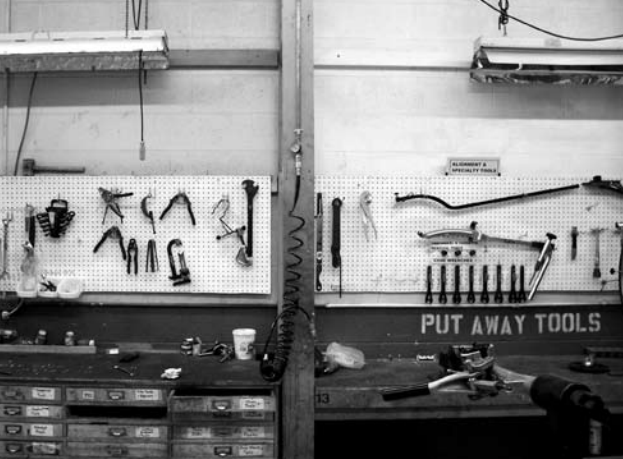
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“It’s friendly and inviting. There is every part I need, and many I’ve never heard of.” –Jen

The many volunteer mechanics can help with any project. Beyond the normal maintenance help there is a good contingent who can direct people in doing something truly awesome. Want to learn to lace and true wheels? No problem. How to repack your bearings? No sweat. Get those bloody rubber grips off? Easy! There is a resident mechanic who is an expert in single speed and fixed conversions, not to mention loosening stiff nipples by lighting them on fire! Experienced cyclists will agree that one of the best ways to learn how to maintain your ride is to take one apart. If you’re nervous about doing that to your own machine, there are plenty of donor bikes that need to be stripped and they provide valuable experience and knowledge about how yours works. One young woman I met there was doing just that, she was so pleased to be able to practice on a bicycle while helping the shop she was learning from strip the parts off. Additionally, it relieved the pressure of having to get her own bike back into a ride able state that afternoon. I met her several times over the summer, and by the end she was truing wheels and repacking bearings.

At the rear of the shop, under the loft balcony that houses the microwave, computer and extremely necessary coffee machine, is a parts room filled with the scavenged remains of scuttled bikes. Where else can you get those replacements for cheap? I even found a pair of blue Cateye toe clips! Not only are there a plethora of patinaed parts, they are well organized in bins for easy searches to complete that restoration or custom machine. Off to the side of the loft balcony is a show room. In following with its goal of increasing the accessibility of cycling, the no frills space contains bikes rebuilt by the volunteers for sale at extremely reasonable, even perhaps unreasonably low, prices.

More than just a nuts and bolts operation, BikeWorks runs several events and training sessions. It hosts CanBike educational courses for new cyclists, and advanced courses to become a CanBike instructor. There are mechanic nights, where a small group of people takes classes in basic mechanical skills. Though you can always get help at BikeWorks, this enables a directed tutoring with far more mechanic-to-learner interaction. For our frightfully frozen

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winters there is a DIY studded tire building night where a parts list is distributed and participants meet and create their own winter tires. There is nothing like knowing you are not the only person out riding in that much snow and ice, except doing so with studded tires.

BikeWorks has been a very transient community shop, located in no less than six places over its near 30-year history. Most notably it was once in a tile factory with no heat. Winters here are cold, -40°F kind of cold. Apparently humans can live at such extremes; I was as surprised as you are. A wood stove was installed and by burning scrap paper and other flammables the shop continued to offer services with its hardy mechanics. During an earlier especially transient period the shop was even run out of a car. Tools and parts were loaded into the back and it would arrive at a known location and set up a street side shop. Only through the tremendous dedication and tenaciousness of its members and volunteers has it been able to survive.

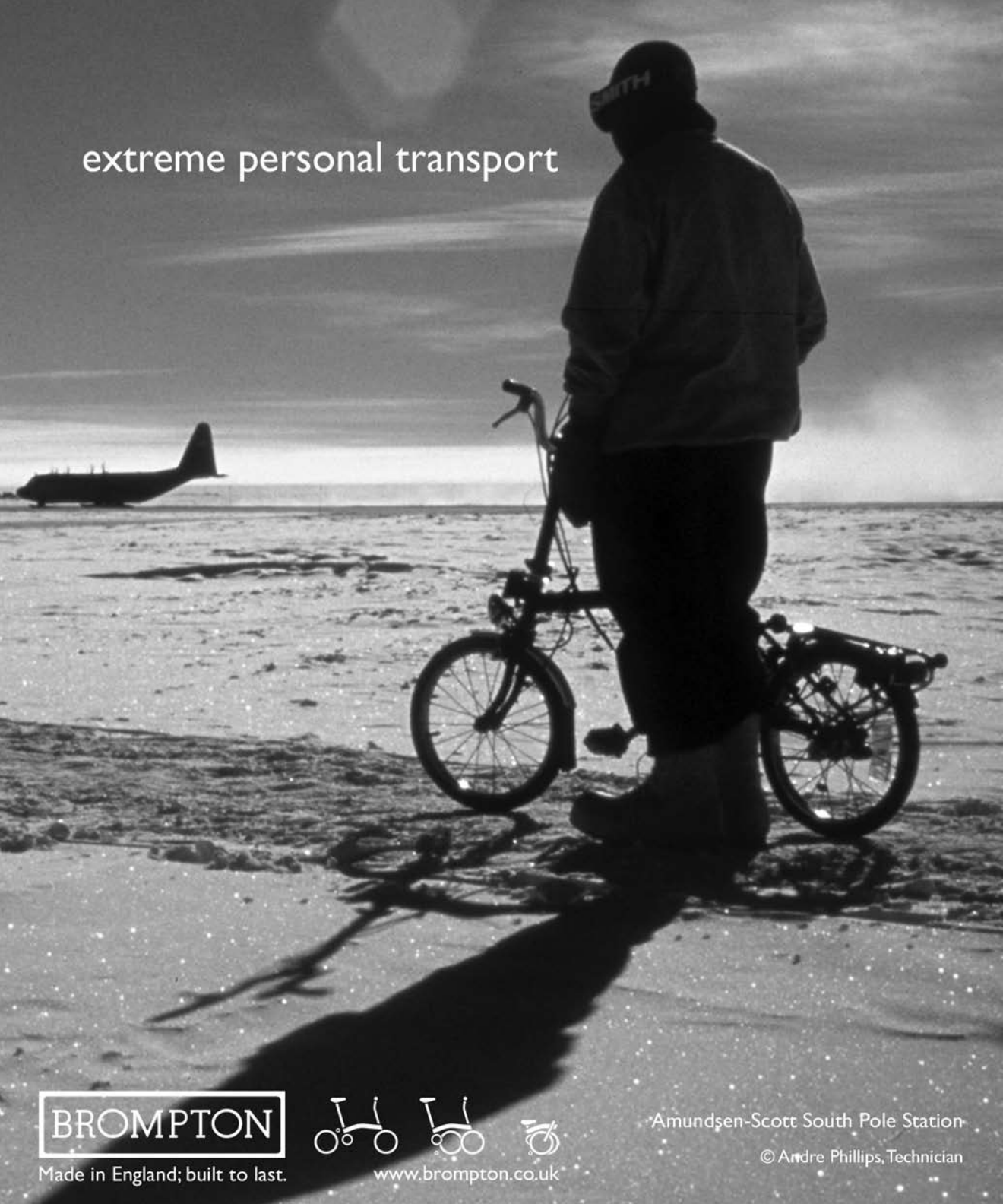
Like many cycling institutions, BikeWorks has seen an immense increase in interest over the last year. Not only have one time visits increased, the overall membership has ballooned. It is encouraging to see such resurgence in cycling, and thankfully BikeWorks was ready and waiting. Its volunteers have created a better cycling community by

offering safe bicycle parking at major events besides their mechanical help. No doubt this work has elevated the collective consciousness about BikeWorks. Excitement is keenly felt when talking with people new to the scene. I had recommended that Toshi, a University student, go to BikeWorks to pick up a replacement for his stolen ride. What I thought would be drudgery after that heinous crime elevated his spirit. He told me, "Thanks, Samuel! I went today and got a new bike. I made!" It was an excellent reminder of how empowering it is to build your own transportation.

Cycling societal towers such as BikeWorks are the emulsifier that brings all kinds of cyclists together. They are where the knowledge transfer from hardened riders to newbies takes place. We make them into our club houses, party venues and staging centers. Their visibility helps with advocacy and builds a higher awareness with non-cyclists. Get out there, spend some time at your community bike shop and improve cycling culture. 

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Pedals Plus People

By Melissa Smith

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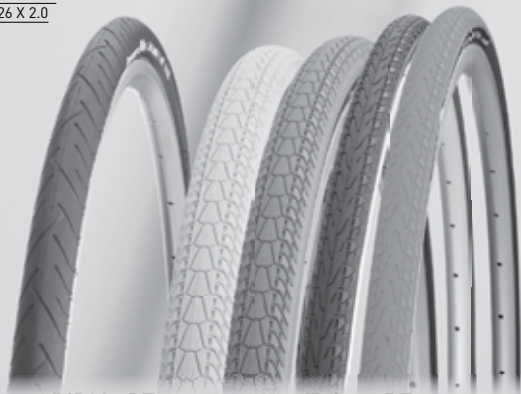
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URBAN LEGEND



Mike Shih

By Leonard Bonarek

The name “Mantua” implies something romantic to many who’ve read Shakespeare. Those who are from Philadelphia, however, have a different word association. Mantua is consistently in the running for worst neighborhood in Philadelphia, neck and neck with the also deceptively named Strawberry Mansion among some others. In 2005, Mike Shih, an Asian-American in his 40’s, bought a house there. When asked why, he offered in an accent that betrays his Midwestern roots “That’s a tough one there. One doesn’t move into a neighborhood like this without trepidation. Then I said ‘fuck it.’ You gotta move and see what happens.” What happened was that he got jumped. He still occasionally gets rocks thrown at him while riding his bike in his own neighborhood, amongst other harassments. Why not rent in a better area? “Renting is a black hole. Something even here has resale value.”

His house would be described by most as a dump, the kind of place a contractor would completely gut to fix up. Paint peels off the walls in huge sheets, rotten floorboards abound, as do wavy ceilings and wobbly banisters. Well-worn paths on the painted floors lead the eye from tops and bottoms of staircases to the most used rooms. It’s clear that Mike has done little in the way of sprucing it up in his 4+ years living there. No TV, no cable, no internet, no computer. His only entertainment is his radio. There are squatters out there who live with more creature comforts, surely.

It doesn’t take long in his place to figure out where the love goes. In addition to being an Army vet, college educated mechanical engineer, welder, generator specialist, draftsman, wood worker, and accomplished (though he would say only decent) salsa dancer, Mike is a bike head. For real. His living room has no fewer than six complete bikes that he has built from piles of steel tubes and vintage Suntour parts. Then there’s several other purchased ones. His handmade machines are referred to by number. He currently spends most of his time on #4, an urban hauling bike with 26 inch wheels (for strength and a low center of gravity), rear rack, and a reinforced version of his telltale (and also handmade) front rack.

His lust for bikes started early, before many readers





of this magazine were born. "I had seen 'Breaking Away,' and my brother while I was in high school got this really fancy Serotta." He couldn't afford such things himself, and wasn't from the kind of family where one asks dad. His father was a modest restaurateur owner, and didn't believe in buying his kids even the simplest toys, so forget about a bicycle. He and his two older brothers adapted, as many kids from the developing world also do. "We would take stuff, in most cases, apart and never get them back together again. But occasionally, we could get stuff back together again, in modified form. We had to make our own damn toys, which in most cases was finding something someone else threw away and taking it apart. The most fun things were the most complicated things."

He graduated high school in the middle of the '81-'85 recession, the worst one between the Great Depression and now. With few prospects, he joined the army. "I bought their propaganda about money for college hook, line and sinker." He doesn't describe that time in glowing terms, but he made the most of his purgatory, learning every skill and trade he could along the way. During this time, he was finally able to buy his first quality bicycle: a Trek 720. It has between then and now seen countless tires, a second wheel set (the first one wore out a long while ago), hauled uncountable pounds of cargo (most memorably 11 flats of soda) and over 25,000 miles. He estimates mileage by chains worn out: about 3000 miles per. Its worn, tired frame now hangs stripped on his wall in an unglamorous retirement. "It's still rideable," he assures. His army commitment done, he returned to his hometown of Chicago. There he managed to eek out a degree in mechanical engineering from a state school with his army

A "living room", full of Mike Shih creations. His Trek 720 frame can be seen hanging on the wall.

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Talking frame building shop at the drafting table.

college allotment by living with family and cutting every financial corner he could. A job as a draftsman at a canning company followed. “I had my bike then, but I mostly rode a motorcycle and walked because I wore a suit and tie.”

In 1994 he moved to Tucson and became a volunteer at BICAS (www.bicas.org). During his Tucson years, he developed his now encyclopedic knowledge of bicycles, as well as the most well known of his current traits: dumpster diving. Skills learned as a child hunting for broken radios were honed. He learned to identify the most lucrative dumpsters, fruit trees, and many other spots that support his current “future primitive” life. He is as generous with his finds as he is secretive about their origins. He used to be free and easy with his info, then dumpsters got left messy and would get locked or switched to a compactor by angry owners, or someone might take way beyond their need, leaving nothing for the homeless. When asked why he doesn’t take notes to aid his dumpster diving, his simple reply speaks volumes about his life choices, “If there’s too many to remember, you’re well fed enough.”

If Tucson was a seminal moment for dumpstering, Philadelphia was for bike building. He roomed with a guy who had just gotten a hold of the *Paternak Manual*, and

they decided to teach themselves the craft. They had little more than plumber’s torches, hacksaws and files. From these humble early efforts, Mike produced #1, which has since been cut up so the joints could be inspected from the inside for defects. There were none. Today he has several complete frames under his belt, yet he’s modestly matter-of-fact about bike making’s most challenging aspects, “Yeah, so I threw the fork together and that frame was done.” Making bikes was just a start: he now makes bike part art, and his bookends are famous in West Philly, routinely fetching over \$100 at fundraiser raffles.

He describes bikes as “amusement park, obsession, a practical tool,” as well as, “The best damn thing that we human beings have ever come up with.” He went on to say “We might have to scale back on our desires. We have to be humbled by our surroundings and nature some of the time.” We might not want to live like Mike Shih, but there is much to be learned from his example. 

Every city has a few urban legends of their own, best profiled by locals that know them best. Get in touch with brad@urbanvelo.org if you’d like to share your local cycling legend.

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POETRY IN STEEL



Love Letters WRITTEN IN HORSESHIT

Words & Photos by Julian Birch

It's rather odd to find myself down to my lowest tally of bicycles in over twenty years. I am sporting exactly one bike (not including two old frames/projects in various states of undress, inertia and decay). My wife currently owns twice as many bikes as I do, not including her unicycle—hmm, 2.5x as many bikes then? What's wrong with this picture? Who's the supposed bike nut here? It's a somewhat sad state of affairs but I try to console myself with the reasoning I can only ride one bike at a time after all.

First my old "Porsche Pink" Holdsworth hack bike went for a knockdown price that the Campagnolo seatpost alone was probably worth. Next to go was my last road bike; a real beauty harking back to the late eighties, fashioned from Reynolds 531Pro tubing, lovingly painted in lustrous royal blue flamm with white lined lugs and hung with an eclectic mix of old, old, old Dura Ace (Super Record look-a-like), Shimano 600 and a rather choice Campag Super Record post—yep I liked my Campag seatpins. With that old companion went 20 years of shared history, memories of a leggy youth, hanging off the back at road races, Sunday morning club runs and busting a gut time trialling around the roads of Essex. Sold for a silly price I was sad to wave her goodbye at the station, but they are only worth what they sell for, eh? And finally the ever-evolving hybrid workhorse of a commuter went to a recently retired friend of a friend. Apparently such a strange beast seemed just the ticket for their planned travels around the country—fenders and lights were thrown in.

The modest coin from the sale of all these bikes was supposed to kick start a new bike fund (see below) though in the end the bank manager seemed to want an unhealthy large slice of the action. Oddly any anticipated extra shed space afforded by all the wheeling and dealing also seems to be disappearing without any new additions. A phenomenon I have come to know as "shed contents creep" peculiar to my chaotic wooden constructions. In its own designated, claustrophobic space sits my one bike, the "proper" mountain bike. A machine that must now serve double duty until I can finalise my budget and source my next two-wheeler of choice. And what of that planned addition to the stable? Well I am scheming to acquire a cross bike. My own strange brand of bike logic demands one of those betwixt and between machines. And I intend to work it very hard indeed. I'm expecting it will manfully discharge triple duties: commuting, offroading and the odd blast on the road (in a strictly non-commuting sense I mean). Who knows with some suitably rapid rubber attached I might even dabble with a little time trialling again. Dependant on getting a wild hair up my... hmm, what are the chances really? However, that's all in the nebulous future and the months of planning, research and attempted squirreling of funds haven't produced a new bike yet. Meanwhile my lonely bike is more than earning its keep by taking on sole responsibility for every two-wheeled activity and basically being the one bike to rule them all. Commuting to work, off road excursions, little family outings with the



kids towed behind in the trailer and all other such duties, no matter how seemingly inappropriate are dispatched without so much as a whisper from my exclusive metal beast of burden. My sole BoB has been multi-tasking with some authority for a little while now.

When #1 bike first stepped up to the rigours of full time commuting the hoops were dressed in a pair of quite expensive and fast rolling, Kevlar beaded hardpack tires. But on one particularly memorable ride home from work I got a record number of flats (averaging one every two miles folks). Those prized puppies basically got shredded on the less than rubber friendly streets of East London and I was not a happy camper after that longest of commutes. New rubber was required and a little exasperated with having made history of such a treasured pair of tires I next tried a set of heavy, no nonsense, steel beaded, commute specific variants. And they've been good and very robust (touchwood) though they are maybe not so fast or lively either.

Unlike my bike I am prone to laziness and having street rubber on my MTB saw offroad activity suffering a significant tailing off. Weekend or opportunistic post work "grab" rides weren't happening and all because I didn't have the energy or industry to swap a humble pair of tires over. Towing the trailer offroad with street rubber was doable as I necessarily stayed to well-groomed bridle-paths to winch the junior Birches around and whilst it's always good fun it's not exactly an adrenalin rush.

Being lucky enough to live in a corner of East London bordering Epping Forest means I have 6,000 acres of history, sylvan beauty and sinuous singletrack under half a mile from my front door. Yet the Forest's more exciting trails and I were becoming a little estranged, like a neglected love affair and all because of my idleness. Hmm I had to be more attentive and Summer (that other seasonal lover) was getting on. Before she breathed her last warm, seductive breath of the season, tippy-toeing south with the Swifts and Swallows I really had to make efforts to address the separation issues before my legs and lungs forgot how to ride singletrack.

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In the end the catalyst came via an external source. Bill and Sophie, friends and riding buddies, invited me out for a Sunday ride in Epping Forest. Hannah, their recent addition to the family had also meant their usual roster of an offroad ride just about every weekend had been somewhat curtailed. Anyway I wasn't going to miss out on the chance to catch up with friends who'd secured a babysitter in order to bag a ride and some precious "adult" time—"adult" time here meaning dicking around on bikes in the woods of course!

Sunday morning came and commuter rubber was hurriedly exchanged for something toothier and more suitable. Yet all the time I'd seemed to have on rising from my sleep pit soon evaporated thanks to industrial amounts of faffing. When I finally got under way I had 10 minutes to do over 4 miles offroad. Fashionably late and puffing like a steam train I pitched up at the High Beach rendezvous with just enough breath to say "Hello!" to Bill and Soph. And

it was a great ride; the Forest was surprisingly dry, trails were very buff. Any lack of specific offroad fitness was partly made up for by a little handling finesse and speed of thought both honed daily on the streets of the capital. The company was top notch too and we celebrated our ride with mocha and cake at the King's Oak café newly opened that very day. I bade Bill and Soph farewell before heading homeward via yet more singletrack. On reaching home (tired and very happy) the bike was gratefully rolled into its stable for the night still conspicuously dressed in offroad rubber. Maybe I felt too idle to swap back to commuting tyres but mental cogs were turning and in the back of my mind I had a cunning plan for Monday's commute. I'd done it previous Summers why hadn't I yet got round to it this year? Mm, well there was the small matter of dislocating my shoulder for about the fourth time back at the beginning of July. Anyway it was kicking on into late August now and I was putting the spicy on/off road commute back on the menu at last. You see that previously mentioned proximity to Epping Forest makes it possible for me ride the first four miles of my journey to work (or the last four miles home) almost entirely on woodland trails. And that's exactly what I intended to do. The next day I would join the Forest in its rebellious push southward into the urban sprawl through postcodes E11 to E4. I was going to ride that secret garden.

And sure enough Monday came, as they always seem to do. The bike was rolled out of the shed yet thanks to heavy cloud cover and the obscenity of the hour that task I'd defiantly been putting off for a little while seemed suddenly essential; lights had to be dug out and fitted. Hmph—how could I have not factored that into the plan? Add to that the heavy tree cover where diaphanous greens of early spring had long since been replaced by the opaque, deep, tired greens of late Summer and Mr Excuse here didn't really fancy the ride through a dark verdant vault too much. OK so Plan B: I'd ride to work on the road and then homeward blast the length of that embattled and less than pretty arterial tarmac of the Lea Bridge Road, popping off asphalt and on to dirt just after the Whipp's Cross roundabout. Sorted.

Riding the road to work on rubber that sounded like a TIE fighter in pursuit of an X-Wing, thoughts of previous Summers flitted through my mind. Summers where I'd engaged in the aforementioned extra-curricular activity a little earlier in the season. When I'd communed with the morning, ridden through clearings where the dewy long grass had kissed my legs as I glided past, filled my eyes with verdant green and the glow of the rising sun, smelt the warming earth, stirred the leaves like a ghost

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as I passed, heard the birdsong, caught some of nature's lightshow as the dappled light fell onto the Forest floor, surprised wildlife and early morning dog walkers as I sped by having more fun that should be allowed on the way to work. On all those occasions parting the morning air, barrelling towards work through the Forest the only thought I'd given to the distant rumble of traffic snarling towards the city was whether all those "cagers" knew what they were missing.

Yet I'd now missed the morning slot for the season so my immediate attention had to be on occupying two square yards of tarmac and being ever mindful of that very same snarling, carnivorous traffic. Don't get me wrong there is so much about commuting that I love, not least carving through city streets and holding my own against motorized predators. But the fight for space on the faster suburban roads can and does wear me down. Sometimes this geezer feels a little grey around the edges.

Anyhoo that's all part of the rich tapestry of commuting (to paraphrase my friend Gary) and into that tapestry I have once again started to weave some green, earthy and

soulful threads. Currently the homeward leg is a double whammy: 1) I am riding away from work and 2) I get to bookend my commute with a few miles of choice trails. Letting the bike flow down those apparently clandestine singletrack chutes, popping off roots, smiling a wry smile as I look down at the gridlock below the bridge across the North Circular, throwing the bike around corners with a little joyful abandon and all with tires pumped up to maximum PSI just adds to the fun and helps me to breathe a little deeper. And in the morning when I stow the bike in the locker room and catch a glimpse of a little mud and crap on the tubes of my beloved cycle-conspirator I see beyond another day at work.

I know it won't be long till Summer disappears through that annual revolving door without so much as a glance over her shoulder, rain and darkness hard at her heels. Once again I will hope her last temperate kiss is not good-bye forever but in retrospect I'm sure it will feel like a semi-permanent farewell...

Meanwhile here's to Indian Summers and love letters written in horseshit.



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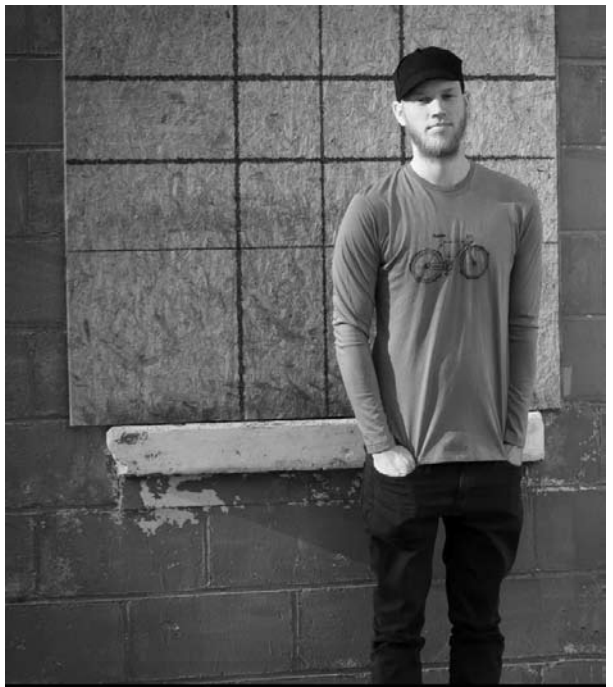
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Victory of the Bicycle

By Gregg Culver

It was a beautiful Saturday afternoon when I set out on a trip through the urban cyclist's dream that is Berlin. I rolled through turn-of-the-century Victorian-era neighborhoods, overlain with their painful, yet awe-inspiring histories, through the regal Schlosspark in Pankow, and over placid green fields on my way to the medieval town of Bernau. It was an amazing trip—the kind that makes you fall in love with the city all over again; the kind that reminds you how much you appreciate the liberated, panoramic perspective of traversing space by bicycle; the kind that washes away the worries of the week and cleanses your body of the excesses of the night before.

I had just been reflecting how marvelous it is to ride in a city where you never feel threatened or harassed from motorists, when a few minutes away from my apartment, a finely-waxed black BMW came dangerously close to me and honked, ripping me out of my cycling bliss.

Even when I lived in the States, where being honked at for no particular reason is not an unheard of experience, it was often pretty startling. But in Berlin, where after hundreds of miles of cycling I had never been honked at a single time, it was a particularly unpleasant surprise. As we both pulled up to the red light, I saw that it was a car full of young fellows of the trouble-making type—the type that one can imagine considers scouring the city for an unsuspecting target of their shameless ridicule a treasured pastime.

An odd chorus of taunts began, as they haughtily proclaimed in not so many words, that the automobile—particularly the suspiciously expensive model they were driving—was a status symbol whose attainment was more worthy of aspiration than the bicycle.


I tried to tell them that their actions were dangerous, but couldn't control my annoyance as I was completely unable to comprehend how such a situation can happen in a city where bicycle transportation is such a ubiquitous, convenient and utilitarian phenomenon. The light turned green, but their taunts continued while they held up traffic, so I responded with a three word sentence, in which the final word completely changed the outcome of the situation, "Just drive asshole!"

At this point our paths diverged slightly, as I rode onto

the bicycle path that adjoined the sidewalk and was separated from the road by parked vehicles on the left. They hit the gas, sped forward and I watched as they pulled over into an empty spot a few hundred feet ahead. The back door opened onto the bike path and one of the tough guys got out and blockaded the rest of the sidewalk. Suspecting what would have happened had I continued toward him, I found a hole between the parked cars on my left, hopped off the curb and reentered street traffic, hoping that would be the end of it.

Unwilling to let it go my antagonist ran out into the street, screaming as he ran toward me, "You call me an asshole!?" I gave it all I could to speed up, slipping into the opposing lane to escape fist-striking distance as I replied in a scream, "No, I called HIM an asshole!" as I pointed to his friend behind the steering wheel. That statement, however, did not restore his vicariously damaged honor. Just as I passed him, he hurled his lighter at me, which flew between my arms and pedaling legs and exploded on the street next to me.

I rode as fast as I possibly could to the next intersection—four lanes of motor traffic, two street car lines, and a series of bike lanes that couldn't possibly be safely crossed on a red light—and waited at the light as I reflected on the utter lack of concern in the faces of those around me. The black BMW sped to the corner and once again ejected my attempted assailant, who ran in my direction. I looked at him for a moment and took off up the street along the bike path, leaving him hopeless in his attempt to catch me on foot and forcing him to return to his friends, who then raced up the street to presumably wait for me once again at the corner.

This was the inevitable move I had anxiously been waiting for. I stopped on a dime, turned back down the sidewalk and slipped into the narrow cobblestone streets of the dense Gesundbrunnen neighborhood; leaving the bloated Beamer trapped in the busy automobile traffic of Osloer Strasse. I returned home heart-pounding and reflecting on our chase. In a battle whose outcome depended on the methods of transportation we had at our disposal, I couldn't help but revel in the implicit victory of the bicycle. 

Masterlink Tech

By Brad Quartuccio



Masterlinks are found in some chains and allow you to break and remove the chain from the bicycle without the use of a chain tool. Additionally, they allow a chain to be adjusted in length without having to push a chain pin back in place, which in some cases can considerably weaken the chain. Until fairly recently the masterlink had fallen out of favor both due to incompatibility with derailleur systems and a reputation for failure. With the introduction of the SRAM Powerlink and other such sliding masterlink systems they've largely come back to life in a stronger, more easily used form.

Traditional masterlinks still in wide use on 1/2" width

chains are made up of three pieces—an outer plate with two notched chain pins attached, a matching “floating” outer plate that slips over the pins, and a spring clip to hold it all in place. These require some sort of pliers or really strong fingernails to install and remove, and have been known to fail on occasion, though the current crop seems to work well enough. By nature of their width they are incompatible with derailleur systems so don't even bother. Some fairly rare versions use two small threaded nuts rather than a spring clip to hold the masterlink together but chances are you'll never encounter a bicycle chain like this.

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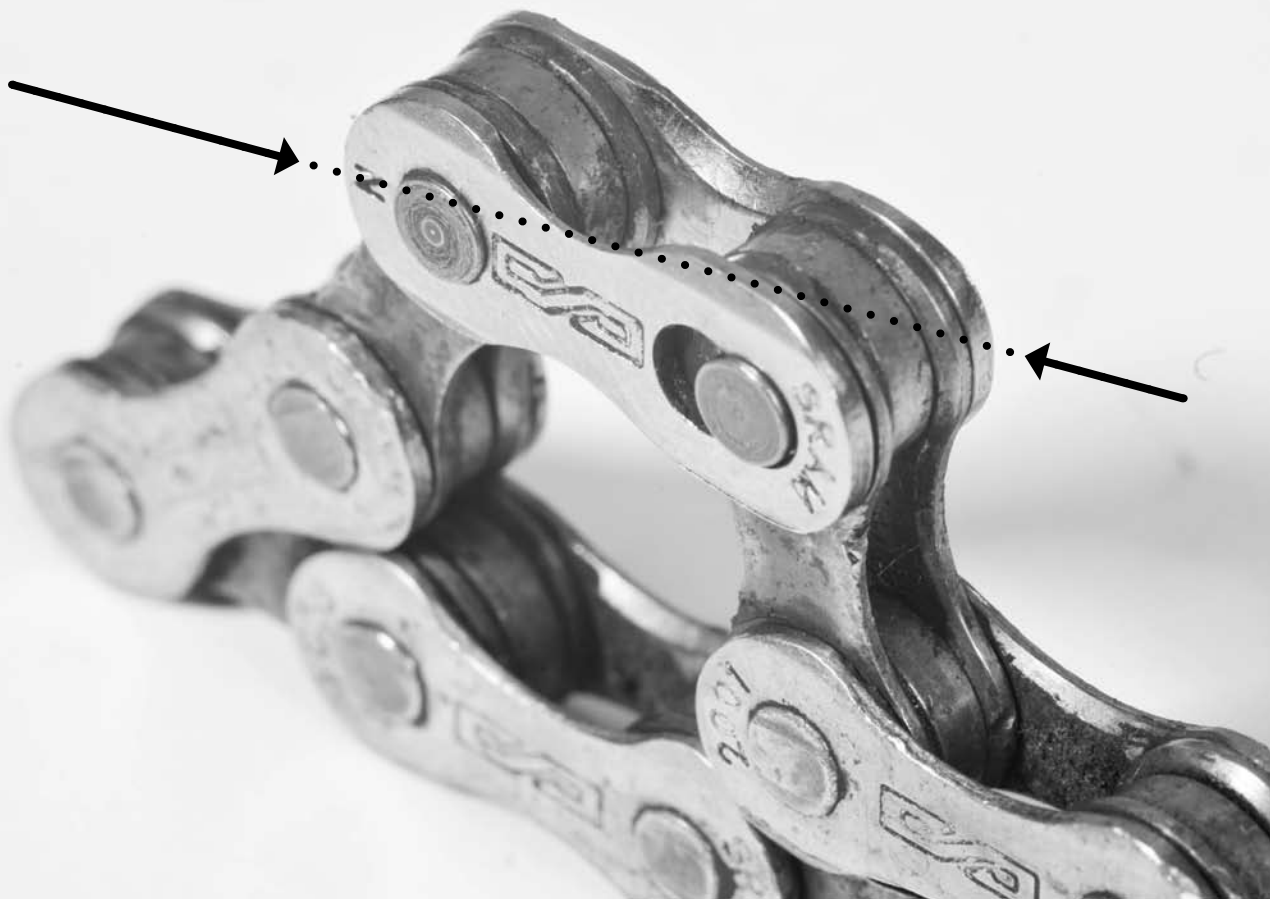
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The sliding masterlink style is exceptionally simple and has proven reliable and as strong as any other chain link since their introduction. Compatible with derailleur systems and thin 9- and 10-speed chains, this style of masterlink is in wide use on modern bicycles. The outer plates are mirror images of one another, having a notched chain pin on one side and an elongated hole on the other. The link slips together and slightly locks into place, with pedaling action more or less pulling the link closed even further. No tools are required for their removal, but a bit of technique helps. Simply locate the fixed side of each chain pin and squeeze the link together from that location on each link. By pushing the chain pins together at a diagonal, and maybe slightly squeezing the outer links together, the notched pins will slide free and the masterlink will slip open with minimal force.

Many high-quality chains feature pins that have a mushroomed profile holding the links together and don't particularly like being opened and closed with a chain tool. Some manufacturers even recommend using a special pin or masterlink to rejoin chains once broken as the outer links can become compromised from forcing the oversized end of the chain pin through.

Some people are known to use two masterlinks between a short, removable section of chain to allow two drastically different gear ratios to be used on a double sided singlespeed hub, especially useful for people riding both on- and off-road, or people who have a long commute to their polo court. The rest of us use them as an easy way to install the chain the first time and clean or otherwise remove it from there on out.



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Diagnose A Stuck Stem


By Brad Quartuccio



When wrenching on older bikes one of the most common problems is a stuck quill stem, hopefully able to be freed but potentially seized in place by contaminants and corrosion. Quill stems are secured within a threaded fork steerer by an expander wedge at the bottom of them, tightened into place with the bolt on the top of the stem. If after loosening the expander

bolt a few turns the stem isn't moving, the first step is to smack the top of the loosened bolt with a hammer in hopes of knocking the wedge free. If the expander wedge breaks free but the stem is still stuck in place, you may be out of luck—especially if the stem is aluminum. Some careful back and forth twisting can be attempted, but beware of using too much force and bending the fork blades out of alignment. A block of wood between the fork blades at the crown can help prevent this fork misalignment, but rarely will a stem that is proving so stubborn actually come out of the fork.

By their very design quill stems invite water into the tight space between stem and steerer tube, flexing back and forth ever so slightly through the miles allowing contaminants to work their way down. With the right mix of salts, an aluminum stem within a steel fork steerer tube can effectively expand with oxidization to the point of being permanently stuck in the fork, save for being patiently cut out. While ammonia does dissolve aluminum oxide, in this situation there is no room for ammonia to penetrate and do its much-needed chemistry work. If brute force doesn't make it budge your time is likely better spent finding a new fork and stem than continuing the fight.

Chalk this up as one more reason that the simpler and stronger threadless headset and direct clamping stem system is superior to its threaded, quill predecessor. Seized stems are now a thing of the past, relegated to older and traditional bikes and the people that like to tinker with them. 

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Line Up Your Hot Patch

By Brad Quartuccio



Purists get worked up over the small touches, like lining up the tire label with the valve stem when mounting a tire to the rim. From a performance standpoint it makes no difference where the label sits assuming the tire is mounted in the correct rotational direction. There are however reasons beyond aesthetic concerns to get into the habit of lining up the tire's colored "hot patch" label with the valve.

Most importantly, placing the label at the valve makes inspecting a tire for a still-hidden piece of glass or wire that caused a puncture that much easier—just look at the tube and line it up. This can save future flat tires from hard to find embedded items, allowing a more thorough search over a smaller area. The label can also help determine rotational direction of the tire, manufacturer's convention

is that if the label is only on one side of the tire, the label should face the driveside.

But back to those aesthetic concerns—the alignment of label and valve just looks right, and can be a sign of a rider, mechanic or even shop that pays attention to the details. While this detail is hardly life or death, it shows an attentiveness that likely extends to ones that are, like your stem bolts for instance. Eventually it becomes habit, and that's precisely when you know that you've changed a lot of bicycle tires.



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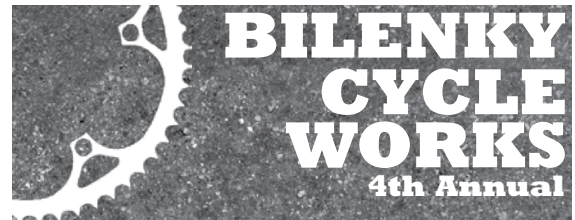
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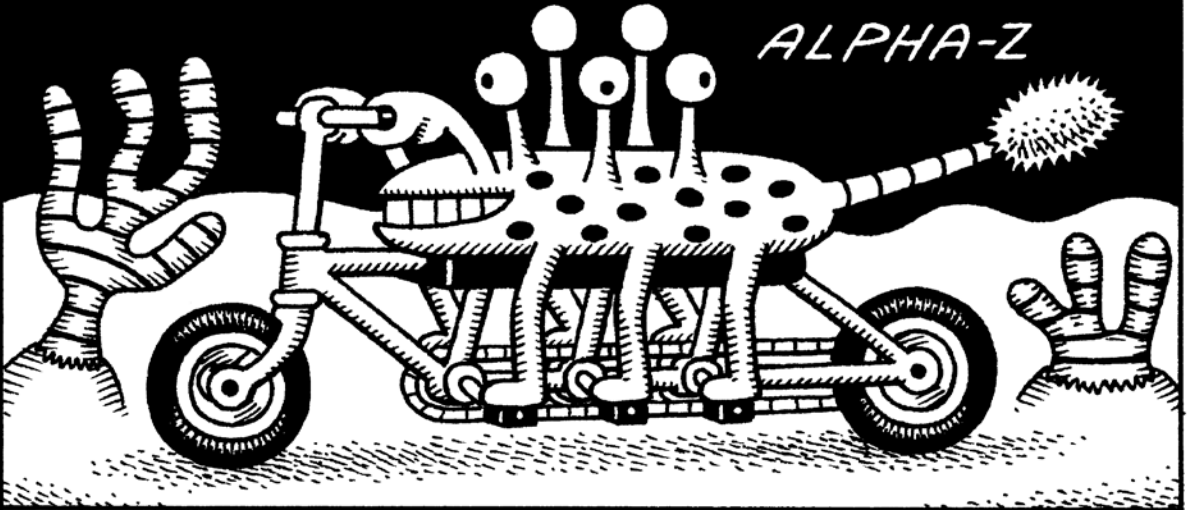
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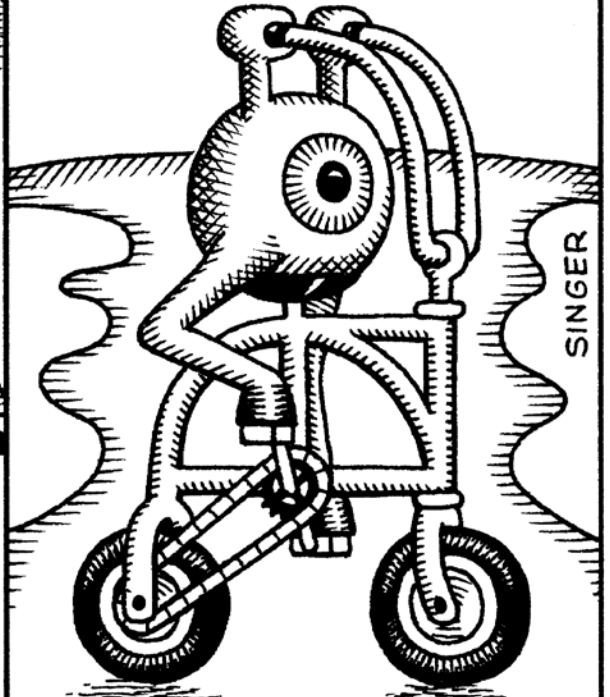
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