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Issue #23 • January 2011

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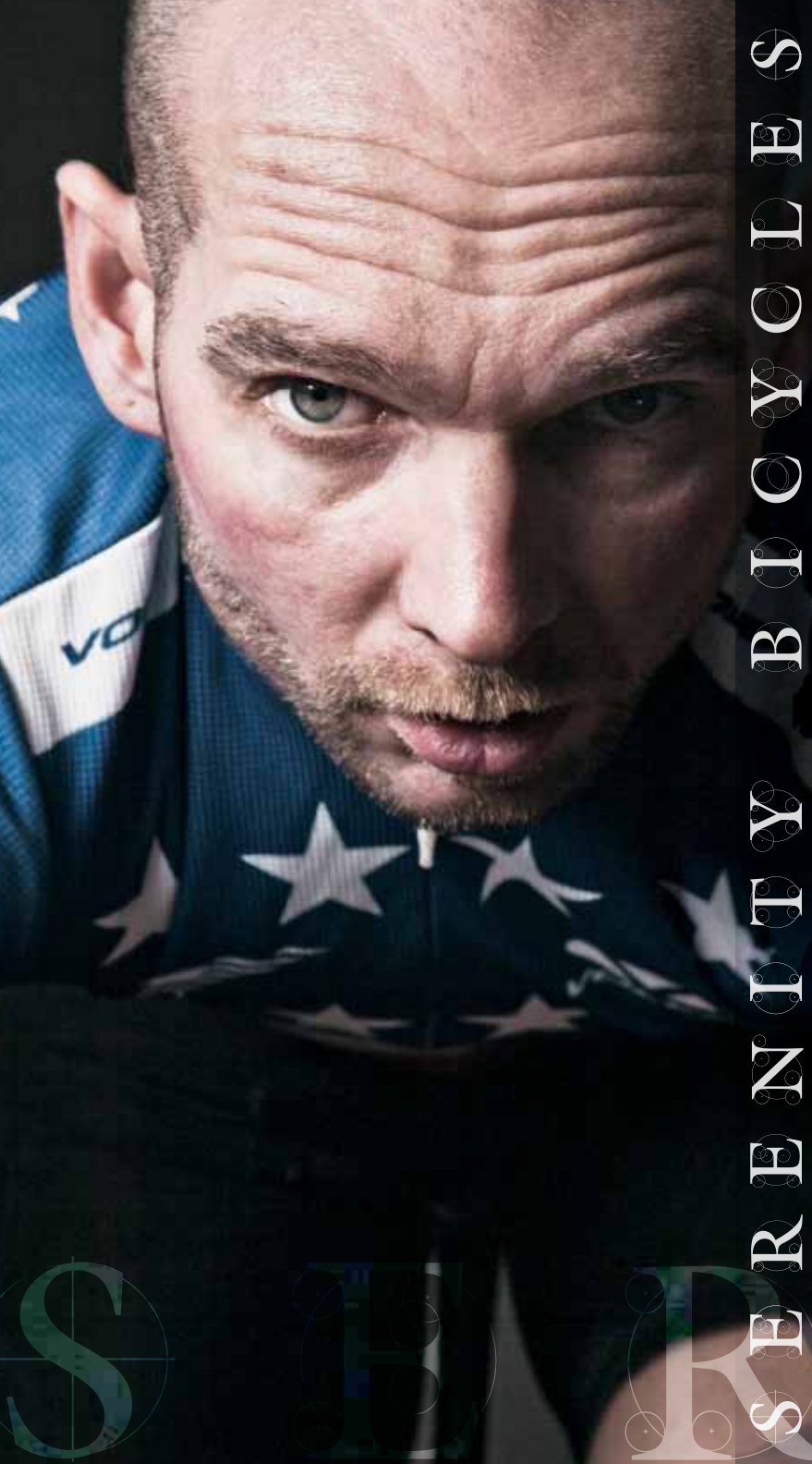


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URBAN VELO

Issue #23 January 2011



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On the cover: Read more about Baltimore local fixed freestyle rider Christina Panteliodis on page 32. Photo by Keith Teket, bmorefixed.blogspot.com

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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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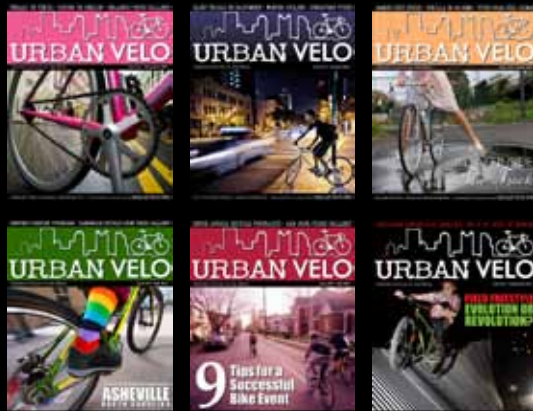
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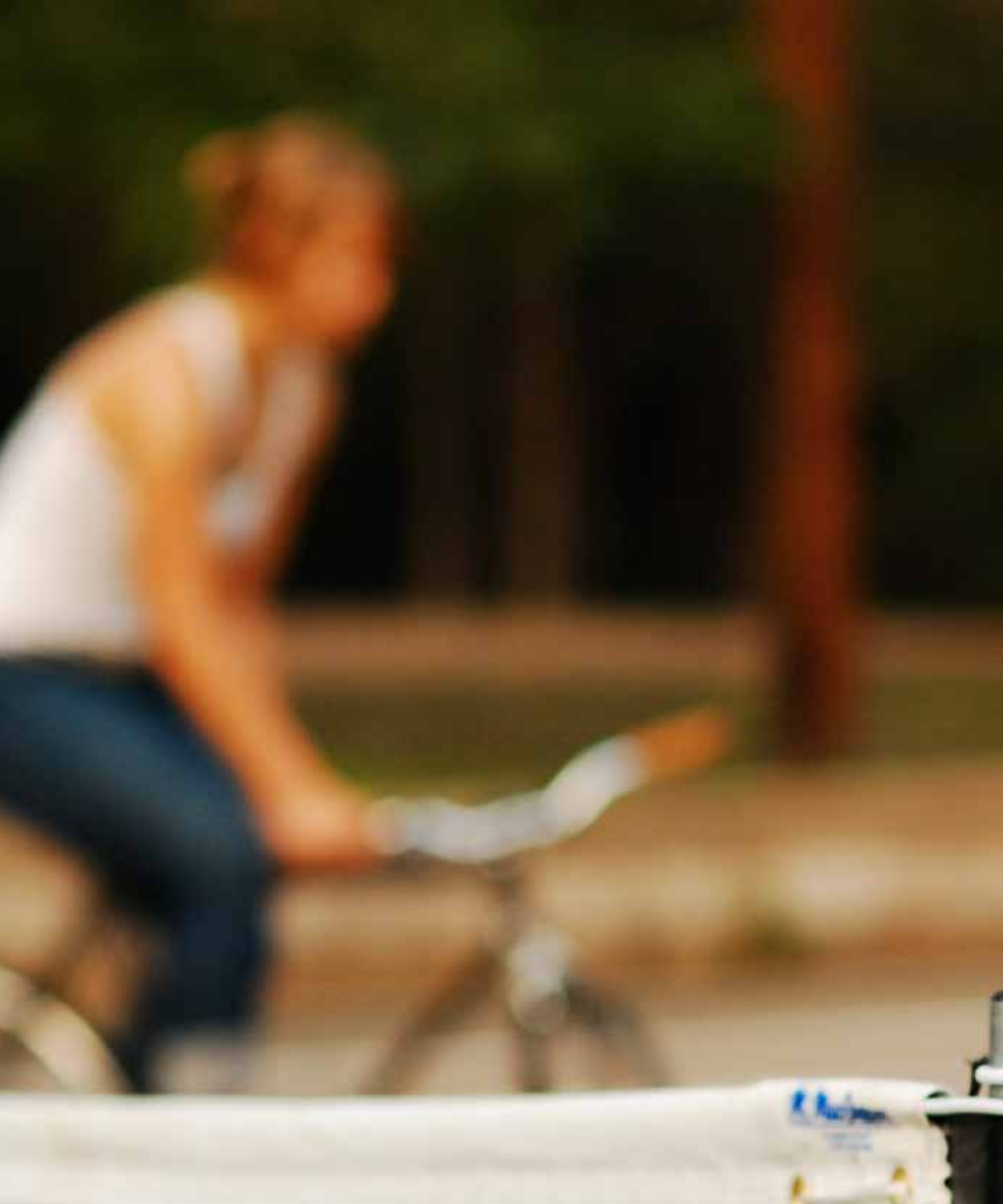
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SKIDS



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Editor's Statement

By Brad Quartuccio




For the third issue in a row our cover features a helmetless rider, with plenty of other photos within of cyclists both with and without head protection. Helmets are a touchy issue; seemingly every time a photo appears of someone without one atop their head someone else condemns riding without one for any reason, many times equating the choice with a deathwish.

Everyone who has been riding for any amount of time has a tale of a helmet saving their life, or the life of a friend. Unfortunately, many of us also have stories of friends that have suffered debilitating head injuries, helmet or not. I know I have a story or two in each camp.

Even though I wear a helmet for 99% of my time on a bicycle, I certainly don't equate not wearing one to a deathwish or outright stupidity. Everyone has their own choices to make in life, and their own judgments of risk.

Take for instance walking down the stairs or taking a shower—in terms of the numbers of folks meeting an untimely end, these are some of the top accidental killers in the country. That said, no one would advocate a helmet at the top of the stairs or hung around the showerhead, and certainly no one would consider someone without a helmet on in the shower as having a deathwish, even if the risk of head injury is very real.

It's not the lack of helmets on heads that is killing cyclists—it's the cars that are hitting them. While I agree that given the current state of our transportation infrastructure in the United States that helmets are a good idea as a preventative measure to help keep minor accidents minor, the fact that so many cyclists feel unsafe without one shows that helmets are a symptom of the problem, not the ultimate solution. 

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

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Publisher's Statement

By Jeff Guerrero



The sky is blue and the air is icy cold as I throw a leg over my cross bike. These Saturday morning rides are always my favorite of the week. I don't have a set destination, let alone a schedule to keep. I'm free to go wherever my camera or my appetite takes me.

As much fun as these rides are, though, in the back of my mind I know they're perhaps the most dangerous type of riding I do. Because I'm not focused on the destination, I'm riding slower and taking in the sights; letting my eyes wander off the road, scanning the neighborhoods for murals to shoot bikes against or cheap and delicious ethnic foods.

And of course that's what drivers are doing on a Saturday morning, too. So the odds that they're looking out for cyclists while they scan the block for a place to park are slim to none.

But these thoughts are merely in the back of my mind,

and they quickly vanish with the sighting of an Afghani takout stand. Sadly, it's closed, and so I'm left to ponder, "Should I try the Turkish place in Shadyside, climb Squirrel Hill for dim sum, head down to the Strip District for pho, ride over to Bloomfield for Thai or maybe venture into Homewood for BBQ?"

En route to the Turkish restaurant I'm distracted by the notion of picking up a bento box at the Japanese grocery. Parking would be a nightmare, but of course that's no problem for me.

Heading home with my stomach growling, I pick up the pace and split the lane. I trackstand at the light, reminding myself, "Don't expect any kind of respect for cycling in freezing temperatures."

Surprisingly, the car across from me beeps and waves for me to take the left in front of him. It goes to show, like life, urban cycling is unpredictable..



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Photo: Lisa Dauso



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i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: Charles Reinagel

LOCATION: Buffalo, NY

OCCUPATION: Recycle A Bike Instructor

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

I am currently living in Buffalo, NY. It feels like winter lasts eight months here. The worst part about riding here is the wind. It blows every direction at once. The city planning here is awesome. Every street curves and doesn't allow you a full sight line to the end of the street. There are trees lining almost every street which makes every ride a beautiful one. We do lack bike lanes though so you have to be extra careful while getting around.

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

Philadelphia is awesome to ride in. There are so many one-way streets and tight spaces to squeeze through. I

used to dodge cars left and right when I was younger, but now I take a much more laid back route. I avoid hectic situations.

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

Take it slow and enjoy your riding. I would prefer to see safe riders enjoying their commute. Running red lights and going 25 miles an hour is definitely overrated and you are not impressing anyone. Play bike polo! It is so much fun and you won't regret getting into it. I am sure that someone in your city is playing and would love to add you to their group of weekly players. At least go check it out and watch!



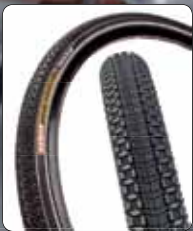
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i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: Doug Gordon

LOCATION: Brooklyn, NY

OCCUPATION: Television Writer and Producer

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

I live on the edge of Park Slope, right where the gentrification begins and ends. Biking in the neighborhood is generally pleasant, but it can get tough quick if you're not careful. There are more bike lanes than ever before connecting every type of neighborhood in Brooklyn, so it's getting easier and easier to bike around.

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

Barcelona. It's a small, vibrant city, and biking is a great excuse for eating more incredible food. On my last trip there I woke up early one morning, borrowed a bike from my hotel, and rode a couple of miles over to the Sagrada Familia Cathedral, Gaudi's unfinished masterpiece. The rising sun gave the cathedral a great glow and I took some amazing pictures. I never would have had the chance without the bike.

Why do you love riding in the city?

It's all about the impromptu stop. No matter where I'm going or what I'm doing, if something catches my eye I can always stop and check it out. I'm not beholden to where there nearest subway stop is or factoring in when the next bus will arrive. You just stop, enjoy, and get rolling again.

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i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: Emily Taylor

LOCATION: Chicago, IL

OCCUPATION: Co-owner of Po Campo

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

In Chicago it's flat and full of traffic, so if you can handle riding in the cold or heat it's really the perfect way to get around.

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

Seriously Chicago, but Europe is always ideal and Austin has some great bike paths.

Why do you love riding in the city?

It's just as fast, if not faster than other forms of transit and much easier to find parking. Plus it's a great, open minded culture to be a part of.

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

The beauty of the city is diversity and transportation variations are part of the whole system. Cycling is my part, along with public transit, and it keeps me from being another angry hot head behind a wheel.

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i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: Zack Rouda

LOCATION: Burlington, VT

OCCUPATION: Messenger

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

Burlington is cold, windy and on a gigantic hill—perfect for biking. I own and operate Crucial Couriers, Burlington's only bike messenger service, which keeps us moving 24/7, running everything from sewing needles to pints of Ben and Jerry's to the locals. Burlington is great to ride in because there's enough of an urban feel to get some flow going with cars, and it's small enough to be covered entirely in under twenty minutes.

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

Burlington's great, and my hometown of Washington D.C. is bike-friendly too but nothing beats NYC. Biking in New York is other-worldly, it feels like flying. There's nothing like pushing through reds past peds, skitching cabs, and seeing so many fellow riders.

Why do you love riding in the city?

Being able to move faster than any other vehicle for free with the knowledge that I can handle virtually any problem that might come up. I love passing cars. I love speeding through an intersection blocked by traffic due to dumb drivers. I yell, "I'm a bike! I'm a bike!"

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i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: Steve Mark

LOCATION: Victoria, BC

OCCUPATION: Geographical Information Systems
Technical Coordinator

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

I live in Victoria, BC where the temperate climate allows year round riding. Cycling is a very accepted and promoted mode of transportation within the city. There are distinct neighborhoods in Victoria that have a unique feel to them that make riding through them so much fun. So many local coffee houses and pubs to choose from. The proximity of amenities, the topography and the awareness of urban cycling make Victoria a great city to ride in.

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

One of my favorite cities to ride in is Hanoi, Vietnam. I was there traveling in 1996. Most guesthouses had bike rentals. In the morning we would head out on our bikes

to check out all the local markets. We would buy fresh baguettes, along with cheese and fruit. We would put them in our baskets and ride around all the lakes. The best part of it was that there were so many locals using bikes as their primary means of transportation. All of a sudden you would be engulfed in a group of kids riding to school, yelling out all of the English they knew.

Why do you love riding in the city?

I love riding in the city because it is such an efficient and stealth way to navigate the urban landscape. There are so many sights, sounds and smells that you miss when driving in a car.

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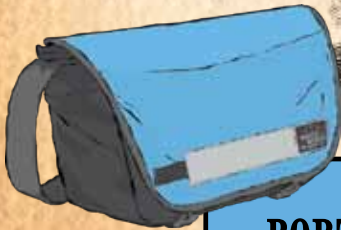
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i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: Houvenagle
LOCATION: Saint Louis, MO
OCCUPATION: Senior Art Director

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

I live and ride in downtown Saint Louis. The streets here on any given day are pretty scarce, but we're working on our bike count. I ride a fixed Charge and I just think it's the swellest adventure machine around. The river is right there and we're a pretty spread out city when it comes to neighborhoods, which makes for fun cross town hauls.

Why do you love riding in the city?

I love riding in Saint Louis for a plethora of reasons, but my absolute number one would have to be tall cans on the riverfront. No matter how many times we may ride to the same spot, a new experience of fun and delight awaits those who made the journey. And let me tell you, sitting under a bridge by the water watching traffic pass on the overpass above... well that's just sheer bliss in this fella's mind.

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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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i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: Cristian Zuñiga

LOCATION: Santiago, Chile

OCCUPATION: Photographer

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

I live in Santiago, Chile and since it's the capital of the country we have a lot of traffic all day and if you like going through cars and buses it's your city. The bad thing is that a lot of the streets here are pretty bad so you have to choose your road wisely, as cars will not give a damn about you.

Why do you love riding in the city?

Because it is fun and efficient and you can get from

point A to point B as fast as you'd like. No one is pushing you, you control your own time and you're always able to choose another route just for a change of scenery. And because I hate using public transportation.

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

Bicycling is the most fun way to move in the city without wasting time looking for or paying for parking. It is up to you if you want to go fast or cruise around town.

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Female Riders

IN

FIXED FREE STYLE

By Devan Mickell Council

We constantly get the opinions of the male riders in fixed freestyle, and really, this is quite typical of most sports. The female perspective is far too often overlooked yet it's a perspective very worth taking a closer look at, especially in a developing, constantly changing sport. We are still in the pinnacle moment in the early evolution of fixed freestyle where we have the ability to make a significant, lasting impact on its further development.



Photo by Keith Teket

Christina Panteliodis

BALTIMORE, MD

Fixed gear freestyle is addicting, therapeutic, challenging, exciting, and frustrating at times but it's just what I like to do. There's something about it.

Fortunately, I try not to pay attention to all that [negativity at events, on the internet, and in general]. For the most part at trick events I get treated pretty fairly. It's such a new sport that primarily it is dominated by males, and being integrated and compared to them is just part of it. Being a female rider I try not to focus on the competitiveness because I don't think it should be primarily about that. As the sport grows and more women are riding in competitions I think there could be a female category. I don't want to get treated special for my gender, but at the same time women riders are different. Personally, what I look forward to at a trick comp is seeing other people's riding styles and trying something new at a new space.

The Internet is another story; I don't get involved in that shit. In some aspects, the inter-web press is nice because it gets you out there and also brings you together with other riders who you may never have known existed. It has built this community in a lot of ways. The inter-web also creates a space where shallow people have nothing better to do but talk shit because they are faceless. People will always run their mouth, and I don't have time to get involved in it.

A lot of men I have been riding with have been pretty respectful. Sometimes there is this tension that I have to prove myself in order for them to take me seriously or see me as equal, but that's just part of it. I can only speak for myself, but I believe that women who are riding fixed gear freestyle are not taken as seriously as men unless proven otherwise. I think the sport is in for a big emergence of female fixed gear freestyle riders and just like anything else that tension will change in time. I think what's most important is that we as female riders continue to support each other and not let egos get in the way. I think community is a big aspect of this sport, and we female riders need to utilize it and make the sport grow and learn from each other.

When I was first asked to write this article, I long considered what the best approach would be. That is, how I could best discuss fixed freestyle from the female rider's perspective. Surely I could easily write a great deal on my own opinions and from my personal experiences, but would that really serve my intended purpose? Perhaps a few readers would take something substantial from it, but even so, the most to be gained would be the admittedly biased opinion of just one female rider. The realization that many of these opinions are universal among female riders is far more persuasive than the expression of one individual's opinions. My aim here is to simply give an expressive outlet to the females in the sport and shed some light on their perspective. Hopefully, you can take something away from it and perhaps gain a better understanding of where female riders stand.

The female riders featured in this article each draw from a variety of perspectives and personal experiences from going to fixed freestyle events and competitions, to riding with a regularly meeting group, to participating on TrickTrack.org and other online communities. Nevertheless, when looking at the responses, we can see several key points that consistently come up. In particular, two themes are touched upon by each of the riders; that is, the incredibly positive effect support from other riders has had on them and their riding, as well as the call to be viewed and respected as riders.

Speaking from my personal experience, I can relate to both of these issues. I have attended a number of events and have experienced both the positive and negative from other riders. The positive reactions have been invaluable. In a sport so dominated by the opposite sex, it can be intimi-



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Photo by Brett Edmonds

Cara Notestine

MEMPHIS, TN

I started riding fixed gears almost two years ago and have only been doing tricks since March. Before I got really into it, I just did a few skid and track stand variations in between rides. I was always a fan of Devan's blog and the thought of another girl my age, in college, and living in Tennessee riding fixed put the whole idea of the sport into perspective and motivated me to get out there and start riding.

Unfortunately, the fixed gear freestyle scene in Memphis is nonexistent. I didn't have anyone to help me out as far as learning tricks goes, so it was challenging and frustrating at first. I forced myself to practice at least an hour a day in a parking lot down the street from my house. I've accomplished a lot of personal goals since I started learning and I'm pretty confident in my riding so far.

I don't think there will ever be as many girls riding fixed gear freestyle as there are boys. We will always be a minority, but I'm okay with that. Gender doesn't have to be an issue and women can be treated with the same amount of respect as the boys, and I think that's the direction the sport is going in. It's great that companies are reaching out to us girls and sponsoring female riders. I know some girls were given some harsh treatment at first, but the girls that are out there riding hard are changing people's opinions.

dating as a female to put myself out there. When attending competitions or even just trick jams where everyone is out there riding, I notice a lot of women standing off to the side with their bikes just watching—I have to wonder how many of them want to participate. When it comes to group rides, I really have no issue being the only female. I am completely confident in my ability as a rider and know that I have no problem keeping up with the guys. Yet when it comes to the bigger trick competitions and jams, I personally have found it incredibly difficult to push myself to ride with all of the guys, especially when no other girls are riding. It is pretty intimidating to ride with 20-30 guys at such a high level of ability. The only thing I can attribute my uneasiness about participating is the worry that I'm not good enough to be out there. But the thing is, if I maintain that mindset and never try, how will I ever get to their level? The fact of the matter is, I won't. The only way to get better is to force yourself outside of your comfort zone. This is the only way this barrier can be broken. If all the females who want to ride continue to sit out on the sidelines because of their intimidation, the female side of the sport will never grow. There is no doubt in my mind that females have the capability to compete with the guys, we just have to go for it. We need more women out there riding, and I know that there are so many who want to, but are still too intimidated to try. This is exactly why the support of those riders who are out there is so critical. It might seem small, but it truly makes a lasting impact.

This past summer a trick competition was held at Venice Beach as part of LA Brakeless' three-day Summer Fix LA event. I traveled with the intention of competing, but upon arrival I had second thoughts. There were

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Photo by Jason Florentino

Meagan Marly

TORONTO, ON

I feel like it would be easier for women to feel comfortable in the scene if the guys would stop acting like it's some huge deal to have a girl hitting some tricks. I was super nervous when I first started going out to Toronto for trick nights at Trinity Bellwoods Park. Seeing those riders in videos and photos, I didn't really know what to expect. The fixed freestyle guys in Toronto are the best group of dudes I've ever met. They've never treated me any differently and have always been super supportive. Riding with them is always great and I always get praise and motivation from the guys when I hit tricks or even just attempt them. Toronto has a great scene and it's growing like crazy!

With TrickTrack.org, I'm not really sure what to say. I don't know the people personally, and it's very hard to determine tone and such in a typed comment. So I think at some times I let my gender get the best of me and get hurt. I just feel it's really degrading when a woman posts a photo of their bike or some sweet action shot and the guys can't refrain from mentioning the hottiness of the girl, but I don't think this can ever really be avoided.

I'd love to be able to have a trick session with just a bunch of girls, but really don't see that happening anytime soon. I think the women should just forget their gender and go out there and do what they love. I won't lie though, it does feel pretty cool being a girl rider when there's so few.

hundreds of people in attendance with 38 guys participating in the trick comp. Watching the riders warm up I immediately realized that there were a lot of really skilled riders out there, and not a single girl riding. I debated over and over in my head whether or not I would sign up to participate. I really wanted to ride, but needless to say, I was quite intimidated by the situation. It's not easy knowing that you'll be the only female amongst a very talented group. I quickly found Katrina, who was tricking off to the side of the course. I asked her if she was going to compete, and found that she had the very same worries as me—I could tell that she too really wanted to give it a shot, but was also intimidated that there weren't any other females riding. After talking it over with each other, we decided to sign the waiver to ride the course, but not to sign up for the actual competition.

Once everything started up, the judges started calling riders out in groups of three. I found a good spot on the side, and started shooting some photos. I began to regret not signing up, but also felt a lot less anxious knowing I didn't have to go out there. Only a few rounds in, I heard the stomach dropping sound of my name being called. My friends started pushing me to get out there and compete, but I was not having it. I decided to just not ride, since I didn't even sign myself up. As judge John Prolly took the mic and offered further encouragement, I gave in. I was so incredibly nervous I was literally shaking the entire time. Needless to say, I didn't do much to write home about. I hadn't ridden the course, and was way too nervous to even think. Nonetheless, I am so glad I did it. I realized that all of my fears were ridiculous as I received encouragement and positive feedback from many of the very riders that I found intimidating in the first place. It

EIGHTHINCH BLITCHER



Photo by Jerome Love

KRIS
FAY



BLITCHER



Photo by Greg Falski

Juliet Elliott

LONDON, UK

It's amazing how much fixed freestyle has progressed over the last year or two. If you look back at the first Bootleg Sessions video, you can see how quickly people have improved. Everyone was just fanning around doing wheelies in car parks not so long ago; now they're doing 180s down big stair gaps, grinding handrails and doing better lines.

As a girl within the fixed gear freestyle "scene," I've always had a lot of encouragement and support. Generally there are a hell of a lot of boys and not so many girls; boys like girls so they tend to think more girls riding is a good thing! There were four of us competing at the last competition I went to in Rotterdam. The standard of riding varied somewhat as it also did in the men's competition, but like with the guys category people were stoked on how the entrants were riding relative to their own ability.

I always ride with guys and that's fine by me, but I get more stoked on seeing girls do tricks as I can relate to it. It's a shame there aren't more girls having a go, but you can't deny that generally speaking girls are less up for hurting themselves or trying scary things. Things are changing slowly, but we're not there yet.

made a huge impact on me personally, and I can't say enough how much it has helped me grow as a rider.

The other theme that came up often was that of wanting to be viewed and respected as a rider, rather than just being seen as a girl on a bike. The necessary change for this must come from both sides. For the female rider, it comes from the realization that we can be just as good as the guys, and there is no reason we shouldn't. We mustn't sell ourselves short, and we really need to raise the level of expectations for female riders. The only way this can happen is to just keep putting the work in. I see a lot of female riders really leading the way in this movement, and I have to commend them. In order to be respected as riders, we must just keep pushing ourselves.

Of course, there are some things that need improvement amongst the male population to further this endeavor. Respect. I have to say, I really do find it upsetting when I make a significant improvement and yet the only comments I get are "I'd hit that." While you may think this is a compliment, it isn't. Sure, I don't mind that you might find me attractive, but that's not what I want to hear, and it's really not relevant. I don't put the work in and push myself so you think I'm pretty. I do it because I love to ride, want to become better and want to be respected as a rider. It is a bit disheartening when I reach a new milestone and the great majority of responses I receive are on my appearance rather than my abilities. Again, I recognize that this is a two-sided issue. To gain the respect we wish to have, we do have to keep working hard to be able to compete with the guys. Nonetheless, as we continue striving to get to that point, the positive support on our riding, not our appearance, will truly help.

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Photo by Lisa Medina

Katrina Medina

LONG BEACH, CA

I started getting into fixed gear bikes when I was 15 years old, as fixed gears started to become really popular in Long Beach. From the beginning, I didn't want to trick, but once I did a barspin everything changed. I started going to events and everyone was really supportive. I was always the only girl riding fixed freestyle, and still am around where I live. I really wish girls would stop being so scared and just do it. I think girls could ride freestyle, it's just the reaction that guys give them that makes them feel intimidated sometimes, as I often did. I would film myself and put them on Youtube just making simple videos on the tricks I learned. Through doing that I met Derred and Fonseca, they always gave me that extra push. For the most part guys have been supportive, but there have been many misunderstandings and drama over the internet. Girls aren't going to want to ride anymore if guys are just going hate—that needs to be put to a stop.

My closing message to all the female riders is just this: I know it is really hard as a female to put yourself out there, but it's something that must be done. We have the ability to be just as good as the guys, we just need to recognize this and raise the level of expectations we, and others, have for ourselves. If we all sit around and think, "No other girls are participating, so I won't either," then none of us will ever get out there, and things will never change. We have to just deal with the fact that we will be the first few females out there for a while, but find assurance in the knowledge that we will influence other females to do the same. If you want to ride, do it, don't wait for others to lead the way. It's an intimidating thing, but putting yourself out there might give the other women sitting on the sidelines that extra bit of confidence to get in the mix as well. And to the guys, simply viewing and respecting us as riders would be so incredibly beneficial and greatly appreciated. Your support and encouragement truly does make a significant, lasting difference.



Devan Mickell Council originally hails from Las Vegas, but currently resides in Nashville readying for law school between rides. Read more from Devan at her blog, www.sortalikeadream.com.



AJ Austin

Photo: Jake Marx

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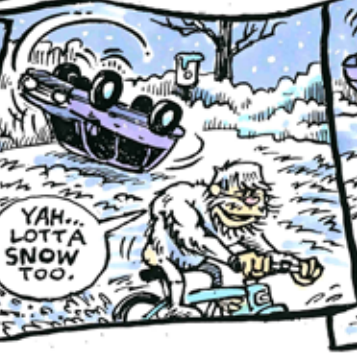
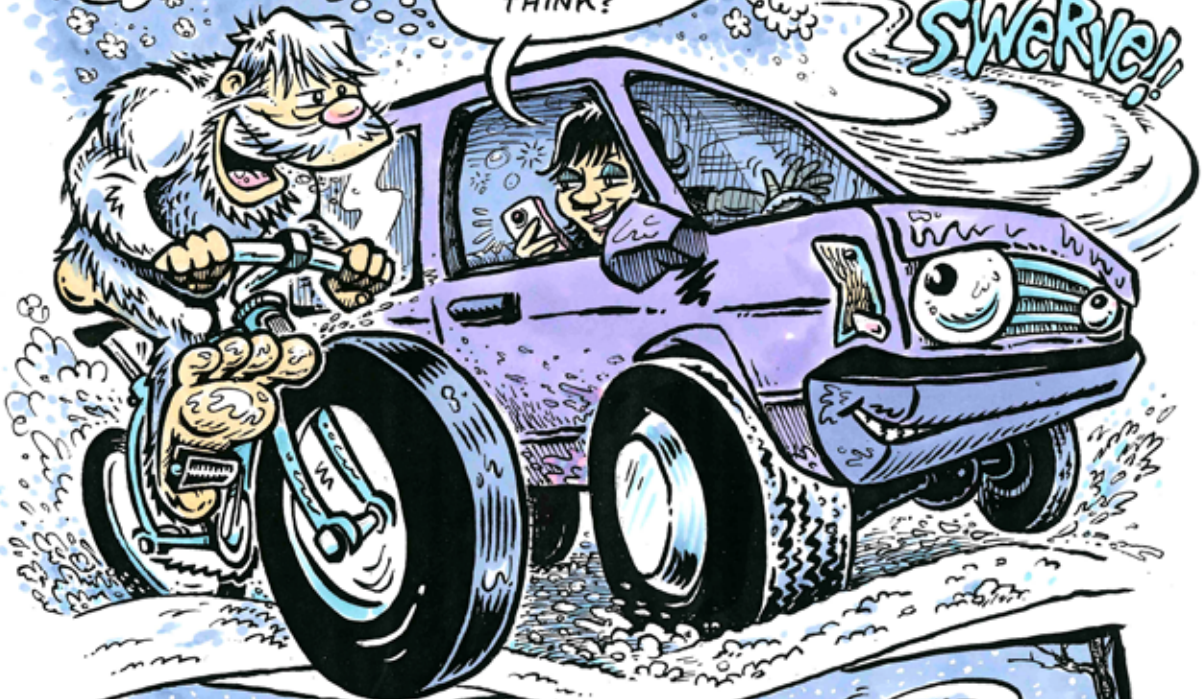


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Torker KB2 Kickback Review

Kickback hubs that swap gears with a slight backpedal have never been particularly common, but in recent years working examples have become all but extinct from service. At one time kickback hubs were used on a number of folding and cruiser style bikes, namely for their ability to add a second gear without any cables or shifter controls. Sturme Archer has reintroduced the technology with the S2C kickback hub, and Torker was quick to spec the hub on a complete bike, the pictured \$400 retail Torker KB2. We've been lucky enough to have the one and only Interbike model in for review for a few weeks before production models hit shops, and I have to say that the bike is totally fun to rip around on. This is a cool bike, and the kickback hub is far more practical than just as a throwback piece of tech to play with.

It's a clean look, besides the coaster brake arm the KB2 looks much like your common entry-level track bike locked up seemingly everywhere these days. The frame and fork is for all intents and purposes the same hi-ten and chromoly steel construction as the single speed U-District, with a nice looking straight blade fork and a low-slung, long toptube for more standover clearance. It's drilled for caliper brakes front and rear and has fender and rear rack mounts, but otherwise doesn't have any fancy bits that should set off alarms at a \$400 price point. No-name but perfectly serviceable parts make up the build, with large volume 30c tires and a chainguard being pretty on-point for the relatively short distance, casual city riding this bike is likely to see. The KB2 is no lightweight at 28lbs, no doubt helped along by the 1400g S2C rear hub.

The real story with the bike is the Sturme Archer S2C hub, which incorporates both the shift and brake into the same back pedaling action. The shift happens just before the brake engages, meaning that you can shift between the direct drive and high-gear without applying the brake, but also that every time you engage the brake the hub shifts to the other gear. With the 42x22t gear combination of the KB2 this translates into a direct drive low gear of about 51 inches, and a high gear of 71 inches, a very reasonable and usable range, easily tunable a bit up or down with a simple chainring swap. The kickback shifting is not for everyone, and not a piece of performance-oriented equipment, but it is super fun for going around town. The action takes some getting used to, but with only two gears it's not hard to keep track of which one you're in. In the event of braking you just need a quick second back pedal to get back into the previous gear—either way, we're not talking a huge learning curve here. It's easy to get used to, even if different than most anything else you've tried.

Check out www.torkerusa.com





NiteRider MiNewt 150 Cordless

The NiteRider MiNewt 150 Cordless is pretty much exactly what most commuters need. It's a reasonably high-powered LED headlight that's self-contained and recharges via a standard USB cable (or the provided wall mount charger).

The internal lithium ion battery runs for three hours on high (150 lumens), four on medium (110 lumens) and six on low (65 lumens). The translucent on/off button doubles as a power meter, glowing green when charged, and red when the battery is getting low (15% charge or less).

The quick release handlebar mount easily fits 25.4, 26.0 and 31.8 handlebars, and it really is one of the easiest on/off systems I've encountered. I have noticed the hinge pin slipping off to one side once in a while, but it's easy to push back in, and hasn't resulted in any problems on the bike.

The MiNewt 150 Cordless retails for \$99 and includes a lifetime warranty on all mechanical components, two years on electrical components and 180 days on rechargeable batteries.

Check out www.niterider.com

Freedom ThickSlick Elite

The latest crop of flat resistant tires are pretty incredible when it comes to preventing punctures from tacks, glass and other common road debris, and double thick rubber for resistance to skidding works out well for those looking for long term durability as well. The Freedom ThickSlick Elite combines a thick rubber tread surface and their Kevlar based Urban Armor Casing undertread to provide a long lasting tire that in my experience is near impervious to flats. I rode the pictured pair of tires for about six months on my lock-up bike and can't remember a flat tire in that time, and through countless miles at home and on road trips to NYC and Boston I was impressed with how long the rear tire lasted as used on a brakeless track bike. It wore to a squared off profile and then just kept going and going until finally the casing was showing through and the rear retired, lasting much longer than I'd anticipated, even for the double thick tread.

The wire bead ThickSlick Elite is heavy at 480g and certainly isn't the most supple tire on the market, but neither is it meant to be. These are flat resistant city tires, not performance road versions and shouldn't be compared to such in ride quality. While marked as 25c, the tires measure 27.5mm wide on my bike, confirming that the tires are larger than some competitors' 28c tires—worth taking into consideration depending on frame and fender clearances. People either love or hate the graphics, but I must say I'm a fan of the dragster effect. For 2011 larger 28c labeled versions are slated to become available, along with white ones to match your belt.

Check out www.freedombicycle.com





Mission Workshop Monty

The Monty roll-top messenger bag is designed for commuters. Dubbed a “small utility bag,” it features a roll-top cargo compartment, quick-access outboard pockets and two internal zippered pockets.

The Monty is perhaps the first production rolltop single-strap messenger bag, and certainly the first I’ve used. The rolltop feature adds to the already highly water-resistant construction, which is comprised of industry-standard Cordura, a heavyweight vinyl liner and urethane coated zippers. Although it’s not always necessary, when the sky really opens up, it’s nice to have the option to transfer everything from the front pockets into the cargo compartment and be certain that it’s all going to be safe and dry when you get to your destination.

At 16” x 10” x 5”, the Monty is ideal for most of my daily needs. For the weekdays, I can fit a full change of clothes (including shoes) along with my lock, tools and a few small items. I like the rather simple organization options, and the double zippered internal pocket is especially nice for securing valuables. And the bag’s just big enough to do some light grocery shopping.

The Monty is available in five colors and retails for \$149.

Check out www.missionworkshop.com

White Industries ENO Single Speed Crankset

The White Industries ENO single speed crankset is not only a beautiful example of industrial design, it’s one of the very few American-made bicycle components on the market. Each piece is CNC-machined in Petaluma, CA and individually polished under the watchful eye of Doug White. The concern for craftsmanship and attention to detail is apparent, hence White Industries has a well-earned reputation for quality.

The crankset is based on a “spiderless” design, with the chainring attaching to the drive-side crankarm via a splined interface with a lockring. I’ve been using a similar setup on my single speed mountain bike for years, and after the initial installation with a touch of Loctite, I’ve never had to tighten the lockring. Thus far, the ENO setup has been flawless, as well. The crankarms are machined from 2024 aluminum, which is known for it’s long fatigue life and high strength to weight ratio. The ENO crankset uses a JIS standard square-tapered bottom bracket, making chainline adjustments easy and a wide variety of bottom bracket choices available.

The ENO chainrings are machined from 7075 aluminum and feature the aforementioned proprietary splined interface. As you would expect, the teeth are un-ramped and perhaps most importantly, the ENO chainring seems to be as round as the day is long, which can’t be said for all chainrings.

The ENO cranks retail for \$225, and the chainring retails for \$50 or \$60, depending on the tooth count.

Check out www.whiteind.com





Chrome Tobruk Shoes

Chrome's second foray into the shoe market was met with a warm reception, and their subsequent trade-in promotion put their kicks into the limelight. The latest release from Chrome are the Tobruk slip-ons, which I had to have as soon as I saw them. I've been so happy with the suede-leather Arnhem model, that a set of slip-on's just made sense.

The Tobruk's feature the same red sole as all Chrome shoes, which involves a multi-layer construction with fiber reinforcements. Chrome really hit the nail on the head with their design, as the sole is stiff beneath the pedal, but flexible enough to walk around on all day long.

Like their messenger bags and most of the Chrome shoes, the uppers are made from 1000 denier Cordura. Obviously, it's some tough stuff. The only sign of wear after two months of use are little spots on the tongue where the rivets from my toe clips did a little damage. It's barely noticeable however, as you can see from the photo. It's not to say Chrome shoes are indestructible, though. A

friend of mine took a tumble and tore his Saipan's up pretty badly. He contacted Chrome and a new pair showed up a few days later. Now that's customer service!

Unlike the messenger bags, the shoes are manufactured in China. Guangzhou province, specifically, which surrounds the special administrative region Hong Kong. Politics aside, the fact of the matter is, the Chinese know how to make good athletic shoes.

One small nit to pick with Chrome shoes is that they don't seem to have the same anti-bacterial treatment as the other shoes I wear without socks. The smell isn't really noticeable while I'm wearing them, but when I when I go to change after a sweaty commute, well... On the bright side, they dry quickly, which makes washing them quite feasible, not to mention a boon for times when you get caught riding in the rain.

The Tobruk shoes retail for \$70.

Check out www.chromebagsstore.com

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SE Bikes has created a one-off Quad Fixed frame, a one of a kind prototype fixed freestyle version of their famous Quad BMX model. There is absolutely only one of these frames out there, and no word if it'll make it into production for 2012. www.sebikes.com

We've hardly spent any time with the original 50 lumen **Knog Boomer** and already Knog has one-upped themselves by introducing a slightly more powerful, USB rechargeable version. We have precious little information to share, but we can assure you that this is the brightest self-contained light in the Knog line. www.knog.com.au



The **Planet Bike** Blitzen Shoe Covers feature windproof fabric with micro-fleece lining and retail for \$39.99-\$44.99. The Comet Shoe Covers are full neoprene shoe covers and retail for \$35.99-\$39.99. And the Dasher toe covers feature Windproof fabric with microfleece lining and retail for \$24.99-\$26.99. www.planetbike.com

Redline created the Urbis Nox for people going big on their fixed gears, with a gusseted headtube and a wishbone stay along with larger diameter cromoly tubing throughout. For \$750 the bike comes with new-school style toe straps, 35mm wide tires and a polycarbonate bash guard, along with the front disc routed through the steerer like its little brother Urbis. www.redlinebicycles.com

With copper saddle rivets and other accents gaining momentum, it was only a matter of time before copper pedals hit the market. Three different copper finished **MKS** pedals are now available for about \$60, including the pictured road/quill versions. Available through any shop with a Merry Sales account, you can also order them online at Soma Fab. somafab.blogspot.com



Feedback Sports offers a shop-grade digital chain gauge to better tell when a chain really needs a replacement so that shops have a better way to give accurate measurements and consumers aren't relying on simple rules of thumb or replacing chains prematurely. It measures chain stretch up to 2.5mm in .01mm increments, yielding the most precise measurement of stretch out there. www.feedbacksports.com



For many urban cyclists, the **Brev.M** Classic saddle is just what the doctor ordered... It's shaped like the classic saddles of the 70's and 80's (think Concor and Turbo) and looks the part, too. It features just enough padding to make it comfortable for long rides without padded bike shorts, but it's certainly not what most people would consider "squishy." Best of all, it retails for just \$25. www.brevm.com

NS Bikes out of Poland has released the complete Analog bike, built up with an entry level fixed freestyle spec with big 38c tires and new-school straps but with square taper cranks fine for most but not really up for repeated stair gaps or anything of the sort. The bike fits long and low, built around a high bottom bracket, lots of standover and a long toptube/short stem combo. www.nsbikes.com

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Zen AND THE ART OF URBAN CYCLING

By Junji Miyazawa

After a rough day at work or school, you hop on your bike and something magical happens as you move through the city dodging cars and feeling the wind. By the time you arrive at home, somehow you are transformed: your mood has been uplifted, you feel energized, and your mind is clear. This is a common experience that motivates us to keep riding again and again.

Why does riding a bike have such an effect on us?

The vast majority of the human mind is not unlike a cluttered house, because as soon as we are born into this world, we start learning, accumulating, adapting, and creating rules to make sense of our surroundings. Our mind loves to do three things and three things only: It wants to Get, Hold, and Have More. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but actually a very healthy mechanism of the mind that enables us to function in this world efficiently. For example, we learn how to recognize letters and words (Get), and remember the definition of the words (Hold) and expand our vocabulary (Have More). But somewhere along the way, the mind becomes out of control, and it takes over our lives.

If you doubt that your mind controls you, instead of you controlling your mind, try this simple experiment: Close your eyes and watch your thoughts. What are you thinking about? Can you stop the mind from thinking or worrying about something? Can you “turn off” your mind?

When you are angry, sad, obsessed, worried about something, try directing your thought to another subject of your choice. Can you confidently switch your mind from the upsetting thought and keep it from going back?

The mind hates being still, for many reasons, but mainly because its primary function is to Get, Hold, and Have More. It's a workhorse, and it's perfect for some things, like driving or reading a book. And by the time we are grown up, the mind is on auto-pilot. It becomes problematic when we lose control of the mind. The only difference between an enlightened person and an unenlightened

person is that the former has total control of one's mind, and the latter doesn't.

In the Zen tradition, this problematic mind is sometimes referred to as the Bull. Most of us don't even know that a Bull lives and dictates our life. The trick is to recognize this Bull and learn to tame it, control it, and ultimately lose both the Bull and the Self. This is cool stuff, but it is digressing a bit from the topic.

One of my favorite contemporary spiritual teachers, Eckhart Tolle, wrote in *Stillness Speaks*, “‘Doing one thing at a time’ is how one Zen Master defined the essence of Zen. Doing one thing at a time means to be total in what you do, to give it your complete attention. This is surrendered action—empowered action.”

The reason we feel so good after biking, especially in an urban setting, is because we are forced into the present moment while we are riding. There is a real danger of getting hit by a car or smashing into a pothole if we are not paying attention.

The mind loves to think about the past—how it could or should have been different, or longing for that “high” experience that we never seem to be able to recapture. It also loves getting lost in the future. Either worrying about an unwanted outcome, or hoping for a favorable result, it keeps going and going, often in an infinite loop.

But all that activity is suddenly pushed aside by the busy intersection you are about to enter. The mind cannot think about more than one thing at a time. When we are quickly maneuvering around that abruptly stopping taxi in front of us, we cannot be wondering about that nasty remark your neighbor made yesterday.

Here and Now. When we ride in the city, we enter the sacred present moment where life is. This is the razor's edge that Zen masters refer to, and invite us to keep coming back to again and again. It is easy to fall off into the past, or wander into the future, but life is always in the Now, and as long as we are here, we are OK.



URBAN RUCKUS





LEARNING TO RIDE IN MEXICO CITY

By Jacquelynne Ocaña

I discovered urban cycling by way of my friend Jimmy, a die-hard street rider and a genuine character, one of those East Los Angeles natives who pride themselves on a mixed heritage and an ability to speak several neighborhood dialects of Spanish.

A bike messenger in downtown Los Angeles for more than a decade, on the side he helped head up a non-profit, rough-and-ready bike emporium called the Bicycle Kitchen, just north of Korea Town. Collectively they continue on as a diverse group of mostly fixed riders who encourage people to learn to build their own setups out of donated bike parts.

A few years ago, I found myself living and writing in Mexico City when Jimmy was invited to Mexico's first ever National Conference on Urban Cycling.

The Congreso Nacional de Ciclismo Urbano has become an annual meet-up of international cyclists working to create alliances between urban bike activists and public authorities in major cities across Latin America. Now in its third year local street riders, messengers and even novice enthusiasts have joined forces with the newly created Mexico City Bicycle Mobility Corp, an offshoot of the city's Environmental Secretary's office. Although it remains a small council with an even smaller budget, they have succeeded in creating actual bike lanes, installing bike racks downtown, and organizing the Sunday closure of major avenues for family-friendly bike days.

In Mexico for less than a week, Jimmy was hyped on touring the city and getting to know the local banda, a crew of helmet-free single speeders and fearless roadies, most of whom don't even know how to drive a car. Although millions of vehicles navigate the chaotic streets of this, the world's third most populated city, not that many people own cars.

Seeing as I didn't even have a bike, the best I could come up with was a borrowed hybrid for an impromptu ride. I had ridden some in L.A., and a critical mass or two in San Francisco, but mostly on a low cruiser around San Diego, so I jumped at the opportunity to explore a megametropolis with such an experienced urban rider.



The Bike Ride

The sky was thick and grey that day, as are most during the summer in the Distrito Federal. A combination of low clouds and pollution cast a dull chrome hue over the city, a flat light that accentuated the looming cement buildings. The typical threat of rain brought out a noxious smell of diesel fuel mixed with burnt cooking oil from the ubiquitous street vendors.

We began in the historic center taking laps around the Zocalo, the second largest plaza in the world, weaving in and out of police cars and taxi traffic. Veering down side streets where no tourists wander, we kept a retreating sun ahead of us and continued due west.

We stopped briefly for food in a sprawling outdoor street market. Forced to walk our bikes, often picking them up to step over the ropes of overhead tarps fixed to bolts in the street, we found a crowded stall with gaudy plastic tablecloths. A large metal vat of boiling oil was being tended by an imposingly thick man while his portly wife supervised three young girls garnishing fried taquitos with cream and queso fresco. With one leg through the frame of each of our bikes, we sat rapt in silence and watched as people made their way about their daily business, hustling replica designer belts over here and negotiating curbside deals over there.

The Santa Muerte

I had read somewhere of a clandestine shrine to the Santa Muerte, a feminine saint of debatable sacrilege. Her devotees are mostly from the notorious neighborhood of Tepito, where black market vendors, pirates and thieves have gathered since the central market days of the Aztec Empire. Venerating the Saint of Death is condemned by the Catholic Church but recent public worship, especially within organized crime, has created a large underworld of followers frustrated with Mexico's financial and social crisis.

Most people are fascinated by her cult-like following. Ask the Santa Muerte for a miracle and she is often willing to oblige, but her fee is typically what one cherishes most in life. I never ended up meeting anyone who would pray to her; probably out of fear of unlocking some dark force from which no other Saint could offer deliverance.

Searching out the shrine, we coasted down wide boulevards lined with a mixture of abandoned architectural relics and decaying industrial space. Eventually we found the unassuming side street and the one-story temple constructed of freshly painted white wooden planks. Although nearly hidden, its eeriness stood out from the tired homes of cement block and window bars. Standing on our bikes



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The experience was both frightening and enormously revitalizing all at once. We were lucky to have survived.

across the street, we watched two elderly women clutching rosaries go inside. They bowed their heads slightly towards an exterior glass case. It held a life size skeleton draped in the velvet robes of a Virgin and shrouded in fresh roses.

We had no desire to approach the creepy effigy, so we continued making our way west through neighborhoods of changing economic status. Following the railroad tracks we were thinking they would bring us back towards Paseo de la Reforma. This six-lane seven-mile avenue cuts through the center of Mexico City from west to east. Beginning in the aristocratic district of Lomas, it traverses Chapultepec Park past the Museums of Archeology and Modern Art through the financial district and ending just east of Tlatoac where the 1968 student massacres occurred.

The Rain

Following the railroad tracks was leading us nowhere and before we knew it, the main boulevards disappeared. As evening settled in, people gathering outside corner stores and on the stoops of neighbor's houses seemed to be glaring at us. We tried to retain our savoir-faire down these shady streets but no doubt we were definitely approaching the wrong barrio. The clouds grew darker and sprinkles of rain began falling. There was nowhere to hide.

The only way out was back the way we came but our instincts told us that was not the way home either. Asking for directions, even without a terrible accent is nearly impossible in the inner sections of the city and asking for a way back to the centro didn't help us appear any less conspicuous.

There is a defiant air amongst colloquial speakers of certain neighborhoods. You can speak perfect Spanish and not understand a word in an entire conversation with someone. Asking directions to a city like Azcapotzalco could take twenty tries before anyone knew what you are talking about. So rather than stop short we continued scoping out side streets as industrial buildings took over the residential area.

The sky opened up just as we finally found a main thoroughfare. A torrential downpour began instantly, nearly blinding us as we maneuvered between broken sidewalks and speeding buses filled with hundreds of evening commuters. Massive puddles formed in the ditches of street corners and we were totally soaked within minutes.

Thunder in the valley of Mexico is almost supernatural. Tropical bolts of lightning light up the sky like mortar blasts and the massive explosions of sound resonate to the core of your soul.

I saw Jimmy go wild in that storm. It was as if the energy of the ancient Aztecs was radiating up from the asphalt and through his bike tires. His thin stovepipe legs were pedaling harder and with more vitality than ever as his dreads threw off the water. I desperately tried to keep pace, squeezing between huge trucks at frenzied intersections, wiping streams of road water out of my eyes and madly blinking to see through the rain. The deafening thunder and threat of being struck by lightning terrified me more than the instantaneous death I would receive should a speeding car cut through an intersection without warning.

The experience was both frightening and enormously revitalizing all at once. We were lucky to have survived. I often wonder if our chance encounter with the Santa Muerte had anything to do with being forced to navigate the cemented-over canals of ancient Tenochtitlan while avoiding a swift drowning by a freak monsoon.

The Bike

Jimmy later gave me the bike he had brought down to Mexico. He had constructed it with parts from the Bicycle Kitchen fully intending to give it a good beating while touring the city and then leaving it to a local. I was honored when he showed up at my apartment just hours before he flew out. New friends in tow, he was full of more bizarre stories about riding late night with the banda from the slums of Iztapalapa in the east, down to the gardens of Xochimilco in the south, and all the indiscriminate chaos, punk rock parties and unruly activism in between.

The silver machine quickly became one of my most beloved bicycles. A 26" aluminum frame with 170mm cranks, flat bars and V-brakes, it had no suspension but I don't think I ever needed any. I rode that bike nearly every day for the next two years. Taking part in late-night rides I explored the city from one end to the other, meeting up with messengers for chelas (32 oz. cervezas) or helping plaster up bike advocacy posters. I quickly picked up the finer ways of yelling at maniac taxi drivers and spent many days cruising San Pablo Avenue, the mecca of new, used, racing, leisure and chopper bikes. Being thrown into urban cycling as if my life depended on it ultimately gave me an extraordinary opportunity to immerse myself in Mexico's Gotham City.

The silver machine quickly became one of my most beloved bicycles.





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Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha...

WIPEOUT!

By Joe Frey



Astronomical spring dawned lamb-like last year, for Chicago, anyway. Temperatures stayed mostly above the freezing mark which, combined with ample sun, melted whatever snow was left. Winds were moderate. All in all, pleasant cycling weather, especially for someone who believes that there's no such thing as bad weather; only bad clothes. But, being Chicago, things changed quickly.

Morning temps under a leaden sky on Thursday March 25 were more frigid, riding a hawk out of the northeast off Lake Michigan. But with it at my back—for the commute from my home in the northside neighborhood of Lakeview to a gig on North Michigan Avenue just over the Chicago River—that was no concern of mine. Not yet, anyway.

In summer, the Lakefront Path is crowded with oblivious tourists, roller bladders, family pedal cars and weekend spandex warriors from the suburbs who, oblivious in their own special way, treat the path like their personal time-trial track. But in winter, the path—plowed by the park district—is owned by intrepid year-round cyclist commuters like me. And despite the random ice patches

and snowdrifts, I consider it far safer this time of year than in more temperate seasons.

The most hazardous stretch of the path in winter is the S-turn at Oak Street Beach, where the path turns east/west along Lake Shore Drive, then back south/north again. Here, the spit of North Avenue beach and the breakwater that extends from Oak Street to the Roosevelt Road—with gaps for the river and the harbors—leave the shoreline unprotected from long-catch waves approaching from the northeast. In the depths of winter, ice floes pushed from the Lake create an arctic landscape that's often impassable here. But by the spring solstice this year, the mini-bergs had all returned to the lake, though their liquid remnants crashed against the seawall, splashing up onto the thirty-foot wide concrete berm that separates the Lake from Lake Shore Drive. On this stretch, the Lake Front Path doubles as this protecting berm.

The steady northerly winds in the 20s made for an effortless ride south to work in the morning, the waves crashing against the seawall, but not washing too far up the berm. However, by the afternoon the winds had kicked up, gusting into the 50s. Foolishly, and admittedly so, I decided to retrace by route home, going north this time on the Lakefront Path rather than negotiate the streets. With the gusts wrapping around the buildings in the center of the city, at least on the Lake I knew which way the wind would be coming: straight at me.

It's less than a mile from where I was working to the perilous stretch. I had ample time to reconsider my decision to ride along the Lake, since fighting a steady 40-mile-an-hour headwind, it took a loooooong time to get there. But the stiffer the wind seemed to become, the more determined I became. Even the people I saw turning around, telling me that waves were blocking the way, didn't deter me.

Just before the S-curve's turn west, I stopped, steeling myself for the assault as I watched the waves slam the seawall, crash up fifteen feet in the air over it and wash up the berm to the wall protecting Lake Shore Drive. It's

just a matter of timing, I told myself, and I waited for a (relative) lull in the surf, then headed off into the wind. (In retrospect, this was akin to George Clooney gunning his fishing boat's motor up the tidal wave in "The Perfect Storm.")

A couple smaller waves crashed against the seawall and washed under my bike, first up the berm, then down it. Then, as I was about half way around the corner, and within sight of higher ground ahead of me, I saw a swell rise just off the shore. It crested and crashed into the seawall just before I hit a slight depression in the berm. Though I kept as close to the wall protecting Lake Shore Drive as I could, the spray reached me like a sudden and short cloud burst. Then came the wash, from my right to my left, up the berm. The flowing water pushed against my wheels, but I was able to keep my bike stable and upright.

But then I hit the depression in the berm. The backwash surged down it like a flashflood, rushing under my bike sideways faster than I was going forwards. As if high-logged, the backwash took the bike right out from under me, and I fell on my left side. The water flowed back to edge of the seawall, my pannier acting as a sail catching the water, which pulled me, clipped to my pedals, closer to the Lake.

Finally, before I got too perilously close to the edge, I acquired the wherewithal to clip out. I scampered to my feet, pulling my bike up and running to safety, back from where I had come. (Why I didn't continue west along my route, I don't know. Maybe the way was blocked by another wave. I don't remember.)

On high and dry ground again, I assessed the damage. I was OK. I knew I'd have a bruised hip and arm, but I wasn't going fast enough to get seriously hurt; I essentially fell over from a stopped position. Maybe the water even cushioned the fall. My bike, on the other hand, hadn't fared so well. The front wheel had been knock so out of true, that as I rode—with the wind pushing me—the tube, pinched by the rim, popped in a report that echoed off the high rises along the Drive. Not yet halfway there, I had to walk my bike the rest of the way to the Lake Shore Park Fieldhouse, where I had a dry out and warm up, and checked the water damage to my cell phone. (I lucked out.) A phone call and a ride home: That's the anticlimactic end of the story.

But I now think of that late afternoon on certain nights in the summer, as I ride that same stretch, sweaty after playing softball in Grant Park, and think to myself, I sure could use a bit of Lake Michigan spray to cool off right now.



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Trail: Steering Geometry

By Brad Quartuccio



How exactly a bicycle remains upright is open to debate, with many a graduate student putting in late nights trying to figure it out on paper. Steering geometry and the basics of what makes a bike handle predictably is better understood, or at least falls into some generally agreed upon parameters. Bikes tend to look like bikes after all, with the geometry differences between similar purpose bikes being fairly subtle. That said, small geometry changes can have large effects on a bike's handling, especially when it comes to swapping forks. It's best to stick to the numbers your bike was designed for, or at least go into things knowing enough to be dangerous.

The combination of wheel size, headtube angle and fork offset largely determines how a bike will handle, and those attributes together create a "trail" measurement that can be used to predict a bike's handling to some degree, especially within the constraints of modern bicycles. More importantly for the sake of this article, altering the trail of your bicycle through swapping the fork to one with a different length (and thus changing the headtube angle) or offset can adversely affect the bike's handling and at times achieve exactly the opposite of what is desired.

Definition of Trail

Trail is defined as the horizontal distance between the contact point of the tire and ground, and where an imaginary line through the headtube of the bicycle contacts the ground (steering axis). This can otherwise be thought about as a measurement of how far the wheel trails behind the steering axis, all by virtue of a combination of fork offset, wheel



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diameter and headtube angle. Some argue that the perpendicular distance between the steering axis and the contact patch is more important, otherwise known as “mechanical trail” and rarely used outside of technical bicycle steering speak. This trailing geometry gives the front wheel a caster effect, not unlike the one on the front of a shopping cart. In the case of a bicycle, this caster effect lends bicycles one of the primary reasons they are stable and stay upright when ridden—that steering angle is self-correcting to some degree, with the bike naturally wanting to return to an upright, straight line position as the lean angle of a bicycle applies a force to straighten the bars. The fact that you can ride no hands, or walk behind a riderless bicycle on the sidewalk and steer it with forces

on the saddle alone also shows the caster effect that the steering geometry of bicycles exhibit.

Practical Considerations

Considering trail can help to explain the handling characteristics of a bicycle in soft sand. Anyone who has gone through a patch of sand knows the uneasy feeling—as soon as your wheel hits it the steering becomes strangely unfamiliar and the wheel wants to flop over. Any steering becomes oversteering, with the wheel washing out and the bike feeling unstable as a whole. This can be explained by the way that the contact patch of the tire moves forward upon entering the sand, reducing trail and therefore making the steering unstable. At some point the contact patch can move far enough forward in sand to reduce mechanical trail to zero and force the rider to actively steer the bicycle in a straight line, contrary to what most are used to and making it feel like the front wheel wants to do nothing more than flop over.

Different varieties of bicycles, even with the same wheel sizes, have different geometries for given handling characteristics, and it follows different fork geometries and subsequent trail measurements. While they generally

look and handle “like bikes,” on a more discerning scale the differences between bikes can be vast to the rider. Trying to succinctly describe how a track bike feels as compared to a touring bike and why isn’t easy, even though one would never be mistaken for the other. Trail can help in this differentiation—relatively speaking, touring bicycles have a short trail measurement and a long mechanical trail measurement whereas track bikes have exactly the opposite with a long trail measurement and short mechanical trail. In terms of handling, long mechanical trail makes a bike feel stable and easy to ride no handed, but perhaps not the easiest to make precision movements with. Short mechanical trail makes a bike very responsive to skilled riders, useful in racing and high performance situations, but can otherwise feel twitchy and can be tiring on long days since it require more rider input to maintain a straight line. Along the same lines, front loaded cargo and touring bikes feature short trail measurements for more predictable handling when weighted down.

Fork Swapping

There are two numbers of upmost importance when considering swapping your fork—axle to crown length and offset—both of which are available from most any manufacturer. If you’d like to maintain the handling characteristics of your bike, stick to a replacement fork with numbers as close to possible as the one originally spec’d. Choosing a different axle to crown length will alter the headtube angle of the bike (and subsequently the trail measurement). Changes within a few millimeters are more or less fine, but +/- 10mm or so will definitely be noticeable. Too long and the bike will handle sluggish with a feeling of wanting to flop over, too short and the bike will feel unstable with a narrow steering range.

While there is a lot of variability in fork length on the market, offset is more “standardized” with the vast majority of road and touring bicycles having a 43-45mm offset, with track bikes having shorter offset and touring bikes in the road range or longer. Keeping the axle to crown length the same, using a fork with less offset will yield more trail, and a fork with more offset less trail. A longer offset fork can be worth looking into if you find yourself putting in lots of road miles on a track bike, or using a front basket to carry your groceries home.

In the extreme, swap to a longer fork with less offset and you’ll quickly realize your folly as your trail will dramatically increase and make the bike hard to ride. Think small, incremental changes and you’ll be that much less likely to end up hating how your bike handles with an after-market fork.





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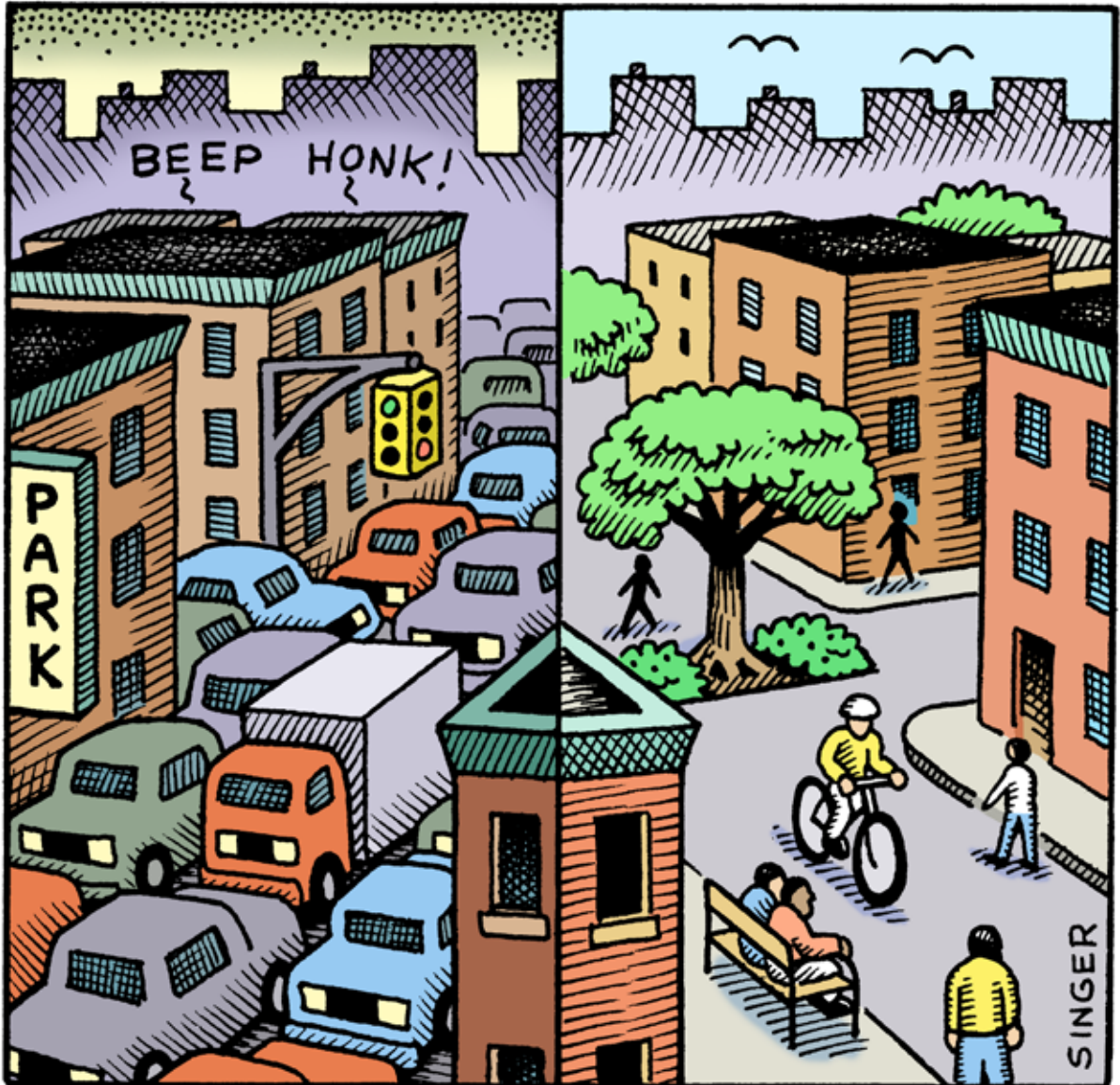
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