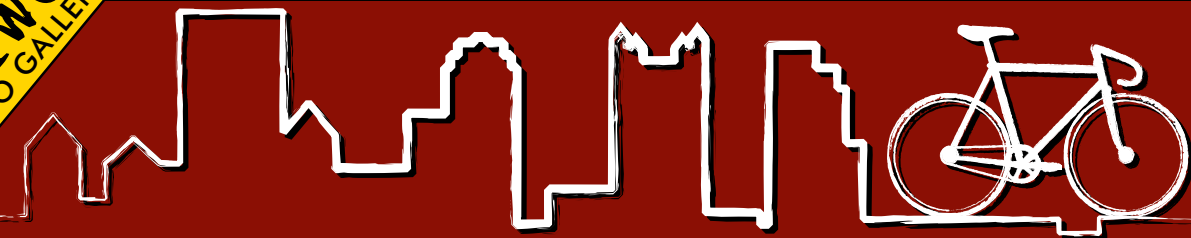


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URBAN VELO

Issue #27 September 2011



Brad Quartuccio
Editor
brad@urbanvelo.org



Jeff Guerrero
Publisher
jeff@urbanvelo.org

On the cover: Bike repair often takes place right on the street in Beijing, China. Read more on page 44. Photo by Berta Tilmantaite, www.godoberta.com

Co-conspirators: Greg Falski, Rie Sawada, John Greenfield, Josh Dick, Krista Carlson, Doug Dalrymple, Tom Hancock, Wojciech Artyniew, Roger Lootine, Davey Davis, and Andy Singer

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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Contents photo: London-based hip hop crew 2Morrow's Victory. Download their new EP "Good Lads" for free at www.2morrowstvictory.com. Photo by Greg Falski



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Editor's Statement

By Brad Quartuccio



To me, the behind the scenes story is at least as interesting as what normally makes the headlines. The “how” and “why” has always had a certain fascination for me. Beyond a better understanding of the mechanics of things, in terms of bikes it’s a look at the passion and history behind the current crop.

Ancient stickers, half assembled concept bikes best left forgotten, beat up test frames. I’ve had the opportunity to see a fair bit of what makes the American bicycle industry work and it’s much the same story from the largest to the smallest operations. For the vast majority of people involved in the design and tech sides of the bike industry it’s as much a job of passion as one strictly for a paycheck.

In this issue we take a look across the world at a very different reality, that of roadside bike repairmen in Beijing. As one of the world’s largest cities Beijing has countless utility cyclists supporting a loose network of several thousand repairmen each staking out a busy corner. Part community gathering place, part anything goes repair stand, the motivations for both mechanic and rider are perhaps more utilitarian and absolutely necessary as compared to our admittedly more recreational outlook. I find the behind the scenes story equally interesting, and can only wonder what parts, tools and further stories are hidden in the carts of Beijing.



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

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Publisher's Statement

By Jeff Guerrero




It may come as a surprise to some that Urban Velo is not necessarily my proudest accomplishment in the world of urban cycling. To be sure, I am incredibly proud of the media entity that Brad and I have created. But just as I prefer small gatherings to large parties, I get the most satisfaction from knowing that I've personally empowered a number of my friends, colleagues, neighbors, coworkers, students and family members to ride.

Sometimes it's as easy as lending someone a necessary piece of equipment—a lock or a blinky light, for example. Other times it involves a bit of bike repair, sometimes a complete overhaul. Or an entire bike, whether it's to borrow or to keep.

And while advice and material support is always appreci-

ated, the best thing that any of us can do to support a fledgling cyclist is to offer our encouragement. Especially when it comes to riding in the city. Because just about anyone who's never mixed it up with two-ton wrecking machines is bound to be a little nervous their first time.

On the contrary, one of the worst things any of us can do to a prospective urban cyclist is to try and coerce them into riding. It's bad enough to send someone out onto the streets without experience; a lack of self-determination could prove utterly defeating, if not disastrous.

The best-case scenario is to inspire the people around you, to lead by example. And when they come to you asking for a few words of wisdom, you'll have the golden opportunity to bring another cyclist into the fold. 

Urban Velo issue #27, September 2011. Dead tree print run: 5000 copies. Issue #26 online readership: 55,000+

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i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: Edward Sim

LOCATION: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

OCCUPATION: University Lecturer

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

I live in a suburb called Puchong, about 30 km away from the city center. Riding in my town is quite challenging, millions of cars, trucks and motorbikes roam the roads

24/7 and there are no bicycle lanes. However, it does not make cycling difficult as cars do keep an eye on motorbikes, so they do not drive like a crazy man, hence cyclists benefit from it. The weather is the typical excuse of not riding a bike, but I know when's the best time to ride and not.

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

I have not had the chance to ride in cities of a foreign country, but definitely Kuala Lumpur is not my favorite city to ride. It lacks the infrastructure and awareness for bicycles, and politicians have not heard of bike lanes. However, the cycling culture is growing, lots of weekend cyclists and the hardcore fixed gear riders. There is hope that one day that I actually could see a physical bike lane in this country, I am positive.

Why do you love riding in the city?

I love riding in the city simply because I get around quicker than a car during rush hour. I am one of the rare ones who bike to work, I love zig-zagging my way through gridlocks and arriving to work without the stress of finding a car park, and I skipped the toll and parking charges. I arrive to work with lots of energy and I am healthier and fitter day by day. There isn't much scenery to see but occasionally I do meet some interesting cyclists and get to know their stories.

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i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: Sheryl Yvette

LOCATION: Brooklyn, NY

OCCUPATION: Femme Fatale

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

I live in NYC and riding can be challenging—there's so much going on all the time. It's full of pedestrians, cars, other cyclists, skateboards, people with shopping carts and other push carts, kids, animals, pot holes, construction—you name it, we got it. And you have to avoid hitting it or being hit by it when you're riding.

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

NYC—it's actually the only city I've ever ridden in. I only started riding a few years ago.

Why do you love riding in the city?

Riding in NYC is the most exhilarating thing I've ever done. You have to be hyper aware of everything going on at any given time. It's part obstacle course, part puzzle, part stress inducing and all adrenaline and awe.

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NAME: Jonas Winn

LOCATION: Moline, IL

OCCUPATION: Bicycle Mechanic

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

I live in Moline, IL and am currently riding across the country. It's technical, beautiful, harsh in climate and delightful riding in my hometown, and I can say the same for the USA.

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

The Quad Cities of Iowa/Illinois! Because this is home, it is life, it is me, and it is Midwest America through and through.

Why do you love riding in the city?

I love it for the challenge, the pace, the noise and the influence that I have of showing how to commute by bicycle.

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

The city is great, if you have what it takes. The drivers honk at you until their faces are blue. The wind in your hair and the tear in your jeans. The drivers are mean, but you know what it means. To keep the air clean and your toned muscles lean. You have what it takes to make the ride great, through love or hate the message you make, that you're on the road and you follow a code of cyclist pride, you will ride 'till you die.

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NAME: Juan Vasquez
LOCATION: Riverside, CA
OCCUPATION: Photographer

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

I live in Riverside, CA and it is a nice bicycle community. We have monthly night rides and it is just fun to ride.

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

My favorite city to ride in would be Los Angeles, CA because it feels good to go downhill and ride by the cars and people.

Why do you love riding in the city?

I love riding in the city because it is fun to ride and meet new people, and it's a good way to explore the city.



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NAME: Jason Vivona

LOCATION: Providence, RI

OCCUPATION: Artist

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

I just recently moved from San Francisco to Providence, RI. It's beautiful and hectic riding in this city. There are gnarly potholes and horrible drivers everywhere, but it's part of the fun for me. This place is gorgeous, tons of old architecture, and a fair amount of urban decay, which I think is beautiful. Not really knowing too many people here, I have found that other cyclists are really very friendly. Just run into someone and strike up a conversation super easy. It's refreshing.

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

San Francisco has a giant place in my heart for all things, especially riding. I am back and forth quite often, so I'd have to say it is a loose tie. Providence and SF have their own respective charms when it comes to cycling. Shouts to my SF bike homies, my Santa Rosa bike friends, LUCE Goods, and my Providence bike friends, as well as DASH in Providence...

Why do you love riding in the city?

There is always stuff happening, you have to stay on your toes. I like the hustle.

Check out www.jasonvivona.com



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i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: Mike and Ann Kelly

LOCATION: Pittsburgh, PA

OCCUPATION: Contractor and Hotel Marketing

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

We live in the Shadyside area of Pittsburgh. This is the central part of the city and the entire city is accessible from here. The best access is the side streets, bike lanes (too few) and the great bike trails along the three rivers. The main drags can be very dicey with potholes, uneven pavement, and sunken catch basins. You can never ride close to the curb. The drivers aren't too bad, but I have been spit on, screamed at, and generally hounded by stupid people. There are a lot more urban riders every year and once you figure it out, Pittsburgh is a great city to ride in.

What was your favorite city to ride in and why?

Hands down, the Washington DC area. The C&O Canal Towpath, the Capitol Mall, around the neighborhoods, Rock Springs Park, Alexandria, and Arlington. And riding down the Lincoln Memorial steps.

Why do you love riding in the city?

Pittsburgh has a fairly small footprint, but some serious rivers, hills and valleys. In good weather, we go out most Saturdays for 3–4 hours. We ride on the bike trails, through the parks, around the universities, and to the Strip District for shopping. We mix it up a lot. I ride year round, with studded tires for the ice. Pittsburgh is a real gem for cyclists of all stripes.

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i ♥ riding in the city



NAME: Simona Bava

LOCATION: Stockholm, Sweden

OCCUPATION: Owner of Bavabici

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

I am Italian but I've lived in Stockholm since 1982 and I love this city. It's nice, easy going... a little bit chilly in winter though.

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

I think Stockholm but I would like to try Portland, Amsterdam and Copenhagen. I actually would love to ride everywhere.

Why do you love riding in the city?

Because you see more, you meet people, you hear the voices, the sounds, you smell the seasons.

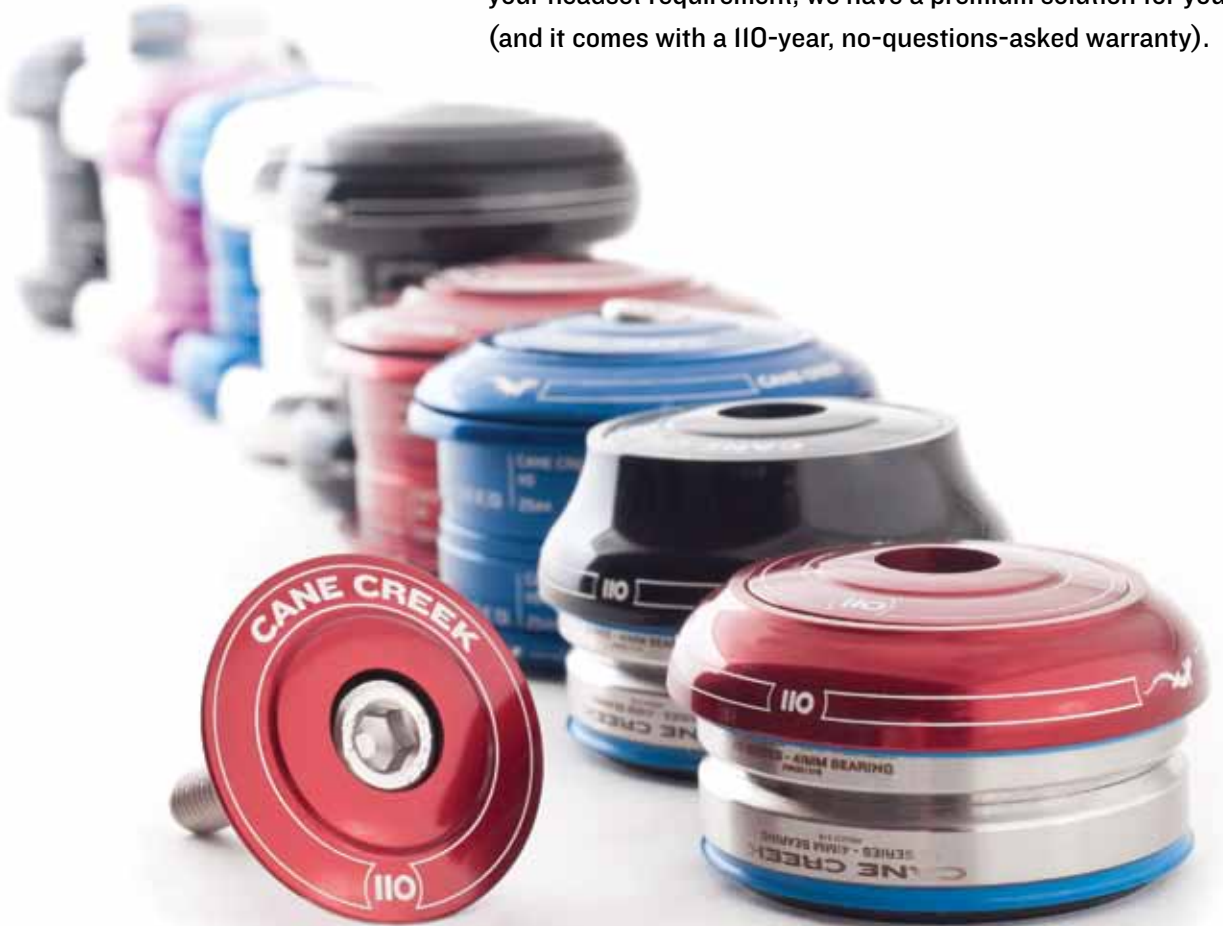
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NAME: Carol Worden

LOCATION: Elmira, NY

OCCUPATION: Unemployed

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

I live in Elmira, NY, most famous for the summer home of Mark Twain and the Civil War prison camp aptly named "Helmira." The name Helmira could still be used today describing the conditions of our city streets and the motorists that rule the road in this upstate New York town. Elmira is just now starting to realize that there is a brigade of cyclists that rely on pedal power to commute around town and the importance of accommodating them. The city is conveniently set up as to not have to ride on major thoroughfares for long periods to get to your destination. Historical, Victorian architecture lines a lot of the streets making for some enjoyable riding. I am not an experienced rider by any account but can tangle with any motorist when the situation arises. After taking the League of American Bicyclists "Traffic Skills 101" course at nearby Cornell University, I have acquired the skills to cope with most demented drivers.

We are a fairly small city compared to many communities in the world, so traffic is not too bad, although we are in the process of putting up two Ghost Bikes in Elmira

in memory of two unfortunate riders killed by motorists. Elmira will never be a perfect cycling destination but by working with local groups and clubs I can do my part to make it a safer and introduce more cycling opportunities to the community.

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

As far as a city to cycle in, I find nearby Ithaca a very cycling friendly community. Bike lanes are fairly abundant as is a good amount of off road riding opportunities. Lots of hills for the exercise and the culture is great with two major learning institutions calling it home. Great shopping, restaurants and waterfalls/gorges galore make Ithaca a wonderful cycling experience.

Why do you love riding in the city?

Gas prices, exercise, convenience... And even though it may be a little hectic at times, it is a great stress reliever and I gain serenity knowing that I am contributing to the betterment of the planet!

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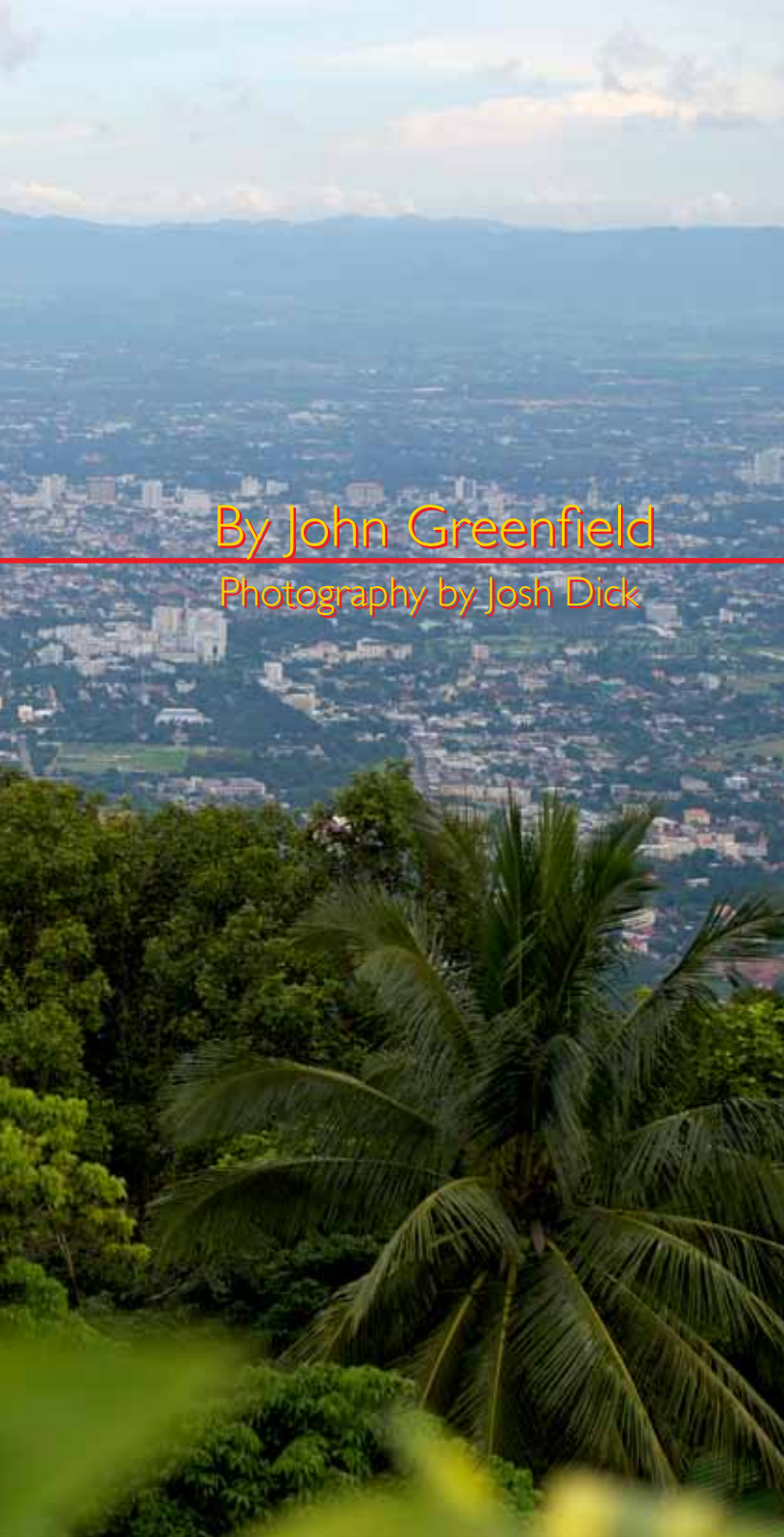
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CHIANG MAI วาทศิลป์

An interview with Kobby Booncoomyou



By John Greenfield

Photography by Josh Dick



It's a sultry Monday night in Chiang Mai, the largest city in northern Thailand, and techno music booms from the hostess bars near Moon Muang Road. This college town of about 150,000 people (one million in the metro area) has dozens of golden Buddhist temples, and it's surrounded by gorgeous green mountains.



In the plaza by Thapae Gate, the eastern entrance to the old, walled city center, a dozen or so young men on fat-tired fixed gears with multiple spoke cards practice skids, wheelies and backwards figure eights by lamplight.

They roll with the Pedal Addict Society, a fixie crew, founded by Kobby Booncoomyou, 32, a graphic designer and street artist. He also flips gourmet hamburgers at Little Cook, a “slow food” café he recently opened with his girlfriend. Kobby filled in me in on the history of fixies in Thailand and told me about Chiang Mai’s burgeoning bike scene.



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How did you first get into fixed gear bikes?

I first saw fixies in Bangkok about three years ago. When I first saw one I said, “What is it? It’s a messenger bike. I want to ride fixie!” Back then not many shops carried them and they were expensive—I didn’t have money to buy one. But now in Bangkok there are more than a thousand fixie riders, and the stores stock every style. And it’s spreading through osmosis to other parts of the country. I started riding one in Chiang Mai two years ago. I think I was the first person to ride one here.

It seems like Chiang Mai is a much nicer city to ride a bike in than Bangkok.

Right now the fixie scene in Chiang Mai is not the same as Bangkok, because Chiang Mai is a good city to ride with no crazy traffic and lots of bikes. I organized the first alleycat race in Chiang Mai—I got the idea from watching YouTube videos. Right now I’m sponsored by Velocity Shop, a Fuji dealer in Chiang Mai. They give me free gear and I help promote their shop. **Are there bike messengers in Bangkok or other parts of Thailand?**

I don’t think there are bike messengers in Bangkok because motorbikes are really popular and there’s crazy traffic. I’d like to start a messenger business in Chiang Mai but there are no customers for it yet.

When do fixie riders show up at this plaza?

People show up here to do tricks every night but Saturdays rides are big—we sometimes get 100 people.

And they’re all on fixed-gears?

Some people are on road bikes and some people are on mountain bikes. I don’t care what kind of bikes they are because many people riding together at night is very powerful. It looks like a campaign. Many people ask, “Hey, where are you going? Why are you riding?” I also ride with the Chiang Mai Bicycle Club, which meets every Sunday morning at 7 am.

Isn’t that kind of early?

It’s fine. Some of the guys who ride fixies all night try to show up in the morning and they’re so tired they have to hang onto things to stay upright, but the club is mostly older people—doctors, nurses, cops and government workers, every occupation. Sometimes we do really long trips, like to Pai, a small town in the mountains. Dr. Nirandorn is the head of the club.

You know, Chiang Mai has maybe 100,000 motorbikes. But we’re trying to say, “Hey, wake up! You can ride a bicycle instead.” Dr. Nirandorn is famous in Chi-



A man with a beard, wearing a green t-shirt and khaki shorts, is captured in mid-air while performing a wheelie on a black mountain bike. The bike is tilted upwards, with the front wheel high and the back wheel on the ground. The background features a clear blue sky with scattered white clouds and a dense line of green bushes and trees. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

AJ Austin

Photo: Jake Marx

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ang Mai because he tries to get everybody to join his club. He says, “Hey fixie rider, come on. Hey mountain biker, come on, come on. Hey downhill rider join with me, come ride on Sunday morning.” He wants to make Chiang Mai the bicycle capital of the country.

What do you think makes Chiang Mai a great city?

Chiang Mai is different than Bangkok. Other Thai people say that people in Bangkok are selfish and everything is about money, money, money. But the pace of life in Chiang Mai is slow and people are friendly. You can go to the temples and you can bike up Doi Sethep mountain.

I want to promote bicycling to people in Chiang Mai, especially in the high schools. Because when you ride a bicycle you don't have to pay for gasoline. You pay for the bike and then after that there's nothing to pay for. And you get good health and look smart and help heal the world.

Thai people think a suntan is not good. They think only light skin is handsome. Actors and actresses on Thai TV are very light. But I want people to know that riding a bike in the hot sun is OK. Black, brown or tan skin is OK. It means you're healthy.

Do you have any stories about biking around Chiang Mai.

Last month my friend went to ride his bike up Doi Suthep mountain. He rode a fixie up the mountain. Because it only has one gear it's very difficult to get to the top that way and it's very slow. Suddenly a car is crashing into him and boom! He gets dragged 20 meters.

So he goes with the driver back down the mountain to the police station. The driver, she says “You know, it's crazy riding a bicycle on the mountain, it's very dangerous.” She says the bicycle was going very fast. But he was riding a fixie up the mountain! The cop believes her and says to my friend, “Fuck bike riders! Be careful! Cars are very important! Bicycles are very cheap and crazy!” My friend goes to the hospital, and he has to pay for his own hospital bill and to replace his bicycle. The driver, she pays nothing.

Is your friend OK?

Right now he's OK but he's scared and so sad. He's a good athlete and he came in second in my alleycat but right now he's not biking.

Anything else you want to tell me?

I want to invite people from all around the world to come to Chiang Mai and join with us to ride bicycles. It's a good city for you. Don't worry, not all the cops are bad.



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For the Love of the Game

Richmond bike polo players travel seven hours to swing their sticks in New York's Pit.

By Krista Carlson

"Body up on him! Body up on him!" The excited cry echoes from the sidelines at The Pit, New York's informally designated bike polo court. On the concrete court, six players weave and sweep across the large open courtyard vying for possession of the ball. As Ace contends with an opponent and the two all but tangle, his teammates on the bench urge him to muscle the man in the way, well, out of the way.

Body-to-body is one of three legal forms of contact in bike polo, a co-ed game that mimics traditional polo with urban equipment in an urban setting. Bike-to-bike and mallet-to-mallet are also legal (within some sort of reason); the general term is "like-to-like contact"—so when one player's bike cuts off another; or the tubular metal mallet shafts smack against one another and lock together as two players cross, it's fair play.

"You got time!" a teammate on the bench calls out once, twice, three times. He's letting his man know that he's far enough from his opponents to take a moment to calculate his next move and ready his shot. It's a game of inches and split-second decisions, where speed and control play equally important roles.

On this particular Sunday, the energy is higher than normal, in an arena where the sweat and adrenaline already pour out heavy on a regular day. Eight Richmond players have endured a seven-hour trek to face off against New York's A-line in the NY Menace Minor, a bench minor format competition.

The bench minor format differs from traditional bike

polo games in that teams are comprised of anywhere from six to nine players who rotate on and off the court, rather than fixed teams of three. There are still only three players per team on the court at all times, but the rotation format allows for longer games: Rather than playing to five points or 10-15 minutes, these bench games consist of two 20-minute periods with a 10-minute halftime; teams battle it out to score as many goals as possible.

Competition is more intense in these games where the players need not be so concerned with endurance and reserving energy; rather they can play their hardest in short bursts and then rotate out. The format has become more popular recently, being employed to carry out larger scale events such as the Chicago Bench Minor II in June, the second bench-style event to carry out a nationwide draft, effectively establishing cream-of-the-crop teams combining players from all regions, as well as the more localized Menace Minor, pitting city-based teams against one another. Similar events are being implemented across the different regions of North America and other parts of the world as well.

"Come back, Chombo! Come back!" Adam "Menace" shouts from the New York's bench zone, which is really just a ramp leading onto the court. Three players from each squad are on the court at any time, while the rest of the team stands anxiously at the sidelines, acting as extra eyes on the game while they await the moment that they will be sent out onto the court.



Meanwhile, Zach Blackburn cuts an S-curve around his opponents, weaving and poking the ball under his frame and around his front wheel. He pushes it to the left side to guard it from would-be thieves on his right, and maneuvers himself sideways to the right to position himself on the other side of the rolling sphere. He raises his arm in preparation for a swing, but a Richmond player closes in fast and stretches out his arm and mallet ahead of him, giving the ball a quick push east and away from Zach and the goal zone.

Players and their bikes tangle in excited efforts to overtake one another in sharp sweeping turns, sometimes dislodging a foot or two, or an entire body away from the bike and onto the pavement.

People strolling through the park stop to watch. Many take pictures of the scrimmage; most inquire as to what exactly it is they are witnessing.

“Are they not allowed to put their feet down?” No, they are not. A “dab” takes a player out of play until they tap back in at one of the unmarked designated tap-out points: one each at the center of the east and west walls bordering the court.

Nick guides the ball with a series of subtle twists of his wrist, keeping it close to his bike and narrowly out of reach of his New York opponents. He skirts in a tight zig-zag until he finds himself alone, facing the southern goal while most of the players are still turned north toward. He has an open shot—maybe it’s nerves, or maybe miscalcula-

tion—but the ball goes just a bit too wide, hitting the goal post, which is really just a traffic cone, and bounces away. Moments later he is crossing mallets with New York’s Chris Roberts as he attempts to regain possession of the stray ball. Roberts is one of North America’s best in the sport; having claimed the top of the podium at the North American Hardcourt Bike Polo Championships in 2010. Swat, tap, tap, clack—they engage in a momentary battle and smiles emerge on their faces amidst this moment of aggression.

“Thirty seconds!” shouts the designated timekeeper, signaling the end of the second 20-minute half. Roberts rushes up to the north end, his large frame and long limbs dominating the landscape, and sends the ball careening well left of the goal. A Richmond player catches the ball from a ricochet off the back wall. He sends a long pass up between the bikes in motion, players scramble into position to capitalize on these final moments. The ball is lost in the sea of mottled shade, spinning spokes, the revolution of pedals and the calculated rise and fall of mallets. In an instant that passes faster than a head can turn, the ball is propelled past the goaltender, nailing in a final goal for Richmond.

The game is over. New York is victorious. They shall head home this evening laden with a single prize: bragging rights. In the meantime, the teams converge in the center of the court, trading jokes and sweaty hugs. Another day of “great fucking polo” has been had.





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BIKE REPAIRS START FROM SQUAT

Words by Tom Hancock
Photos by Berta Tilmantaite

You might associate a punctured tire or broken spoke with an unpleasant repair bill, and a long trek to the nearest repair shop. But in Beijing, thanks to a pool of enterprising migrants from China's countryside, broken bikes are fixed quickly and cheaply, right on the street.



Squatting on a Beijing street, oily rag in one hand, a pair of pliers in the other, Mr. Li is having an argument with a middle-aged female customer. “You’ll worry me to death” she says in her throaty Beijing accent. “All I ask is for you to fix this one thing.” “It’s not as easy as that, you try it yourself!” Li replies. “Me try it?” she wails “I came here so you could fix it!”

The object in question is the pedal on a blue “Giant” brand bike, which is proving a more difficult repair than Li expected. On the ground next to Li sits a chipped white basin, filled with the spanners and wrenches every Beijing bike repairman needs. Behind him is a blue metal cart, with shelves on which inner tubes, screws and bicycle locks are placed. Li is one of the several-thousand street-side bike repairmen (and they are always men) in Beijing, and he has been working in this spot for four years.

Bike repairmen are a common sight in Chinese cities, but repairmen in Beijing are usually outsiders. When Li arrived in the capital six years ago, he only had one contact in the city—a male cousin, who’d been running a repair stand for a couple of years. Li comes from Anhui,

a poor province in central China, and was looking for an escape from his old construction job, laying pipes and digging foundations for apartment blocks on China’s rapidly developing east coast. “I prefer repairing bikes to working in construction,” Li said. “Because it’s more independent.”

This cousin gave Li a tip-off that a Beijing local, who was retiring from the bike repair business, might be able to pass on his spot. “That’s how most bike repairmen get started, through family connections,” he said. Li got the spot, on a patch of sidewalk next to a clothing market, but his wife and two children remained in the countryside, growing corn on the farm where he grew up.

In Beijing’s street side hierarchy, repairmen occupy a more secure position than clothing and food vendors, who are unlicensed, and are often targets for physical assault from Beijing’s teams of urban administrators, known locally as the Chengguan. In contrast, repairmen can pay a monthly fee of 100 Yuan (about \$15) to the city’s department of business, after which they can operate without interference from the authorities.

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Profits from repairs are small. A punctured tire earns Li around 3 Yuan (\$0.50), new bearings for a worn out pedal get 8 Yuan (\$1.20), and re-inflating a tire gets 3 Mao (\$0.04), before you subtract the cost of the parts. The price for bigger repairs is always open for bargaining. Beijing's bike repairmen usually earn between 1500 and 2000 Yuan (\$230-310) each month, about half the average income for a Beijing resident.

Repairmen work all year around. "The only time I close my stall is when it snows" Li said. Although temperatures in Beijing can drop as low as -20° C in winter, fiddly repair work makes wearing gloves unfeasible. "My hands are just used to it by now."

Bike repair stands can become unlikely community centers, as most repairmen put stools on the street for customers to sit on. The number of stools at Li's stand has grown to five, and on one April afternoon they are occupied by resting workers from a nearby construction site, dressed in blue work overalls, concentrating on a card game called "fight the landlord." Three or four adolescent security guards, responsible for directing traffic on the street, also find themselves pulled in by Li's stall. "The repairs are something interesting to look at," one security guard says.

The hangers-on at Li's stall are exclusively male, and generally migrant workers from other parts of China, looking for a sense of community in an unfamiliar city. "It's not an interesting job, just getting your hands dirty everyday," Li said. "But talking to customers, and watching the card games is probably the most fun part."

Not all bike repairmen manage their social relations so well. On another lane less than 200 m from Li's stand, sixty-one year old Mr. Tong finds communication with his clients more challenging. "I've never learnt standard Chinese," he said in a thick southern accent. Although he's lived in Beijing for ten years, most of Tong's time is spent with family from his hometown. "Can you understand him?" a Beijinger who emerged from his house wearing pajamas asked. "I have no idea what he's saying!"



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Mr. Jia, a customer at Tong's stall, talked about the dramatic changes Beijing's bike culture has undergone since the 1970s, when bikes could only be bought with coupons handed out by government-controlled work units. "There weren't many bikes around then, and people did repairs themselves, because they were poor." The 1980s and early 1990s were a golden age for cycling in the city, as economic growth and the end of the planned economy brought bikes within the reach of ordinary Beijingers. "I think that was the time when you saw the most bike repairmen, even more than there are today," Jia said. "Nowadays people prefer to buy electric bikes, or cars."

The decline in the number of Beijing's cyclists has created incentives for repairmen to diversify. Mr. Zhang, also from Anhui, has recently started repairing electric bikes, after 10 years of running a repair stand. "I prefer doing mechanical repairs," he said. Mr. Zhang worked at a state-run vehicle factory in his home province before he moved to Beijing. "Mechanical repairs are probably my only hobby, apart from watching TV."

Mr. Li also added other services to his stall in recent

years, including key cutting, shoe repair, and even wheelchair maintenance. As he sews up a pair of high-heeled shoes using his tripod mounted sewing machine, a customer turns up with a wheelchair. Li abandons the shoe to assess the damage. "That wheelchair looks pretty comfortable," remarks one of the security guards hanging out by the stall. "It's not bad, I got it online," says its owner.

When darkness falls, Li washes the oil from his hands in a plastic basin placed on the street, closes his stall, and trudges to the room he rents in a nearby alleyway, in time to cook dinner and catch his favorite TV show "People's Life."

"I plan to stay in Beijing for at least a few more years" he says.

But as food and rent prices in the capital rise, and conditions in the countryside improve, Beijing's migrant bike repairmen are increasingly feeling the lure of home, including Mr. Zhang. "I sometimes think about going back to my home town and looking for work," he said. "I could drive a goods truck, and probably make as much money as I do here in Beijing".





Rider: Wizard ★ Photo: Lingo

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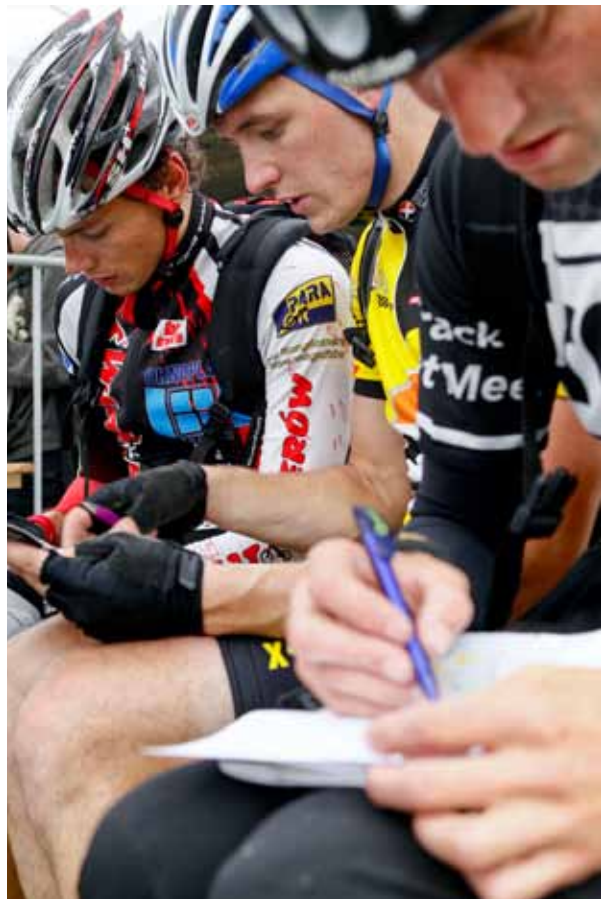
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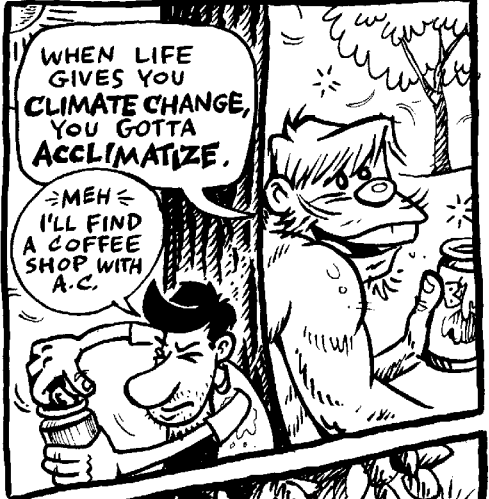






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VooDoo Maji

VooDoo Cycles was founded in 1994 by a handful of cyclists. The bikes were designed by Joe Murray, a bike designer, framebuilder and hall of fame professional mountain bike racer. While VooDoo is primarily a mountain bike company, keep in mind that the chief designer was a champion racer in the 1980's, and back then they did it all. They raced hill climbs, downhill, cross country, dual slalom and quite often road and trials, too. Sometimes all in the same day! In other words, they were supremely well-rounded cyclists. And while that's not altogether unheard of today, it certainly afforded Joe Murray a wealth of experience when it came to designing bikes.

The Maji is VooDoo's take on the urban singlespeed. Sold as a frame only with an optional fork, the Maji brings the vibe of a classic hardtail mountain bike to the street. When I get on the Maji, I just wanted to start jumping curbs and popping wheelies (which I admittedly kind of suck at). The frame is stiff enough to make it an efficient climber, but the Maji is most in its element bombing a long downhill stretch.

Built from tried and true 4130 chromoly tubing, the frame is a shining example of Taiwanese manufacturing. The TIG welding is clean and the paint job is a flawless metallic black. In other words, the quality belies the very reasonable price.

Much like a mountain bike, the bottom bracket is high (278 mm) and the top tube is short (520 mm on the 52 cm model). The frame weight, for those wondering, is just about 5 lbs even. The rear end is spaced at 120 mm, and the cast track fork ends feature built-in micro adjustable chain tensioners. The frame has clearance for up to 40c tires, though the largest I tried were 35c. Though regular caliper brakes will work with up to 28c tires, long reach calipers are recommended for versatility.

As far as nits to pick, my number one complaint would be that the Maji uses a 26.8 mm seatpost and not 27.2.

The Maji is available in 52, 54, 56 and 58 cm sizes (black only). The frame retails for \$250 and the optional straight blade chromoly fork is \$80 (red only).

Check out www.voodoocycles.net



Illumenox Vega IW

The Vega IW Rechargeable is a high-powered commuter headlight from the Taiwanese manufacturer S-Sun, sold under the brand name Illumenox. Like several of the top bike light manufacturers, S-Sun specializes in diving lights, which means they're more than capable of designing effective lights for biking and hiking.

The Vega IW Rechargeable is rated at 20 lux. Most bike lights marketed in the US are rated in lumens instead of lux, which makes it hard to compare the Vega to the competition on paper but seems on par with 100 lumen lights I have in my collection. The beam is relatively tight, yet wide enough to provide an appropriate field of vision, provided the light is not pointing down too much. Interestingly, the bulb itself is mounted at the top of the unit pointing down, not straight out like most lights. All of the light emitted has been bounced off of the curved reflector.

Illumenox claims the Vega will run for eight hours on high when fully charged. A low-battery indicator begins after seven hours, however the light's constant current technology means that the light output will remain the same, regardless of whether the battery is fully charged or nearly depleted.

The unit features a tool-free quick-release mounting bracket that fits bars from 22.2 - 31.8 mm that features an indexed micro-adjustment which lets you precisely set the horizontal angle of the light.

The Vega uses a replaceable lithium ion battery, which is readily available online and retails for about \$6. The light includes a wall charger, and it can also be charged via USB, each taking approximately 4 hours for a complete charge. The Vega IW Rechargeable retails for \$160.

Check out www.ilumenox.com

Milwaukee Bicycle Co UHMW Bike Polo Mallet Heads and Caps

Up until recently, the material of choice for bike polo mallet heads has been HDPE (high-density polyethylene), aka gas pipe. With a little research and plenty of field testing, Ben's Cycle has brought upped the ante by bringing UHMW (ultra-high-molecular-weight polyethylene) mallet heads to the masses.

According to Wikipedia, UHMW has "the highest impact strength of any thermoplastic presently made." And according to Ben's Cycle, the UHMW heads will outlast HDPE heads and weigh about 10 g less on average.

Milwaukee Bicycle Co is taking 2.5" OD/.25" thick UHMW and machining it in-house down to .15" thick, except at the ends. The heads come with pre-drilled starter holes to help you get your shaft lined up perfectly straight. The optional UHMW cap is machined to fit snug inside the end of the UHMW head, and comes with three grub screws to hold it in place.

As far as performance, I can't say I've been happier with any other mallet head. My shots feel solid as ever and the material seems to be wearing slowly, even though this is the only mallet I've been using for months. You can see in the photo below, the capped end is still almost perfectly round, indicating very little wear. The non-capped end has deformed over time, but it should be noted that I used a Dremel Tool to chamfer the inside of the open end to make it easier to scoop the ball.

The UHMW head retails for \$15.99 and the cap for \$4.99. Buy them together and save \$1.

Check out: www.benscycle.net





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PAINT FIGHT



Chrome Romer

The Chrome Romer is a basic two-strap commuter backpack. While I definitely have a fondness for smaller backpacks like my old Dually, lately I've been finding that mid-size backpacks like the Yalta and the Romer are just right for me.

The Romer measures 16" wide, 17" high, 6" deep, and weighs in at a very respectable 3 lbs. And despite its light weight, Chrome didn't skimp on the materials—1,050 denier nylon outer shell with floating 18 oz. truck tarp liner, a lightly-padded back panel and padded shoulder straps with alloy adjustment buckles and Velcro accessory strips.

Under the flap, things are extremely simple and functional. There are two zippered exterior pockets, the main compartment and a separate large interior slash pocket. Off to the bottom right there is one exterior pocket that's just the right size for holding a water bottle. Unfortunately, my favorite pump, a Topeak Road Morph, doesn't play well with the integrated pump holder, but it's just as easy to stash it inside the bag or grab a different pump.

And that's about all I've got to say about the Romer. As much as I like it, it's basically a simple, high-quality, no B.S. messenger backpack. It does exactly what you expect, and nothing that you don't want it to. There are certainly bags with more features, but at some point you have to ask yourself, "Is all of that really necessary?"

The Romer is available in five different color schemes and retails for \$120.

Check out www.chromesf.com

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Paul Canti Lever

Paul Price has been machining bike parts in Chico, California since 1989. In the past 22 years, he's stuck to his guns, making the parts that he wants to ride and coincidentally making a number of things that nobody else makes. Paul's popularity among retro grouchies and handmade bike aficionados is not surprising, but the brand has also garnered quite a loyal following from cyclists who appreciate American-made components and people who simply like really nice bike parts.

Out of the package, you can't help but admire the quality of these levers. The machined and anodized 6061 aluminum surface has a feel that's more refined than mass-produced imports. Every manufacturing detail has been looked after, not just by humans but by fellow cyclists.

Of course you can have the greatest manufacturing facility in the world, but it won't mean a thing if the products aren't designed well. Again, this is where a rider-owned manufacturer excels. Paul's parts are brilliantly simple, and these levers are no exception. The lever blades feel incredibly sturdy, yet unquestioningly comfortable. The hollow pivot pin assembly feels smooth as butter and results in almost zero vertical play in the levers. The 22.2 mm clamp is visibly solid without adding much weight (the levers weigh just 120 g per pair). And the double aluminum adjustment knobs are simply too cool for school.

The Canti Levers retail for \$116 per pair, single levers are available for \$62.

Check out www.paulcomp.com

BIKE NYC—The Cyclist's Guide to New York City

BIKE NYC is a new guidebook to cycling NYC written by three Urban Velo contributors. Perhaps the best known of the bunch is Michael Green, the man behind BikeBlogNYC.com. Regular readers are more than familiar with Ed Glazar, as hardly an issue goes by without one or more of his photographs. And Marci Blackman, a professional author and NYC tour guide, wrote a feature for us back in issue #18.

From great people come great things, and this book is no exception. Part history book, part guidebook, it's also a great snapshot of bicycle culture in early 21st century New York. As a guidebook, it's not your typical "go .2 miles, turn left on Bedford and follow the bike lane to your destination." Although it does have specific directions and the like, it's a lot more like a giant magazine article about riding in NYC. It's entertaining, enlightening and oftentimes irreverent. I don't think I've ever read a guidebook that suggests that you insult the natives in order to get an authentic experience!

There's no doubt that BIKE NYC was written at a feverish pace, with tons of passion and inspiration. Yet the book exercises considerable restraint in that the authors don't beat you over the head with the idea that their city is the best in the world. Instead they make you fall in love with it the way they have by sharing countless facts and anecdotes and even a few secrets.

Check out www.bikenycthebook.com



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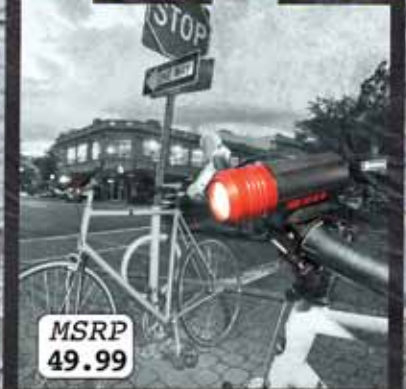
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EighthInch Julian V2 Wheelset

So you're a wheel crusher, eh? Whether it's fixed free-style riding, bike polo or just miles and miles of broken concrete on your daily commute, the EighthInch Julian V2 wheelset was designed with you in mind. Available with 32 or 48 spokes (tested), the main feature is the 42mm deep, triple-walled aluminum rims. At 800 grams each, the rims alone weigh more than some wheels.

EighthInch uses Formula hubs with sealed cartridge bearings. Formula's hubs are extremely popular in the urban market because they're inexpensive, yet they roll smoothly and last a long time. The front wheel is spaced at 100mm, and the rear comes as 120, but can be spaced to 126 or 130. If you order a wheelset with machined sidewalls, you'll get a fixed/free flip flop hub. Non-machined rims come laced to a fixed/fixed hub. A 32 spoke pair weighs in at about 1300 grams for the front, 1340 for the rear. Naturally, the 48 spoke versions weigh a tad more.

So how do they ride? As you might expect, they kind of feel like strong, heavy wheels. But in a good way. They're so sturdy that I just want to launch off tall curbs and wheelie through patches of broken concrete rather than going around. The Julian's are confidence-inspiring, even if they do add a pound or more to the overall weight of the bike. And I know that engineering standpoint, more weight at the rim is known to make a bike slower to accelerate, but I can honestly say that it's not these wheels that are keeping me from becoming the next Thor Hushovd.

The Julian V2 wheelset retails for \$230.

Check out www.eighthinch.com



Nutcase Gen2 Helmet

Nutcase introduced an updated version of their classic helmet some time back, and now all current helmets in their street collection are the Gen2 design. Like the original version, the helmet features an injection molded ABS shell and EPS foam liner. They kept the same high quality straps and the innovative magnetic buckle system, and three sets of low-density foam pads are included to help tailor the helmet's fit.

The big upgrade for the Gen2 helmets is the Spin Dial adjustment feature. The knob at the back of the helmet lets you adjust the tension with one hand, adding a higher level of comfort and fit to an already successful design.

Overall, I'm quite happy with the Gen2 helmet. Like the classic helmet, the construction and finish are above average, and the comfort and fit are spot on. I really do wish the helmet had more ventilation, though. On a 90° day, the foam pads soak up a ton of sweat which inevitably comes pouring down your face at an inopportune time. Of course, in the colder months the lack of ventilation is probably going to be a blessing.

The adult Gen2 helmets are available in two sizes: S/M (52-60 cm) and the L/XL (61-64 cm), and in kid's size XS (46-52 cm). Retail price is \$55.

Check out www.nutcasehelmets.com



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Sturme Archer S2 Duomatic Kick Back Hub

Kickback hubs aren't familiar to most riders these days, having gone all but extinct decades ago even if once relatively popular on cruising and folding bikes. Before this past year I'd only had the chance to ride one such hub and at that only once, nearly a decade ago in a motel parking lot during Interbike. Just last year Sturme Archer resurrected the kickback concept—I had the chance to ride the coaster brake equipped S2C hub on the Torker KB2 we reviewed back in Urban Velo #23, and recently have been putting in time on the rim brake use Sturme Archer S2 hub.

For the uninitiated, a kickback hub is an internally geared hub that shifts by backpedaling while coasting, no external shifters or cables required. Each time you backpedal, the hub shifts. The S2 has two gears that you can switch between, a direct drive low gear and a 38% higher second gear. The hub body accepts standard 3-tab Sturme Archer or Shimano cogs common on coaster brake and internally geared hubs.

My particular S2 hub is laced to a 700c rim and finds itself on a Pake track bike with front and rear handbrakes and a CETMA front cargo rack. I have it setup with a 48 x 20 gear ratio, which gives a 64.2 in low gear and a 88.6 in high gear, straddling my roughly 72 in gear that I prefer on most single and fixed gear street bikes. A good compromise between a low, but not too low, climbing gear and a high gear suited to flat and downhill sections without having to spin like mad.

Riding and shifting is easy enough, though I'll admit that even after a couple of months of riding this hub I've not mastered shifting in certain situations. At normal riding speed I find the shifting easy enough, and while coasting you can audibly tell which gear you are in as the direct drive low gear is nearly silent while the high gear has a whirring click to it. Starting off from a stop has proven more difficult however, whether at a redlight or just pull off the sidewalk. When stopped you can still shift the bike by pedaling backwards, but without the sound of the free-wheel to guide you it's impossible to tell what gear you are currently in. I personally find it hard to accurately shift the bike when accelerating from a stop as well, but I think it's more poor technique and lack of patience on my part than anything to do with the shifting mechanics. The S2 definitely shifts best with some patience and a solid back pedal motion. The only strange behavior I've encountered is the hub ghost shifting when I cross railroad tracks—it is the only place it happens, and it happens consistently but not really each and every time no matter how careful I am to make sure I'm not inadvertently back pedaling.

For the right person and the right application, the S2 hub is a worthy addition to the stable, a hub with most of the advantages of a single speed drivetrain but with two gears and no external shifting bits to speak of. I plan on keeping this hub on a bike long term, it is a great piece of componentry for my more utilitarian riding around town. The hub is heavy, weighing in at 980 g without a cog on my scale, but internally geared hubs aren't known for being lightweight. The S2 hub is available for a bargain price of \$90 in either 110 mm or 120 mm spacing, in black, silver, red, gold, purple, and turquoise.

Check out www.sturme-archer.com





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Fyxation makes some pretty nice tires, but up until now they've not really been built for speed. The newly announced Accela model is more a road tire than any of their previous offerings, but holds true to the other Fyxation tires by being relatively affordable at \$30 each and having a puncture resistant layer for glass lined city streets. The tires will be available this fall in black or dual compound white, blue or red. www.fyxation.com



The **Skully K1** lights are the evolution of the original Skully Skull lights. The new larger design was necessary to accommodate the new internal, USB rechargeable lithium-polymer battery. The Skully K1 retails for \$40. www.skully.com.tw

The **Boombotix BBI** portable amplified speaker system packs a self-powered 5W audio system, complete with a USB-rechargeable 900 mAh lithium-ion battery. The charge takes about 45 minutes and lasts more than 4 hours. The BBI retails for \$40 www.boombotix.com



After quite a long development process, **Chris King** has released their fully serviceable ceramic bearing bottom bracket, with versions compatible with both Shimano and SRAM style cranksets. The \$200 bottom bracket has a 5-year warranty and is available in a number of anodized colors. www.chrisking.com



The 2012 **Bianchi** Sei Giorni has an aluminum frame and a carbon fork. It will be available complete in September 2011 for just under a grand. Components include Tru-Vativ Touro track cranks, Maddux track wheels, Hutchinson tires and VP pedals. www.bianchiusa.com



The **IRD** freewheel is CNC machined from chromoly steel and features a three pawl engagement system. Available in 16, 17 and 18 tooth models, it's only compatible with 3/32" chains. Retail price is \$60. www.interlocracing.com



The **Panaracer** Crosstown is a heavy-duty urban tire. They feature a puncture resistant belt underneath 6 mm of rubber. Reflective sidewalls (as shown above) are optional. They retail for \$34 per tire. www.panaracer.com

The **Serfas** TSL-250 True Light offers up to 250 lumens in "overdrive" mode, the highest setting. At full blast the lithium-ion battery will last about three hours, and it can be recharged in 3.5 hours via USB. Retail price is \$110. www.serfas.com



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RIDER: TAMARA





Biking in the West Bank

Words and Photos by
Davey Davis

“I have another bike you could buy, real cheap. You should really get a new bike, that one’s crap.”

Thus began my friendship with Seif, a trilingual Palestinian hoodlum whose candor and lack of deference make him extremely unusual in the conservative West Bank city of Nablus. Another stand-out feature about him is that he is obsessed with riding bikes. Nobody here over the age of 14 rides one, yet Seif, who claims he’s 27, and looks 19, is a regular bike punk. He works illegally in Tel Aviv, hopping a fence and catching a bus there from inside occupied Palestine several times a month, staying in a cheap room shared with other laborers and hawking various products on the streets. He makes seven to ten times as much money as guys his age in the West Bank do, who usually take in a flat rate of about \$14 a day. Like almost all Palestinians, he is barred from going to Jerusalem, or Tel Aviv, or anywhere else outside of the small patch of land relegated to them in the war of 1967. Nevertheless he bought his bike there, a tricked out Iron Horse with mechanical disc brakes and a decent set of shocks. It might as well be a spacecraft next to the other two-wheeled specimens around here: a scree of department-store mountain bikes, rebar BMXs, and inventively-preserved cargo bikes from the early 20th century.

Nablus is an ancient, stony city tucked between two mountains, there are steep hills, lax rules toward maximum road grade, and endless stairways everywhere. To get around people take shared taxis or walk places, hands full of groceries split between plastic bags. When the streets aren’t tiny, interconnected footpaths they are crowded with honking taxis, salmoning vegetable carts, the occasional donkey, and jaywalking women in long dresses and hijabs.



I feel very much out of place riding my bike here, where foreigners are already incredibly conspicuous. Culturally, bikes are really only for children and poor old men, so the white guy cutting through traffic and dodging potholes in business casual attire becomes something of a celebrity. Com-

petent cycling in the daily bustle is fantastic, however, because drivers are excellent and used to reacting to variables in the dense, unpredictable street. A bicycle skitching on the back of a furniture truck, lane-splitting between cars, and running a red light, while unexpected, is perfectly manageable vehicle behavior. Seif takes this liberty to the maximum, incorporating motocross-style turns and huge, flared jumps into his passages over the cobblestones and frequent speed bumps. He shows off, cutting close to pedestrians and drawing shouted abuse wherever he goes. It is clear that, rather than a commute, riding for him is a kind of lawless therapy that both contrasts and parallels his normal existence. Whatever else he is, Seif is a rare rebel under Israeli occupation.

“I’ve been in jail three years, for various little things, working without papers, running from the soldiers, resisting arrest. Now I can’t afford to stop when they yell after me.”

He smiles as he talks, exaggerating the scenario with bravado.

“‘Stop or we’ll shoot motherfucker!’ I know they won’t, so I just fly. You’ve never seen me when I run from them, man, I just stop thinking and go, go, go.”

It is hard to tell how much he’s talking himself up and how much he really does spend at the edge of oblivion. As immature or reckless as it seems, Seif’s belligerence in the face of foreign authority is a refreshing thing to see, as it is an exception to the rule. Palestinians often joke about their situation: “What did you do to be thrown in prison? Oh, you were being Palestinian? Don’t you know that’s illegal?” In an area that’s increasingly restricted and divided into separate cantons by militarized Israeli settlements, the pressure is everywhere. If you aren’t being stopped at random Israeli checkpoints, then the draconian internal government (the Palestinian Authority) is questioning you, discouraging political involvement in the youth and curtailing their future opportunities. When he’s not racing around like a maniac on his improvised urban downhill course, Seif is fed up with it. His current plan is to forge papers to get him to Europe, and then work illegally or claim refugee status. Obviously, I suggested bike messengering, but most people, bound by poverty, dreams, or familial obligations, just keep their heads down and work their asses off.

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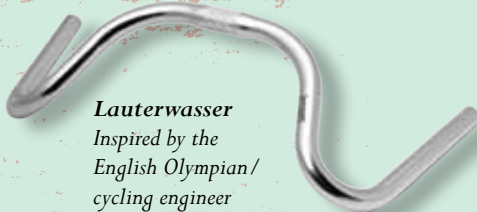


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Like Ibrahim. Impossibly tall, bearded, blond, and always smiling, Ibrahim could pass as Irish. He's a salesman like Seif, but in Nablus, making far less money. He sets up a little cart every morning and lays out the same mass-produced crap you see elsewhere in the West Bank: shoes, drapes, whatever. He too is a rare biker with a decent mountain bike, a newer entry-level Trek women's frame that is comically small for him. His reason for biking sounds ordinary to an urban cyclist, but with a Middle East twist: He enjoys the liberating feeling of getting exercise and seeing the city, all for free, as he commutes between his two houses. His father, as is permissible under Islamic law, has two wives in different districts of the city. As one of his sons Ibrahim splits his time between the mothers, a 29 year old bachelor living with the family until he saves up enough money to attract a wife, build a house, and throw a ridiculously expensive wedding party. As is typical of the folks pulling in \$14 a day, his coming of age may be quite a while off.

Unlike Seif, Ibrahim is traditional: religious, well-known in his community, and respectful. He speaks little English, and repeats the long, elaborate call-and-response patterns typical of Arab culture with everyone he greets. Our weekly bike ride together lasts around eight hours and spans about 60 miles, punctuated by hummus restaurants, visiting of obscure relatives, stopping at mosques to pray, and the occasional four-hour village wedding party.

He pauses constantly to scoop littered cigarette packs out of the road. I thought he was just fiending, vainly searching for a forgotten cigarette, and was nearly to the point of buying him a pack when I realized: On each package are the words "Manufactured in Ramallah," a city name that happens to have the Arabic word for God in it. The Arabic language in general is precious, religious texts doubly so. Ibrahim leans over, rips the label off each pack, and tucks it into his pocket for proper disposal. We ride on, toward Ramallah, long stretches of scrubby hills and smooth turns between crowded cites. I secretly scheme of ways to get "Allah" printed on every plastic bag to put an end to the insane amount of litter in the Middle East. In most aspects we act as good logistical and cultural foils to each other: When we're in villages he explains to Palestinians that I'm not a settler or a spy, and when we cross checkpoints or get flat tires in the dusk I wave my passport and explain to perturbed Israeli police that we are foreign tourists. One night coming back from Ramallah two separate Israeli military bases trained their spotlights on us from a mile away across the entirety of the valley. We joked that it was nice of them to show us the way. We didn't mention that in each case someone's rifle was trained on us, evaluating whether we were a threat to settlement security.

Security is the name of the game from an average Israeli perspective, the reason for the continuous 63-year-old occupation and the justification for demolition of houses, an Orwellian attitude towards freedom of expression, random checkpoints, military incursions, and a looming 25 ft high barrier that often cuts off farming and water access to critical areas. To the native Palestinians the security obsession creates the frustrating scenario of being a constant prisoner in one's own land, completely without agency, voice, or freedom.

On the Israeli side of the barrier everyday life is entirely different. In Tel Aviv, a cosmopolitan city with fine dining, bumpin' nightlife, and relaxed beach culture, the daily wage of a Palestinian will buy you a snack and a drink. It is 35 miles from the center of Nablus, and incidentally, there are bikes everywhere. In green European-style parks retirees in matching outfits spin for health, hipsters scoot to and from art galleries and fusion food joints, and surfers in wetsuits pedal down to the beach on cruisers, boards by their sides. Biking has all the connotations of affluence and leisure attached to it in the west. It is easy to forget for a moment that you are in the nucleus of the world's biggest powder keg.

But only for a moment. For Israelis, the constant stalemate creates a low-level unease and fear that allows the culture to be defined by militarism, akin to the historical

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red scares that were employed in America, or the modern day war on terror. If you are young, the occupation is often something that you struggle to keep from defining you. It crops up in all kinds of conversations, especially with foreigners, and while many people are radicalized by it, some just want to be normal. "It's a horrible situation for them, and I am sad to say this, but I am not really involved in it."



Yoav, a 28-year-old sculptor living in Tel Aviv, is the kind of guy who does as he feels. He throws parties and works odd jobs, avoiding a daily routine so he can focus on his art and relationships. I swear he knows every good-looking artist in Tel Aviv. To keep his life simple he moved into a crumbling second-story studio where he promptly broke the zoning and built his own shower and kitchen, routing pipes from the plumbing outside. We spent a weekend scrubbing out the flooded basement of the place for an art party, only to be rewarded with a threat of eviction when the landlord stopped by. He rides a flat-bar Principe road bike, a nimble urban combination of speed and casualness that would be right at home in Berlin or Chicago. Last summer he flew to Europe, bought a \$75 bike in Amsterdam, and rode it to Berlin, drawing and thinking along the way. He's planning on meeting up with the bike and riding it to Athens this fall, leaving Israel for a while to study in Europe.

It is exhausting being an apologist or justifying your existence constantly, in a country that burdens you with its highly tense legacy from the moment you are born. Yoav, like many young liberal Israelis, fluctuates between being sympathetic for Palestinians, disgusted with his country's obsessive militarism, and feeling the whole world misunderstands and simplifies Israel. There's a desire to improve things, but also dejection. Before the Arab Spring revolutions we talked about which direction things would go. "Every year Israelis get more, Palestinians get less. There is a true passion on the Israeli side to win this conflict and unfortunately that stupid brutality actually works. It worked in the US. Ever think the Native Americans will be successful in kicking you off their land?" In his art scene, most pieces are decidedly apolitical, staying mute on the issue of their future with the Arab nations. The problem is tired, it is not their fault, and they would rather think about something else.

Deferential, religious Ibrahim and thoughtful, driven Yoav will probably never meet each other, though they have both expressed interest in sneaking across to the other's side. The division wall ensures that to each other they remain stereotypes, one a voracious oppressor and the other a murderous fundamentalist. Yet when I am in the company of each I am struck by their carefree nature, their love of bikes, the desire to hurl themselves into pedal adventures in order to meditate, take risks, and see new people and places. Their simple common grounds and shared futures are kept apart by an imposed idea that they belong to separate narratives, where one cannot exist in the presence of the other.

Alone I take the bike ride on which none of my aforementioned friends can join me, from Tel Aviv to Nablus, straight over the mountain, watching the placid, suburban developments of Ariel settlement give away to farmland, water tanks and minarets, another culture. They are here, side-by-side, one atop the other, Israel and Palestine. Though people are overworked and disillusioned and wishing to change the subject, the situation remains. A checkpoint divides the two, curtailing commonalities, dialog, progress. After a moment of guns, harsh concrete, scared young soldiers, and dispirited oppressed families, I am across and away, spinning frustration through the cranks and out into the dust, pedaling along on a human scale, turning the fear around in my head, over and over, and trying to pull a lesson from it. 

Davey Davis is a journalist, writer, and bike nerd who spent six months teaching filmmaking and bike touring in the West Bank. See more of his work at dadarobotnik.blogspot.com.

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Fixed Gear Drive Train Cleaning

By Brad Quartuccio

Pictured here are good intentions with a potentially terrible outcome. Keeping your drivetrain clean is key to long-term reliability, but the common method of pedaling the bike with one hand and running the moving chain through a rag in your other hand can prove dangerous, especially on a fixed gear drivetrain. Even on a drivetrain that can coast, a simple slip or holding the chain too tight can get the rag caught in the teeth of either cog or chainring and quickly pull your finger in with it. On a bike with a rear derailleur there is usually enough slack in the chain to prevent serious injury. Single speeds are less forgiving with no chain to spare—a finger can easily be crushed between chain and cog. Fixed gears are the most dangerous of the bunch, as the momentum of the moving wheel will continue to pull your hand into the drivetrain even if you've stopped applying pressure to the cranks. There is a very real risk of serious injury or finger amputation using this method to clean your fixed gear's chain—ask around enough and you're sure to meet someone witness to a horror story. Avoid injury by wiping the chain in sections while the wheel is not rotating or removing it altogether for cleaning.





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Stem Faceplate Installation

By Brad Quartuccio



As threadless stems have become all but standard so have removable faceplates, and with good reason. Stem and bar swaps are made much easier thanks to a removable faceplate, but installation requires more care than with an old-school single bolt clamp. Think about it—a sheared bolt or a cracked faceplate could result in complete loss of control. A few extra seconds upon installation could prevent a nasty component failure down the road.



As they say in London, “mind the gap.” With a removable faceplate, it is important that the gap between stem and faceplate is the same top to bottom to avoid distorting the stem or bolts or crimping the bar. For much the same reasons it is important to tighten the clamp bolts to torque spec gradually, alternating between them on a two-bolt clamp and following the 1-2-3-4 pattern shown on stems with a four-bolt clamp. Common with other non-bicycle precision fittings, alternating bolt patterns are a good habit to practice to maintain the integrity of most any clamp with multiple bolts.



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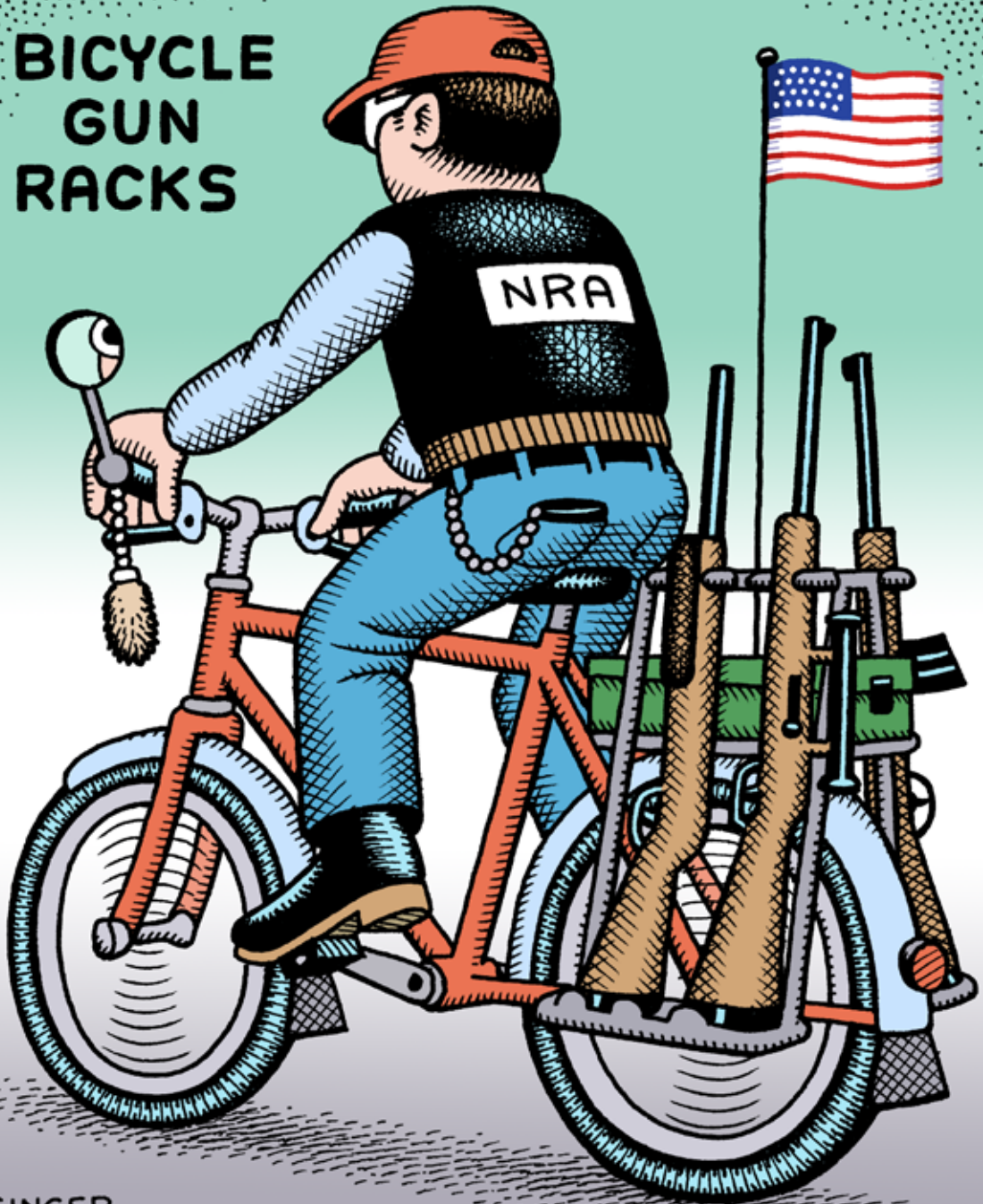
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