

Bicycle Sport



UK £1.60 DGS

JANUARY 1984 \$2.50 48228

AMERICA'S OFF-ROAD CLASSIC:

CRESTED BUTTE

**HOW TO
PEDAL AWAY
YOUR EXTRA
POUNDS**

**FREE CONTEST:
WIN BIKES,
HELMETS,
AND MORE**

**50 MPH ON A
BIKE? MEET THE
MEN WHO DO IT**

**WINTER TOUR:
WARMING UP
TO FLORIDA**



CRESTED BUTTE TO ASPEN TOUR THE HIGH COUNTRY

Story and Photography by David Epperson

More than 250 mountain bike enthusiasts from across the nation wind through the Colorado countryside on the eighth annual pilgrimage toward the 12,715-foot summit of Pearl Pass. The Crested Butte-to-Aspen Klunker Tour capped off Fat Tire Bike Week in Crested Butte, the world's largest gathering of off-road cyclists. The week's festivities featured a bicycle rodeo, a stage race, courses in orienteering, and a manufacturers' symposium on fat tire bicycles. There was something for everyone and it seemed that just about everyone with a fat-tire flyer was there. The magic of the

Pearl Pass Tour attracts cyclists of all ages — families center their vacations around the ride and dozens of groups of cyclists charter buses and planes to be in on the action. For most, just the opportunity to escape the city and workplace, unwind and relax, and enthusiastically share a common interest is the best reason to come. But the dominant feature of the Tour is geographical — the chance to complete the 17-mile, 3,835-foot vertical climb to the summit and the subsequent 18-mile, 4,915-foot vertical plunge to Aspen — that's really what draws you in.





Fat Tire Bike Week is an event so unique and special that you are compelled to share the experience with others. (This page) Three friends enjoy a late afternoon tour through the countryside, dwarfed by the enormity of their surroundings. It is no wonder that many cyclists return every year. (Opposite page, top) Young Toby's "I love my dad" T-shirt seems to tell it all as this father and son team negotiates the boulder-strewn trail to the summit. Toby brought his father back again this year, but he may be getting too big to get a free ride in the back. "No way!" declares Toby. "Dad just loves this and I figure I can get him to take me along for another 10 years." (Opposite page, bottom) Jeff Day and Margaret Brown set an afternoon aside to ride through the scenic upper loop which offers a spectacular mountaintop view of the town of Crested Butte.

CRESTED BUTTE TO ASPEN: THE BEGINNINGS

By Charles R. Kelly

The first Crested Butte-to-Aspen "klunker tour" was an unplanned, unorganized and completely spontaneous event — the kind that should probably only happen once. Had the rest of the world not interfered, it might have only happened once. Now it is the premier off-road event, and there are at least three thousand people who claim to have been on the first one.

To appreciate the origin of the tour it is necessary to understand the difference between the towns of Aspen and Crested Butte. Although they are only 40 miles apart by crow or by an off-road bike, they are 120 paved miles apart and perhaps further apart culturally. Aspen is known as the playground of the rich; the town is well-kept and expensive. In 1976, the year of the first tour, Crested Butte sported one paved street (lined with blue-collar bars left over from the mining days), and the summertime economy of the old town was slow. One group of robust locals, nicknamed the "Hotshots," made their summer living fighting forest fires for \$5 an hour, and spent a good part of those earnings in the — are you ready? — Grubstake Saloon.

Crested Butte being so small and the streets so rough, many of the residents owned "town bikes," stripped one-speed cruisers of uncertain vintage and ancestry. These were used strictly in town, the idea of true off-roading being confined to motorcycles and four-wheel drives.

In autumn 1976, just when the fire season was winding down, a horde of motorcyclists from Aspen made their tortuous way to Crested Butte over 12,700 foot-high Pearl Pass. The pass is tough enough to be a legitimate test for any vehicle, including motorcycles, and the Aspen riders parked their bikes in front of the Grubstake, then belled up to the bar to lubricate their success.

This didn't sit too well with the locals, especially the Hotshots, who felt like they were crowded in their own oasis. Rick Verplank suggested that everyone go get their town bikes for a ride over to Aspen and park a load of ragged bikes in front of the Jerome Hotel, a popular Aspen watering hole.

So the first tour got under way. Some hardy souls actually rode their bikes, at least part of the way, to the base camp at 11,000 feet. Others piled their bikes into the several trucks and jeeps that accompanied the group, bringing beer, food, tents and other camping supplies. Base camp was the

scene of a large party, with a good number showing up from town in vehicles.

The next day some of the trucks and all the riders pushed over the pass. Richard "The Rat" Ulery, who had a broken leg, achieved a few moments of notoriety by riding over in a padded antique copper bathtub in the back of a jeep. Albert Maunz suffered the first of a number of yearly flat tires in a place that came to be known as "Albert's Flats." Somehow the crew eventually arrived in Aspen looking grizzled and hungover enough to properly intimidate the patrons of the Jerome Hotel. After celebrating, everyone returned to the Butte via truck, no doubt thinking that that was the end of that. In fact, it was the beginning.

Although there was talk back in Crested Butte of the Grubstake sponsoring the ride as an annual event, in 1977 there was no "second annual" tour. The subject might have been forgotten had not a local freelance writer mentioned it in a magazine article that came to the attention of some Northern California riders, who were just then developing what has now become the popular "mountain" bike. Under the impression that the "tour" was a regular event, they called the Grubstake and asked if they could go along on the 1978 version. The party who unwittingly answered the phone said, "Sure," and opened the floodgates.

In September of 1978, five California riders, fancy bikes and all, showed up in Crested Butte, ready for the ride. Duane Reading and Bob Starr, at that time co-owners of the Grubstake, swallowed hard, then rounded up some food and a couple of trucks and announced to the surprised locals that the tour was on again for that year. As finally assembled, the group included eight riders from Crested Butte, two from other parts of Colorado and the five from California.

The local riders were hardly prepared for the West Coast technology or cycling dedication. Crested Butte Pilot reported: "Shortly after the tour departed, the first mishap occurred: a flat tire on Dick 'Archie' Archuleta's klunker. The California boys jackknifed into action: tools selected after years of experience glimmered in the sunlight as the intrepid Californians removed the wheel, replaced the tube, tuned the

spokes, remounted the wheel, slacked the cones a tad, adjusted the chain and had Archie's bike back on the road in 35 seconds flat!"

Several other mechanical problems that morning pointed up the fact that the ride, although a lighthearted event, was not a joke in some respects. A working machine was a necessity. All the breakdowns were on "town bikes," which had never been exposed to this kind of treatment and weren't really built for it.

Riders feasted that night on steaks and beer brought up by Duane Reading, and another tradition was created. The next morning the little crew, now down to 13, after the defection of two riders, struggled,

staggered and struggled to the top of the pass, possibly slower than anyone else has ever covered a similar distance with a bicycle, where they posed for a photo. In that photo, the California riders were obvious: they all looked smug because their bikes worked. The Crested Butte riders just looked tough. They were dressed mostly in shorts despite the biting wind, and their bikes were all one-speeds with ape-hanger handlebars.

The six-or-seven-mile trip down Pearl Pass, over what is possibly the roughest piece of road anywhere on the planet, once again separated the men from the bikes. Albert got his yearly flat, and Richard "The Rat" once again jeered

into Aspen when his coaster brake shattered (he continued for awhile by jamming his foot into the front wheel). Outside Aspen everyone regrouped and Bob Starr distributed balloons, which were put on the forks so the spokes rubbing them would simulate the sound of a motorcycle. Then the unlikely assembly vroomed into Aspen, where they met at the Jerome to toast their accomplishment.

Transportation back to the Butte was a single flatbed truck, which made the three-hour drive piled high with bikes and riders.

Since 1978 the tour has skyrocketed in popularity, and this year's eighth annual (seventh actual) had 250 participants. In a short time Crested

Butte has become the hardcore off-road center of the United States, a place where perhaps half the residents own fat-tire bikes, many of them custom models. The Hotshots don't go on the tour anymore, since the emphasis has shifted from partying to actually riding bicycles. Now there are races, tours, events, teams, publicity, you name it. Crested Butte-to-Aspen is a great ride. But one time, it was a hell of a party.

Kelly missed the first "klunker tour" — but he's managed to ride every year since. It's a record he's proud of, one that he shares with only two others.



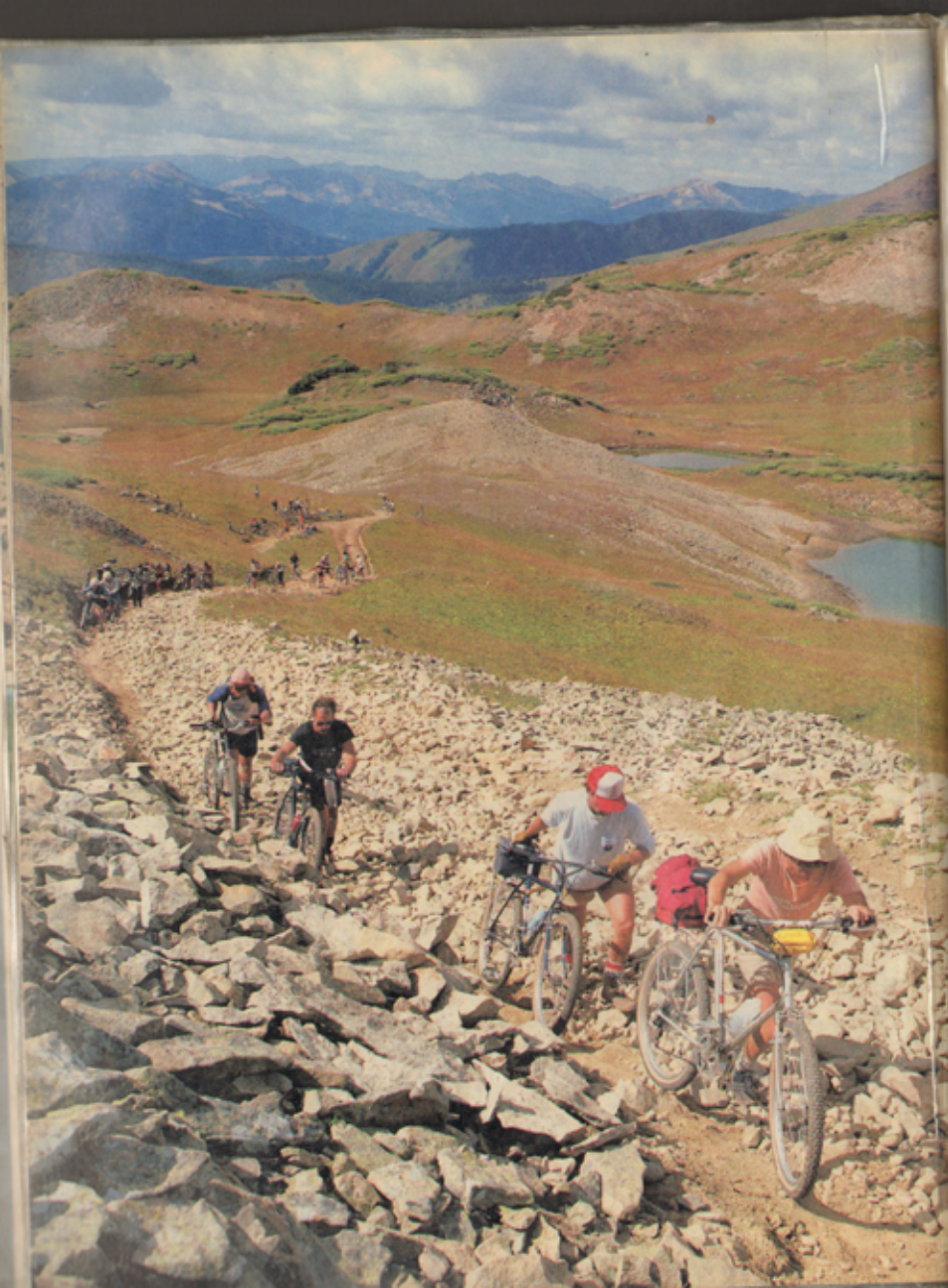


Off-road bicycle racing is rapidly growing — nowhere was the competitive spirit more apparent than in Crested Butte. The Paradise Divide stage race was the center of excitement the day before the tour and much of the attention was focused on the strong Ross Bicycles Team. They appeared to have the best chance against locals Don and Steve Cook in the 30-mile road race and the criterium through the town streets.

But the Ritchey MountainBikes Team threw a curve of its own, signing up 1983 Coors road champion Dale Stetina to lead its squad. When the dust settled, Stetina (bottom, left) and Steve Cook (bottom, center) tied for the overall championship. Ross Team captain Clark Roberts was a strong third. Marin County, California racer Jacques Phalen, alias Alice B. Toe Clips (bottom, right), dominated the women's competition.

(Top) The criterium start through town streets included top talents Tom Ritchey, Gary Fisher, Steve McIntosh, and Don Davis. (Center) Ross Team hotshoe Jim Harlow led the chase group through the tight corners of Crested Butte.

Many non-competitive riders used race day as an opportunity to escape to the high country for some peaceful cruising. (Far left) A ride on a path winding through a mountainside Aspen grove provides for quiet enjoyment, far from the din of the crowd.



As you huff and puff your way to the summit of Pearl Pass, it is somewhat comforting to note that over 100 years before, some of our ancestors may have been cursing the same trail. They, however, were not riding fancy, high-tech transport. Pack mules and wagons were the vehicles of choice.

The Great Rocky Mountain passes were opened first by trappers and traders and then by miners in the rush for gold and silver. Pearl Pass is the result of the mineral rush.

In 1878, Leadville, Colorado overflowed with miners and their entourages who headed west after hearing news of the biggest gold strike since California. Those new arrivals found every spot claimed, so they moved west to the Gunnison-Crested Butte-Aspen area. Accordingly, Pearl Pass, which follows an old Ute Indian route, was built in 1881 as a pack trail connecting Aspen and Crested Butte. The trail features some of the roughest terrain in the Rockies.

In his book *The Great Gates*, Marshal Sprague writes, "Mule skinnners were conducting their teams and wagons over Pearl Pass, though not with ease or gladness. The seventeen mile ascent north from Crested Butte to the barren spectacular top was not much worse than very difficult. The real trouble began on the Aspen side — an eighteen mile torment."

Pearl Pass officially opened for wagon traffic in 1882, but reverted to a pack trail by 1885. It officially opened to pioneers of another sort when fat-tire enthusiasts made the first two-wheeled trek eight years ago.

