mountain bike

for the adventure

RACE BIKES - FATTENING UP THE EAST
FOUL WEATHER CLOTHING - SUMMER CAMP

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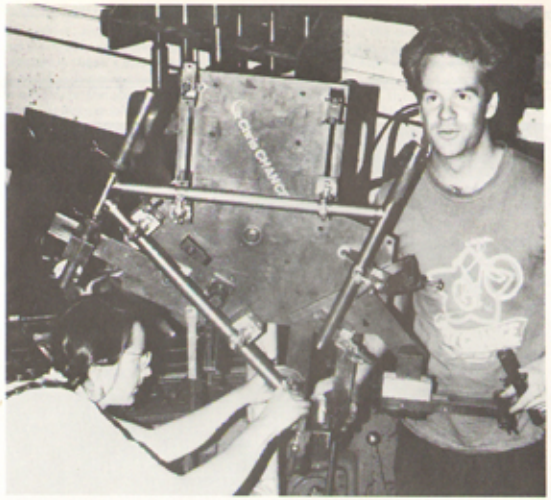
Fattening Up the East

Story and photos by Richard Compton

Fat is a relative term. Compared to the custom road racing machines that Chris Chance once built, the Fat Chances are certainly that. But compared to your average clunker, they are lean, right, hungry predators. Nothing is left to chance in their construction. In the dry climate of New England humor, the name is ironic advertisement for a high-tech, hill-climbing machine that springs from a turf long since flattened by the automobile and an aggressively material civilization.

Somerville Avenue is part of the hopeless tangle of cowpaths and country lanes fanning out from the colonial port of Boston that became the city streets of an industrial revolution and the urban blight of a decaying war economy. Sandwiched between a furniture mart and a liquor store, 331 Somerville Avenue boasts a corrugated metal facade emblazoned with a circus-size sign announcing Chris Chance Cycles - the eastern equivalent of a Marin County garage. Inside it's much the same: a fistful of healthy, intelligent young human beings turning a chaos of machine tools and chro-moly tubing into thoughtfully conceived and lovingly built trail monsters. There's not enough space and what there is is fundamentally unorganizable; only the commitment of the crew - fired by the knowledge that they're on to something hot - keeps it together.



Chris Chance and Betsy Earley hard at work

"Mountain bikes will take over a major share of the market," predicts Chance who has watched his own production grow from zero to seven hundred units per year since 1982. That growth was promoted strictly by word of mouth and the exponential increase in demand for a truly practical bike. He is unwilling to hazard how big Fat City Cycles will become, saying only that they are in the budding stage and have an abiding commitment to hand-made quality.

A love of bicycles and making things have been with Chris all his life. When he was fifteen and sixteen, he built a log cabin on land his parents owned in Canada. Back home in Connecticut, he was getting into junior racing. He did a year at Earlham College in Indiana but found academia not to his liking and returned to Connecticut where he did a short stint at the Electric Boat Company in New London (the builders of atomic subnarines). In 1975, he started building bicycles for Richard Sachs at Witcomb USA. He stayed there two years then moved to the Boston area and started his own company.

He was joined in 1982 by John Troja, a tall, personable ex-carpenter who caught the mountain bike bug from Gary Fisher in Santa Barbara. Not seeing any openings in the west coast mountain bike business, John came east and offered to back Chris in a new venture. His goals were, and are, to build a bike that is strong, fast, and a good climber, and to bring custom quality down from the stratospheric price range established in California and make it competitive with Japanese imports.

The time and place were right for doing that for while residential prices were soaring all around, there was still available some undesirable, and correspondingly cheap commercial space such as 331 Somerville Avenue. And as shop industries give way to Wang, Lotus, DEC, and the rest of the silicon cowboys, there are a lot of sophisticated machine tools floating around the local market within the reach of a small custom bike builder. Like the building, the tools it houses are old but their power and precision allow Fat City to cut and bend chro-moly tubing like no one else, adding a little strength here and cutting a little weight there and saving time all around.

The big time saver was the decision to go to a tig-welded rather than lugged or brazed frame. Tig-welding isn't as pretty to the cycle connoisseur but, contrary to orthodox beliefs, the joints are as strong or stronger and a lot easier to repair if they ever should fail. And there is no faulting Gary Helfrich's welds. They're nearly as clean and smooth as brazing. He uses an advanced form of tig-welding that he calls "plasma welding", another bit of fall-out from the high tech Cambridge environment.

"We're only a mile from MIT and three-quarters of a mile from Harvard," points out Chris Chance. "It's only a few minutes to all kinds of advanced research and materials. And there's no way to get distracted by what's outside." The truth of that is indisputable. Somerville Avenue is in a vacuum created by the surrounding centers of power. Here their leftovers and detritus, human and mechanical, collect for recycling. In this societal Limbo, Fat City is a nucleus of sanity and enterprise, a seed in the dunghill.

In spite of the surroundings and the casual manner of the crew, they are in business and mean to remain so. Chris, a slender, boyish redhead, is considerate of me and my job but always has one eye on his work. Taking care of business is as natural to him as his smile and his craftsmanship. While I was there, he was anxiously awaiting a large shipment of Tange tubing. "We're ready to explode," he said, reminding me of a racer ready to make his break.

Without parts to assemble, the shop was rather slow, giving us time to go riding and have a barbecue in Gary's back yard over the biggest piece of chro-moly tubing I ever hope to see - a section of 20-inch diameter nuclear reactor steampipe. The fuel this time was only scrapwood, which gave the chicken and veggies a rather sooty taste but we had no time to mess with charcoal. In two years of ownership, Gary hasn't gotten around to remodeling his kitchen but quite happily tore a wall out of the ground floor to squeeze in a huge milling machine and lathe. We contrived to cut our firewood on one of these devices; don't ask me how.

Several of the machines in the bike shop are Gary's; he works with various HPV enthusiast as well as with Chris. Relationships within the group are symbiotic more than hierarchic. Chris provides the focus but for him, the bottom line is the customer's satisfaction, not being the man on top. It's a goal everyone shares and to which they contribute their own craftsmanship rather than having it exacted for a fee. The price of such a cooperative spirit is a constant tendency toward anarchy, which carousing around on the bikes feeds rather than dissipates. I think Chris was relieved when I departed and the crew's volatility could be redirected to the work at hand.

Completing the crew are Nancy Earley, a brazer who's been working with bikes for ten years and brings her own steadiness and attentiveness to the shop - Harry Wallace, a hot-riding youngster - and Chris Igleheart, a quiet, self-propelled intellectual.

The Fat Chance is a no nonsense, business-like machine. It just happens that its business is to go wild in the hills. Some earlier editions reflect the then popular ambition to build bulletproof bikes but the latest Fat Chance models seek the optimal balance between weight and durability. At 25.5 pounds, the Team Comp may be the lightest bike in its class; at $1,675, it proves once again that "less is more". Titanium handlebars and seatpost are the bike's most exotic weight-savers; more weight is lost through careful design and construction. Perusing the balance of the Fat Chance line, you'll discover that you will pay considerably less for a little more luggage. The Kicker Comp comes in at 27 pounds and $925, the Kicker at 28 pounds and $795. The Kicker isn't cheap considering it's the bottom end of their line but then we're talking about a hand built frame built to a tolerance of .003

continued on p. 50

Bikes *Those beautiful Race Machines*

Paul Gallaher

Salsa A La Carte, about $1100

These are the creme de la creme of mountain bikes, the lightest, fastest off-road bikes made. Conventional thinking has it that such bikes are only of interest to full blown racers, that the average recreational rider has no need for such high performance machines. I don't agree. While the average (and I suppose what I mean by "average" is any recreational rider who doesn't train or ride on a regular basis) may have no need of shelling out a grand or more for a bike, that emphatically does not mean that he or she should settle for diluted performance.

If you're a prospective mountain bike owner, shop for a top-of-the-line performance model first. I said shop, not buy. Check them all out. Take them out for test rides, real test rides. Don't ride them around town on pavement. Ride them in the environment in which they were meant to be used. Go from bike shop to bike shop testing bikes and picking brains. Ask questions and test out friends' bikes until you have a pretty good idea what level of performance is available and what bikes you're comfortable on. Then, decide what your budget is and go back and test bikes in your price range until you find one that comes closest in performance to your ideal. Buy it.

Testing the hottest bikes available establishes a reference point by which to gage the bikes in your price bracket. Competition bikes are the leading edge of the performance curve. The ideas incorporated in their designs eventually trickle through entire mountain bike lines but without knowing what the state-of-the-art is, you can easily end up settling for a bike seriously lacking in the kind of performance that's available.

But don't expect to find a $500 dollar bike equal in performance to these $1,000 machines. You won't. But at least you'll know what you're looking for. Consequently you should be able to buy a bike that approaches that ideal.

Don't be dismayed by these bikes' race label. Unlike skinny-tired bikes where race models are dramatically different from touring and sport bikes, competition mountain bikes really aren't all that different from their lesser brethren. The shortest, steepest mountain bike geometry available is still more relaxed than that found on road touring bikes. The characteristics that make some mountain bikes superior for racing also make them superior for day rides. Their competition credentials simply mean they're lighter, quicker, and faster over any given terrain.

Ah, you say, but what about comfort? A mountain bike's primary suspension system is the tire. While mountain bike geometry clearly affects the ride, remember, we're starting off with longer wheelbases, longer rear triangles, and shallower angles than skinny tired bikes in the first place. A forty-four inch wheelbase may be smoother than a forty-two inch but that forty-two inch wheelbase is still some four or five inches shorter than a road racing bike's. While there are in fact variations in mountain bikes' comfort, we're still talking differences in comfort, not lack of comfort.

Today's mountain bikes have come a long way from the clunkers that started this whole crazy sport. I'm continually astounded at how fast and nimble today's bikes are. In just a few years, mountain bikes have evolved from refurbished 1930's Schwinn Excelsiors to high tech machines with more innovative and practical touches than can be found on road bikes. Even more amazing is that these advances have come from the heads and hands of garage frame builders without the benefit of huge corporate R & D budgets supporting them. They've been created by backyard crazies looking to extract a little more fun out of their adopted sport.

Without wanting to sound like some kind of jacked up, flag waving, America-over-all patriot, I get off on the fact that this sport has in fact been created by the guys down the street just screwing around, looking for better ways to get out and raise some hell on bikes. Without the Japanese and their immediate and eager response to the needs of the garage frame builder, there wouldn't be any mountain biking sport as it exists today. And no one can legitimately put down Japanese bikes; they offer exceptional values. But the cutting edge of the sport is still defined by those guys down the street. Plus there's one other somewhat intangible advantage inherent to garage frame builders: the ability to know first hand the man or woman who builds the bike. Not just meet them but go out and ride with them then sit around chugging brews and talking shop. That always has been and always will be the primary attraction of the custom builder versus the large manufacturer.

Hereupon are a few more samplings in the latest offerings in competition mountain bikes.

Salsa A La Carte

Salsa is what every hard core Mexican food lover lives for. It's full of tomatoes and onions and chili peppers and still more chili peppers, usually Jalapenos. Jalapenos are a rather innocuous looking little pepper that has the kick of a bull elephant in heat with no known remedy though everyone has their favorite solution that only seems to work for them. The strangest thing about these little devils is the more gut searing they are, the more cardiac arresting they are, the better they're liked.

Salsa is the perfect apres-biking food. After a long day of rambling through the backcountry, there's nothing better than a tray full of Dos Equis, a basket of chips, some guacamole, and a bowl of salsa. That's just about the closest a mountain biker will ever get to paradise. Now no doubt not everyone will agree with that. But then a state of enlightenment is not universally attained at the same rate. For some, ignorance is bliss.

Ross Shafer loves salsa. Some might even say it's his primary food. And therein lies the source of the Salsa Cycles name. As it turns out, it's an especially appropriate name. It fits the bike. This is a bike with a kick, a bike that grew on everyone the more they rode it. It's short, steep, and fast. The head angle is 70.5 degrees, the seat tube 73 degrees, the chain stays 17.5 inches, and the wheelbase 41.625 inches. These are dimensions more like a road bike's than a mountain bike's. For good reason. Ross built road bikes first. He only built a mountain bike because friends kept bugging him to build them one. He somewhat condescendingly agreed. Condescendingly because he knew road bikes were superior even on the dirt and therefore why bother with a mountain bike.

But he's also a perfectionist so he decided to build a mountain bike for himself before doing so for his friends. He'd ridden his road bikes on the dirt enough to have a pretty solid idea what he needed to do. In effect, he detuned road geometry to the needs of dirt. Then he tried out what he had wrought. What that was was a bike that instantly captured his soul and Salsa Cycles was born.

The Salsa A La Carte is Ross and his partner Marcus Kaufman's production version of their custom bikes. But despite it's production label, it's still a hand-made, fillet brazed frame. The finish is simply not quite as polished as on the custom jobs. But we're still talking superb craftsmanship. In fact, the average rider probably won't even notice the difference. Further discounting the production label are standard features, all manufactured by Salsa Cycles, such as chro-moly stem, aluminum bars, bottom bracket cable guide, reinforcing seat collar, seat binder, and the portage strap are. A full complement of braze-ons are also standard.

As can be expected, components are excellent. Specialized crankset (26/36/46) with KKT alloy pedals including clips and straps, Suntour New Winner 6-speed freewheel (13-30), Shimano XT derailleurs, shifters, and front brake, Suntour XC rear brake, Specialized hubs and X22 rims, Grab-On grips, Specialized saddle, etc. All good stuff.

The question is: is it a bike for everyone? The geometry is radical even considering the current trend to shorter and steeper bikes. You'll just have to try it out for yourself and see. We liked it. Every test rider returned from a ride on the Salsa exclaiming about the bike's merits. That included other frame builders whose own bikes are quite

Ibis Cycles race bike, about $1,200

Paul Gallaher

different.

The test bike was small to look at yet didn't feel small when ridden. Its climbing ability was awesome; there's no other word to describe it. But steep downhills could be a bit of a problem. One six-foot rider, who likes to ride with just a mere touch of hyper-extension in the knee, took off on the bike with the saddle set accordingly. He hammered up a hill and disappeared into the woods on the test track. A short time later he was seen soaring into the air, frantically grabbing at bushes, trying to keep from catapulting into boulders.

Seems he'd headed down this one particularly steep, rocky passage at a somewhat high rate of speed based upon the bike's incredibly sure-footed handling up to that point. But the combination of the 73-degree seat tube, short front end, and the high seat position doomed him. The rear wheel hit a rock, bounced into his butt, and launched him out over the handlebars. But a quick recovery was made and he landed on his feet with only a slightly embarrassed look to show for it.

He promptly lowered the seat slightly and returned up the hill to attack it again. That did the trick. He flew down in complete control, nimbly dodging through the obstacle course. This is one bike where a Hite Rite would be just the ticket. He didn't need to change the seat height much but that little amount made all the difference. Despite his dramatic exit from the bike, the rider returned more enthusiastic over the bike than any other he'd ridden.

Our bottom line in evaluating bikes is the grin factor. When a bike makes the rider laugh, you know you've got something. Forget all the technical stuff. If you find yourself booking on a bike and looking for challenges, you've got a winner. Based on that formula, Salsa has a winner, but not for everyone. It's a bike that demands a rider's attention. This is probably not a "first" mountain bike. But then not too many people are going to plunk down a grand or so on their "first" mountain bike. It's also not a bike for the lazy rider out for an occasional Sunday cruise. Not that you can't cruise on it. You can. It's just that this bike likes to get up and fly and you darn well better be on it and paying attention or you'll get left behind.

Handmade stem, Salsa Cycles

Ibis Cycles race bike

"This is a bike! I mean this is a bike!" That was a quote from a frame builder after taking the Ibis out for a spin over our test track. He wasn't the only one who stated that conviction after riding this bike. Everyone expressed pretty much the same feelings. Not that the Ibis was the only bike that generated that kind of uniformity. The fact of the matter is that there are a lot of superb bikes on the market today. Collecting a group of riders to test any one of these bikes and ending up with a solid consensus on the bike's quality is easy. What made those statements about the Ibis so remarkable was the nature of the bike they rode.

The Ibis was equipped with drop bars. Yes, drop bars on a mountain bike, you read correctly. No doubt that seems strange to riders used to the flat bars typically found on mountain bikes. But drop bars have been appearing on more and more fat-tired bikes though admittedly the majority of those are used by racers. Scot Nicol, designer and builder of Ibis Cycles, is one of those who prefers drop bars. We asked him to send us a race bike set up the way he feels best represents what he builds. Hence the drop bars.

Scot's original motive in putting drop bars on his bike had nothing to do with performance. He just wanted to be able to ride and that was the only way he could do so. He'd hurt his wrists during the long, rough descent in the Whiskeytown Race. Flat bars hammered his sore wrists, preventing him from riding. But he could ride a road bike with drops. He put them on his mountain bike and by the time his wrists had healed, he was sold on the superiority of drops for off-road riding.

Those drop bars made evaluating the bike somewhat difficult. Riding a bike with drops is dramatically different than with flats. No longer are the shifters and brake levers immediately at hand; you can't shift and brake at the same time. Compounding the problem is the rider position during steep downhills. You've got to be on the drops to operate the brakes instead of in the high position. The sensation is often one of being on the verge of sailing out over the handlebars. But that is mostly a matter of getting used to them if, and this is a critical if, if they're set up properly.

The key to that set-up is the stem. Standard stems for the most part don't work too well. Mountain bikes have longer, lower top tubes than road bikes. Most road stems have too little rise and too much reach. The one exception is the SR Swan. It's taller and shorter than normal. The best solution is an LD Stem, its shape somewhat similar to a wilted flower. The LD stem is quite tall with almost no reach. The rider's resulting position relative to the seat height when on the drops is about the same as flat bars. This was the stem on the Ibis. The drop bars themselves were a modified Specialized criterium model. The modification is a slight increase in the outward flaring of the drops.

Once a rider is used to the drops, their advantages quickly manifest themselves. Those advantages are a more powerful position for climbing, a more aerodynamic position for downhills and flats, and four different hand positions so riders can change positions thus resting various muscle groups. But for riders unused to drops, their disadvantages become immediately apparent the first time they hit any kind of trials type of riding or especially rocky, steep downhills. Terrain that requires the use of the brakes dictates being on the drops with the hands forward on the brake levers. That moves the rider's weight forward and down, a position many riders may find uncomfortable. Yet if you talk to off-road riders who regularly use drop bars, they'll tell you that in fact those are the very conditions when the drop bars' advantages are the most dramatic.

Drop bar system, Ibis Cycles

It's simply a matter of learning how to ride them. The trick is moving your butt back on the saddle at the same time that you move your hands onto the drops. That backward movement compensates for the lowering of the chest. The advantage of drops in these conditions is the lessened hammering your hands and wrists suffer. Experienced drop bar riders insist they finish long downhills less tired than they did with flats.

Our test Ibis was a full-blown race bike and set up accordingly. It had the shortest wheelbase of any bike yet tested: 41.5 inches with 17.5-inch chainstays, 70-degree head, and 73-degree seat tube. Those kind of dimensions would seem to make for an incredibly quick bike. And no doubt with flat bars that's precisely what the bike would feel like. But the drop bars tone down that quickness somewhat. It's still plenty quick; it just doesn't seem that way even though effectively it was one of the nimblest bikes tested. We suspect that toned down reaction is partially the result of the narrower positioning of the hands on the drops plus the hands' movement seems rounder than the more lateral movement of flat bars. Quite frankly, that difference is hard to pinpoint yet almost everyone noticed it.

Climbing traction was excellent and combined with the drop bars rider position, very powerful. It wasn't unusual for someone to find themselves hammering up a hill in a higher gear than they'd otherwise use. And on the flats, the acceleration was impressive. The position, especially on the drops, has an animal like feel to it, like a wild cat caught in mid-stride at full speed, all four limbs collected underneath, ready to explode into another ground eating lunge.

The bike was equally impressive when out-of-the-saddle. Weight distribution was evenly balanced between front and rear so adjustments for maximum traction only required subtle rider movements. The 73-degree seat tube made those sitting/standing transitions smooth and effortless, causing no break in pedaling rhythm or traction.

Scot prides himself on his carefully thought out frame designs and carries that right into his component selection. Rather than taking the easiest and usually least expensive route of selecting an entire gruppo, Scot, like most other custom builders, uses a variety of manufacturers' components. In fact, this is one area that distinguishes mountain bike builders from their road brethren. Roadies generally believe no components should be mixed while off-roaders are always mixing components. They're always searching for maximum performance in a wide and demanding variety of conditions.

Components on the test bike were all top-of-the-line. Specialized provided the cranks (28/38/48), saddle, headset, previously mentioned drop bars, X22 rims with Wheelsmith spokes, and the what many are already calling the finest dirt tire yet developed, the Ground Control. Pedals are modified Suntour MP 1000's with clips and straps. The brakes are Suntour XC's with Suntour Superbe brake levers. Derailleurs are Shimano XT's with Suntour bar-end shifters.

Two particularly noteworthy components were the hubs and seatpost. The hubs were Paragon prototypes designed and built by Mark Norstad of Marin County. The bodies are 7075 aluminum with titanium axles and oversized 1.25 bearings. They're beautifully crafted and finished but still in the development stage. The seatpost is by Interlock Racing Design and uses seamless 2024 T3 aluminum for great strength and little weight.

In summary, if you like short, steep mountain bikes, here's one more excellent bike to check out. If you prefer flat bars, that's no problem for Scot builds bikes with both. But you owe it to yourself to give the drops a test ride. You might surprise yourself and discover that drops are just the ticket.

Fisher Excalibur

If you ride mountain bikes and haven't heard of Gary Fisher, Joe Murray, and Fisher MountainBikes, you must be some kind of mountain biking hermit. Gary is one of the original Marin County crazies, an ex-road racer, ex-motorcycle nut, and one of the two best known names of the mountain biking industry, the other being Tom Ritchey. Tom and Gary along with the idiosyncratic Charlie Kelly were the trio that jammed Marin County mountain biking into the nation's consciousness. But, like most first marriages, it wasn't long before the partnership's fabric frayed then split. Tom spun off to build his own bikes, Charlie pursued his writing and publishing career, and Gary was left with Fisher MountainBikes. What he was left with has turned into a major off-road bicycle company. And in terms of racing success, Fisher is hands down the best so far.

Joe Murray, kingpin of the Fisher race team, came out of nowhere and has cleaned up ever since he started racing seriously, the only way he knows how. Cycling insiders have been predicting his downfall as soon as the competition heats up but so far that has not come to pass. He still wins more races than he loses. And, according to the folks at Fisher, the Fisher Competition he races on is no different than the ones you can buy from your local dealer. Okay, I agree, that's probably an exaggeration. Joe and his teammates have free rein of the shop and no doubt are continuously experimenting with different designs in their search for a faster bike.

The Excalibur is a recently introduced, relatively affordable, Fisher racing bike. Relatively affordable means less than a thousand dollars, a hotly contested price range these days. What you get for your bucks is exactly the same frame geometry as the Competition model but instead of a hand built frame from Marin County, the Excalibur features a tig-welded frame made in Japan for Fisher MountainBikes.

The design is fairly classic though there are a few notable changes based on Fisher's race experiences. The test bike's head angle was 67.5 degrees, the seat tube 73 degrees, wheelbase 43 inches, and the chainstays 17.5 inches. The front half, with its laid back head and 2 inches of rake, was designed for downhills while the rear half's 73 degree

Fisher Excalibur, about $975

Freewheel on Fisher Excalibur

seat tube and 17.5 inch stays were designed for efficient forward motion.

It's a design that contradicts almost everyone else's current thinking. The original model for almost all off-road bikes was the Schwinn Excelsior with its 68/70 angles, 44-inch wheel base, and 18-inch chainstays. But since then, mountain bikes have been gravitating closer to road bike geometry with steeper angles and shorter wheelbases.

Obviously Gary bought part of the theory but discarded the rest. The steeper seat tube angle places the rider in an ideal position relative to the pedals and bottom bracket. Shortening the chain stays brought the rear wheel closer to the rider for better traction. But Gary stayed with the shallow head angle. He admits it's not as ideal for climbing and slow manuevering as steeper angles but in downhills, he believes it's the best. If the results racked up by the Fisher MountainBikes race team is any measure, he appears to be justified in that decision.

It's easy to discount that success by saying it's not the bike, it's the rider. But Fisher MountainBikes have been raced successfully by a range of riders, not just Joe Murray. And that kind of consistent success definitely says something about the product. It works. It may not suit your style of riding but for those who like it, the bike works and works well.

The Excalibur isn't any make-believe race bike. Gary has made a point of setting it up appropriately with all the right stuff. This is one bike you won't find yourself having to take down to your local bike shop to start changing parts. Well, almost. You might want to change the handlebar.

Everyone who rode the Excalibur thought the handlebar reach was too long. When we sat on it and looked down over the handlebars, the line from one hand to the other was well out in front of the hub. It's somewhat similar to driving a car where the driver's position is in front of the steering wheels. The long reach exaggerated the front end's tendency to flop. Instead of turning the handlebars with a resulting smooth, round turn, the Excalibur seemed to simply change directions with no transition. Any movement of the handlebars immediately leaned the front wheel over with a corresponding instant change in direction. That was even more noticeable when standing. Coming out of the saddle resulted in zig-zagging path up a hill. A different handlebar on a short reach stem tones down that tendency.

But the primary source of that tendency was the shallow head angle. All the test riders were used to steeper head angles and consequently weren't overly enthusiastic over the Fisher's. But they also agreed that changing the stem and handlebar would improve the situation. That's just one of those things you have to try out for yourself. If you try the bike and like everything else but wonder about the steering, try it with a different handlebar/stem setup. That little change can turn the bike into just your ticket.

Ovalized tubing on Fisher Excalibur

In every other respect, this is a full race bike. The double butted tubeset, Unicrown fork, Shimano Dura-Ace EX sealed hubs with quick releases, Shimano free-hub, Suntour XC rear brake and Dia-Compe front cantilever brake, and Suntour MP-1000 pedals with toe clips are all straight off the race shelf. These are goodies rarely even seen on most road bikes, much less mountain bikes. Then there are the little things like oversize slotted cable stops, Fisher heavy duty brake cables, Grab-On MTB grips, and a Specialized racing seat. These are the kind of things that manufacturers can and sometimes do save money on under the theory that the buyer won't notice the lack until after the purchase (that's especially true of little things like grips where builders inevitably save a few bucks rather than going with more expensive and better quality grips like the Grab-Ons).

There was one other universally expressed gripe about the bike, the gearing. But it's also a gripe that not every one will share and one that can be easily remedied. The six-speed free-hub gearing is 12/13/15/17/20/24. That kind of gearing is great for maintaining cadence if you're Joe Murray. But if you live in the mountains and haven't his exceptional leg strength, that 24-tooth cog will quickly exhaust you. You'll find yourself walking many a hill others pedal. It's true the small chain ring is a 24 for a one to one ratio but when it comes time to climb mountains on the dirt, half a dozen more teeth in the rear are awfully welcome. But then this is a race bike a la Joe Murray and the Fisher race team and that's the way it's put together.

Fat Chance Team Comp

I saw my first Fat Chance bike at the second race of the Rocky Mountain Series. I didn't really see it for it was being ridden by at a moderate pace and I wasn't paying much attention. But then I overheard a racer exclaim: "Man, did you see that Fat Chance? I've got to get one. I hear they're hot!"

I looked over and thought "You're kidding! Why do you want a Fat Chance?" But I didn't say anything. Instead I wondered what kind of bikes these Massachusetts boys were building that caused Colorado racers to talk about them. Not that I hadn't heard of Fat City Cycles. I couldn't help but remember them. Not because of their bikes but because of their name. You see, in the latter half of the 1960's, Hunter Thompson ran for sheriff of Pitkin County, Colorado. The only city in Pitkin is Aspen, generally regarded then as a haven of marijuana smoking ski bums, not without some justification I might add. At any rate, Hunter and his friends who were opposed to the Californication of Aspen referred to Aspen as Fat City. It's a name I've held dear ever since.

Massachusetts may not have mountains the way we westerners think of mountains but those boys back east know how to make a mountain bike. The Team Comp is the first steel bike we've tested that broke the 27 pond barrier. It's pretty conventional looking with all the usual components but somehow it's lighter than the rest. We're still not entirely sure why. The Prestige tubing certainly helps but then both the Team Stumpjumper and the Mountain Goat used Prestige tubing but without breaking the 27 pound barrier. Whatever the reason, the bike is light. It feels light and it rides light.

New Englanders are always telling me eastern riding is different than western. In fact, they even go so far as to claim it's superior to anything the west has to offer! That may be but they certainly want to keep it a secret for I never see anything written about it. But if the quality of a bike is any kind of reflection of the quality of the riding, and I believe that's true, I have no doubt eastern mountain biking is in fact superb. The Team Comp is a sweetheart of a bike. It's geometry is fairly conservative as far as the angles are concerned, 69.5 degree head and 71 degree seat. It's the wheelbase and chainstays that set it apart. They're short, 42-inches and 17-inches respectively.

Those dimensions would seem to indicate super quick handling but the Team Comp was a surprise. The bike was quick enough but there was also a sense of stability and predictability about it, possibly because of the slightly shallow head angle. The handling was smooth and responsive, in or out of the saddle. If the bike had a forte, it was climbing. Those short stays really put the rear wheel under the driver for maximum traction. Yet for some reason, it didn't climb as well when out of the saddle as the short stays would indicate. I suspect that's partly because of the 70.5 degree seat tube. A steeper seat tube makes the transition from sitting to standing very smooth with no abrupt change in weight. That transition on the Chance seemed to necessitate a subtle but noticeable effort with a consequent momentary lightening of the rear wheel.. Once the transition was complete, the bike's climbing ability was superb.

The Team Comp is definitely a bike that grows on you with use. Familiarity in this case inspires rider confidence and soon enough, trails are taken at increasingly higher speeds. The Prestige tubing has a light, smooth feel to it somewhat like that of aluminum. The fork, not particularly attractive but amply stout, kept the wheel on the ground over the roughest terrain and responded instantly to rider input. I'm told that much of eastern riding is over trails. That explains the Team Comp's eagerness on single tracks. Single track riding is where everyone agreed the bike excelled. That and climbing.

This was one of the smallest bikes tested even though all were basically the same size. For example, a six-foot rider when riding out of the saddle usually felt like the handlebars were a tad too close for comfortable pedaling. It wasn't unusual for that person to occasionally brush the handlebar with a knee. But that was just a sizing problem. A touch more reach in the stem or a slightly larger frame would have solved that. That's why purchasers should insist, before buying a bike, that changes be made until the bike fits them correctly. In other words, so that you're comfortable yet feel strong and agile at the same time.

Components are top-of-the-line. Shimano Deore XT brakes, shifters, and derailleurs. Rims are hard anodized RM 20's with the new Cook Brothers carbon fiber hubs.

Fat Chance Team Comp, about $1,600

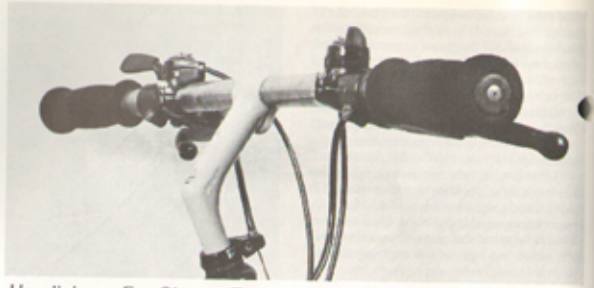
Paul Gallaher

The quick releases are Campy. The gearing is a bit of a problem but easily rectified. The freewheel is a six-speed New Winner with 13 through 24 cogs. Such gearing is no doubt fine in many parts of the country but in the mountains, you'd best have full race thighs to pump this bike up hills. The chainrings are 26/38/48 so dropping down to a 24 granny ring won't make that much difference. But that's the kind of thing you have the shop change before you buy it. Besides, the Team Comp is a full race bike and set up accordingly.

One of the bike's components were the rarely seen Cook Brothers crankset. They're beautifully machined out of solid pieces of aluminum and, while not particu-

larly light, they're bomb-proof. The handlebars and seatpost were also notable. They're made out of titanium by Fat City Cycles. That's where some of the bike's weight was lost.

The bike struck everyone with its solidity despite it's exceptional lightness. Smooth predictability was the bike's keynote. It's a bike that if more westerners tried it out, Fat Chance could well end up having to open a west coast shop to fill the orders. In the meantime, easterners seem content to keep their secrets to themselves. But if you ever seen one go pedaling by, rush out, flag the rider down, and beg for a test ride. That's true of all custom mountain bikes for the truth is they're really rather rare and you'll have far too few opportunities to try such a bike out.



Handlebars: Fat Chance Team Comp

Plasma welded joints, Fat Chance Team Comp

Fuji LTD

This is Fuji's answer to the American custom mountain bikes. They don't classify it as a racing bike, wisely as it turns out for it's definitely not designed for that purpose. What it is is a high performance recreation bike for three or four hundred dollars less than a full-blown race bike. The LTD is for the experienced rider who's ready to step up to a more advanced level of mountain biking.

The geometry is relaxed: 69.5 degree parallel angles, 17.875 inch chainstays and 43.25 wheelbase. Those numbers translate into a smooth, balanced bike. Riding the bike confirms that. Our testers were surprised at how comfortable they felt on it. Surprised because quite frankly, they approached the bike somewhat skeptically after having spent time on some of the fastest race bikes yet produced. The LTD has quality components but its geometry struck everyone as too relaxed for a high performance machine. But after a few quick spins on it, they started changing their idea.

The bike felt good, nothing radical, nothing that made a rider want to start hammering down a narrow single track. No, the Fuji LTD didn't create those kind of reactions. Instead, everyone kind of forgot about the bike and just started having fun riding. They'd come back from a circuit saying, "hey, that bike's ok. I like it. It's not a race bike but it's still plenty of fun."

The bike's most serious deficiency was climbing. Those long chain stays didn't keep enough weight on the rear wheel for optimum traction. Admittedly, the combination road/dirt 2.125 tires didn't help. The tires were much of the reason our test riders turned their noses up immediately upon spotting the Fuji. Such tires are not particularly good on pavement and even worse on the dirt, even with low air pressure. No, they didn't help the bike's climbing ability at all. But its poor climbing performance wasn't caused only by the tires.

Part of the problem was the Fuji's seat tube. That shallow angle makes the transition from sitting to standing slightly difficult. Rather than coming up out of the saddle in a smooth, flowing motion with no change in weight distribution and consequent traction, the Fuji requires a slight effort to make the switch. That results in an immediate loss of rear wheel traction if you're not careful making the move. Once you're out of the saddle, you've got to maintain a very low crouch over the top tube while keeping your weight back to maintain traction. Consequently, sitting down when climbing seems to be best. But, while the shallow seat tube angle places the rider's weight further back over the rear wheel, that angle also places the rider behind the most efficient pedaling position relative to the cranks.

Why the Fuji's climbing ability suffered was never adequately settled. There are so many variables affecting a bike's performance that isolating any one as the source of the problem is almost impossible. Especially since the only time the bike's climbing abilities suffered were on steep, demanding hills. The kind that most recreational riders will more than likely push up anyway. So while the LTD might not be a great steep hill climber, its performance elsewhere made up for that lack.

The saddle/handlebar relationship was excellent, far better than the average production mountain bike. Riders felt comfortable and collected with the bike's response smoothly predictable on jeep tracks and graded dirt roads. On single tracks, the Fuji was stable and quick without being so fast that only advanced riders could enjoy the performance. The handling was neutral, responding to rider adjustments without ever feeling squirrelly. When the terrain became particularly challenging and rocky and slow-speed trials skills were necessary, the long wheelbase, long chainstays, and shallow head angle made our testers work hard to negotiate the obstacles without foot dabs. But, off-setting that was the bike's overall predictability and all-around performance.

Its handling is well above the average beginner and intermediate mountain bike's. And while its not a racing bike, anyone tempted to give racing a try shouldn't hesitate to do so on the Fuji. With a few changes, such as narrower rims, lighter spokes and hubs, and dirt tires like the new Ground Controls from Specialized or, if you want a more general purpose tire with an emphasis on off-road conditions, the Ritchey, you can quickly improve the Fuji's performance dramatically. You'll be amazed at how much faster the bike will be but then you'll have to drop a few bucks into it to do so.

The frame is lugged with a fine finish and paint job. Components are excellent considering Fuji's need to keep costs down to keep the price down. Suntour's XC group supplied most of the components including: brake levers, shifters, brakes, rear derailleur, seatpost, and pedals. The front derailleur is a Suntour Montech. The crankset is Sugino's widely acclaimed AT with 26/36/48 gearing complementing a six-speed freewheel. Hubs are Sunshine with 1.75 Ukai rims and the aforementioned general purpose tires that were particularly unimpressive. Fuji wisely avoided the classic manufacturer's mistake in saving costs; they put a fairly descent saddle on the bike. In short, component selection is pretty good.

Paul Gallaher

Fuji LTD, about $700

Considering the bike's performance image, the only area we thought the components should have been improved was the rims, spokes, hubs, and tires. It may be true that the majority of mountain bikes are ridden around town rather than off-road but nevertheless, those ubiquitous general-purpose tires just don't really fit this bike's nature. They're heavy and slow and this is really quite a fast bike. At $700, it's a good solid buy except for those wheels and tires.

Moots Mountaineer Racer

Every test bike we've received so far came in a box. Not the Moots. Kent Eriksen, the lead man of the Moots Cycles team, hopped on the bike and rode it from Steamboat Springs, his home, to Crested Butte, Mountain Bike Magazine's home. The distance? About 180 miles. The first 100 miles or so were over paved state highways. He then followed an improved dirt road over a low pass into the Roaring Fork Valley where he turned onto Highway 82 between Glenwood Springs and Aspen. Highway 82 is one of the busiest highways in the state, only has two narrow lanes with almost no shoulder, and everyone is in a hurry. By the time he was that far, gray skies were dumping their contents on his head. Hey, no problem, just lower your head and push on.

Kent's original plan had been to continue through Aspen and over Pearl Pass, an exceptionally rugged jeep road, and down into Crested Butte. But friends in Aspen wisely talked Kent into spending the night there and going out on the town instead of attempting Pearl. A wise decision as it turned out. It was snowing heavily on Pearl.

Plan "B" was unveiled; he and his friends drove around to Marble where they unloaded their bikes and headed over Schofield Pass via Crystal and the Devil's Punchbowl. After delivering the bike, he hitchhiked back to Steamboat.

That ride and the fact that Kent was delivering a test bike tells just about all you need to know about the Moots Mountaineer and the man behind their design. Versatility and all-day comfort is the key to Kent's bikes. Roughly 80% of the route was over paved highways; the balance was graded dirt and jeep roads. All were done on the same bike with the same tires and the same gearing.

The Moots Mountaineer carries this concept of versatility to lengths unimagined by most frame builders. Every other manufacturer uses brazed on studs for the brakes. To Kent's thinking, such a design is too limiting. You can only run 26-inch wheels if that's what they were set for. But if you also like to road tour, you'll either be stuck with having to run slower and heavier 26-inch tires or use a road bike. Not with the Moots. A ten minute change and presto, the studs have been moved to accommodate 700C wheels.

How's that done? With clamp-on, adjustable studs. If new and improved brakes become available but they require different stud positioning than your bike has, you'll have to send your frame to a builder to have the studs moved. Not the Moots owner. A ten-minute change and the studs are ready for the new brakes. The fact of the matter is that few riders require or even will take advantage of that versatility. Changing wheel sizes is simply rarely considered. But the ability to move the studs to accommodate different brakes can be exceptionally useful; witness the introduction of Suntour roller cam brakes whose mounts are quite different from cantilevers'.

Comfort is something every off-road rider desires. While a bike's primary suspension system is the tires, frame geometry and material strongly influence how a bike rides. Kent's objective is a bike that can be ridden all day, day after day. Ah, but of what use is that in a race bike? The racer who's comfortable can go faster over rough terrain because he or she isn't being shaken to death and barely able to hold onto the handlebars.

That comfort also translates into better control since the wheels remain in contact with the ground more efficiently. The word that describes the Moots' passage over rough terrain better than any other is suppleness. It simply absorbs shocks and vibrations while seeming to glide over the ground.

Considered against the current trend for shorter, steeper mountain bike frame geometry, the Moots appears almost archa-

ic, particularly when compared to other race bikes. Its 17.875 inch chainstays and 43.75-inch wheelbase (dimensions vary with frame size, typical of almost all custom builders) are right in there with the original Schwinn Excelsior's. The 69.5 degree head angle and 71-degree seat angle are pretty conservative too. That kind of geometry seems almost sled-like when compared to every other race bike. But be warned: if you're ever in a race and there's somebody on a Moots, don't be surprised if you're left in the Moots' dust. The bikes are sleepers.

The bike's ride is difficult to describe. The only thing I can relate it to is a long, super comfortable limosine like a Mercedes 600 that just happens to also be fully capable of blowing just about any sports car off the road. The bike doesn't seem like it ought to go the way it goes but it does.

Our test riders, some of whom were rather skeptical of the Moots, all returned exclaiming on the bike's virtues. All without fail mentioned the bike's exceptional smoothness, a suppleness that made the bike seem to glide along as if it was some sort of bicycle hovercraft. Yet jump on the pedals and the bike immediately responded with a burst of acceleration. Take it onto a narrow, twisting single-track - and that's what our favorite test ride consists of - and the bike darts along with the best of them. It's just that it doesn't seem particularly quick yet whenever a quick manuever is needed, the bike is always right there. The only area where the bike appeared to be lacking was on any kind of trials type of riding. Jumping logs and manuevering over rocky terrain at slow speed wasn't the bike's forte yet after having completed a difficult passage, a rider would look back and suddenly realize that the Moots had in fact done rather well. Separating preconceived notions from results wasn't always easy with the Moots.

No one could really quite figure this bike out. All agreed the Moots is an exceptional bike and if a person could only have one bike, the Moots would definitely be in the final running. They just weren't sure exactly why that was. The only thing missing from the bike's bag of tricks is a sense of showmanship. But that's just a reflection of Kent, an unassuming, always full of life, unflappable bike rider who's perfectly capable of jumping into a race like the '84 NORBA Nationals and finishing fourth against the top mountain bike racers in the country. And that was on a standard Moots Mountaineer, not the race model.

Kent is also one of those guys who's always thinking of new gadgets. His latest are "road handles". These are short handlebars sticking out in front of the main bar with 2-inch, wooden balls on the end. They're only about 6-inches long and look somewhat strange but everyone who tried them liked them. What they do is let the rider change into a stretched out position over the bike for a more aerodynamic profile. On road rides they're great. That change in position relaxes certain muscle groups just as the multiple positions of drop bars do. Only with Kent's Road Handles, you still have flat bars for trail riding. They're an ingenious and simple solution to a problem inherent to flat bars.

Mountain Goat

When mountain bikes were just clunkers requiring much effort and even more walking to navigate through the backcountry and the state-of-the-art in Crested Butte consisted of rebuilt Schwinns with drum brakes and a three-speed rear axle, along came the Mountain Goat. Chris Carrol, a certified social pinball hopped up on this latest outdoor craze, stopped me in the street and, in a veritable tidal wave of words stacked up on each other like tumbling dominoes, proceeded to tell me about this incredibly light mountain bike he had. I had no idea what he was talking about for to tell the truth, the idea of pushing an overweight, one-speed sled through the mountains didn't appeal to me at all.

He kept talking about these oval tubes and 15-speeds and some sort of peculiar cantilever brake. He made no sense at all but to humor him, I went along to check out this wonder bike he was bragging about. He was right; it was incredible.

That was the first diamond frame mountain bike I ever saw and though another year passed before I jumped into this trail riding quicksand, I suspect that was the bike that really hooked me. It was light, looked the way a bike ought to look, had knobby tires and cantilever brakes, and flat flew over the ground. Later that summer saw the arrival in town of two Cunningham aluminum mountain bikes but it was that Mountain Goat that first riveted my attention.

The name alone was an attention grabber. What more appropriate name could there be for a bicycle capable of zipping over rugged mountain passes? That bike's builder was Jeff Lindsay from Chico, California. He's still building bikes today and they're still called Mountain Goats.

The Comp is a full race version of Jeff's standard bikes. But instead of using oval tubing, the Comp has Prestige tubing. The frame is right in there with the most current thinking with its 17-inch chain stays and 42-inch wheelbase. The head angle is 69 degrees while the seat angle is 71.5 degrees. Middle of the road stuff in terms of head and seat angles. Results were pretty much what we'd expected. To quote some of the test riders, "this bike is fun!"

The bike was a climber, in or out of the saddle. Those short stays keep the weight right on the rear wheel while the seat tube's 71.5 degree angle makes the sitting/standing transition fairly smooth, especially with the saddle all the way forward on the rails. A steeper angle facilitates the transition even more but the Mountain Goat made up for that by the ease with which weight distribution could be adjusted during fast downhill corners. Slight movements forward or aft on the saddle instantly affected the bike's handling in corners for maximum control.

That sense of control was possibly the bike's strongest attribute. It's handling was always predictable and smooth. It's not the quickest bike we've tested despite the short wheel base, probably the result of the conservative head angle, but it's certainlyan immediate sharp turn past a tree after the log, no problem. Turn the handlebars and the bike scooted right past effortlessly. Our main test track is over a loop consisting mostly of an exceptionally fun single track. The Mountain Goat passed with flying colors. The bottom line in bike tests is, in my mind, the grin factor. In this department, we had another winner.

Lugwork on the Mountain Goat Whiskeytown Racer

Components are as usual top-of-the-line, though not all the test riders agreed with the selections. But then, you're not buying the components; you're buying the frame design. Every builder and every rider has access to all the same components so setting up the bike to your taste is easily accomplished. At any rate, the test bike (it used to be George Theobald's race bike) came with Specialized hubs with quick releases, crankset, and saddle. Rims were RM 20's. The front derailleur was a Shimano Dura-Ace (the bike was equipped with only a double chainring rather than the more common triple) while the rear was a rarely seen Huret. The front brake was a Shimano Deore XT, the rear a Suntour XC. Shifters were Suntour with Suntour XC brake levers. Except for the derailleurs, the components were all standard stuff. The stem was a handsome affair built by Jeff.

The paint job was an eye catcher as befits a sponsored team rider's bike. There was no mistaking it for anything other than what it was. While it's true fancy paint jobs on mountain bikes are somewhat of a waste of time considering the abuse the Imron is going to be subjected to, more and more frame builders and riders seem to be opting for that kind of finish. It's a matter of pride and pleasure in having a finely crafted machine and the paint is simply the crowning touch despite the wear and tear it will be subjected to.

Moots Mountaineer Racer, about $1200

Mountain Goat Whiskeytown Racer, about $1,500

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Paul Gallaher

Fly Fishing and Mt. bikes
A Successful Marriage

Story and photos by Roger White

In the glow of the evening sun bathing the Sierra Madre Mountains of south-central Wyoming, I pulled a nine-inch trout from the net. I was standing hip-deep in water, my mountain bike lying nearby on the lake's steeply sloped bank, staring at a brook trout of extraordinary pink coloring. Here, in my hands, was the reason we had planned to fish the lake at day's end.

"Those fish are for eating!" This comment, from a conversation made two months earlier with my fishing buddy's uncle, resounded in my mind. We had unveiled to the retired gentleman our plan of a four-day mountain bike/fly fishing trek into the Sierra Madres. He's a veteran angler and familiar with the area we'd targeted.

Graciously advising us, he stated, "While I primarily like to fly fish streams and rivers like you fellas, I'll tell you this," and pointing emphatically to Battle Lake on our map, "this particular native brookie, its flesh so pink from gorging itself on lake bottom shrimp, is a taste you'll never forget...or want to!"

This moment of inattentive reflection cost me. With a quick twist, the trout jumped out of my hand and, free of the hook, darted for the depths. This was the topper on a day of no fish amid a string of misadventures. My companion, fishing a short distance away, cast a glance my way. The creases in his face reflected our shared disappointment. A hushed silence settled on the lake.

"Angling: Incessant expectation and perpetual disappointment."
Arthur Young
Travels in France
1787

A rock, knocked loose from the top of the glacial escarpment ringing the south end of the lake, suddenly hurtled onto the apron of talus below the cliff. We both turned and caught sight of a Big Horn Sheep. The ram stood momentarily in regal repose on a ledge high above and then, turning to exit, threw back his magnificent head as if mocking our technological dependency.

We'd been told the best fishing was below an amphitheater at the lake's south end in Elk's Cove, named for the outline of a huge log jutting off shore. But we'd failed to reach it with our mountain bikes. The rocky debris made our assault dangerous and my friend wore its abrasive proof on his hip from an earlier fall. Our frustrations seemed to be hemming us in on all sides.

I remember thinking how hungry I was. Somehow, the primal realization of the need to catch my meal dissipated my frustration, sharpened my senses, and recharged my energy. I became distinctly aware that I was

Waders

Waders are what keep you dry when wading through rivers. In effect, they are waterproof pants with attached shoes. Weight is a major consideration when selecting waders. The ability to easily get in and out of a pair is another. I usually keep mine on when working a stream, removing them only when the ride to a different location requires any strenuous effort or bike handling skill.

Years ago, I cut down weight by using a pair of old running shoes with pieces of carpet cemented on. The system was fine except in cold, alpine waters.

Waders are usually either boot foot or stocking foot types. The former have the boot built-in to the wader. Shortcomings are a lack of ankle support and bulkiness. Stocking foot types require purchasing a boot to fit over them. They're light and easy to pack but drawbacks include a tendency to wear quickly at points of rubbing (heels) and the difficulty of putting them on and taking them off.

Most boot waders are made of rubber and must be protected from ozone with proper cleaning and storage. Stocking foot waders are made of latex, nylon, or neoprene. Neoprene is superior but is expensive.

Whatever type you select, if you are fishing areas with slippery footing (not uncommon), get waders with felt soles or with cleats. My choice is rubber hip-waders with cleats. They're heavy and bulky but easy to get in and out of. I position the cleats on the sole to permit use on the bear trap pedals of my bike.

You generally get what you pay for and it definitely pays to buy the type of wader that best suits your needs. A good pair of waders are an investment in summers of pure joy wading crystalline waters and casting over rising trout.

my own greatest obstacle, not the fish.

We had begun this trip with the idea that fly-fishing and mountain biking would be a perfect marriage of two forms of recreation. Our day had begun at sunrise. We stumbled out of our sleeping bags, put on the coffee, shook up the orange juice, and sat down to map out our day's strategy. Eager for an early start, we gulped down coffee and pastries and made ready. We put on helmets and placed full water bottles into holders then mounted up and rode out of the campground just as the sun broke through the surrounding stand of aspens.

The sun's warmth quickly soaked away the remaining morning chill in arms and legs. From the smaller trees bordering the road, the flute-like heralds of thrushes greeted us as we passed by. We turned westward while a warm breeze gently rattled the aspen leaves.

We toiled upward over the long trail and, near the Continental Divide, passed a dark, weather beaten sign inscribed with "Battle Townsite, 1889-1908". I shivered involuntarily at the thought of what cold, harsh winters

As I continued fishing, time became non-existent

the miners of the Cooper District above Encampment must have faced. The snow pack a short distance away was a powerful reminder of how recently the snow had receded, barely in time for the summer solstice.

West of the old townsite, the gravel road crossed the Continental Divide at Battle Pass (9,916 ft). We paused long enough to stare northward at the dominating mass of Mt. Bridger (11,000 ft) and the breathtaking panorama to the west. Below us, high mountain lakes lay nestled in glacial cirques. Towering cumulus clouds sailed toward us like great clipper ships of the sky, their billowing masts foretelling an afternoon thunderstorm, a regular occurrence in the area. The faint sound of thunder rolling out of the distance was a graphic reminder of the danger posed by lightning on high altitude slopes.

The sight of those thunderheads hastened us down to the streams we'd targeted below. A steep, rough road plunged downward, whipping us around hairpin turns and past Battle Creek Campground to where the road paralleled the creek. At a point just below the confluence of a smaller stream, we stopped to survey the area. We agreed to meet back at this point later in the afternoon then set about the serious business of fishing.

The streamside brush made access difficult, forcing us to leave our bikes and approach on foot. As rapidly as possible, I smeared bug repellent on all exposed skin to neutralize the waves of voracious mosquitoes lurking in the brushwood then entered the water just below a quiet spot.

I slowly worked upstream, carefully casting in a semi-circular pattern with five or six casts going from right to left or vice versa to adequately cover an area before moving on. The bike enabled me to quickly enter a fishing spot, work its length, then retreat back to the bike and ride on to the next area. The range I could cover in a short period of time was thus greatly increased. Additionally, the bike made the stablest of walking sticks for easily accessing both sides of a stream or river.

As I continued fishing, time became nonexistent. A particularly appealing bend in the stream mesmerized me and I was oblivious to my friend's streamside plea: "Time to make for the lake!" Reluctantly, I trudged away from the stream to my bike.

He pulled out a map from his handlebar bag and pointed to a trail, advocating that it would be the perfect short-cut to the lake plus providing a little bushwacking adventure. Reluctant at first but feeling the challenge of off-road mountain biking, I consented.

We began our adventure at the trailhead of an unimproved four-wheel drive road. After a mile trek inward, we came upon a small meadow with a lively mountain stream running through its center. A dense floral bouquet of superb wood lilies, anemones, shooting stars, and wallflowers bordered both sides of the stream.

The prolific showing of colors stopped us in our tracks. We took a moment's break to enjoy the panoply of wildflowers. Standing astride our bikes, we discussed how easily we'd carried with us equipment normally left behind yet still remained completely mobile for exploring areas off the beaten track. Not only did the mountain bikes provide us that mobility, they did it with minimal impact upon the environment; quite a benefit when compared to ATV's or horses.

We tore ourselves away from this pristine meadow and pressed on. Beyond, a forest crowded in on the stream. Within a short distance, our well traveled path grew narrower then divided and subdivided into a maze of animal paths through the deadfall blanketing the area.

After a quick look at the topo map and noticing its 1961 printing date, we saw that our charted route did not reappear on the photo-revised map of the adjacent quadrant. A basic orienteering rule is that a trail's condition cannot be deduced from a map. Retreat seemed the wiser option rather than a cross-country trek over the map's narrowing contour lines.

As we turned to ride back to the trailhead, clouds closed in and a wind swept out of the west. The roar of approaching thunder sent us scrambling for cover in the nearby forest. We donned our rain gear, moved away from the bikes, crouched down low, and dismally waited for the slightest hint of clearing. Those dark skies fed our apprehensions about the prospects of further disappointments with poor fishing at the lake.

Catch and Release

Catch and release allows the trout best adapted to an area to reach maturity to spawn and reproduce in order to replenish and stabilize the natural fishery of the area. Management practices show that planted trout do not survive as well as native trout.

To provide the fish with the best chance to return to is domain and survive as a healthy and strong specimen requires the fly fisher to follow a few cautionary steps:

- Fish with barbless hooks.
- Play a fish quickly; don't exhaust it.
- Minimize any handling of the fish out of the water.
- Allow the fish to calm itself before removing the hook.
- Handle the fish gently with little pressure on the body.
- Do not attempt to remove a swallowed hook; cut the line as close as possible to the hook.
- Finally, when you prepare to release the fish, attend to it gently until it regains its strength to swim away from your cradling hands. Moving it slowly back and forth or into the current can help speed recovery.

A sparkling blue sky coincided with our arrival at the lake. Its glassy surface reflected nothing of our misfortunes in attempting to reach Elk's Cove or losing the only fish caught the entire day. Like the lake's calmness, we resigned ourselves to a type of fisherman's humility that perhaps man and his fishing methods are at best only chance and, at that, a chance much bigger than any trout he can imagine.

Our resignation signaled an end to a fish's prudence and, as luck would have it, a resurgence of the trout's appetite. The lake came alive with feeding fish. As the sun leaned heavily down upon the horizon, we reeled in brookies, releasing those too small, then clambered jubilantly up the steep bank to our bikes.

Late that evening, around the glowing embers of a dying campfire, we knew that for us, mountain biking and fly fishing was a successful marriage of two of our favorite forms of recreation. Eating the fresh caught brook trout with an ice-cold cup of white zinfandel tied the big red bow on the present nature had given us on our trek.

With a few equipment adjustments and a modest investment, you too can discover the best of fly fishing and mountain biking and the unexpected mixed blessings they can bestow upon you. A day of bike fishing covering more than ten miles requires a

Eating the fresh caught brook trout with an ice-cold cup of white Zinfandel tied the big red bow on the present nature had given us on our trek

system providing for the needs of both fishing and biking as well as personal needs. The system I use consists of a fanny-pack for personal items, handlebar bag for bike items, tackle bag for fishing gear, front or rear pannier bags, and a three piece rod with case.

Into the fannypack go the usual items needed for quick access: sunscreen, insect repellent, anti- itch lotion, chapstick, first aid items, sunglasses, croakies, anti-glare and defogger wax, a snack, and a stick of Krazy Glue. The handlebar bag contains tire repair kit (also can be used for patching waders), spare tube, tools, chain lubricant, camera, maps, and compass. The panniers contain net, cleated waders, sweater, rain gear, TP, extra water, lunch, and creel.

The tackle bag I sling over the shoulder with reels, fly box, and the usual fishing paraphernalia inside. Check with locals on fly selections. We included mosquitoes, renegades, Adams, humpies, elkhair caddis, irresistibles, Royal Wulffs, and Bruce's Barber Pole on our trip.

My aluminum rod case is three feet long and contains a three piece Winston glass rod (8 ft) with #6 floating line. I attach the case to the rear carrier with the case extending beyond the the bicycle.

One modification I've found useful for quick trips in and around heavy scrub areas where breaking down the rod is necessary is a handlebar-rod carrier. Two large velcro felt tabs were sewn onto the front of my handlebar bag. Next, I made a pair of velcro straps, each one a one-inch section sewn to a two-inch hook section. With this combination of straps, I can securely fasten the rod to the handlebars and bag. But care must be exercised when riding through narrow clearances. For additional protection, I attach a cover that fits over both the reel and the butt end of the rod.

The Urban Renewal Project

by Paul Tepley

I turned my ten-speed onto Seventh Avenue Parkway and was impressed. I'd never seen the street before. Mansions and large houses built around the turn of the century marched in orderly array down both sides of the street. Down the center were grass covered islands lined on each side with large maple trees. With the trees on each side of the street, parallel archways of green were formed. The parkway's islands and the majestic old dwellings' yards contained countless schrubs, flowers, and rock gardens, a cornucopia of colors. It was the most beautiful street I had ever seen and a true find for Denver cycling.

Seventh Avenue Parkway ran slightly uphill into the distance from where I stood and was completely unobstructed by stop signs with only one stop light. The sun had just moved behind the mountains, removing the harsh heat of that late July afternoon. My muscles were warm but the air I rushed through kept me fairly cool.

My favorite riding on pavement has always been slight inclines and I reveled in the street's easy but constant climb. I could take it easy or push myself as hard as I wanted yet never quite overcoming the gearing. I felt the smoothness of the road, the eager responsiveness of my bicycle, and the exhilaration of my body. I entered a state where my bicycle, the wind flowing by, the smooth pavement, the calmness of this tree lined neighborhood, and my body were completely interrelated. My mind quieted, content to witness the underlying connection between myself and the environment.

I noted anew the charm of this street and the wide variances in architecture and landscaping. Each house seemed to be created independent of each other - a relief from the suburbs' tract housing. I saw Gothic mansions, three-story Swiss chalets, Colonial mansions with great pillars, Victorian houses, and a Mexican adobe ranch house.

Too soon, the turn towards home was approaching. I was tempted to keep pedaling up the parkway but it would soon become a regular street. Reluctantly, I turned and headed downhill along a street lined with smaller but still grand old houses.

That ride happened 13 years ago. Since then I have had many wonderful rides in the city and through the countryside. But over the last few years, those experiences have become fewer and farther between. The city and surrounding countryside has become crowded and hostile to bicyclists. I've grown tired of unconscious automobile drivers, ever more frequent stop lights and stop signs, and my lungs being filled with exhaust fumes. Riding the pavement has become more and more dangerous, less and less enjoyable. As a result, over the last two years, I have only used my road bike for a one-mile commute to work along a little used side street. Bicycle riding had lost its joy.

I now live in Boulder, Colorado with my wife, Vicky. Our house is at the bottom of a steep hill which is a popular running and biking route. Upon leaving our house, we have to ride up this steep hill first thing, which is a pain.

Vicky began to notice the ease with which people on funny looking bicycles rode up our hill. The bikes, of course, were mountain bikes. It wasn't long before she wanted one. I explained that we could change the gearing on her bike so she too could ride up the hill with ease. But it was too late - the allure of a bright new bicycle that could be ridden almost anywhere had her. I was not the least bit interested. As far as I was concerned, a bike was a bike was a bike. And I already had a seldom used $700 bike.

Still, I decided to help Vicky look for a mountain bike. We started in the library. There were a few articles in various magazines, but no evaluations of specific bikes. However, we did get an idea of what characteristics to look for in a mountain bike. I also found an article in Town and Country about the fun of riding dirt farm roads. The story stirred my interest a little - which I quickly suppressed. Our next line of attack was to go to all the bicycle shops in town. We went to each one and got brochures and prices. After lots of comparing, we narrowed the field down to three bikes. Now it was time to go and try them out.

Vicky tried out the first bike then wanted me to try it. "Just" to help her out, I got on the bike and took it out for a spin. It was better than I expected.

The first thing I noticed was a completely different feel. It wasn't at all like a ten-speed. It was quite lively and not at all what I had expected. Because of its heavy appearance, I'd assumed it would be unresponsive and sluggish. I rode up a steep paved hill almost effortlessly. It was great! Then I rode through a dirt alley, being especially careful to hit every hole and rock. No problem. The bike seemed like it could do anything. I was hooked.

We had our mountain bikes a week later. Our first ride was up our steep hill, easily done, and then over to a dirt fire road on the mountain behind our house. The first 100 yards of riding completely sold me again on mountain bikes. We were impressed with how well the bikes went over rocks, ruts, gravel, and other objects deadly to skinny tire bicycles We enjoyed the ease with which these bikes could climb. After only 20 minutes, we were at the top of the ridge directly above our house. We looked out over Boulder and the foothills to the north. We had climbed in less than 20 minutes what would have taken an hour by foot.

Then we discovered the most exciting part of mountain biking: descending. Almost silently, we swept down the mountain, flying over rocks, dodging ruts, skidding through the dirt, having a great time. I rediscovered that state where I was one with the bicycle, the road, and the environment. I found a speed where there was a sort of controlled uncontrolledness: where the individual movements were uncontrolled but the overall flow was. Vicky describes it as excited terror.

Three quarters of the way down, we turned onto a foot path leading off to the right. The trail took us back up to the top of the ridge where we had overlooked Boulder but on the opposite end and right above the hospital where I work. It reminded me of when I was a kid exploring the gully three blocks from my house. Like then, our first ride was an adventure in our own backyard.

Perhaps some people think it is foolish being childlike. All I can say is that children are very much alive and being this way isn't foolish; it's what makes life worth living.

Our next adventure took us to a trail south of Boulder in the greenbelt. The Rudd Trail runs from Marshall Reservoir to Eldorado Springs and some of the best rock climbing in the country. To get to it, we went through a barbed wire gate generously marked by Boulder County with a 3-inch by 5-inch sign. Beyond was a cow pasture. This proved to be the first of many encounters with the Hereford.

Frank Staub

Before getting my mountain bike, I had never paid any attention to cows. I had even given up eating them 9 years before. Today, I am all too familiar with them. There isn't anything really wrong with cows. They just litter the trail and it sticks in your tires. Plus they aren't particularly interesting to look at compared to wildlife encountered on the trail. You also need to be careful about upsetting them.

Once, Vicky and I were rapidly descending a steep trail that abruptly entered a cow pasture. This pasture had a fence, a gate, about 40 cows, and 2 bulls - one bull on each side of the fence. Our abrupt appearance startled the cows. Every single one of them started mooing. The way they carried on you would have thought we found the youngest calf and tortured it to death. Of course, all this upset the bulls. We didn't think the bulls were as innocuous as the cows so we made a hasty retreat to a narrow trail leading away to the right. This turned out to be a real mess. My feelings for cows hasn't been the same since.

The Rudd Trail has a wonderful optical illusion. Down is up and up is down. The lie of the land makes it appear that you are going down towards the mountains. You aren't because the trail follows a ditch and the water flows in the opposite direction. When you return along this trail, it looks as if you are going uphill at a pretty decent pitch, yet you are not. All this makes for very enjoyable riding because it seems you go downhill both ways. It also makes me wonder about the psychology of uphill riding.

You don't have to go to or live near the mountains to enjoy a mountain bike. Recently, Vicky and I were in Colorado Springs. We stopped to see a friend who is also a long time road bike enthusiast. He was interested in our mountain bikes. Vicky, being the most gracious, loaned Terry her bike. Terry and I took off looking for a place to ride. After all of four blocks and behind the local shopping mall, we found an empty lot. It was complete with bicycle obstacle course, ditch, and weeds. Bike trails ran over small hills, through the ditch, into deep sand, and through a small marsh. Terry and I spent the next hour jumping and dodging obstacles, getting hayfever, splashing through the ditch, sinking in sand, and just generally being ten years old again. We lost nearly half a century between us. Mountain biking had a new convert.

I have never had such a great toy. Perhaps there should be a label that comes with every mountain bike stating: WARNING, this device is addictive. Use only when you need to improve your physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Frank Staub

Big News

TNT / TANDEM

A significant first in mountain bike racing occurred at the Tahoe to Truckee (TNT) off-road classic. On August 11, two tandems lined up for the start of the race for the second year in a row. The TNT, with 1,000 feet of elevation gain and descent separated at the halfway point, is well suited to a tandem's advantages. Fast down hills are a tandem's forte.

No protests of the tandems was ever heard until after Roy Rivers and Joey Peterson, riding for Wilderness Trail Bikes/-Suntour, crossed the finish line first. They won by a significant margin (2:23) over the second place rider. The promoter of the TNT, basecamp in Tahoe City, was put in a judgemental position when the 2nd and 4th place finishers protested the lack of special classification for tandems. This was after the race was won. Apparently none of the PRO/AM riders took the tandem seriously, even though Rivers and Peterson are always a major force to be reckoned with. The NORBA rule book gave no clue as to what should be done in such an event.

Protests to the effect of an unfair advantage of the tandem were heard. The promoter and the racers agreed on a compromise, on Roy and Joey's part. It was decided that first overall belonged to the tandem team but that the first place cash prize would go to the first single bike across the line with suceeding riders placing accordingly.

Very few mountain bike courses are suited to tandems. The TNT happens to be one of them. Since most courses are dis-advantageous for tandems, separate classifications seem unnecessary. And in fact, the disadvantages of a tandem racing were never discussed, disadvantages such as: technical handling abilities and increased likelihood of mechanical failure. Peterson and Rivers put up little objection to the protest for they didn't feel the point was worth arguing about. Both riders wanted to win the race and they figured that the tandem had the best chance as long as there were no mechanical failures. As far as the Wilderness Trail tandem team was concerned, they won the race.

Perhaps next year, the TNT will see more tandem entries. No doubt their appearance will be taken more seriously by the PROs.

Matthew Hebberd

A Chip Off the Old Block

You'd better look twice at this machine. Because we understand how you could mistake the new Specialized Rockhopper for off-road bicycles costing virtually twice as much.

Five years ago the Rockhopper would have retailed for $750. In fact, this all-terrain wonder is as good or better than the original Stumpjumper.

Third Generation Technology

The reason for the Rockhopper's remarkable price/performance stems from dramatic advances in manufacturing techniques. This hard-nosed bike also boasts the bloodlines of the sport's most respected machines: the Stumpjumper family.

As with all of our 1985 off-road bicycles, the Rockhopper is equipped with a uni-crown fork/frame system. Allowing a blend of agility and stability found only in the world's most expensive all-terrain bikes.

SunTour derailleurs, Specialized crankset and sealed bottom bracket.

Then we made sure nobody could come even remotely close to the Rockhopper's features. There's SunTour derailleurs and shifters. Specialized crankset, sealed bottom bracket, and hubs. And Saturae X-28 off-road rims fitted with Specialized Crossroads tires.

While the Rockhopper establishes bold, new parameters for off-road riding, it's precisely what you've come to expect from Specialized. We've pioneered off-road production bicycles. And quite clearly, from the Rockhopper and the Stumpjumper Sport to the Stumpjumper and Team Stumpjumper, we continue to lead the way.

But you must be wondering about the Rockhopper's price. Visit your local Specialized Dealer. Take the Rockhopper out for a test ride. Its price will floor you and its performance will leave you spellbound.

SPECIALIZED
Our Tradition Is Technology

Clothing for the Backcountry

Standard road garb is fine for day rides of an hour or two but more specialized gear is required for backcountry rambles of any length at all. That's especially true for mountain environments. A day that starts off with sparkling blue skies in the morning can by mid-afternoon have become overcast with gusting winds and cold, stinging rain. There've been plenty of times when, shirt off and sweating heavily, I've ground up a long pass and crossed the summit just in time to see a wall of rain closing in from the other side. The consequences of not being properly prepared for the weather can be disastrous.

Three of us once celebrated an important occasion by getting together for a champagne breakfast. By the time we were finished, we had an excellent buzz under way. We then impulsively decided to go for a long ride up one valley, over a ridge, then down another valley and home. The ride up was a somewhat leisurely cruise in the hot sun with wildflowers along the road swaying in a light breeze. Near the top of the ridge, we stopped for a break at a spring and, without our noticing, time crept by. We finally headed over the top and started down the backside but we'd dawdled too long. We were caught by a driving sleet storm half way down.

Naturally, in the midst of our laughs and distracted thoughts, the idea of extra clothing had never entered our buzzing brains. We'd worn cycling shorts and t-shirts and that's all. We dove for cover under a large spruce but before long, the storm's intensity penetrated our shelter. We were getting colder by the moment and there was no sign of any break in the weather. The ground was rapidly turning white with sleet and finally, during a slight waning of the storm's intensity, we decided to make a break for home. We thought that at least we'd get warm pedaling. We hammered those bikes for all we were worth, working hard to get warm and get back to town as fast as possible. We made it but for awhile there, we were close to becoming dangerously hypothermic. All because we'd not bothered tying extra clothes around our waists. That was a lesson I've not forgotten.

Fortunately, precisely the kind of clothing mountain bikers need is starting to become available. You don't need a lot, just enough to break the force of the weather. Not that foul weather gear hasn't been available. Obviously it has. But a mountain biker's needs are somewhat unique and the outdoor industry has been slow in responding to their needs, especially the needs of mountain bikers.

One of the most important considerations of mountain biking clothes is portability. It should be light enough and compact enough to be tied around the waist. If it's too bulky and cumbersome to carry, you won't. Most mountain bikers prefer heading out fast and light. Loading up a bike with extra gear and weight just takes away from the fun. So look for clothing that you can tie around your waist or stuff into a fanny pack or saddle sack.

Achieving light weight, compactability, and protection from diverse weather conditions isn't easy. Particularly since cyclists are great heat generators. Staying dry from rain doesn't do much good if you end up soaked by perspiration. Balancing those conflicting goals is a challenge. Following are two manufacturers' solutions to this challenge.

Leading Edge stretch Goretex tights and vest.

LEADING EDGE

Leading Edge is a small company out of Boulder, Colorado specializing in cycling clothing. They've been a well known secret for years amongst a small circle of bike racers and skiers in Colorado. Jim Heiden, president of the company, has been working with the US National Cycling Team for two years developing their newest line of clothing.

That may not at first seem a particularly strong recommendation for backcountry cycling foul weather gear. The needs of the National Team would seem to be far removed from those of mountain bikers. But the results of Jim's designing and testing are not only adaptable to mountain biking, they are superb for backcountry use.

What makes Leading Edge's newest line of gear so unique is the use of four-way stretch Gore-Tex fabric. Gore-Tex is wind resistant, waterproof, and breathable. In any activity where body heat is generated, there has to be some means of letting the perspiration escape. But if your outer shell is waterproof, not only is the exterior water not able to pass through, neither is the interior water. You end up as wet as you would without the shell. Not with Gore-Tex. Gore-Tex is a thin micro-porous film that allows only very small molecules of water to pass through. Sweat falls into this category. Rain doesn't. It's like a one-way, see-through mirror.

Does Gore-Tex work? Depends upon who you talk to. The majority of outdoor clothing manufacturers believe it does. Jim Heiden and Leading Edge have no doubt about it. Their extensive use of Gore-Tex is ample proof of tthat. Because of that support from both manufacturers and users, Gore-Tex has become the state-of-the-art in foul weather clothing for active use.

Leading Edge's foul weather cycling gear consists of tights, vest, jacket, booties, hat, and gloves. The eight-panel tights use four-way stretch Gore-Tex from the inside leg seam across the front to the side and around the waist with a small panel vertically down the back, right where the tire splashes mud and water on you. A zipper on the outside of each leg extends up the calf so they can be put on over shoes. The balance of the tights are made of polypropylene/lycra panels. The vest and jacket use the same design idea: four-way stretch Gore-Tex in front, polypropylene/lycra in back.

Gore-Tex is used in front because that's where the most protection is needed. The back is made out of polypropylene because of its excellent wicking action and insulation. Despite Gore-Tex's ability to be waterproof and breathable at the same time, additional outlets are required for the quantities of perspiration released by riders. Hammer up a hill in the midst of a rain storm while enveloped in a cocoon of Gore-Tex and you'll be wet from sweat unable to pass through the fabric. You'll simply be producing moisture faster than the material can get rid of it. Hence the use of the polypropyle-

continued p. 47

PLUMLINE

Plumline has introduced an entire line of clothing for backcountry cycling. They use a combination of Gore-Tex, polypropylene, and nylon in a variety of pants, knickers, and anoraks.

Their lightest, most compact weather shell consists of an anorak and pants. The Trilite Wind Top is a pull-over jacket with large chest pocket. The lightweight nylon shell is not water-proof; it's for wind protection, not rain protection though it works quite well in fog and mist conditions. Stretch knit panels down both sides make for a snug fit so it's not billowing and flapping in the wind when riding fast. The stretch knit also extends around the wrists, waist, and hood. The Trilite pants are similarly constructed with the stretch panels down the outside of each leg. Short zippers part way up the calf enable putting the pants on over shoes.

Both garments can be stuffed into the back pockets of a cycling jersey, rolled up and tied around the waist, or jammed into a small saddle bag. They're so easily taken along that including them happened almost without conscious effort. We used them in a variety of conditions with excellent results. We imagine they're also excellent for cross-country skiing, spring skiing, running, hiking, and mountaineering.

The next step up in weather protection are the Plumline 3-Season Jacket and Pants. Polypropylene and nylon are combined for protection from cold air but not rain. The front of both the jacket and pants consists of polypropylene with an exterior shell of nylon for wind protection. The back of the jacket is polypropylene with two gear pockets. Hand pockets in front are lined with polypropylene while the cuffs and bottom have elastic closures. A full-length zipper provides ample ventilation.

The pants have two noteworthy design tricks. The first is a complete break in the nylon fabric over the knee. The nylon coming down from the waist ends below the knee while the nylon from the ankle up extends above the knee but underneath the upper nylon. Consequently there is no

continued on p. 46

Maximum protection from Plumline 3-Season pant and Gore-Tex jacket

Windpants and jacket on left and on right

Paul Gallaher

Camp: No matter how one goes, the thought of camping should act as magic, should make one restless for the freedom of out of doors. There is only one way to get the real flare for outdoor life, it is to get into the wilds, away from the cities . . . Camp life is an intimate association of people. Probably nothing else so fully discloses strength and weakness of character.
World Book Enclyclopedia, 1925

Summer Camp

story and photos by Paul Gallaher

Hello Muddah, hello Faddah
Here I am at Camp Granada

The song by Alan Sherman, the weird Al Yankovich of his day, conveys, more than any other I know, the special kind of bizarre psychic confusion that for most kids is modern summer camp. Far from the 1925 ideal, the institution seems to have drifted away from its original emphasis on outdoor life. Wilderness intimacy has been lost.

Or so I thought until a friend, Andrea Heller, told me about a camp called Navaho Trails. Andrea was a Navaho Trails counselor, an instructor on one of the first mountain bike programs ever developed for kids anywhere. The camp seemed to bear checking out. How would a mountain bike program fit into Navaho Trails' version of the hallowed American institution, summer camp? And what, I wondered, would the kids really get out of it?

If it were anything like the camp I went to as a youth, I'd find a structured barracks type affair where insecure pre-adolescents stood in line to have their fingernails inspected by stern but well meaning counselors. They would scurry off to every 2-hour activity at the sound of a buzzer, bell, or pre-recorded wolf howl. Arriving flustered but tidy in orange and white uniforms, they would worry lest they incur extra KP duty or a de-merit for being late. The bike program would no doubt consist of 2 hours of riding around a pre-arranged course guided by a bored counselor. It would be hell for anyone with a sense of adventure. It would be Camp Granada. But, who knows, maybe this one would be different.

Camp is very entertaining
And they say we'll have some fun
When it quits raining

The boy comes screaming down a narrow single-track. A nasty boulder is all but blocking his path around a sharp turn. I shout a warning. He deftly avoids it and laughs.

"It's not that hard," he says. "You should have seen us yesterday."

I would gladly have seen them yesterday but I spent all day and half the night just trying to find the little weasels. Oh, it was easy enough to find Navaho Trails Camp outside of Bicknell, Utah. And Dale Tiffany, camp coordinator, was helpful enough. He truly wanted me to see the mountain bike program. Trouble was, they were 20 miles away near Fish Lake in the Henry Mountains. He explained that when the campers go on a trip, they cover as much ground as they can.

"Why did you start a mountain bike program in the first place?"

"I got a great deal on a dozen bikes about 2 years ago," Dale can be quite candid at times "and we had to figure out how to use them. As it has turned out, the bikes are one of the most popular activities we offer. They really get kids out into the wilderness."

Dale's enthusiasm warmed up as he continued to explain how easily kids adapt to riding bikes in the mountains and desert. He said they quickly learned that kids as young as nine can ride long distances. The kids also pack all their gear on their Raleigh Tamracks although I could see by the large amounts of food Dale was putting in my car that they had fallen short of their goal. Late that evening, I found the intrepid campers bedded down by the shores of Fish Lake, so poetically named by the Morman pioneers.

The next morning over pancakes, I met the campers of Navaho Trails. They seemed enthusiastic, especially for 7:00 AM, and for a while I thought they were excited to meet me until I realized that it was I who had brought the pancakes. The kids ranged in age from 10 to 15 and were from as diverse places as Sunnyvale CA, Leesville LA, Tuscon, AZ, Berkely CA, and Berlin GDR. Most had heard about the camp from friends or seen ads in magazines like Sunset.

Amid the laughter and fal-der-al of breakfast, a voice rose from the other side of camp.

"Your parents pay $370 a week for you to come out here" says Shawn Gogerty to one complaining camper, "so you better be having fun. Don't wuss out on me." Shawn tightens up a crank on one of the bikes. He's a little annoyed. The bikes break down a lot. Shawn is in his mid-thirties, a school teacher from Denver. He could have been the inspiration for Bill Murray in Meatballs. Attired in a sweatshirt, riding pants, and his ever present WW I motorcycle sunglasses, he is ready for today's ride.

"We're going up Um Pass today" he states.

"Where's that?" asks a camper.

"How should I know? It's out there somewhere. we'll find it, you'll ride it, and you WILL have fun."

As I'm listening to this, Andrea, co-counselor with Shawn, fills me in on the program. "It took all day for these kids to cover the 20 miles from Bicknell." "Don't forget the rain" a chipmunk-faced camper pipes up. "Oh year, it has rained continuously since we left." says Andrea. "But they did pretty well considering they had full panniers." Now I know Andrea is being generous. She's used to high mountain trails where 30 miles with full panniers wouldn't keep her away from a good party that night.

"I hate the rain," says one pimply faced older boy.

"Name something you do like, Marvin." says Chipmunk.

"Knock it off you two." Andrea knows how to break up fights, one reason she's a good counselor.

"This is a co-ed camp although this week Shawn and I are taking out only boys. The way it works is the kids come here for anywhere from three to eight weeks at a time. Each week, they pick a sport for that week. They can choose from windsurfing or water skiing on Lake Powell, kayaking on the Green River, rock climbing, hiking, horseback riding in the Henry Mountains, and mountain biking just about anywhere we want to take them. Each activity is done for a week so there's plenty of time for long expeditions."

The more Andrea talked, the more I realized this camp was far different from what I'd expected. Only a day and a half or so of each week is spent in the comparative luxury of the main camp. The rest of the time is spent out in the wilderness where counselors like Andrea are fond of saying "I won't do anything for kids that they can do for themselves." For the first time in their lives, many of these campers were *away* from mom, dad, and the TV set. They were swapping stories of skunks, bears ("an old man told us on the way up here that you're supposed to sleep in trees so the bears won't get you" said one wide-eyed kid.) and the eternal werewolf. They were scared to death sometimes and loving it. They were also doing things on bikes that most kids never get to do.

Take me home oh muddah faddah
Take me home I hate Granada

The day dawned bright and cloudless. The aspens were shimmering green all around us. Scents of pine and earth freshened by days of rain came to us on the breeze. We stripped our bikes of all non-essential gear and lubed the chains in preparation for a day ride over Um Pass just north of 11,500 foot Mt. Terrell. Our route followed a trail through a cow pasture. Home on the range. Our bikes glided effortlessly like deer and antelope playing. The skies were not cloudy but suddenly there was a discouraging word.

"It's probably going to start raining." It's Marvin, the tall, gangly, pimple-faced boy I'm getting to know as a complainer. "If it starts to rain this time, can we go back to camp?"

"No way!" Sean shoots his answer.

We turned off the main trail and started up the pass. The ten boys labored up a

steeper slope. They weren't used to the altitude since most we're still fresh from sea level. We stopped more often for water breaks. Marvin drank his fast and tried to bum from others.

"Any body here have some water?"

"Sure, Marvin, everybody but you."

They were all on to him. Marvin was a southern California boy who had grown up with little real contact with people other than what he saw on TV. He was used to getting his way but not used to having to justify it. At 15, very few camps would accept him. But here, I could see he was learning.

I remembered the words of Nancy Sampson who, along with her husband Don, started the camp some 20 years ago.

"Our programs are designed to entice kids to discover their own uniqueness. We want them to learn to value themselves as contributors to society and value others as unique contributors."

"How" I wondered "do you do that?"

"We prove to kids they're survivors. Marvin is a fine example of the kind of kid we can help," she continued. "He's not a bad kid really. It's just that he hasn't ever had to associate with kids his own age much, at least not intimately like one does in camp. When he first came here, another kid stole something from him, just to tease him. Marvin got mad and wanted us to call the police and have the kid arrested." She laughed. "That's the only way he could think of to deal with the situation."

It seemed that Marvin, and many other of the kids who go to Navaho Trails, would always rely on parents or some other authority figure to bail them out of unpleasant situations, to solve their problems for them.

"We agreed to have Marvin here on the condition that his parents have no access to him while he's at camp. They were pleased to be rid of their problem child for the summer without having to put him, or themselves, in an asylum. They're off on vacation. We find that when a kid is out on his or her own in the wilderness, they discover there is something inside of themselves they can rely on."

So Marvin's folks are off in Europe now and Marvin is in the woods learning about himself and other people.

Four hours of laboring up the trail brought us to the top of Um Pass. On the way, Marvin somehow sat in a cow patty and tried to wipe it off on one of the young kid's panniers. He was caught, of course, and forced to clean it off.

When we reached the top of the pass, we discovered, much to our amazement, that the trail had been completely blocked off in efficient Forest Service fashion. A huge log fence interlaced with barbed wire stretched to both horizons. The trail on the other side had been bulldozed. A series of forbidding mounds and corresponding holes descended the steep mountain for as far as we could see. Trees grew thick on both sides. What was once a fine jeep trail had been bombed back to nature.

"Now this looks like fun," says Sean.

"Are you kidding? There's no road!" whined an exhausted Marvin.

"Yeah, I know. It's an adventure."

"I don't like it, it's crazy and I'm going back the way we came."

Marvin has a good whine on and the other campers who usually don't pay any attention to him are beginning to wonder if he has a point. The situation is going critical and Sean knew it.

"OK guys, we'll vote on it," says Shawn. "If you want to go back the same way, see the same boring stuff, the same old cows, we'll do it. But if you want to see what these bikes can really do, we'll ride them of this here cliff and..."

He was hilarious in his argument. His sense of abandon appealed to the kids. Even the youngest had a strong desire for adventure that a leader could appeal to. Somehow, his gonzo logic convinces eight out of ten of the boys to follow him off to the wild kingdom. But two of the boys, including Marvin, were set on going back.

"No way!" Shawn's voice sounded like God broadcasting the ten commandments.

"But I thought you said we could go back if we wanted," squealed Marvin and the other boy.

A slow smile came over Shawn's face.

"I lied... Besides, we have all the water."

That little problem out of the way, the young explorers begin the descent. Most of them were seeing what a bike could do for the first time in their lives.

Carefully, then with greater confidence, they tested their bikes on the hills and dips that had been plowed up. Far from being a hindrance, the kids discovered the Forest Service had made a playground for them. Their speed picked up and soon they were flying down the mountain. Finally, they needed the helmets the camp required them to wear.

"This is just like BMX" whooped 11-year old Sam.

Marvin was screaming with joy in the first 100 yards. His compatriot in revolution was far ahead of the pack until he came to a place where the road had been flooded.

"What do we do here?" the boy asked fearless leader Shawn.

"You do this," he replied as he sped down a hill and into a foot of water. The kids followed and soon everyone was soaking wet and laughing. They continued down the trail, now looking forward to the warmth of camp.

Andrea had a huge fire burning when they arrived. Every kid had some exciting story to add to the day's adventure.

"I was going down like 50 mph then I hit this bump and went flying!"

"It was better than BMX!"

"That water was cool!"

"It was cold too!"

"I almost died! The downhill was the best part."

"Hey, you guys are not true Mountain Bikers," says Shawn. "You've been up and over a mountain in one day."

"Yeah, and we made up a song," says one kid.

"Let's hear it,"

Three or four kids start up to some nameless tune, more like the chant of warriors coming back from the hunt.

"Mountain Bikers, brainless wonders
marvels of the hills
they wear helmets to keep the sun off
and catch their brains when spilled
Mountain Bikers, Mountain Bikers
Crazies on two wheels

Alan Sherman would've liked that. But if he'd made it into a song, it would have been about a different sort of camp.

Negotiating yet another obstacle on the trail

New Products Review

TIRES

One of the most exciting aspects of this crazy mountain biking world is the continuous evolution in products that is going on. It's an entrepreneur's playground with enthusiasts across the country experimenting with one idea and another. Some work out. Some don't. The Ground Control tires, distributed by Specialized and Wilderness Trail Bikes and just introduced onto the market, and the Ritchey tires, distributed by Avocet, are two of the latest mountain biking ideas that do work.

The Ground Controls are a dramatic leap forward in off-road tire design. They're the result of hours of brain storming by Wilderness Trail Bikes' partners Charlie Cunningham, Steve Potts, and Mark Slate working in concert with Specialized. Ground Controls were designed for one purpose only, traction on dirt, gravel, rock, and mud, the normal terrain surfaces found once you turn your back on pavement. They are definitely not multi-purpose though they can be ridden anywhere. It's just that on any hard surface such as pavement or compacted dirt and gravel, they're slower than many another off-road tire such as the Ritchey. But on the trail, there isn't another tire currently available providing the same level of performance as the Ground Controls.

Normally, Mountain Bike Magazine stays well away from making any such blanket statements concerning one product versus another. Evaluating products is too subjective. Who is to say what's right and what isn't. We have no intention of setting ourselves up as the final authority. Instead, we prefer passing on the information then letting you make up your own mind what is right for you. But we're making an exception with these tires.

Their performance stands out so clearly above every other tire's that we're willing to go out on a limb and state so. The reason is simple. Every technological advancement starts somewhere and we have no doubt that the Ground Controls will turn out to be the first in a wave of new tires that will put the ones currently in use into the same category as the clunkers that led to today's modern mountain bike.

Ground Controls (the name is as outstanding as the tire) owe their grip to specially shaped blocks flanking the tire's center line. Braking and acceleration blocks are pretty strait forward. Rectangular blocks are spaced along the center line of the tire with only a touch of alternating off-set. There is no attempt at creating a center line ridge for hard surface riding. The blocks are spaced for maximum traction. The only way to really evaluate their effectiveness is to either use the same bike on a hill, switching tires after each climbing attempt, or have a number of identically set-up bikes with different tires on each one. Our climb tests showed an improvement over most other tires' traction though compared to the IRC Racer, the difference was subtle.

Ground Control

Ritchey tire

It was in cornering and side hill grip where the Ground Controls stood out. Their ability to stick to the ground was uncanny. The side blocks are unique. They're shaped like flattened crescent moons with the open arch facing the center line. The ends of these small dams are blunt points and while they provide some surface area for accelerating and braking traction, it's minimal compared to the surface area of the center line blocks. No, the side blocks are clearly intended for resisting any lateral slipping of the tire.

Additionally, the relief of each block is greater as you move away from the tire's center. Lean the wheel over and the grip seems to increase. This was proven time after time by everyone who rode them. Cornering speeds were almost uncanny. Yet even more dramatic was how solid the tires felt in a turn. There was never any squirrelness. When the tire did let go, the slide was predictable and controllable. We were continuously finding ourselves flying into turns faster than we had ever dared before. On side hills, they were unbelievable. Those side blocks just dug in and carved across where other tires slipped right out from under us.

But there's more to the tire than just the blocks. The sidewalls are remarkably soft, enabling the tire to supplely roll over the ground, absorbing irregularities and maintaining constant contact with the terrain. With equal tire pressure in two different tires, such as the IRC Racer and the Ground Control, the latter felt smoother where the former seemed to ever so slightly bounce over the ground.

No doubt Ground Controls are starting to sound too good to be true. Don't worry, they do have their drawbacks. First, they're slow on pavement. All that great traction that propels them forward on dirt also holds them back on smooth surfaces. Definitely they are not a dual-purpose tire. And initial impressions are that they may wear faster than many a tire. Time will tell whether this is in fact true. But so far, that's what people are thinking. They also tend to load up with mud perhaps a bit faster than other tread patterns. That was strictly a subjective observation for when the tires did load up with mud, every other tire did too. They just appeared to load up after the Ground Controls.

The Ritchey tires were introduced this summer. Like the Ground Controls, they are also a step forward in tire design but in a different area. The Ritchey's are a dual-purpose tire that have made all the other

dual-purpose tires obsolete. There's really nothing particularly dramatic or different in the design. Instead, they've simply taken existing ideas and made them far more effective.

The blocks are small squares with each side sculpted into a concave curve. Whether moving straight ahead or sliding sideways, those curved surfaces are always digging into the ground. Along the tire's center line, those small squares have been cut in half and offset, alternating down the centerline with one to each side. A narrow band of rubber joins the corners of those blocks, forming a continuous ridge of rubber for paved or hard pack surfaces. It's an amazingly simple and ingenious solution.

Pumped up to as much as 80 pounds, the Ritchey's are a superb road tire. We've heard reports of riders using Ritcheys having no trouble staying with roadies on the pavement. Then, after quickly releasing 35 pounds of pressure, they take off into the dirt with traction equal to most of the strictly off-road tires.

We've used them in every condition imaginable with few complaints. In certain situations, cornering for example, some riders say they prefer a more specialized tire, IRC Racers were mentioned by most, than the Ritchey. That should come as no surprise since a specialized product will almost always out perform a more generalized approach. But when it comes to all around performance, the Ritchey is currently without peer. You can race on it, trials on it, ride down to the corner market on it, mud on it, or just cruise on it.

Leaping Lizards Skin Suit

Lizard Skins are body suits that can be worn as outer- or inner-wear. The fabric is 90% polypeolylene and 10% spandex lycra. The special textured knit reputedly doesn't pile.

They're designed with flexibility in mind and can be worn for downhill skiing, nordic skiing, running, and of course biking, particularly mountain biking. They're available in two styles: one with a full-length, two-way zipper extending from the neck through the crotch, the second with a half zipper. The former is appropriate for winter use and for ladies while the latter is better for biking though both styles can be used in all sports. A soft polypropylene storm flap prevents the zipper from biting.

The only color available is black with a royal blue interior neck. Sizes are small through extra-large. Special introductory price is $68 and they can be ordered from PO Box 4522, Steamboat Springs, CO, 80477. We haven't tried them out yet other than to try them on. But based on that alone, these suits are hot (no pun intended). They look great, feel great, and are totally functional. We'll have a more complete review of Lizard Skins in an upcoming issue.

BLACKBURN APX TRAINER

Winter's coming on, the trails are either buried with snow or muddy, and you're bored and losing that great conditioning you worked so hard to attain all summer. At least if you live anywhere other than the sunbelt, that's true. Well, Blackburn has come out with a new trainer.

We haven't used it so are unable to pass on any information on it other than what their press release has told us. This is a wind load trainer with a fly wheel that is reputed to simulate more realistically riding on the road. The front wheel is removed and the fork clamped onto a triangulated stand for a sturdy position. They claim it's designed for hard workouts.

None of us have ever used a stationary trainer. The only kind we've ridden are rollers where you have to pay attention or you'll quickly find yourself crashing off. Stationary trainers are said to be lots easier while providing a better workout. You can even stand up on them, or so I'm told. At any rate, This one looks impressive and bears further investigating.

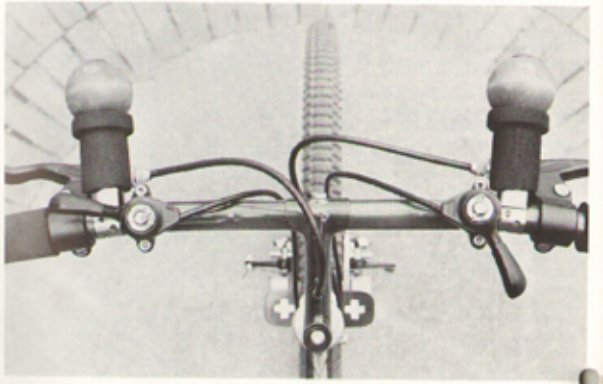
FROM THE WORLD OF MOOTS

Moots Multi-Mounts and Roller Cam Mounts are now available from Moots Cycles in Steamboat Springs. Moots Mounts attach via a clamping system to seat stays, chain stays, and forks. They're adaptable to any frame and enable you to precisely adjust the stud position for whatever brake and rim combination you're using, including 26-inch and 700C wheels.

Another particularly handy item Moots now available are Moots Portage Pads. Unlike most other straps that attach to the seat tube and top tube, the Moots pad clamps onto the top tube alone. The pad is dense foam with a top grain leather cover. The pad doesn't interfere with a pump or water bottle and can be attached to any bike.

Road Handles are just what they say, handles that attach onto flat bars for road riding. It's an ingenious solution to the flatbar problem of long, road rides. They clamp on, extend out in front of the handlebars, and are padded with 2 inch diameter wood balls on the end. They look funny but they work. Everyone who has tried them thought they were great. If you like flat bars but do a lot of road riding, check these out. They might be just the trick for you.

The Multi-Mount costs $20/pair, the Roller Cam Mounts are $25/pair, the Portage Pad is $25, and the Road Handles are $30/pair.



Moots Mounts, Moots Road Handles

Trials and Errors

by Bodfish

Paul Gallaher

Beginners are easily intimidated by picnic table climbing and backward stair-step descending mountain bikers. However, like various other "trick" sports - frisbee, hacky sac, juggling, and the like - such skills come only after hours and hours of blundering and fumbling. Many of us shy away from trials competition when we imagine the consequences of blundering: crushed components and a desperate body somersaulting onto a bed of river rock. Expert trials riders claim that actual bike or bodily injury is uncommon.

But, Hey! This can be a helluva lotta fun. My first "ride" in observed trials competition was a few years ago during the Sierra Nevada Fat Bike Fest. Wm. Jeff Lindsay of Mountain Goat Cycles set the course in a rockbed/scrub forest/riverbank area adjacent to Butte Creek in comfortable and scenic Butte Meadows.

I had just returned from a complex and aerobic, road rally along the forgotten roads and railroad beds of Lassen National Forest. Still buzzing and throbbing from the high speed dirt ride, I pulled up to the first section of the SNFBF trials course.

"Going for no dabs today, huh Bodfish?", inquires Lindsay as he disbelievingly shakes his gray shaggy head while glaring at my cleated shoes and toe clips.

"Riders may walk the sections and ask questions. No practice runs on the bike, however," bull-horned Jeff. I removed my shoes, leaned my bike into a bush and took a stroll along the course. There were ten sections requiring no more than a total of fifty yards of bicycle riding.

First up was a tight U-shaped route on softball-sized river rock. It didn't look particularly challenging but turned out to be the spoiler for the third and fourth place finishers. The second was a narrow path approaching a seemingly innocuous mud hole (how were we to know Lindsay had thrown a wedge of firewood in there?) which was exited by making a ninety degree pivot to the right (pivot sounds much too graceful for what actually took place) and a short six-inch jump to dry ground followed by an immediate ninety degree left.

Jeff assured us the entire course was "beginner caliber" and, since none of us claimed any trials expertise, there was no need to set up an advanced route for each stage. I made sure to get in line behind Steve O'Bryan - the only "trials expert" I had ever known. (Afterall, he'd won the Slow Race in town a few years earlier and was capable of two-mile wheelies.) By following Steve, I had hoped to learn all I needed to know by watching his example.

This strategy worked well until section four. Somehow, my attention was diverted as O'Bryan left the gate. Executing number four correctly required an immediate steep climb from the entry gate to a narrow shelf, then a quick ditch-descent featuring a decaying, two-foot diameter log at the bottom. The exit gate was three feet beyond the log.

I looked up just in time to see O'Bryan coming to rest on his back in a willow thicket next to the log. I was on my own here. (These trials course composers are a sick lot. If you can find one slinking around in a creekbed a few hours before his event you'll hear a hideous and perverse string of snickers, chuckles, and guffaws.)

It was on this run that I learned the heretofore unexplained rule - "rider must exit with bicycle attached to body". Toe clips didn't help much. There was a point atop the log where the bike insisted on a different direction of travel even though I had made a successful body launch for the gate.

Trials section five looked straight forward enough, a thirty-foot creek crossing, (until Lindsay explained that rather than arriving on the opposite bank, the task was to make a U-turn half-way across ("It should be only bottom bracket deep") and exit the entrance gate. "You can make your U-turn with the current or against it, your choice." Nice guy, that Lindsay.

The last five stages were along the same vein: "Ride that mossy plank, duck through the poison oak and hop up on that rock

Trials continued

ledge there." My friend and teacher O'Bryan finished the course with seven points, (two dabs plus five points for the crash in the willow.) I finished with four times as many ("gee ma, wasn't I good?" "Not especially, son. The object is to finish with the least amount of points.) Incidentally, there were no bad bruises, broken bones or crunched bike components through-out the afternoon.

As I said in the beginning, all this takes is some practice - trials and errors. This is where the rest of you have a distinct advantage over lowland Californians and other Sun-Belt types. While they are out foolishly putting in the miles, you can be down in the basement or out in the garage dancing your two wheels over various household obstacles. Try the wife's (or the mom's) cedar chest for "ledge mounts". Your tool box is a good substitute for practicing log hops while serpentines through piles of laundry will have to do for simulating overgrown trails. Old couches are great for that decaying log effect and finally, feather-beds feel incredibly similar to sandy riverbanks.

So don't despair, by next spring you too can be hopping over picnic tables while holding a beer in one hand and smiling at the assembled multitudes staring in dumb-founded awe. Practice assiduously and you may even be able to really wow them by successfully completing a U-turn on a bare spring mattress while moving against a shower's stream.

For more information on how to put on a trials event, contact NORBA (National Offroad Bicycle Association). Jeff Lindsay also suggests consulting your local motorcycle shops on the details of organizing a trials event. "Hey, these guys have been holding trials events for years."

Handlebars cont. from p. 9

flared drops will soon be available from Specialized and Wilderness Trail Bikes. These are the first drop bars specifically designed for mountain bikes and no doubt will be the forerunner of more to come from other designers.

The last major consideration is placement of the shifters. Bar-end shifters cannot be operated while braking plus the increased width of these new mountain drop handlebars demanded something new. Thumb shifters were the obvious answer but where to mount them was the problem. After more trial and error and considerable deliberation, a modified Suntour thumb shifter was fitted just below the brake lever. In order to brake and shift safely and comfortably, the shifters are mounted on the inside of the handlebar with the shifter axis or pivot pointing directly at the front-most part of the front tire. The advantage of this placement takes on added importance proportional to speed and roughness of terrain.

The final result was worth the considerable effort invested. The new bars with modified shifters come the closest yet to blending the best of both flat and drop bars. Undoubtably they're simply one more stage in the continuing evolution of mountain biking equipment.

Modifying Suntour LD 2800 Thumb Shifters for Drop Bars:

Left used on right, right used on left for rear derailleur down shifting while braking (front derailleurs vary). Remove all lever stops from base plates and grind smooth. Modify straps to accept bigger handlebar diameter by filing square openings at each end 1/16 of an inch Cut thumb lever approximately 3/8 of an inch in length. Shape and smooth. Mount on bars immediately below brake levers.

Stoves *Two models to accent your cycling travels*

Paul Gallaher

Coleman Peak 1, left, Wonder Epigas, right

A ring of rocks surrounding a fire may be romantic but a modern cook stove is far superior. They're light, easy to start, burn hot, simmer gently, and save the environment. Cooking food is never a problem when every stick of wood around you is soaking wet. Put up your tent, light up your stove, and you're set.

Stoves come in a variety of shapes and types to suit every need. The two in this report represent two of those types, the Coleman Peak One white gas burning stove and the Wonder EPIGas propane stove. The former requires carrying along a fuel bottle and periodically refilling the stove. The latter uses self-sealing, propane cartridges for no muss, no fuss cooking except for the necessity of carrying along the required number of cartridges.

COLEMAN PEAK ONE STOVE

In this instance, the too often over-used "new and improved" title is justified. The stove itself has changed little over the years but what recent changes have been made clearly improved the product. Early models required an inordinate amount of pumping to get the stove started and even more to keep it running. No longer. Starting is a two-step process rather than three and all but infallible.

The Peak One burns white, regular, or unleaded gas though the former is strongly recommended. That fuel versatility makes obtaining fresh fuel easy. Oftentimes enough fuel to fill a quart bottle can be gleaned from gas pump hoses. Don't worry if all you can find is regular; it'll burn fine. A built in pump makes starting the stove a snap. No need to worry about spilling gas in the process of preheating the stove. Just pump the pump thirty times, open the valve, light a match, then pump another sixty times and you're set. It works every time and it's much easier to do than it is reading how to do it. The only time some type of preheating paste is necessary is in conditions far colder than any cycler is liable to encounter.

The Peak One has always been known for a hot flame and that hasn't changed nor has its excellent simmering characteristics. The stove is a joy to cook with. The base is solid with three legs folding out for a low profile stance that can be situated almost anywhere. A built in wind screen around the burner is effective in all but the worst winds, even when simmering.

Fuel consumption is low and a tank of gas when used sparingly seems to last for more meals than it should. But fuel consumption is more a matter of how you use the stove than the stove's burning characteristics. The Peak One isn't particularly light but then that sturdy nature means you shouldn't have any problems with it. That has at any rate been the stove's history. The generous gas tank holds enough gas for short outings without any need for a second fuel bottle if used conservatively. Perhaps the stove's best quality is its price, somewhere around $40 but that can vary by quite a bit. It's been known to sell for quite a bit less than that during sales and at those discounted prices, it's a great buy.

WONDER EPIGAS

A lot of people have never been able to feel comfortable with having to fill gas tanks then either prime them by pumping or spilling a small amount of gas then light them up. The entire subject is entirely too explosive for them. Hence the birth of propane stoves with cartridges. But the problem with those in the past has been the non-sealing nature of the cartridges. Once the cartridge was punctured by the stove, it had to remain on until empty. That wasn't always too handy when it came time to pack things away. The Wonder EPIgas stove doesn't suffer that drawback.

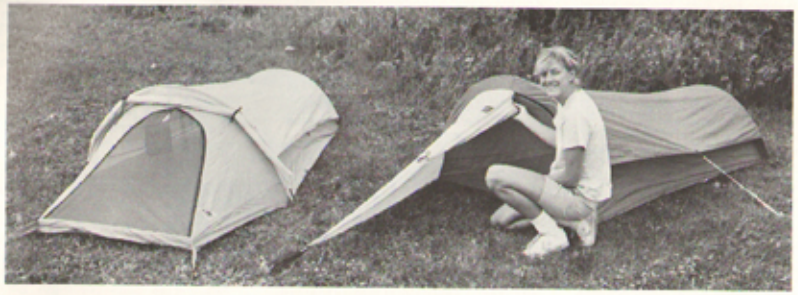
You can put on and take off the cartridge as many times as you want. Starting it couldn't be easier. Screw the stove onto the cartridge, open the valve, light a match, adjust the flame as needed. Finished? Turn it off. Oops, forget to cook something? No problem. Just turn it back on and light it. Cartridge stoves are the epitome of simplicity.

But they're not perfect. Generally they don't burn as hot as the other types and when the fuel is low in the cartridge, keeping a hot flame can be an even bigger problem. Plus you're always lugging along those cartridges. Tossing them into the woods is an ever present temptation but at least when you're cycling, the chances of coming across a trash can are far better than when backpacking. If you run out of fuel, finding more fuel can be a problem too.

Nevertheless, despite these drawbacks, cartridge stoves have maintained their popularity. The Wonder EPIgas is light, very small, easy to set up, and inexpensive. In short, if you like cartridge stoves, a good buy.

Tents

PEAK ONE CONSTELLATION AND CANNONDALE TOURING TENT *(right)*



The Constellation and Cannondale Touring tents both use the tried and proven tunnel design for minimal weight and a low, wind shedding profile. Both are either comfortable one-man tents or tight two-man tents in a pinch.

At just over three pounds, these are about as light as you're going to get. There's not much room for two people and definitely not for any gear but when you consider both the weight and packed size, they're great cycling tents. For the single traveler interested in the minimum weight, they might be just the ticket. Especially if much desert travel is planned. The roofs have large mosquito netting panels over which an attached rain fly rolls. Combined with the large mosquito netting door, there's plenty of air circulation.. But, and this is an important but, circulation is somewhat limited with everything shut down during a deluge. More than likely the result will be some condensation. How much you'll get will depend upon the weather conditions. That's a small price to pay considering the tents' minimal size and since hopefully you've planned your cycling trip with the weather in mind, you'll only have to carry your tent, not use it. If there's a major drawback to backcountry cycling tours, it's having to hang out in a tent while the rains come down and the trails get muddy. The only way to make all that pleasant is with a big tent but who wants to lug along a big tent? With this in mind, either of these tents fills the bill. * *

Plumline cont. from page 37

constriction over the knee when pedaling yet wind protection is still complete. That protection is important since cold air can make for sore knees. The second trick is a chain guard on the inside of the right pant leg. Since it's just about impossible to keep from occasionally hitting the chain, the black chain guard will keep the pants from getting unsightly with chain grime. There's also a heavy piece of nylon in the crotch and butt area that ought to wear quite well.

The back of the pants, like the jacket, is polypropylene without the nylon wind shell. The pants and jacket combination worked great. They were comfortable and warm without being too hot even during hard climbs. We also wore them during light rains and, though the nylon isn't even water resistant, everyone who used them remained warm and dry. For fall and mild winter temperatures, the outfit is excellent.

The only thing we heard complaints about had nothing to do with their functional capabilities. The nylon is a dark blue while the polypropylene is a light gray. The nylon butt patch was also dark blue. The result was a definite visual broadening of the butt and hips. Complaints about this were strongly worded even to the point that some refused to wear the pants.

The jacket and pants were light enough with little enough bulk that tying them around the waist was no problem. Putting on the pants requires taking off the shoes but that is just an annoyance rather than a major problem.

The last layer in the Plumline system is the Gore-Tex Touring Jacket. Basically, it's just the 3-Season Jacket with Gore-Tex replacing the nylon shell and three pockets in the back instead of two. During the test period, we received quite a bit of rain and the jacket was a real favorite. It worked great. Kept riders dry with no condensation build up inside yet was light enough to just tie around the waist when not needed. When combined with the Plumline Gore-Tex Cycling Cap, the outfit made wet weather riding a joy instead of a bummer.

For still more riding protection, Plumline also makes the Sespe Gaitor and Gore-Tex/Thinsulate Touring Gloves. The gaitors keep the lower leg and ankle dry, but not the shoe. The gloves seemed like a good idea but the Gore-Tex is on the back only and in practical use, did not keep the hands dry though they were warmer than had no gloves been worn.

Plumline has also introduced a particularly fine cycling outfit for cool weather riding: stretch polypropylene knickers and zip-neck turtleneck shirt. The knickers are padded over the knees. While that's certainly nice to have in case of a fall, the best feature is the additional warmth provided. The knickers were exceptionally comfortable and just the right amount of insulation for cool fall rides. Their black color was also appreciated because of its ability to absorb the sun's heat. Knickers may not be very high on your list of desirable cycling clothing but try these Plumline knickers out before making up your mind. Chances are you too will be convinced of their value. In fact, the few skeptics on our staff were soon seen wearing them every chance they got.

The zip-neck shirt was another favorite and not just when cycling. It quickly became a standard part of the daily wardrobe. Stretch polypropylene, padded shoulders and elbows, and a sharp design made it into a good looking, functional piece of clothing. Combining the knickers and zip-neck with the Trilite Wind Top and Pants was the perfect solution to clear but cool days of cycling. The polypropylene wicked away any perspiration while providing insulation during climbs and then the nylon shells supplied the necessary protection from the wind during descents.

More Letters

continued from page 17

Canadian author and environmentalist Bill Mason said it eloquently: "It's sad if our culture sees wilderness as a place to play. Wilderness should speak to our souls, teach us to be quiet and to respect the world we live in."

Fat times forever - but not in wilderness areas!

Norm Tessman
Prescott, AZ

It's too bad you don't read as eloquently as you write. I did not "attack" environmentalists or wilderness; I "attacked" the Sierra Club's grouping mountain bikes with ORV's. All those non-wilderness acres of Forest Service land that you talk about can suddenly become closed to you and your friends if the Sierra Club has its way. By labeling mountain bikes ORV's, the Sierra Club is who is aligning mountain bikers with four-wheelers, etc. They are the ones "promoting animosity between environmentalists and mountain bikers."

As far as discarding technology in the wilderness, does that include pack frames, dome tents, Gore-Tex, trail-eating Vibram soles, etc. Or do you define technological intrusions according to what meets your personal idea of a wilderness experience. That is precisely the problem with the Sierra Club's decisions. They are based on subjective reasoning, not objective.

As I said in the editorial, I can live with bikes banned from wilderness areas. But calling mountain bikes ORV's and threatening to ban them from still more lands is too much. The Sierra Club is not the only environmental organization. Opposing them is not a statement of anti-environmentalism. It's a statement against irrational decisions.

Editor,

Neat idea for a first issue. However there are several issues regarding the use of bicycles in wilderness areas which I'd like to raise.

The first involves traditional uses being allowed to continue. Bicycles are certainly a traditional use. In the 1920's, the Army had a bicycle corps which rode from Missoula, MT all the way to Saint Louis, MO. The corps were riding through wilderness area before the term even came into existence.

Second, all wildernesses show some inpacts that are the result of human activity. Any use causes impacts. Hikers and horses do, and bicycles would also if allowed. The question is, what levels of impacts do we deem acceptible? Some wilderness areas are less "wild" than others. Many have dirt roads or trails wide enough to constitute a road. Why shouldn't bicycles be allowed on them? If riding were allowed on these corridors, the potential for user conflict should be little greater than that which occurs on roads everywhere. Bicyclists venturing further into wilderness areas, off these roads, would most likely be heavily loaded down with panniers. They would hardly be the types who cause complaints about "bikes barreling down trails blasting people off them."

This problem brings up my final point. Even if bikers ride fast, they are doing it under their own power. The argument seems to be more against efficiency than anything else. Riders are the same scale as what they encounter. It's a roughly equal proposition. People who drive up in their cars should realize that out on the streets, it can be a life-or-death situation when bicyclists encounter motor vehicles. In comparison, complaints about getting startled seem more than simply trivial, they are downright arrogant and dumb. Perhaps if we all learned to be a little more courteous, many of the problems existing or imagined would ease. The question of "mechanized" (quick, hide the straw) wouldn't be important.

Ben Berto
Missoula, MT

Editor,

I read every word of your "Spotlight Colorado" - you would all do well if you ran for office in the respective chambers of commerce I'm sure, but you really needn't sell Colorado to the fat tire crowd - it's on everyone's expedition agenda.

This is not criticism...Like I said, I read everry word. One thing that surprises me is the heavy lean toward single tracking, (with lots of push-n-ride there) - especially since my adventure buddy, Lisa Jo, and I found 2000 miles worth of spectacular dirt in your state during a recent September (33 passes in 30 days).

So let's write about Schofield, Ohio, Cottonwood, Tin Cup, Cumberland, and Kebler Passes...Oh sure, a truck may pass you every couple of hours...but this is the kind of riding that gets folks jazzed about fat biking - seldom too tough and plenty of scenary. And, of course if you want "sweat wringers",there are roads that can bring the best out of ya - Argentine, Webster, Taylor, Crooked Creek, Lands End, North Engineer, Gypsum, Guanella or Cebolla Creek to Slumgullion Pass, and fast becoming one of the "ultimates" Mosquito Pass.

Somehow I think you'd best "sell" Colorado to mountain bikees world-wide by featuring the easy dirt - like Rollins and Boreas and Waunita and Los Pinos - or Elwood and Stunner Passes. Maybe you'd like to look at my slides? But, this is Colorado through the eyes of a Californian, which may turn your stomachs a bit...Does it help to know that I never resided in Marin? I live 200 miles north of the Bay Area and grew up in Kalamazoo, MI (so I'm not one of the "fat brats" afterall).

Now that we've exposed some of the technical, gonzo single-tracking possibilities in Colorado, let's write about the stuff even die hard road bikes would love.

Bodfish
Chico, CA

Leading Edge cont. from page 37

ne/lycra panels. Moisture is wicked away to evaporate into the atmosphere.

How does the system work? Superbly. The tights were amazingly comfortable and looked great. Just wearing them makes a person feel 100% faster. Fortune smiled on us for the test. It rained part of almost every day. The tights kept legs so dry and warm that the weather conditions were almost unnoticed. On one particularly cold day of sleety rain, thin wool dance tights were worn under the tights. The tester normally complains about her knees any time the temperature drops below 50 degrees but not this day. She came back with a mud splattered, smiling face after hours of cycling in the rain having remained warm and dry throughout the ride.

The vest and jacket performed equally well. The vest has a short neck zipper and pulls on over the head while the jacket has a full length zip with a velcro storm flap covering it. The same tester was wearing both the vest and the jacket on that particular day and after her ride, stated that never before had she enjoyed cycling in the rain. She's notorious for refusing to go out any time the weather isn't ideal but this four-way stretch Gore-Tex clothing turned her into a regular mudder.

The hardest parts of the body to keep warm when cycling are the hands and feet. Leading Edge has these covered too. The booties are made out of four-way stretch Gore-Tex with a thin rubber sole. A zip up the back facilitates putting them on though it's definitely not easily accomplished. But a tight fit is necessary to fit into toe clips so the struggle is worth the effort. The material comes well up the ankle then wraps tightly around the leg for an excellent seal.

The gloves are made out of polypropylene with ultra-suede palms and thinsulate in the back for warmth with a cotton exterior back for wiping sweat off your brow. The cuff is also made from polypropylene and extends well up the wrist. No Gore-Tex is used on the glove since Jim and his testers found that there was no way to keep the hands totally dry. Instead, the gloves keep your hands warm even after they get wet. We found the gloves did everything Jim claimed they would do. The cotton back for wiping sweat or mud from the face was especially appreciated.

Topping off the ensemble is a Gore-Tex cycling cap lined with polypropylene. A number of companies are making pretty much the same hat for the simple reason that it's a great idea. The polypropylene extends below the cap and forms an ear muff for cold weather. We've been wearing such hats for skiing for years and are still convinced they're the best.

What most impressed everyone was that we could hammer through the mountains in the worst weather, stay dry the whole time, and look like we were dressed for an attempt at the one kilometer record. The clothing is totally functional and absolutely hot looking. Even better is that it will all fit inside a small saddle bag Jim is designing specifically for the clothing. Or you can just tie the tights and jacket around your waist and take off knowing you're covered for just about any weather condition.

Bill Mog enjoying a little trailside cuisine.

continued from page 19

inches then equipped with quality components. It's an impressive buy.

All three bikes have a very centered 71 degree seat tube and 17.25 inch chainstays that put the rear wheel right where you need it for climbing. The head tube angle is a relatively laid back 68.5 degrees on the Kickers but a degree steeper on the Team Comp. All are characterized by a balanced, responsive ride - a little tricky for the casual rider who likes to doze at the wheel but beautifully quick and responsive under expert guidance. Trials and tight trail riding are the milieu in which Fat Chance bikes evolved and excel.

A new addition to the line is a bona fide trials bike equipped with five speeds, a 70 degree head tube with no rake in the fork, a 13.5-inch bottom bracket, and a 24" rear wheel that moves forward and back to adjust the wheelbase. If you're into nose stands and picnic table riding, it's a machine worth looking at.

Fat City currently dominates the eastern custom market, a market that is growing just about as fast as they can keep up with it. Only a few Chances are to be found west of the Great Divide, the land of legendary creations from enigmatic designers. There's nothing mysterious about a Fat Chance though. Lean practicality fairly breathes from its tubes. It's made to work and work well.

mountain bike

November - December

Scott Warren

Casey Cunselman with Ned Overend in hot pursuit at the Colorado State Championships, Durango CO

Features

10 **Jim Thorpe Rides Again** ..... Steven Lyte
14 **Why Race?** ..... Hank Barlow
18 **Chris Chance and Fat City Cycles** Richard Compton
30 **Fly Fishing and Mtn. Bikes** ..... Roger White
38 **Summer Camp** ..... Paul Gallaher

Columns

6 **Editor's Note**
8 **Guest Column with Gilda Lyons**
9 **Mark Slate**

Plus

12 **Cambridge Revisited** ..... Richard Compton
34 **The Urban Renewal Project** ..... Paul Tepley
43 **Trials and Errors** ..... Bodfish

And

13 **Book Reviews**
20 **Racing Bikes**
41 **Tires**
47 **Stoves**
46 **Tents**
36 **Foul Weather Clothing**

Cover photo by Paul Gallaher
Bill Mog with Steve Cook and Scott Brown racing, Crested Butte, CO

Back cover by Steve Benson
Relaxing on the abandoned railroad trestles of Colorado

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Editor's Note

by Hank Barlow

The trick to living is perspective. It's how you see things, how you measure their importance. The only reality is death itself and even that some will argue is only a point of view, a change in perspective. I'm more than a little skeptical about that on the rather safe assumption that whatever it is, I'll find out eventually but in the meantime, it's of little consequence.

What I like about mountain bikes is the change in perspective they provide. They're still bicycles, still have two wheels, derailleurs, brakes, handlebars, and they still require effort on the part of the rider. And yet they're as different from road bikes as Nordic skiing is from Alpine. Mountain bikes represent freedom for me, freedom from the day to day trials of bobbing and weaving my way through this blindingly complex world we've created, freedom from the constant assault of machines crowding the highways, freedom from the highways themselves and civilization's flotsam that washes up along the highways' shores.

But since beginning this magazine, I've discovered that the refreshing perspective mountain bikes provide can be lost in the press of getting each issue out. Mountain biking is taking on serious overtones. When a person's livelihood is dependent upon something, that something can quickly become very serious business. That seems to be one of the gifts passed on from generation to generation of the offspring of those European immigrants who drew up the rules governing this country. This business of life is serious so we'd best put aside our childhood toys and get on with creating careers, bank accounts, and stock portfolios.

This is not a universal trait, this serious business of living. American Indians, before they were overwhelmed by our ways, were the most secure when the garbage was hitting the fan. Faced with the ultimate reality, they laughed. But when things seemed to be going along too smoothly, that's when they worried. Insecurity was the source of their security. I recently read a story in Outside Magazine about a white man spending time with South American Indians. The worse things got and the harder they had to work to get their food, the harder they laughed. They turned the very act of surviving into a game where losing and winning are not even part of the equation.

I've found myself in somewhat of a quandary. Mountain bikes have reintroduced into the grownup world what is considered by much of the adult population a kid's toy. The reason is simple: they're fun. All kinds of rationalizations justifying mountain bikes can be put forth but in truth, the bottom line is precisely that fun.

But then that Puritan belief system begins its insidious intrusion into the fun. As more and more people discover how much fun mountain bikes are, more and more people discover there's a buck to made here. Then others with an equally Puritan bent also intrude and suddenly mountain bikes are being banned from this place and that. Naturally, those who have found themselves banned from where they once played get up in arms. And this affair of mountain biking is serious all of a sudden.

This seriousness is a whirlpool that sucks and drags the unwary down. At first riders race against one another for the sheer joy of feeling the wind against the face and beating the other to the bridge. Unfortunately modern societies abhor any vacuum of organization so races become organized. Organized races mean prizes. Prizes mean money. Soon teams are formed and the importance of races is measured by the size of their prize list and the size of the spectating crowds. And once again the seriousness of life has had its way. Racing is no longer just the joy of competing. It's serious business.

I took off for a few days last month and went walking through the mountains with our two Llamas. No bike, no work, just walking and camping in the mountains with my family and friends. Crossed a 13,000 foot pass in the wilderness area, lay in our sleeping bags listening to thunder roll through the valley, woke up the last morning to snow on the ground, watched the clouds evaporate and disappear. By the time we were walking down the valley back to our truck, there wasn't a cloud in the sky. It was one of those silver dollar days that puts a gleam in the eye and a spring in the step. I didn't want the day to ever end, didn't want to go back to town and all the work I knew was awaiting me. I'd shed the seriousness of living like a Labrador Retriever shedding water and I felt great. The thought of returning to that perspective and what it does to me was enough to make me laugh and cry at the same time.

Oh, there were times during those days when I thought about the magazine and about mountain bikes. At times I'd find myself looking at a trail and thinking about how much fun it would be to ride it on my bike and what a silly thing this entire controversy about bikes in the wilderness was. Other times I'd look at the trail and be thankful I didn't have a bike along for I really don't relish taking it for long walks through the mountains. Or I'd think about how I wasn't out on my bike training for some upcoming race and how any conditioning I'd been able to hoard was being scattered on the winds like so much chaff.

Only I'd think about those things from a completely removed point of view. It didn't really matter if I could ride my bike on the trails or not or if I was in shape for some race. Those were just miniscule blips on the horizon of bright blue skies, wildflowers drying in the autumn air, and jagged peaks soaring up into the sky.

I returned to town and back to the fray. Mail was piled up, letters awaited replies, the October issue was pleading for help, a few people were ragging on me about bikes in the wilderness, both for and against. But I saw it all differently, as if I was looking at it through one of those mirrors that distorts the image, accenting the obvious and reducing the subtle. That buzz is wearing off as I become once again immersed in the daily affairs of Mountain Bike Magazine and the off-road cycling industry in general. Things are becoming serious. But for awhile, I can stand back and look at it all and shake my head in wonder.

Winter's on its way. The high peaks have already been dusted with the first snowfall, leaves are turning, the air has that touch of cold that makes me look over my shoulder wondering how soon flakes of snow will follow. I welcome that change of seasons (I its accompanying change of perspective. Even though I'm slightly frustrated because I didn't get to ride anywhere near as much as I wanted to, I'm glad the summer is passing. I can put the bike away, pull out the skis, change my perspective.

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Thank you.

Editor
Hank Barlow

Art Director
Kimberly Schappert

Staff Photographer
Paul Gallaher

Advertising Manager
Mark Waters

Business Manager
Nancy Schappert

Contributing Editors
Mark Slate
Tom Prehn
Richard Compton
Gary Sprung

Editorial Correspondence
Photographic Queries
Advertising Sales
please contact:

Mountain Bike Magazine
Box 989
Crested Butte, CO 81224
303-349-6804

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Applachian Hill Country

by Gilda Lyons

Dear Mr. Barlow,

I read your first issue of Mountain Bike Magazine and fell in love with it. As an avid mountain bike enthusiast, I devoured every page over and over again then hungered for more after I had worn out the covers. My only disappointment was the coverage extended only to the western areas of the country, which is typical of most bicycling magazines. There is an eastern United States.

I've always believed if you complain you should present a solution, so I have written a little article about some experiences I've had in the mountains here in Tennessee and Georgia. Being a high school biology teacher makes me appreciate the beauty of our natural resources in America and I would love to share some of the thrills I get when I ride through our mountains. I hope you can use the article and please keep up the good work on your promising new magazine.

Sincerely,

Gilda Lyon
Chattanooga, TN

You're right. The first two issues have had too much western coverage. I live in the west as do my friends so putting together western stories was a snap. Doing so on the east has been anything but easy. I've been told by numerous easterners that the riding is even better than out west but getting stories out of there has been like pulling teeth. Either eastern riders want to keep all the good stuff to themselves or else they're too busy riding to write. So thank you for your letter and accompanying story. Perhaps your piece along with the other eastern stories in this issue will spur more creative writing along the east coast.

I am not a professional bicycler and never intend to be. I do not train, don't have a cycling computer, and only climb hills for the sheer thrill of barreling down the other side. My panniers consist of old army bags picked up from a flea market and my cycling clothes are whatever is clean in my T-shirt and short drawer. I don't know my pedal cadence, have no idea how fast I ride, and never know how far I've gone. But when it comes to pure physical joy and fun, cycling can't be beat, plain and simple!

Since my first 10-speed, I have loved cycling and the sense of freedom that comes with feeling the wind hitting my face. But I never knew real freedom until I became the owner of a mountain bike. No, I don't own a special, hand-built, autographed model, but a Trek 830, purchased in my local bike shop in Chattanooga. Don't ask me about gear ratios, wheelbase, or head angles for I have no idea what they are. All I know is it's fun.

No longer am I glued to smooth paved roads and streets. Instead of dodging pot holes, I can't wait to find them. If I'm riding on a deserted sidewalk, I no longer have to get off when the sidewalk ends to gently drop my tires over the edge. Nope, I just hop over the edge and jump up onto the next sidewalk. It's the greatest!

Every chance I get, I load my Trek into my van and head for the mountains. By mountains, I'm talking about the southeast Tennessee and north Georgia mountains. The southern end of the Appalachians is an endless source of mountain biking excitement. Ten miles north of Chattanooga is the Prentice Cooper State Forest with 25,000 acres of land and so many dirt roads you can be lost for days and never cross the same trail twice. You can camp out or just drive in for a day's ride. Whatever your choice, the riding is guaranteed to be thrilling. Anything from gradual, gentle slopes to steep, leg-burning hills will challenge your riding skills as you dash over ruts, rocks, and dirt mounds.

When I go, I have no schedules to adhere to, no training runs to time, and no predetermined distance to cover. I just ride until I get tired then I stop. There's always something to see at my rest stops. I've never failed to come upon a deer off in the woods, sometimes even crossing the trail in front of me. There may be a red-tailed hawk circling above (I always carry a pair of binoculars with me in my flea market army bag attached to the top tube of my bike) or it may be an uncommon or endangered plant flowering for the summer. Boring moments in Prentice Cooper are unheard of.

Then, there's north Georgia. I just spent a week camping and riding the trails in these mountains and there were so many dirt roads I had to add some to my topographical maps! Just exit the interstate anywhere between Chattanooga and Atlanta and head for the mountains and you'll be in off-road cycling heaven. Hit some of the little towns like Ellijay, Blue Ridge, Hiawassee, or Helen and you'll find innumerable dirt roads jumping from one mountain to the next. Just park your vehicle, unload your bike, and go for it.

For a real challenge, go south of Helen, Georgia to Yonah Mountain. Right beside the Mt. Yonah Campground is a 2.5 mile dirt road straight up to the top. Talk about a leg burning, lung bursting good time! That one is hard to beat! The view from the top is worth any pain getting there. A sea of mountain ranges stretches into the distance with seemingly no stopping. But you'd better have brakes in tip-top shape for the blood-curdling descent unless you'd like to end up wrapped around the nearest oak tree.

Obviously, I'm sold on our Appalachian Mountains. A constant canopy of ageless trees keeps you cool, the scenery is spectacularly beautiful, while the endless stretches of isolated roads make for sensational mountain riding.

If a riding vacation in the south sounds interesting, there's no better place for diversity than the Appalachians. If you need a guide, contact me for information. You may have to take me with you though, for I look for any excuse to get back into the mountains.

Mark Slate

Handlebars

Off-road bikes have traditionally used motorcycle style handlebars and brake levers whose bend and shape evolved over much time and testing. Though there are subtle differences in handlebar sweep and lever ergonomics available for mountain bikes, the basic rider position remains the same. This has been cause for criticism among long mileage off-road enthusiasts transplanted from road bikes.

Handlebar preference has more to do with what a person is used to than any other factor. Motorcycle transplants are partial to flat bars for the same reasons ex-roadies are partial to drop bars. A second consideration affecting handlebar preference is the kind of riding that will be done. For long rides, twenty-five miles or more, drop bars make sense. Their four distinct hand and arm positions alleviate shoulder, back, and neck discomfort. Those positions evolved from years of use by road racers.

Hills are one area where drop bars have a definite advantage over flat bars. Climbing with the hands on the brake lever hoods is generally considered the most efficient position by those used to this position. On rough terrain, most riders have their hands on the drops but control suffers with conventional drop bars due to the hands being parallel to the top tube instead of almost perpendicular as they are on flat bars.

Mountain bike riders with drop bars discovered that tweaking the bar ends outward improved their balance and stability. Wrist interference with the tops when braking was also improved. This tweaking was accomplished by cold setting each side of the handlebars in two planes, being careful to retain the symmetry. The end result is a slightly angled brake lever and drop flared out 10 degrees. Sever distortion results when trying to attain more than 10 degrees of flaring. This cold setting is best performed by qualified bike shops who understand the desired end result. The drops were then cut and bar-end shifters installed. This set-up failed in at least one respect. It is not possible to down shift and brake simultaneously with the same hand.

Mountain drop bars require a high stem with little forward extension. Typically, mountain bike top tubes are lower and longer than road bikes, necessitating the use of taller stems such as the Specialized 25 degree, 11cm model or the SR Swan. Tops should be approximately the same height as the saddle. The brake levers should be about the same distance from the saddle as on flat bars. The idea is a secure position for rough stuff handling with differing positions for cruising and climbing.

If the slightly flared position is good, conceivably more will provide increased stability on rugged terrain. Overall width is a major consideration both for clearing tight obstacles and proper feel in the braking position. A larger angle than 10 degrees further aids control in demanding technical sections when the flared bars overall width is also increased. This extra leverage combined with the 25 degree angle greatly increases stability.

Most riders using drops prefer Cinelli 64 or Specialized Model 1 bars because they have the least drop and forward reach. This helps when changing hand positions. The high stem and multiple bend bars provide better arm positions for shock absorption, thus reducing fatigue. The braking position on the drops is such that when hitting obstacles, your hands are driven into the hooks instead of being bounced off the bars. Flat bars provide more leverage for resisting front wheel deflection but large impacts can also dislodge your grip if you're caught unawares.

Flat bars provide more confidence to less experienced off-road riders and on rugged high speed terrain. I have also yet to see any trials riders with drop bars. While drop bars make lofting the bike easier, flat bars in combination with toe clips accomplish the same result. Drop bars excel in climbing though some riders, experienced with both drops and flats, claim they can sprint better with the solid grip characteristics of a flat bar.

A flat bar has one position basically. You can tuck in next to the stem for an aerodynamic advantage on smooth downhills but generally you're locked into the braking position. But that one position can be comfortable if the bike is properly set-up.

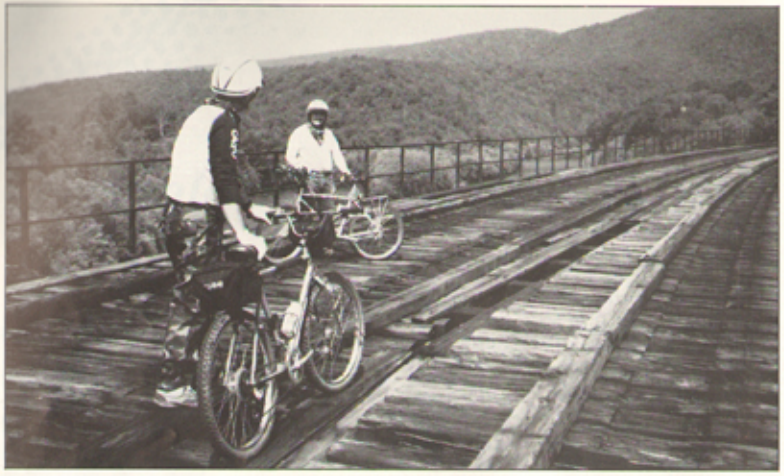
Mush Emmons

Mark Slate, along with Steve Potts, builds Steve Potts and Swift Mountain Bikes. He is also a partner with Steve Potts and Charlie Cunningham in Wilderness Trail Bikes Components.

The nature of drops encourages switching hand positions. These multiple positions are great for cruising long miles. However, there is only one secure braking/handling position: in the hooks with brake levers close at hand. This position feels far more comfortable to me when the hooks and drops are flared out, putting my hands at an angle to my direction of travel.

Though virtually all other builders, racers, and riders use less sweep, I've found that the ideal flat bar angle is about 65 degrees from the top tube or 25 degrees off of perpendicular. I've also found, after much experimentation, that the ideal drop bar bend is about 25 degrees measured from the top tube. Drops so far have only been flared 10 degrees due to distortion but 25-degree

continued on p. 44



Jim Thorpe Rides Again

story and photos by Steven Lyte

Take a map of the Eastern United States, stick a compass point in the little NE Pennsylvania town of Jim Thorpe, then draw a circle with a radius of 200 miles. You can now make some interesting observations. First, you've holed a perfectly good map. More importantly, perhaps, you'll discover that nearly 25% of Americans live within a four hour drive of this now-out-of-the-way destination.

Doubtless some statistical nerd, who'd be better off riding a skinny-tire bike, will challenge the precision of my facts. But the point is that those of us who don't have the Rockies as our backyard have plenty of superb mountain bike riding very close to home. For you can do that same operation with a compass and a map, poking a hole just about anywhere in the Northeast and come up with results as gratifying as our 4th of July ride from Jim Thorpe.

I'm sure the western vistas are spectacular but we easterners like a little more Deliverance/Industrial Archeology type experiences when we set out for a ride. There has to be some doubt as to whether we'll return and, so failing, to which of the many horrible possibilities we might fall. These were some of the thoughts on my mind as we parked our vans behind the old Jersey Central station and prepared for out sortie along the Lehigh River.

Jim Thorpe, more suitably known by its older name of Mauch Chunk, was a child of the very beginnings of the industrial revolution. The town first served as the point where coal was transferred from train to barge. After the demise of the canals, the two railroads running through promoted Mauch Chunk as the "Switzerland of America". Then the trains, too, went away and the town fathers were left with a rapidly dying tourist trade. Back in the fifties, digging up the famous Indian athlete and moving his remains to Mauch Chunk and renaming the town seemed like a good idea. Unfortunately, nobody flocked to see the granite memorial they erected and business kind of sputtered to a halt.

Now there's been something of a revival. Suddenly people are rediscovering the fascination of the town and the beauty of the surrounding area. A walk through the business district requires an occasional smack on the head as a reminder that you're in the 20th century. And the town's location, at a point where the river exits one gorge and plunges into another, makes for spectacular scenery. Someone's running a steam train from the old depot and it seems there's some type of artsy-craftsy festival every weekend. Plus, as the gateway to some terrifically interesting mountain biking, what more could you ask?

Every good adventure should have an objective. I'd recently read of a place called Glen Onoko, several miles up the Lehigh River from Jim Thorpe. It had been developed as a resort by the railroads and was accessible, at the turn of the century, only by train. In fact, when the resort's large hotel burned in 1911, there was no way firemen could get to the site to put out the blaze. The rest of the buildings soon fell to ruin and the beautiful glen and its many waterfalls, the resort's raison d'etre, became overgrown and forgotten. Our goal was to find and explore it.

We headed out of town about ten, following the railroad access road on the southern bank of the river. We hadn't gone far when we came to the "beach" where rafting companies end their 30-mile whitewater voyages through the Lehigh Gorge. Rick Davison, of Whitewater Challenges in White Haven, PA filled us in on the fun to be had on the trip through the gorge. We decided to get in touch later and try to work out a combination bike/raft trip for the fall.

About a mile into the ride, the old Jersey Central right-of-way, now abandoned and ripped up, veers north and crosses the Lehigh on a girder bridge. Railroad bridges don't need decks so there were some mighty big gaps between the cross-ties and we pussyfooted our way across. On the way home, tired, aching, and with a real taste for a Stroh's, we just barreled our way over that same bridge, caring less if it tossed us for a thirty foot dive into the water.

My topo map indicated there was an old tunnel ahead and, after another perilous bridge crossing, one of our party managed to spot what looked like a hillside cave off to the right of our track. Riding up the embankment revealed that the cave was, in fact, the top of the old tunnel. Most of the mouth had been filled, but there was space enough to enter and plenty of light at the far end. It was a tricky ride down the other side of the fill and through the dark rubble. Fortunately we approached daylight cautiously for it was soon apparent why they hadn't bothered to fill the other portal. It was also the abutment for a now-missing bridge and it was 40 feet straight down into the river!

As we stood on the precipice, looking back into the old tunnel, all of us remarked how unreal the interior appeared, like one of those papier-mache jobs that Lionel trains used to run through. It would have been a real challenge to get to the opposite bank from that perch. Lacking both the ropes and the desire to rappel, we made our way back through the earth to our original point of entry.

We found the bridge that had replaced the one missing from the end of the tunnel farther down the roadbed. By this time we were getting used to riding over ties and made short work of it. The opposite shore was the takeoff point for the trail to the glen that we sought. But our ride had been so pleasant and relatively easy that we thought we might scout ahead for possible future camping sites. We could always hunt for the waterfalls later.

What followed was an exceptional afternoon's ride along the old roadbed. To our left was the still active Conrail line, to our right the Lehigh River. In more than 24 miles of cycling, up and back, we encountered only four other people, and two of them were on the water. The railroad architecture was fascinating: old bridges, retaining walls, and signals. While we were often out of sight of the river, we could always hear it rushing over rapids below. On either side soared the tops of ridges, some more than a thousand feet above the smooth, upward gradient of our water level route.

While there was an occasional area where the ties had not been completely removed, most of the ride was pretty smooth. There's nothing better than an old coal railroad roadbed for off-road riding. It's generally straight, level, and free of vegetation. At times we were into the 20 mph mode.

Using the cycling computers, the topo map, and the compass we'd brought along made determining our location fairly easy. But there was still enough of the element of the unknown to make it a real adventure. We really had no idea what might lie around each bend in the river: perhaps an impassable barrier or an unsupervised chain gang. Yet, as always, something drove us on. It was that secret male desire for danger, survival, and remembrance.

At one point, the gorge widened and we found a long, flat trail leading to a beach. The river slowed as it ran across a rocky bottom. On the opposite shore a sheer rock wall rose from the water to join the ridge above. With the blue sky, the red sandstone, and the tall pines clinging tenaciously to the cliff face, the scene was very much like the West. But we knew where we really were. The heat and humidity racing each other toward the 90 mark as the morning's breeze disappeared saw to that. This was definitely not the Left Coast.

We set our sights on a map spot called Penn Haven Junction where the Conrail line split in two and Black Creek flows into the Lehigh. According to our calculations, it was about halfway through the gorge. We started looking forward to the return trip, a steady downhill, when the junction appeared right on schedule. More interesting bridges, ruins, and artifacts followed. The river curved and there was a swift running though strangely deep, black section directly below our perch on a tall retaining wall.

I had a strong urge to push on. All of us wished we had the benefit of someone else's experience in this area. We surely would have brought tents and continued until we reached civilization or found a point in the gorge where we could go no farther. But, commitments beckoned. As we turned back toward Jim Thorpe, we vowed we'd return another day and satisfy our curiosity about what lay ahead.

Meanwhile, back at the Glen, we did our usual number of trying to go as far as insanely possible without dismounting. Fortunately, the July undergrowth was soft. Unfortunately, the "path" along the stream up the glen was hyper-steep. Somehow, the Snickers and lemon pie (sorry, OutWest guys, there was no quiche available in Penn Haven Junction) I'd had as a "lunch" were no longer supplying much energy. Besides, once you've seen one waterfall.....I guess I was getting a bad attitude, thinking about a beer and a shower and a bed and the way my butt was going to feel going the last couple of miles to the van. But upward we climbed. My recommendation: do the climb to the falls before the ride. No wonder they let that hotel burn.

It was too bad we'd so cooked ourselves.

Portal of the Glen Onoko tunnel

I had hoped to show my buddies around Jim Thorpe after our triumphant return to the station parking lot. There are a number of historical sites, quaint shops, cheap bars, and an amazing museum in the depot. But we were done in and could think of nothing more than quickly stowing the equipment and heading out of town by the quickest route.

Maybe you'll have a bit more time for the area than we did that day. I hope, at least, you'll have enough energy to stick that old compass point in your map and see how far you are from Jim Thorpe and the Lehigh River Gorge. There's a lot of beauty and adventure waiting for you there and, delightfully, not a lot of people to share it with.

Cambridge Revisited

by Richard Compton

It was a bicycle that let me again fall in love with a city I thought I knew by heart and left a dozen years before. It was, admittedly, a Monday-Tuesday affair but it transformed the past forever and gave my present dreams the poignancy of fresh ambitions. Not years, but only seasons, lay behind me.

There are far more bikes and as many cars in Harvard square as there were a dozen years ago - a baker's dozen since I scrawled through my last exam and hopped the first plane to Wyoming. It's reunion week and the Yard, the square, and the Holyoke Center Plaza where I sit are crawling with prosperous members of the class of '60 and their spouses and offspring. A fast French restaurant, industriously supplying past, present and future generations of yuppies with croissants and coffee cheerfully served up by blacks and Italians from the other side of town, has replaced the staid Harvard University Press outlet that used to fill this corner of the Center.

I feel closer, however, to the streetwise paperboys hanging out in a corner of the plaza and playing tough with their BMX's and high-rise cruisers, killing time between work and school. As I leave, they pause in their private ritual to cast cool, appraising eyes at my Fat Chance, an honor as great as any the University could bestow. Given half a chance, they'd probably steal it but then the University would gladly take all my money as fair payment for once having given me a degree. We are all masters at justifying our own desires.

It was freedom that I wanted then in those school years and freedom that drives me still and I find bicycles quite as liberating as the "select company of learned men". It was on bicycles and on skis that I escaped from that select company into myself, trusting the world of my own body more than the earnest blandishments of conflicting minds.

Once, in the fall, I wandered north from Cambridge carrying only a banana, a cookie, a dollar and my duvet. I rode all day until I came to the ocean somewhere near the New Hampshire line. The beach was cold and deserted and I sat there bewildered by the emptiness, the cold, and the surf's ceaseless noise. Eventually I curled up in my parka and tried to sleep. At dawn I was back on the empty highway and, following a more direct route, was back at school in time for lunch. I had discovered nothing of which I could speak, only something unnameable that was my own.

Riding was a lonely occupation, and I believe I preferred it that way, alone and vulnerable inside my own cocoon of knowledge and power, however limiting that may have been. I believed in the ultimate hostility of the outside world; only inside could I find the peace I craved. Bicycling was a metaphor for my existence: fragile and lonely, traveling a road to some vague and distant goal, beset on all sides by unfeeling monsters breathing death and carrying off human hostages to a grim and unholy fate. I was the unknown hero who was going to set them all free, yet none was more trapped than I.

As I hunched over my handlebars, my life focused on the few yards of crummy pavement in front of my wheel and I cursed the antediluvian Department of Public Works and dared the drivers behind me to hold as tight a line as I. It was all a perfectly obvious manifestation of the corrupt and anti-human nature of the system and a clear indication that I was destined for higher things. It didn't occur to me for quite some years that I could have been wiser than I was, or started the revolution with my bicycle. Luckily, I escaped a self-imposed martyrdom, discovered that the world could be shaped to hold my own emptiness, and lived to ride a mountain bike.

Now mountain bikes aren't God nor are they His direct descendant. They are merely a shining example of technological evolution - taking the same parts and processes and making something more versatile and better adapted to its environment. "Racing" bikes of the sort I used to ride (I still keep one in my shed) are just that - specialized machines designed for endless miles of wheel sucking and as ill suited for street fighting as a poodle. Mountain bikes on the other hand are bred for wide open spaces where route finding is a matter of balancing the obstacles encountered against one's skill, determination, and final objective. Customary usage of terrain and machine are strictly optional.

This ability is wonderfully suited to the urban jungle. No longer was I a victim of circumstance but the lord of my domain, from Harvard Square to the Middlesex Fells. Would I have accepted such responsibility a dozen years go, been willing to trade in my cocoon of fear for such untrammeled freedom. Probably. I knew I had changed because I rode a very different bike but it wasn't until I returned to the streets of Cambridge on a borrowed Fat Chance that the difference came home to me.

Curbs were only a minor inconvenience, not a major barrier, likewise for potholes, cobblestones, and anything else showing less than ten inches of relief. The balance of power was now in my favor. I switched from vehicle to pedestrian to vehicle and back again with hardly a gear shift and nary a dab. Standing in line at a stoplight, I felt quite the equal of the truck beside me, knowing I could beat it off the mark and down to the next block where I might stay in the right lane or jump the curb and mosey down the empty sidewalk. The chance sunken manhole cover, wide-mouthed sewer grate, or bit of obdurate trash that made riding a fragile, skinny-wheeled road bike an exciting but enervating gamble were just so many opportunities to exercise my new found power.

I rode around and around, refreshing memories and checking out the changes. Where I used to fight the traffic for road space on Brattle Street was now a mall, empty at midmorning, so I slipped over the curb and rolled across the bricks, quietly short-circuiting the designated traffic flow. Rolling up Kirkland Street, I exchanged glances with a denizen of Harvard labs pedaling the other way on his antique Raleigh. One look was enough for him to comprehend the tremendous advance my machine represented. I wonder how long before he gets one.

For all their obvious advantages and the marked increase in the total number of bikes, mountain bikes are still scarce in Cambridge. Most of the machines I saw were strictly second-class, skinny-tired commuters, objects of convenience, not of pride and joy. "Why ride a good bike in the city?" goes the conventional wisdom. "It will only get trashed or stolen." Whether fat-tire technology will eliminate that excuse, I don't know; I speak only from first impressions. I expect no two-wheeled utopias but having tasted the nectar of fat-tire freedom, I know its addiction.

The ability to dash and dart with avian impunity, shielded from the cold, hard ground by a two-inch cushion of air, transforms the city from enemy to friend. Parks, playgrounds, and empty lots regain their childhood freshness. Sitting upright on a stable, responsive machine, even the daily commute is less of a bore, not to mention safer and softer.

I am not a materialist and I don't believe that technology will either save or damn us. This freedom I feel is as much my own as the machine's. These new bikes are the result of someone else's desire for freedom in a challenging environment and the new technology enables us to share that freedom just as we share our fear and ignorance in the form of wars and pollution. It is all a matter of choice and choosing freedom erases the barriers that once seemed insurmountable.

Heading north from the Fat Chance factory in Somerville (a few blocks from the Cambridge line), we encountered the inevitable blocked street and "Bridge under Repair" sign but the "Oh no!" of normal travel was transformed into a collective "whoopee!" as we shot off the pavement and into the dirt. We then dodged across a narrow wooden walkway and back onto the street, eliciting a few "all rights!" from spectating kids.

Our objective was the Middlesex Fells, a nineteenth century watershed preserve that still supplies water to the suburbs but, just as vitally, is also a wild park laced with dozens of miles of dirt roads and rocky trails. Such reservations dot the Boston area, providing rocky, wooded enclaves where you can listen to the leaves or wear out your knobbies on a summer afternoon.

Mountain bikes conform to none of the artificial distinctions between city and country, civilized and natural and we returned to the city streets in the same spirit of adventure in which we left: cutting corners, jumping curbs, and flicking cans into the gutter with our front wheels - generally behaving like a bunch of kids.

Mountain bikes cut the city down to size, making fun of all the monolithic hassles that used to keep me cowering behind my ego. Perhaps, I think, taking a peek outside, it is possible to grow up without killing oneself in the process.

Book Reviews

MOUNTAIN BIKERS MANUAL, Lake Tahoe Edition
by Bill Cushway
available from the author at:
Box 7102, Tahoe City, CA, 95730

This is exactly the kind of book mountain bikers need more of. It's small, probably inexpensive (the price was included), and to the point. That is if your point in going to the Lake Tahoe area includes mountain biking, and it probably should based on the information packed in this guide. Besides describing twelve rides, Bill has included a brief but informative section on mountain bikes in general, how to size one, how to maintain it, and how to find your way around even if you get lost.

Those chapters are well done with an excellent sense of humor lightening up the valuable tips he's included but the book's real strength are detailed route descriptions. Armed with the book and the appropriate topos, anyone ought to be able to find and follow all of the listed routes. Without the topo, things could easily get tricky in a hurry. Not for a lack in his descriptions. It's just awfully easy to get to flying along and totally pass a turn. With a topo, getting straightened out again is likely. Without it, well, that's part of mountain biking too, the adventure.

At any rate, the book's great, the riding sounds great, and hopefully its existence will spur others into putting out guides to their favorite areas.

THE MOUNTAIN BIKE MANUAL
by Dennis Coello
Dream Garden Press
Salt Lake City, UT
$7.95

This guy practically lives on a bike. We're talking 10,000 miles per year. Somehow, and how he does it is probably an interesting story in itself, he's also married. Whether he lives to cycle or cycles to live isn't completely clear. But whichever way it is, he's managed to do what many a reader has probably dreamed of doing: his riding and writing are his employment. He's on the road and being paid for it. Perhaps not in a royal manner but nevertheless, he's out there cycling over the world and getting paid to do it.

With that many miles under his knees, he's got to have learned something about cycle touring by now. And he has. His primary form of bicycle transportation is now a mountain bike. THE MOUNTAIN BIKE MANUAL is the result of his experiences, experiences gained from the school of hard rocks. This isn't a bunch of theoretical stuff. He's done it, seen it break, fixed it, and gone on. The book is full of practical advice. The only other place you could probably find as much good solid sense would be in a bike shop but the truth of the matter is that Dennis has more experience than even hard core bike mechanics. It's one thing to work on bikes with all the tools available or a phone call away. It's another to be out on the road where no one speaks your language and a bicycle is practically a space age marvel and you have to fix a bike with whatever you have.

You don't need to be interested in world tours or even one-nighters to appreciate this book. Dennis talks about choosing a mountain bike, caring for it, modifying it for commuter use in the city, and, of course, touring with it. And all in a well written, interesting manner. He doesn't talk down to the reader like many an expert likes to do. He's just passing on what he's learned over the years and miles.

It's a good book, highly recommended. THE MOUNTAIN BIKE MANUAL might just be the best buy in a bicycle book that you'll ever find. It might even spur you into going cycle touring on a mountain bike. Off-road of course. So buy it. You'll learn something of value even if you already know all about bikes.

Why Race?

Hank Barlow

Getting to the first Mosquito Pass Series race required a late departure after work. I drove three hours then stopped in a campground to sleep for five hours. My watch alarm's beeping sent me stumbling out of my sleeping bag into the cold light of early dawn and into the driver's seat for three more hours of driving to the race site. I arrived just in time to scramble into my bike clothes and jump on my bike for the start. Some fifty minutes later, the race was over.

There I was, six hours from home, one Ritchey tire wealthier for placing second in the expert class, and wondering why I drove six hours for less than an hour of riding? Being editor of this magazine has reduced my riding time to almost nothing. Between the magazine's demands and my family's needs, there's little time left for heading into the hills. Giving up a day and a half for a too short race over an unaesthetic course was a major sacrifice. Heck, I could have stayed home and ridden all day on single tracks and jeep roads without ever crossing my track!

So why did I do it? Evidently, I, like many others, have this competitive urge within me. Racing is an opportunity to see how I measure up against others plus it provides a motive for training, a motive beyond just staying in shape, strictly a subjective state of affairs.

Racing also expands the limits of what I think is possible on a mountain bike. In that first race, a fellow on a Moots passed me just before we turned onto a single track angling down a hill to an intersection with a drainage ditch bordering a gravel road. I'd carefully ridden through the ditch during the first lap but on the second lap, this guy who'd passed me headed towards the ditch at full speed and, as lightly as a bird, hopped over it and disappeared down the road while I braked to ride through. I kept thinking about how he'd done that every time I approached the ditch. Had I not seen it for myself, I wouldn't have ever considered that as an option for crossing that or any other ditch.

Tracy Smith in the Ironhorse Classic, Durango Scott Warren

I drove home from that first race puzzled. The course had been boring, the distance too short, and the drive too long yet part of me was looking forward to the next race in the series. I'd been riding enough that I'd thought I was in pretty good shape but the pace, as racer after racer went by, had clarified my actual condition. I wasn't a wreck but I was a long ways from being seriously competitive. Finishing second in expert and eigth overall was more a reflection on the level of competition than my own.

The few pro-ams were long gone off the front from the start. My race was back in the pack with what turned out to be novice class entrants (which class someone entered was strictly a matter of personal choice). Each lap there'd be someone nearby and that was who I raced against. Sometimes I'd come out ahead, sometimes not. But that race within the race kept me pushing harder than I would have otherwise. I'd be sweating up a hill, cursing the course, ready to bag it, and someone would sail by like they'd found a secret tailwind and suddenly I'd be hammering again and going as fast as I could to stay with them and hopefully repass. Afterwards, I kept thinking, damn! with a little more training, I could do really well. I decided to hang in there, race the series, and worry about why afterwards.

Race two was a dandy. The drive was a couple of hours shorter but that wasn't what made it so enjoyable. The course did that. We raced over a series of jeep roads and double tracks at the Lake Eldora ski area near Boulder, Colorado, the same track used for the '84 NORBA Nationals. We flew over road sections, darted along twisting double tracks, splashed through stream crossings and bogs, and hammered rocky uphills and rockier downhills. The course encompassed everything that makes mountain biking such an exhilarating and challenging sport.

We raced the circuit three times and every time around was better than the one before. I was last in the Expert class for much of the first lap. About half way through, I started passing a few racers until suddenly, on a steep hill in front of me, I spotted a friend of mine. Like a camera lens focusing in on its target, I zeroed in on him and jumped on the pedals. I caught up and the race was joined. Where we were relative to the rest of the pack was irrelevant. We were hammering our best trying to outdo one another yet encouraging each other on at the same time. When Lou dropped back with a derailleur problem, my sails lost some of their wind. I chased someone I didn't know but it wasn't the same. But then a stump knocked my rear wheel askew and while I was straightening that out, Lou passed me and disappeared up the track.

I finally got the wheel fixed and took off after him, hammering for all I was worth knowing this was the last lap. I flew around a turn and there he was pushing his bike up a long hill. About the time I thought I'd be able to catch him, he looked back and, seeing me, started running up the hill. We finally flew across the finish with Lou leading the way.

When it was all over, there was no doubt the drive getting to the race had been amply rewarded. My legs were cramping and my arms were on the verge of joining them but I felt great. I'd had a good race with friends, passing and being passed in turn, and had finished ninth in the expert class, nothing spectacular but satisfying. I'd thoroughly enjoyed myself and was psyched for the next race.

The third race was a disaster aesthetically. I left Crested Butte early in the morning and drove three and a half hours to the start line. The race started shortly thereafter. The course was up then back down a graded road. The climb was never really stiff - middle chain ring the whole way - but it also never let up. I rode most of the way with a guy on a Fat Chance. He was pushing the pace the whole time and I was barely hanging on. Finally, near the top, he shifted up a gear and I couldn't hang on any more. I let go and slowly drifted back, disappointed at my slowing speed. Once I let go, my strength seemed to leave me even faster than it had been before.

But the downhill was great: full-speed, big chain ring stuff. I caught one racer and was eagerly closing in on two more but ran out of race course about fifty feet too soon. But once again, it was over too soon. And because of prior commitments, I was on the road home even before everyone had finished. Three and a half hours later I was back at work.

From the time I'd left to the time I returned took a little over eight hours. About an hour of that had consisted of cycling. I was again seriously questioning why I was ddoing this. Finishing ninth again felt good yet where I placed wasn't a priority, wasn't why I was racing. I'd long ago given up any worries about being at the front of the pack. No, my race was back in the pack. But still, why I was racing wasn't clear either.

In retrospect, that I raced in the entire series to find out why I wanted to do so strikes me as somewhat strange. Racing to find out why I was racing doesn't make much sense but that's what I did.

Racing expands the limits of what I think is possible on a mountain bike

The carrot that kept me participating was the final race over 13,200 foot Mosquito Pass. Mosquito is reputed to be the state's highest vehicle pass. It's an 1800's mining road between Fairplay and Leadville. The road traverses the Mosquito Range beneath which lay some of the richest silver and gold veins ever exploited in Colorado. The mines were played out long ago and the towns have been hanging on with ever more frayed shoe strings but the pass is still there.

I figured I'd have the race wired. Few people live near the base of a 13,000 foot pass like I do. The road up Gunsight Pass starts near my home and is rough, steep, and sustained, the perfect practice route for Mosquito. Three weeks between the third race and the final left me plenty of time to get in some solid training.

So much for the best laid plans. The magazine kept me on a tight leash and I made it up Gunsight once in those three weeks. Plus I was attacked by some willows during a ride over a single track and violently thrown to the ground. The impact with the

Paul Gallaher

Scott Brown, Don Cook, Steve Cook, Todd Sweitzer, and Bill Mog on an afternoon training ride

ground joined with the magazine to keep me off my bike even more.

Mosquito Pass attracted the largest field of the series. And for the first time, I wasn't the only veteran. As usual, the pace off the start was faster than I really felt like going. So once again I was off the back and watching everyone else hammer up the road. I started wondering why I was doing this. If it hadn't been for the other veterans, all of whom were in front of me, I probably wouldn't have picked up my pace. But I did and slowly, I passed one and then another until finally there was only one vet left in front of me.

His legs looked like steel springs and my objective became just keeping him in sight. The climb was sustained and the pace remained fast. Because of that pace, I soon found myself walking sections I would normally ride. But I was caught up in the momentum of the race and pressed on, chasing those in front while being chased by those behind. Ever so slowly, I was gaining on the veteran in front of me and I started thinking I could pass him. Then I looked up and saw him running up the hill. I felt like yelling at him to slow down, damnit.

His running didn't last and before long, I crept by him. He was walking more and I was riding more and the distance between us opened up. But instead of experiencing relief at having passed him, I became anxious. At least before I'd been able to see him and could pace myself accordingly. Now I felt like he was breathing down my neck and I ended up forcing my pace even more. I couldn't slow down for fear of being passed yet my muscles refused to go any faster either. I was perched precariously at the limit of my strength, balancing my effort between just making it over the top and staying ahead of him. I had this image in my mind of him steadily pumping up the hill, my back clearly focused in front of him, just waiting for me to crack, and like a flash, he'd be by.

Steve Benson

Beth Appleton preparing for the Rocky Mountain Series

I was riding in a trance, blindly staring at the road, and almost ran into a mountain goat crossing the road. Two more were standing beside the road to my right. They were so close I could almost have reached out and rubbed their noses. The sight of those wonderful, mountain animals put the race in perspective and made me laugh. So much for this struggle I was engaged in and so much for the argument that mountain bikers scare the wildlife.

The views from the Mosquito Pass are spectacular. Across the Arkansas Valley is Mt. Elbert, highest peak in Colorado and second highest in the contiguous US. Next to Elbert is Mt. Massive, second highest in Colorado and third in the US while Mt. Harvard and La Plata Peak, third and fourth in Colorado, are also clearly visible. In fact, over a dozen of Colorado's fifty-six 14,000 foot peaks are visible from the pass.

I didn't see any of them. I was in too much of a hurry. It was as if I was riding one of those horizontal escalators so often found in airports. You know how you walk along that moving sidewalk and then it ends and spits you out onto the floor and suddenly you find yourself running. Or at least I do. That's how it was. My mind was into pumping up the pass and suddenly I was over the summit and heading down before I even grasped that the climb was over.

The descent turned out to be one of the roughest rides I've ever experienced. My eyes had to be riveted on the road. The pounding was intense. At one point, I made a wrong turn then had to turn back to the correct route. I was in a partial panic that I'd look back to see racers streaming by but no one did despite the time I lost.

Like the uphill, the downhill seemed like it would never end. My arms and hands ached so bad I contemplated walking to give them a break. I didn't because I kept thinking things would let up and because I knew there were others behind me somewhere. So on I pressed though slower and slower since my hands could barely grip the bars.

Just before the course finally hit the graded road to Leadville, I heard a bike behind me. I hit a short uphill and gratefully came out of the saddle and pounded up. Not having to squeeze those brakes anymore was the best thing in the world. Suddenly I was on smooth dirt and started to fly. My highest gear was pretty low and before long, the guy behind me, riding a Team Stumpjumper with drop bars, flew by. He turned out to be a vet also and he won our class by a few seconds. The one I'd been chasing up the hill came in quite a bit later. Turned out he was from New York, owned a bike shop, and sponsored a racing club. He and a few members, all vets, had come out for the race. They'd arrived the day before and promptly raced over a 13,000 foot pass! It was an amazing performance. He'd been the second vet to the top!

At last, the race and the series were over. I sat in the sun and watched riders come racing across the finish line and wondered if it had all been worth the effort. At that moment, I didn't care if I ever rode over Mosquito Pass again. Anytime would be too soon. The climb up had been fine. My only frustration with the climb stemmed strictly from my lack of proper conditioning. The downhill had been a bear though. I literally hadn't enjoyed a moment of it. But now that time has passed and the constant jarring is only a slightly blurred memory, my feelings towards Mosquito Pass have mellowed. By the time next summer rolls around and it's time to start thinking about the possibility of racing over it again, I'll probably be having fond thoughts and images of pounding over the top.

Plus there's always that nagging little thought: geez, with a little more training, I could do really well. Maybe I could even ride with the Pro-Ams. Not at the front but at least respectably, maybe squeezing into the top ten. Besides, maybe next year there will be more veterans, enough for our own class.

But I think I'll pass on the rest of the series. I enjoyed the competition, enjoyed matching myself against others, but the courses over which we rode were not worth the effort. The competition is fun but for me, the ride itself is more important than the race. My free time is too precious. I'd rather stay home and take the day off for an all-day ramble through the mountains than repeat those long drives for only an hour's ride.

It's just a matter of priorities. My judgement of a race is based solely on the grin factor, not on how I place. I go as fast as I can and I definitely get caught up in racing against whoever is in my vicinity within the race. I even get slightly bummed when someone I'm working hard to beat beats me. But any delusions of athletic grandeur were lost long ago. I race to have fun and the quality of the course has more bearing on that than anything else.

But whenever a race over a course that sounds like it would be fun, challenging, and long comes up, I'll be right there ready to go. I thoroughly enjoy the competition, finding out just how good my conditioning really is, being pushed and pushing in turn. And racing against friends is even better. There's a certain sense of camaraderie that goes in hand in hand with competition, especially mountain bike racing at this stage of its development, that makes it really special. So I imagine next year will find me once again weighing the attractions of jumping into the car and heading off for a race versus staying home and going for a long ramble through the mountains. If I knew there would be a veterans class, I'd definitely have to reconsider any decision to curtail my nacent racing career.

Letters to the Editor

Editor,

Congratulations on a fine premier issue! Enthusiasm for outdoors activity and biking fairly bubbles off the pages. I am delighted to see a magazine written by cyclists with such a love for the backcountry, and the most reasonable way to enter many areas of wilderness, the Fat Tired Bike.

Equipment reviews done by writers with first hand experience are another strong asset to your publication. Your reviews seemed to be well balanced between showing the assets and strong points of good products, and why a particular feature might not be desirable. Not gushing and glowing (like certain other heavily advertised magazines), and not nit-picky.

Bravo for your articles on wilderness protection and especially those articles about fragile ecosystems. I believe that FTB's have a place in desert and other backcountry experience, but an aware and responsible riding population is essential. Without such awareness, mountain bikers are certain to be lumped into the category of users of dirt motorcycles and jeeps. With care, the mountain bike need make no more impact than two people walking single file, out of step.

Please continue articles like these. You have shown a very fine beginning toward filling a gap in outdoor experience magazines.

John Ludwig

Editor,

Mark Slate's article on roller cam brakes contains a point that not a few bike builders will contest: that if you choose to mix-n-match roller cams with cantilevers, the roller cam should be placed up front. Granted, 70% of your braking power, thanks to the physics of gravity and momentum, is in your front brake. All the more reason to fit the more powerful roller cam in the rear to beef up that sad sack 30%. The front brake just plain doesn't need any more help, and a fist full of front roller cam at the wrong moment on a downhill can result in a woeful endo. Some folks with roller cams front and rear even go so far as to de-tune their front unit in an attempt to lessen its braking power relative to the rear. Cable routing is also much cleaner and simpler with the roller cam in the rear, and this arrangement eliminates the dread cantilever "stab-in-the-back" which cyclo-cross riders and other folks who shoulder their bikes find so annoying.

It is not just a coincidence that the Fisher Montare, the Ritchey Ascent, the Salsa A La Carte, the Team Stumpjumper, the Mountain Klein, and numerous other upper end mountain bikes are designed the way they are, rather than the other way around.

Bob Slope
Santa Cruz, CA

Editor,

I enjoy your magazine enough to shell out hard-earned $ for a 2-year subscription. Not only that, I'd like to send my old man a 1-year subscription insofar as he got into mountain biking before I did.

I was dismayed to see the proposed Sierra Club policy in the Editor's Note in the second issue, having been a Sierra Club member for virtually all of my life. I'm sure my father will be equally concerned, particularly in view of his long service to the Sierra Club at local, regional, and national levels over the past twenty years.

More upsetting, however, was the extreme "us versus them" confrontational stance adopted in the editorial. Viewed in a broader context, mountain bikers and Sierra Club conservationists are brothers and sisters when faced with the threats of big money, slash and burn resource extraction development interests. Rather than the squabblings of sibling rivalry, might I suggest a little communication and cooperation? Rather than getting pissed off and burning your Sierra Club card, why not get involved and communicate your concerns directly to the club? Why not form a mountain biking group or section within your local Sierra Club chapter to promote safe and sane backcountry bicycling and educate the public and fellow Sierra Club members about the benefits and responsibilities of mountain biking?

In summary, patience, persistence, cooperation, and compromise are ultimately more beneficial and rewarding than desuctive, dogmatic, confrontational extremism. Seek the stability of a balanced perspective.

Alan Nelson
Berkeley, CA

Thank you for the note and support via the subscriptions. And I agree, compromise is far more beneficial. I also believe that it is not the mountain bikers who are confrontational but the Sierra Club, based upon their actions. The last I heard, the proposed policy has been passed. Perhaps working with the Sierra Club would be better but at some point, mountain bikers have to stand up for their interests before we're thrown off of still more land. You're right, extremism is not the answer but sometimes that's what it takes to create some movement to moderation.

Editor,

As one who rides over three hundred miles a month and recently competed in my first NORBA race, I share your enthusiasm for mountain bikes. I do not agree, however, with your editorial stand against bike-less wilderness areas and the Sierra Club. In fact, I think your demands, if you make them seriously, are extremely selfish and short-sighted.

Here in Arizona, less than 15 percent of the total area of national forest is designated wilderness area. The other 85 percent offers literally thousands of miles of dirt roads and unrestricted hiking trails to ride on with good conscience and no ethical or legal hassles. To me, demanding to ride wilderness areas is senseless; particularly when it involves fighting against environmentalism. Who needs access to the few remaining islands of peace in this mechanized-to-death country when there are so many other fine places to ride?

Let's also face facts on the trail damage-danger issue. Mountain bikes do skid, slide, and eat into trails. Every study has confirmed this, and I've personally ridden too many miles to believe otherwise. In fact, you yourself write, in your Crested Butte article, "A groove has been worn by bikers descending in a controlled skid..." Regarding speed, here in Arizona we usually ride as fast as we can and wish we could go faster - I presume Colorado riders do the same. Even more at issue, however, than erosion of trails or possible biker-hiker collisions, is the damage that mountain bikes do to the wilderness experience.

Apparently you have never enjoyed wilderness for its best quality - as a refuge to visit for quiet and isolation, where nothing mechanized comes around the bend of the trail. There hikers can forget about automobiles, wars, inflation, and that humanity is so rapidly devouring this beautiful planet. The lonelier the area, the better; and the more one can discard technology and concentrate on the solitude.

Surely, you must realize that now is an incredibly bad time for you, as an editor, to promote animosity between mountain bikers and environmentalists. In fact, backcountry good guys of all persuasions should be combining muscle against the developers and mining and logging interests who would rape the wild lands for profit. We also need to close ranks against the ORV "conquer the wilderness in the name of horsepower crowd." The Reagan administration has shown that it views wilderness with the overall ethical concern of Attila the Hun in a convent. Only united political clout will help to slow the environmental losses of the last six years.

In fact, by attacking environmentalism and designated wilderness, you align yourself by default, with the ORV's. Would you really want to share beer can-littered, tire-churned, road-up-every-hill, former wilderness with the four-wheelers in order to gain the right to bike anywhere? Weaken the groups like the Sierra Club and Earth First! and that is likely to be the price that you pay.

continued on page 47