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Bicycle Culture on the Skids

Issue #33 • September 2012

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# URBAN VELO

Issue #33

September 2012



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**On the cover:** Ian Fenwick of Toronto watches the action unfold at the 2012 Cycle Messenger World Championships in Chicago. Turn to the gallery on page 38 for more images from the event. Photo by Brad Quartuccio.

**Co-conspirators:** Meligrosa, Scott Klocksins, Kurt Boone, Andy Singer and Rie Sawada

Urban Velo, PO Box 9040, Pittsburgh, PA 15224

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

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Left: Tijuana, Mexico has long endured a bad reputation as a seedy border town, but times are changing and the bike scene is on the rise. See page 62 for more. Photo by Meligrosa

# EDITOR'S STATEMENT

By Brad Quartuccio



It is undeniable that parts of bicycle courier culture have hugely influenced what has become a much larger urban cycling world. The most obvious may be the proliferation of messenger bags and fixed gears, but a fair amount of cycling fashion and public perception has a strong argument for street roots amongst bike messengers. Mini u-locks, alley-cats, untaped bars, Aerospokes. Some blame a certain renegade image of city riders to the most rogue couriers, others don't necessarily see it as a bad thing. I remember seeing the old X-Men courier video on TV as a kid—my first bicycle courier exposure and amazing stuff indeed, but I'm glad their fashion sense didn't catch on, let alone the insane skitching.

One could call this issue a nod to courier culture, and a look at the changing industry. Traditional paper messenger work has been stretched thin from digital communications and the financial slowdown, the work is changing. Scott Klocksins's feature "Pushing the Envelope" on page 20 explores a certain shift happening in the courier industry towards more service

oriented, direct to consumer work. In dense cities, and for the foreseeable future, the fastest way from A to B is still on a bicycle no matter if it is an envelope, a pack of cigarettes, or a take out meal being delivered.

When speed is a part of the job, all out racing is but a short leap. Street racing may not be legal, advisable, safe or anything else that most people look for in weekend activities, but it is exhilarating to watch and some of the best footage in the world comes from the headcam setup of filmmaker Lucas Brunelle, profiled on page 32. It can be argued pretty strongly that it isn't helping larger bike advocacy efforts, but it's not like the people emulating the *Fast And The Furious* really give motorists as a whole a bad name either. No matter your opinion, street racing is happening and we all have an unparalleled inside look at the past decade and counting through his lens.

The courier business and its influence on the larger cycling culture are changing, but if the past is any guide it will continue to play a part in urban cycling's future.



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# PUBLISHER'S STATEMENT

By Jeff Guerrero



Last month Pittsburgh lost another urban cyclist to a hit-and-run on Penn Avenue. According to news accounts, James Price was an inspirational figure. The 46-year-old had taken to bicycling in an effort to fight back against diabetes, and it seems that he was winning. He lost over 100 pounds in two years, and had begun encouraging his family to follow his lead. He was improving his mind, as well, so he rode early in the morning in order to make time to attend classes.

According to his relatives, James wore a helmet and used lights and reflectors. Unfortunately we all know that ordinary safety precautions become insignificant when a reckless driver enters the equation. And according to witnesses, the white car heading inbound just after 5 am was traveling at about 60 mph—about twice the posted speed limit.

I visited the roadside memorial shortly after the accident, just a few blocks from the house on Penn that I used to live in. It didn't take long to remember why I avoided riding on that stretch of road. Although it's lined on both sides with residences, it's also a four lane speedway where cars jockey for position between stoplights. As I stood there reading the notes written to James Price, I couldn't shake the notion that he might still be alive had he simply chosen another route.

A few days later I learned that another cyclist,

Anthony Green, had been hit just a stone's throw away from where James Price was killed. This time the driver didn't leave the scene, but reports say that she did not have a valid driver's license. And although Green soon died of his injuries, as of now nobody has been brought up on charges.

As if to prove the point that motorists are wreaking havoc on Penn Avenue, two days later a Pittsburgh police officer was struck on the same stretch of road while patrolling on his motorcycle. He had been specifically assigned to enforce bicycle safety.

By this point in time, every major news entity was reporting on bicycle safety, and some published op-ed pieces that weren't exactly well received by the cycling community. Worse still was the response by many members of the non-cycling community, whose comments seemed to portray the bike community as a legion of disrespectful, self-important road hogs with no regard for traffic laws or their own safety.

Meanwhile the local advocacy organization stepped up and demanded that the city do more to protect cyclists. In response, the mayor asked Pittsburgh cyclists to avoid Penn Avenue and ride on one of the parallel streets with significantly less traffic and much more room for bikes and cars to coexist. And the district's city councilman echoed the mayor's suggestion, and added that while Penn Avenue is not a highway, it is part of State Route 8, a major thoroughfare.

I don't believe either politician meant to imply that cyclists don't belong on Penn Avenue, they're just trying to offer a common sense solution to a public safety concern. But the fact remains that cyclists have a right to ride on Penn Avenue—it's the fastest and most direct route to downtown—and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has a law that requires drivers to pass cyclists at a four-foot minimum. Lest we forget that there are speed limits and mandatory license, registration and insurance laws, as well. These laws weren't set in place just to inconvenience motorists, they need to be enforced in order to ensure the safety of all road users. That means cyclists, pedestrians and motorists alike.



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# i ♥ riding in the city



**NAME:** Owen Lloyd  
**LOCATION:** Chicago, IL  
**OCCUPATION:** Co-Owner at Blue City Cycles

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

I live on the south side of Chicago. Riding in this city can be challenging at times, like any urban area, but overall it is a great city to ride in. We have pretty darn nice cycling infrastructure. There is no other way I'd like to get around, except maybe by horse, but that is a whole other bag of monkeys.

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

I'd have to say Brighton, England. I was back visiting in the spring and cycling around there brought back good childhood memories. I was also out of my comfort zone for the first time in a while. Different traffic patterns and setting really offered a challenge. I had to get off and walk after a while. It is a very busy city and it was too much for me to handle all at once. I'm looking forward to going back and figuring it all out.

## Why do you love riding in the city?

It is hands down the most efficient and fun way to get around.

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

The best way to connect with a place, and get around at a reasonable clip, is to cycle. Otherwise one is speeding by too removed from things, or just plodding along.

Check out [www.bluecitycycles.com](http://www.bluecitycycles.com)







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**NAME:** Eva Mohr

**LOCATION:** New York, NY

**OCCUPATION:** Founder at [www.allthatiwant.com](http://www.allthatiwant.com)

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

I live in New York City and I have always been a big biker. I grew up in Germany where I basically had to bike everywhere until I had a driver's license. When I first got to New York I didn't have a bike, so I relied on public transport. But then my friends got me a beautiful pink '60s cruiser, which I fell in love with right away. I basically bike everywhere in the city. New York is definitely not the safest place to bike, but the more people we get on bikes the better and I hope they keep improving the urban infrastructure.

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

Of course Amsterdam and Maastricht. The Netherlands (and most European cities in general) have a great bike culture. Copenhagen is also an amazing city to bike in and everyone looks so good and stylish on their bikes.

## **Why do you love riding in the city?**

In New York I love biking because, the city is so diverse. You bike from one block to another and you are in a different culture within seconds. I used to commute to work from Manhattan to Brooklyn and biking back over the Brooklyn Bridge late at night (when it's not busy) is just breathtaking.

Another just really practical reason: It is much faster and more efficient than using the subway. Manhattan is relatively small in terms of distance and has no major hills. So it is actually the perfect city for a biker.

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

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# i ♥ riding in the city



**NAME:** Dewei  
**LOCATION:** Singapore  
**OCCUPATION:** Media Executive

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

I am from Singapore and have been living in this city since I was born. Cyclists here usually ride at night as it is more temperate and during the weekend where there is lesser traffic.

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

Singapore is the only city I have rode my bike. There are a lot of park connectors that link different neighborhoods together to make riding safe. The country is also planning to build a connector around the island in the future.

## Why do you love riding in the city?

Due to the high population in Singapore, the public transportation is usually crowded like sardine cans that move. It can be quite frustrating at times when you have to squeeze with other passengers. Through cycling, it provides me with the personal space, health benefits as well as reducing my carbon footprint.

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

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*Do you love riding in the city?*

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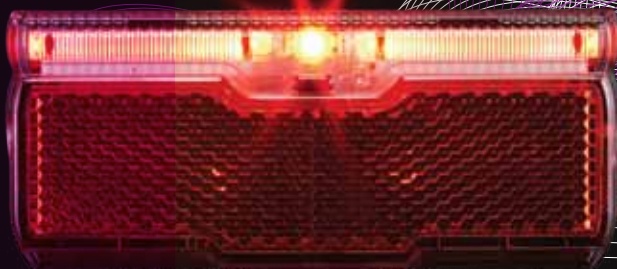
**What was your favorite city to ride in, and why?**

**Why do you love riding in the city?**

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

*Email your responses to [jeff@urbanvelo.org](mailto:jeff@urbanvelo.org)*

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# i ♥ riding in the city



**NAME:** Mark Russell Dean

**LOCATION:** Melbourne, Australia

**OCCUPATION:** Reformed hobo and general avoider of the nine-to-five

## **Where do you live and what is it like riding in your city?**

Melbourne. A very cool city for cycling, in both senses of the word. There is a strong bike culture and the numbers of commuter cyclists are also on the increase, which is all good.

Despite what you were led to believe in Crocodile Dundee and Mad Max, Australia is not completely desert and sand. We have proper seasons in the south and to paraphrase Crowded House, often all four in one day.

You never leave home without a bag containing winter, summer and wet weather options and frequently end up wearing all three at once.

The only real downside to cycling here is the car culture (I suspect we have more V8's rumbling around in daily commute than in the US) which is really Neanderthal. You need your wits about you and a thick skin—rare is the trip out where you won't receive some kind of abuse.

## **What was your favorite city to ride in and why?**

London, my hometown. Deliberately ignoring the chronic pollution and endemic bike crime, I remember feeling more confident on the roads there—on a good day, on my fixie belting along the Embankment by the Thames, with a fluid traffic flow and strong legs working in my favor, it would feel like surfing. Just an amazing feeling.

## **Why do you love riding in the city?**

There is no better way to travel. And it is incredibly good at sobering me up on the way back from the pub.

## **Or just say whatever you like about riding in the city?**

There were three of us riding home one evening. I set a harsh pace, mostly fuelled by beer, and the other two kept up. We swapped positions like we were in the peloton. Threaded our way across roads, down streets and up hills to home. During that ride we weren't adults, we were kids again. Great fun. City riding, I love it!



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# i ♥ riding in the city



**NAME:** Steph Irwin  
**LOCATION:** Philadelphia, PA  
**OCCUPATION:** Student/Video Specialist

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

I live in Philly where every time you clip in it's a new adventure. I love to mash pavement here only because there are so many different areas of the city that offer a different biking experience. Whether I'm zipping around city hall or cruising down Kelly Drive, Philly offers cyclists an abundance of places to ride. It's more exhilarating than any roller coaster I know and I get to do it daily.

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

As much as I rep Philly I have to say I really enjoyed riding in San Jose CA. The city is teeming with bike culture and the bikers are in it for the long haul. Not only do they have winding trails that run throughout the city, but barren multiple lane highways that make group rides super fun.

## **Why do you love riding in the city?**


My bicycle allows me to engage my city in a much more intimate manner than public transportation or a car. Riding in the city is more than just my means of transportation, it's the best workout, community builder, stress reliever, money-saver, and past-time I know. So I guess I love it because it keeps me sane and on my toes. You can't aimlessly float through day-to-day life if you are tucked into your drops with the wind in your face.

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

Philadelphia has an immense amount of potential to develop a stronger bike community. I am so sick of feeling like a lone cyclist trying to make it in the fight against traffic when really it's a fight we are all a part of. It shouldn't matter if you are a commuter or messenger, we are all members of Philly's bike community. So in an effort to cultivate said bike community I volunteer with any bike race I can get my hands on and also run a few bike events including Philly Naked Bike Ride and Philly Bike Party. Check us out if you're down to ride!

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# PUSHING BEYOND THE ENVELOPE

RE-IMAGINING THE BIKE DELIVERY INDUSTRY

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By Scott Klocksinn

Photos by Brad Quartuccio

It's sometime after 2 am as I'm shepherded deeper into the dark and nearly-deserted expanse of Northeast Minneapolis. At a steady 25 MPH clip a landscape of small residential buildings and graffiti-lined warehouses fades past. I'm lost. But Ben isn't.

We stop at a convenience store. I catch my breath and follow Ben inside, keeping half an eye on our bikes. I don't know quite what kind of neighborhood this is, but I have an idea.

"Two packs of Parliaments," Ben says to the cashier.

He thinks better of smoking one from the pack he's just bought. He grabs a square from a different pack, lights up, takes a few hard puffs and we're back on our way.

Ben "SK" James, one of four owner-riders at Rock-

It Courier, had gotten a call. Somebody needed cigarettes in a part of town where they were scarce, and Rock-It, a new service established earlier this year, fills a niche that had previously gone unfilled in this Mid-western city: anything that can fit into a giant messenger bag delivered anywhere within the city limits, any time you want it.

It's obvious that an industry that had for decades been sustained largely by delivering pieces of paper would suffer some blows as commerce found its footing in the digital age. What's less obvious is how that industry would begin to reinvent itself in the face of a recession, forging new paradigms and ways of doing business in the shadows of the very skyscrapers whose tenants have increasingly favored ones and zeros over sling bags and envelopes.



Rock-It may be emblematic of a shift in the industry away from urban cores, toward working outside of standard business hours, and toward delivering things other than documents and small packages. But they are far from the first service to go the route of on-demand delivery of convenience items by bicycle.

Kozmo.com arrived on the scene first in New York City in 1998, delivering DVDs, candy bars and other random goods first for free, and then for a \$1 delivery charge. Porn addicts and junk food lovers in eleven U.S. markets rejoiced. According to a May 2012 *Slate Magazine* article, the company had raised \$232.3 million in just its first two years from private investors who saw dollar signs in the brave new world of e-commerce and its inevitable intersection with legions of lazy urbanites. But Kozmo bit off more than its young teeth could chew. The company saw losses of \$26.4 million in 1999, according to the *Slate* article—in a year that saw only \$3.5 million in incoming funds. Ouch.

Vernon Schleyer is a lawyer who worked for them as a bike messenger in Chicago in 2000 and says that it wasn't the idea that was flawed, or even its timing. What did them in, Schleyer insists, was a fatal cocktail of over-staffing, over-expansion, ineffective advertising, reckless spending and a failure to understand the young, net-savvy demographics that constituted its client base. "Kozmo decided that they needed to be ready for any sudden increase in business, so they would have a spoke—their term for a warehouse—absolutely stuffed with people," Schleyer said. "We would have sometimes as many as fifteen bicycle riders, two delivery drivers, two dispatchers, four order pickers, two front desk people, a bicycle mechanic and three managers working per shift. The first five or six months rarely if ever saw more



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**Cowtown Couriers** was started in January 2012 in Kansas City, MO. The city had no bicycle delivery businesses at the time Cowtown was founded, so 23 year old Rudy Gonzales took it upon himself to start doing research on the industry and registered the new business as a limited liability corporation. Initially, it was just a one-man operation, but Gonzales now has a business partner and is expanding to include more riders to enable them to do more business over a wider part of the city. We caught up with Rudy at the Cycle Messenger World Championships this August in Chicago to find out what he's been up to.

**Did you have any experience delivering stuff by bike or any other means before starting the company?**

I hadn't done other courier work prior to starting the company, but I had experience riding and carrying various loads on my own. I don't have a car, so being able to do all my errands by bike is essential to living car-free.

**What kind of stuff do you guys normally deliver, and for what types of clients?**

We normally deliver food and basic grocery items like produce, sundries, or drinks. Our main clients are residents, but I hope to expand our business clientele soon to include more restaurants.

**How do social media and mobile phone apps factor into your business model?**

I've used Twitter to post updates about delivery, find people in need of delivery, and to respond to client feedback. I also use Instagram to show things like deliveries that we make, food from our restaurant clients, and to keep in touch with other couriers. Having a good social media presence is important to staying relevant and "in the know" with our clients. I'm looking into developing an app to help streamline our service with our clients and make ordering even easier.

**Can you say a couple things about where you see the company going in the future?**

I see us growing to the point where we are a vital service to the citizens of Kansas City, MO and make living here even nicer than it already is. I want people to see how progressive we can be as a Midwest city.

than forty or so deliveries a day, which could have been easily filled by six people per shift."

The dot-com boom that Kozmo was part of was just the beginning of an ongoing move away from brick-and-mortar storefronts and toward the still-rising power of online commerce. In 2012, consumers are more accustomed than ever to staying at home or in their offices and awaiting the arrival of their lunch, bottle of wine, book or laptop computer. At the same time, appetites for sustainable transportation and locally-sourced products are at an all-time high. It adds up to a lot of potential.

So how will the bike delivery industry seize on that potential and get it right?

...

Burrowed in the lore of the bike messenger is the notion that the packages they deliver are, by definition, time-sensitive in nature. Why else would these guys rip around the city like maniacs? But it's not always so, especially in the bruised and battered parcel delivery sector of the industry. I worked as a bike messenger in New York City in 2008 and 2009, and saw a noticeable drop in the number of runs I was dispatched following the financial collapse in September of 2008 and the economic turmoil that soon spread across the city, the country and the world. But even before that, I sometimes kept packages in my bag for as long as a couple hours

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Andy Larson from Trash Messenger Bags

before delivering them. Sometimes it made sense to do that, depending on where I had to make pick-ups or deliveries. But most of the time, there simply wasn't a lot of work. It's hard to feel much urgency when you work on commission and you're hardly doing better than minimum wage.

Horror stories about the peril of the industry abound. Blake Young quit a 9-5 sales gig, cashed in his 401k to buy a track bike, and got into the messenger game in Chicago in 2008. He says over three years, he saw a dynamic of messenger companies continually under-cutting each other on the rates they charged clients, just to stay alive. "What would happen," Young said, "is you'd lose clients because [somebody] would come in and just undercut everybody. So then U.S. Messenger, who I worked for, would get a new client

---

The only way to survive is if a new model is applied.

—Andrew Young, Breakaway Courier

---

and then someone else would go back to them and say 'Woa woa woa, why did we lose your business?' and then they would undercut *that*, and their guys would be making like \$1.88 a run or something. It was like: where does it end?"

Andrew Young (no relation to Blake) is General Manager at Breakaway Courier in New York (full disclosure: I'm a former employee). He was on the streets from 1985 until 1993, and estimates that the number of bike messengers in Manhattan today is less than 1,000—down from his guess of 5,000-7,000 when he was working as a messenger. Breakaway has in the past had as many as 130 bike messengers, according to Young, who put the number at 85 when I spoke to him in June of this year.

"The only way to survive is if a new model is applied," he told me. In 2009, Breakaway, one of the largest messenger companies in New York, began making deliveries by bike outside of Manhattan—the long-time sole domain of the New York bike messenger. They've also started doing more work using a company-owned cargo bike and have accounts with new types of clients, like retail stores and a large butcher shop. "Anything that can't be faxed or emailed is a possible model," Young said.

Part of what forging a new model has meant is using bikes to deliver what cars or trucks once did. Andy Larson retired from messenger work and founded Trash Messenger Bags in part because he recognized the growing market for bigger and bigger bags. Though Larson says about 80% of his business comes from non-messengers, he has had orders of between one and three bags from food delivery or traditional bike messenger services in Austin, Chicago, Boston and Milwaukee, as well as his hometown of Minneapolis. The bigger versions of the bags are massive—big enough to carry a small adult, if anyone wanted to—and make it possible to carry loads that once would have required at least two riders or a car.

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Kevin "Squid" Bolger

Kevin "Squid" Bolger started as a messenger in New York in 1992 and co-founded CycleHawk Messengers in 2007. "We probably went into business at the worst possible time," he said. "I didn't agree with it but I understood why bigger companies seemed to take advantage of people," he said, citing workman's compensation as an example of the kind of overhead that can leave companies little choice but to accept an offer

to be acquired by someone bigger or to fold outright.

This year Cyclehawk started working with Zipments, a communication platform for couriers and customers. With E-commerce rushing towards same day delivery, tech companies are realizing that the bike messenger is still the best way to get product around in urban areas. "I'm excited for the rise in urban cycling," he said. "I think the car culture's kind of coming to and end, and the younger generation is seeing that cars don't make sense. If you're working with bikes, business is probably gonna grow."

...

TCB Courier in San Francisco is on the lookout for new ways to grow. When Nextel, the company they had used to set up communication between riders, reduced service in the city in May of 2012, TCB switched to another service provider and encountered similar problems. It soon became clear that they would need to move to an app-based system to track

deliveries. So they made their own.

The app helps TCB riders dispatch jobs to each other and stay on top of what's going on with all of the company's 40-and-counting clients. The plan, says Alex Farioletti an owner-rider at the company, is to eventually test the app in new cities. "This is gonna get weird," Farioletti said about the intersection between the city's technology and delivery sectors. And weird could mean good.

Since the company was founded in 2009, they've seen new services like Taskrabbit and Zipments make inroads in the expanding market of delivering food and other items from businesses that, just a few years ago, might have relied much more heavily on a physical retail outlet.

But there's no substitute for experienced, professional bike messengers with the skill set needed to handle a high volume of time-sensitive runs. So TCB is looking at expanding the market they serve to facilitate some of this shift from retail to home and office delivery, bringing the expertise they've honed and their staff of 30 riders with them.

"We're always hiring. We're expanding steadily and we could be expanding even faster but it gets hard to get the caliber of riders we need to work for us," said Farioletti. Another owner-rider, Trevor Beanes, estimates that they do 200-300 deliveries on an average day, using their current model of primarily doing food delivery for local restaurants.

Much smaller-scale operations are popping up outside the big, dense cities with histories of working bike messengers or strong bicycle commuting cultures. Kansas City, MO had no bike delivery businesses when Rudy Gonzales started Cowtown Couriers earlier this year. He says he envisioned the service partly as a way to help link the recent influx of new residents in downtown Kansas City with amenities only available in outlying parts of the city. If something isn't available downtown (or anywhere else in Cowtown's 14 square mile delivery zone), Gonzales or his business partner, Joshua Carney, are on call to deliver it by bike from 8 am to 5 pm during the work week, with plans to hire more riders and provide 24-hour service.

So far, they've gotten a lot of odds and ends or grocery runs for individual customers and also the occasional document for an architecture or design firm. Gonzales told me a lot of his business comes



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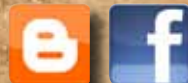
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Alex Farioletti from TCB Courier

from people who appreciate an eco-friendly service. But, let's not forget: bikes are fast. This past April, *The Pitch*, Kansas City's alternative weekly paper, rated three different methods for the on-demand delivery of a sixpack of beer: a guy with an ad on Craigslist; Zaarly 2.0, a do-it-yourself e-commerce platform; and Cowtown. The guy from Craigslist never showed. Zaarly took 56 minutes. Cowtown got it done in 18 minutes.

Nowhere is time-sensitivity more critical than with food delivery. A cold burger just isn't the same. After Blake Young left the messenger service he worked for in 2011, he and Arturo Rodarte founded Snap Courier, a service that works with restaurants in Chicago. "I wanted to have consistent business and make a higher dollar amount per run. Rather than do point-to-point [where we would pick up deliveries at random locations] and have 30 individual people who call in 30 times, I'd like to have clients like restaurants who will call us 30 times a day, and then maybe get 30 of those clients."

They may get there. Snap now has nine clients at 13 locations and has met their growth goals each month since launching in January of this year. Trey Elder, Manager of Jerry's Sandwiches, says the restaurant switched from delivering by car to bike because so many customers had asked: "What are you guys doing to be green?" But aside from that, Elder says working

with Snap is "far cheaper" than hiring in-house delivery staff, because the customer pays the \$5 delivery charge directly, and Jerry's doesn't have to contribute shift pay or an hourly rate. It works out for the rider as well, since they work for multiple restaurants each shift.

...

About two months after my visit to Minneapolis, I caught up with Ben James to see how things had been progressing with Rock-It Delivery. He said their always-on-call structure will stay, but they've hired four new riders to help make it more manageable. He expects business to reach "frenzy status" once the harsh Minnesota winter takes hold and more customers lose their appetite for the outdoors.

They've been featured in the local press as an innovative new business, which James says has helped spawn the creation of several new accounts. The work has even circled back to delivering documents in Downtown Minneapolis—the very type of work the company's four owner-riders had done for conventional messenger services before leaving to start Rock-It. "The only difference is we're playing for keeps now and the money's going back in our pockets," he said.







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 GIRO





# LUCAS BRUNELLE

By Kurt Boone

Lucas Brunelle is best known amongst urban cyclists for his incredible, and incredibly risky, helmet cam footage of alleycat racing from around the world. Earlier this year he released “Line of Sight,” a full-length documentary collecting his best footage from the past decade of filming. He grew up in Martha’s Vineyard, an island seven miles off the coast in the Atlantic Ocean, best known for its presidential get-aways. Lucas’s first bicycle was a Diamond Back BMX that he loved to ride around the island with his friends, exploring by bicycle, learning the ins and outs of riding through trial and error. Lucas was an outcast in his youth but found fast friends riding his bicycle.

Lucas Brunelle attended Martha’s Vineyard High School and was a rebellious student—riding his bicycle down the hallways at full speed, stealing a couple of cars and getting himself arrested in front of the high school building on purpose. Such rebellious acts landed him in reform school at 15 years old. In high school

he also began his entrepreneurial career by starting a lawn mowing business and then getting involved with a criminal insurance scam that would send him to jail and put 18 felonies on his record. Lucas developed a fondness for technology early in life, working with Basic, Fortran and other computer technology of the day. Like his filmmaking skills, most of his computer knowledge is self-taught.

Eventually Lucas would get himself on track and attend The University of Massachusetts at Amherst and graduate with a degree in finance with honors in 1996, starting a courier company from the ground up upon graduation. In 1993 while in college he got his first taste of working as a bicycle messenger during a summer semester at Northeastern University, along with his first experience in bicycle messenger street racing. Alley racing was the precursor to today’s alleycats, with bicycle messengers sprinting down deserted alleys for bragging rights. There were no checkpoints



involved in these one-block long alley races, and all number of different bicycles in use. Lucas won a few of these early races, and retains a lot of video footage, some of which is posted on his website.

Lucas's first actual alleycat with checkpoints was in 2001 at a Red Bull sponsored event, "Urban Underground" where he took second place. Also in 2001 he was inspired to document the street racing he was increasingly involved with after watching a film a friend made with a shoulder camera. Thorough many hours of shooting and years of trial and error he devised a filmmaking technique that would showcase the action unfolding in front of him. He bought a Canon camera in 2002 and used Tupperware and duct tape to attach it and a counterbalance battery to his helmet. From that method he started regularly filming races, eventually moving to two cameras on the helmet filming forward and reverse views. The original idea for his latest "Line of Sight" work began with Brendt Barbur, founder of the Bicycle Film Festival, and his encouragement to make a video of the greatest hits. Three years of editing work and some \$300,000 of travel and production costs later "Line of Sight" made the rounds of the 2012 Bicycle Film Festival and is now available for purchase at [www.lucasbrunelle.com](http://www.lucasbrunelle.com)

## Alleycat Filming

"I am thinking about my life, the fact I can lose it if I do a wrong move and if I fuck up. That first and foremost."

"[I have] so much experience with this that it is second nature. It does come very easy for me, second nature, I think about what the viewers are going to see, safety first."

"So I got into this through messenger work, loving to race. I race CAT 2, I race the alleycats—those are the two maintainers. I race a lot and my favorite thing is riding in traffic, I love traffic".

### Filmmaking Goals

"[Line of Sight is a] love of cycling and definitely not a financial success, this is a financial disaster for me."

"I want to show people how to live on their own





All-City 2X World Champ, Craig Etheridge





accord with the bicycle and that there is no better way to do that than through the bicycle and other people that ride.”

“[To show] that I am artist and my favorite thing is to take people where they’ve never been before, whether it is riding with me or watching my films. This is something that I just love doing and obsess with doing... Putting smiles on people faces, people laughing, people telling me about problems in their lives that I have solved or made better because they ride more, and people who ride period because of my films, and people ride a lot more and faster and take chances in life on bike because of my films.”

## Urban Cycling

“Urban cycling, it doesn’t matter if you are riding a beach cruiser on a bike path, or you’re an executive, a judge, messenger, whatever, BMX, it doesn’t matter. The moves and riding styles you see in my films apply to you. Because they are life saving moves, they are familiar to you because you ride through those same intersections. Certainly my films have big influences on the way people ride and I want people to ride according to way they feel comfortable. And that might not be following laws, or rules, or society expectations about how you are supposed to ride or where you are supposed to bring a bike or where you are not supposed to have a bike. The ultimate expression of living on your own accord is riding a bike.”

## Feedback

“I think the coolest compliment that I ever got was on a ride from London to Edinburgh. There was a messenger in Liverpool, which was one of the stop overs, and he said to me, ‘I became a messenger because of some of your films.’ That’s very powerful, there have been a number of people who have done that. But the thing about this guy is that he was the coolest cat. His accent was really the Liverpool thick accent and he said to me and the other thing he said about this, ‘Lucas I am the only messenger in Liverpool.’ Liverpool has a messenger because of my films. And that is why I do this.”





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## Specialized Tricross Elite Disc Apex Compact

Specialized has termed their Tricross line as “Freeroad,” worthy of smooth pavement and gravel roads, light trails and that cheater line though the park. Wide range gearing, disc brakes and full rack and fender mounts make the bike a capable commuter while still sprightly enough for weekend road rides. For most city riders, such a bike is far more suited to everyday riding than more roadie inspired models, or even the racier cyclocross machines often used as serious commuters. At \$1900 complete, the Specialized Tricross Elite is far from entry level, but for the committed rider is a reasonable choice for an almost do-it-all machine.

At the heart of the 22.7 lb Tricross Elite is the disc only aluminum frame with formed tubes, integrated

headset and internal cable routing. The sloping top-tube and tall headtube means comfortable positioning on- and offroad, the ample tire clearance allows large volume tires with fenders or tons of mud clearance if you’re looking to get deep into the muddy ‘cross circuit. The SRAM Apex drivetrain and Doubletap shifters paired with an FSA crankset, sporting a 50/34 set of front rings and an 11-32 tooth 10-speed cassette out back, provides a quick shifting, wide range of gears that should get you up most any hill with plenty of gear on the downhills and flats for anyone that’s not a full-on road racer. Avid BB5 disc brakes handle the stopping duties.

In the saddle and on the pedals the Tricross Elite

does not disappoint. As expected, the aluminum frame has the classic feel of every bit of power getting to the wheel without discernable flex, and the aluminum fork tracked exactly as pointed through turns, even if by the end of the day I found it a bit harsh on the hands and arms as compared to a steel or carbon fork as on my personal 'cross bike. I appreciated the tall head-tube and ample headset spacers allowing me to keep the bars relatively high by road bike standards and the drops within reach. And I love the raw aluminum look of the clear anodization.

While I found the SRAM Apex drivetrain a fantastic performer, I do wish the bike was spec'd with Avid BB7 brakes rather than the less powerful BB5s. And



given that SRAM makes both brakes and levers, I found the overall feel less than ideal even though the stopping power was ultimately there—spongy, with it easy to bottom out the brake levers on the bars. If I were king I would have spec'd lower profile rims for the weight savings, but everyday commuters may appreciate the added durability of v-section rims.

Racers may find themselves looking elsewhere, but for the rest of us the Specialized Tricross Elite is a capable road and light trail bike in one. For people willing to hit singletrack on skinny tires, it won't be the bike holding you back.

Check out [www.specialized.com](http://www.specialized.com)





## Skully K2 Lights

The new Skully K2 lights are, in a word, cool. We've seen the company's products evolve from their cute little skull-shaped "be seen" light that ran on watch batteries, to the slightly bigger and more powerful USB rechargeable K1 lights, which beamed 20 lumens through the skull's eyeballs. The latest offering marks Skully's metamorphosis into a significantly more serious bike light, yet it still maintains their trademark design aesthetic.

The K2 is actually two separate models that utilize the same body style. Both models mount via silicone "bones" to fit virtually any size handlebar, and come in nine colors. Each have both a high powered LED light in the skull's mouth, as well as two white LED safety lights in the eyes. The curved reflector in the mouth is designed so that the main bulb faces straight down, and the beam shines out in a wide rectangle. And on both models, the lone switch that controls power and mode is housed in the skull's nose.

The S-L 126B uses 3 AAA batteries to power a 1 W LED which is claimed to run for 8 hours on steady and 40 hours in flashing mode. The safety lights should last 70 on steady and 200 hours in flashing mode.

The S-L 126S features a 1.5 W LED that's powered by a rechargeable LiPoly battery. It has a claimed run-

time of five hours on high (1.5 W) and 12 hours on low (.33 W), and the safety light should last 26 hours on steady, and 110 hours in flashing mode. In addition to being USB rechargeable (which takes just 100 minutes for a full recharge) the light features a solar panel for supplemental recharging during the daylight hours.

In practice, both lights are seriously bright. The manufacturer says that the luminous flux of the S-L126S is 152 lumens, and S-L126B is 122 lumens. In layman's terms, the battery powered version is bright enough for virtually any nighttime urban cycling situation, including shortcuts through the park, and the rechargeable model is even brighter. The light beam is rather unique, and you may be surprised by the angle that the light needs to be mounted at in order to obtain a proper long, wide pattern.

And German cyclists take note, the Skully K2 lights meet your country's strict StVZO requirements.

My only nit to pick is that while the mounting system is extremely convenient, and easy to adjust vertically, it leaves no way to make horizontal adjustments to the beam's trajectory. The S-L126S retails for \$125 and the S-L126B retails for \$41.

Check out [www.skully.com.tw](http://www.skully.com.tw)



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## Surly Mr. Whirly Crankset

In the world of single speeds, Surly has long been known for their drivetrain components. First came the Singleator, the oft-copied but never duplicated chain tensioner for conversions. Later came their venerable stainless steel chainrings which pretty much kicked sand in the face of weight weenies everywhere and garnered audible grunts of approval from the world of everyman cyclists. It was only a matter of time before Surly introduced a crankset, and although it hasn't quite set the world on fire, the Mr. Whirly has gained a loyal following due to its adaptable nature.

The same crankset can be set up as a single, double or triple depending on which spider is installed. Though complete cranksets are available you can go a la carte, as interchangeable spiders are available in 94 mm, 104 mm and 110 mm BCD. All attach to the drive-side crankarm via the 58 mm BCD granny ring holes. I opted for their standard single speed crankset, which

comes with a 33 tooth steel chainring and an outboard bottom bracket. It seemed like the perfect fit for my urban trail bike, aka my single speed cross bike with a mountain bike riser bar.

The spiders and crankarms are forged from 7075-T6 aluminum, aka the good stuff. Though complete cranksets are only offered with a limited choice in crankarm length, the armsets are sold separately in lengths of 165, 170, 175, 180 and 185 mm. The spindles are chromoly, and available in either 68/73 mm or 100 mm for fat bikes.

After months of riding, and not necessarily all of it in good conditions, the Mr. Whirly crankset is still functioning like the day it was installed. I haven't had any issues with slipping bolts, or anything else of the like. It's just been a solid workhorse of a crankset, as I kind of expected it to be.

The Mr. Whirly single speed crankset retails for \$275. Check out [www.surlybikes.com](http://www.surlybikes.com)



photograph by Peter DiAntoni

*Milwaukee*  
*Bicycle Co*





## NiteRider Solas

I don't know why I always seem to do this when I get a new taillight... I clip it on something and press the power button while looking straight at it. Without fail my reaction involves an expletive followed by, "That thing is bright!" And with the NiteRider Solas, I really, really meant it when I said it.

At 2 W, this taillight is way brighter than the lights I used as a commuter headlight for years. So I definitely feel safe in the knowledge that any car behind me is going to see me. In fact, they'll probably see me from blocks away when I've got this thing on high.

What's nice, though, is that NiteRider also equipped it with what they call "group ride mode" which is to say that it can be run on low power in steady mode as to neither blind nor annoy the person riding directly behind you. The other modes include medium and high power flashing and high power steady for a total of four distinct and useful modes.

The Solas has claimed run times of 36 hours on low steady, 4:30 on high steady, 18:00 on medium power flashing and 7:00 on high power flashing. It retails for \$45 and includes a seatpost mount, seatstay mount and the built in clip for mounting on your belt or bag. Check out [www.niterider.com](http://www.niterider.com)

## NiteRider Lumina 650

A few years ago I was doing a lot of nighttime mountain bike riding, and my go-to light was a 600 lumen NiteRider Moab. It was great, but having wires connecting lights to battery packs always seemed like a hassle, and I dreamed of the day when self-contained bike lights would be bright enough for trail riding at night. I'm happy to say that that day has arrived. I've been pairing up the Lumina 650 on my helmet with the 600 on my handlebar, and with both lights on low I was more than comfortable in the woods. On medium I'm hard pressed to out-ride the lights, even on fast downhills, and on high they're almost too bright.

Obviously, on the city streets you'll be able to see for blocks, and be seen for blocks as well. This kind of light has a tendency to freeze cars at stoplights like a deer in a car's headlights.

According to NiteRider, the Lumina 650 will run for 1:30 on high, 3:00 on medium and 5:30 on low. That's a lot of run-time for a light this bright.

NiteRider has redesigned the handlebar mount, making it more stable and secure, yet just as easy to install as any of their previous models. I do have a slight nit to pick with the helmet mount, in that it's excellent all around except that the quick-release interface has a tiny bit of play in it. If I'm not paying attention to it, however, I don't notice the slight jiggle.

The Lumina 650 retails for \$140. Check out [www.niterider.com](http://www.niterider.com)





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## Timbuk2 ICOE Tool

The Timbuk2 ICOE (in case of emergency) tool isn't designed to be the world's greatest multi-tool. No, as the name implies, it's designed to be a simple, helpful gadget to help you fix a flat or make minor adjustments to your bike on the road. And to that end, I think the ICOE is pretty cool. Let's take a look at some of the features.

First and foremost, it's got a 15 mm box wrench for axle nuts. While it's not long enough to provide superior torque, unless you've got arms like pipe cleaners it'll probably get the job done. The box wrench also serves as the loop for the nylon strap, which Timbuk2 intends for you to attach to your bag's exterior. Personally, I prefer to keep it inside the bag, making the strap kind of unnecessary.



A metal tire lever can be a blessing and a curse, as we've all fought with difficult tire

beads that can snap plastic levers. On the other hand, a metal lever can damage your tube and even your rim, so inexperienced mechanics should use extra caution.

Finally, the most unique aspect of this tool is the magnetic tool attachment and storage compartment. It comes with 4 and 5 mm steel hex wrench bits. And they work well enough for minor repairs, though the shape of the tool does somewhat limit their ability to reach certain parts of the bike. The storage compartment lid is held in place magnetically, too, and it is possible to cause it to fling open by whipping the tool back and forth. But even if you do lose a bit, they are fairly cheap and easy to replace at your local hardware store.

The ICOE retails for \$35.

Check out [www.timbuk2.com](http://www.timbuk2.com)



## Club Ride Go West Jersey

The Club Ride Go West jersey is not the first technical apparel to feature casual wear styling, but it's one of the more successful attempts I've seen.

Made from moisture-wicking synthetic fabrics, the jersey features both a button down closure and a hidden zipper. This allows for a variety of airflow options. There are mesh panels under the arms and down the back to provide additional ventilation. The jersey has zippered rear pockets which are carefully styled as to not stand out.

Off the bike, the jersey is as comfortable as almost any shirt I own. And with its pearl buttons and chest pockets, I can even wear it to the office for my day job.

The Go West jersey retails for \$90.

Check out [www.clubrideapparel.com](http://www.clubrideapparel.com)





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## Erg! Raw Energy Bars

Most urban cyclists don't use energy bars in the same way that endurance athletes do, but it's not to say they aren't useful. I even know of people who don't exercise at all but still use energy bars as a healthy snack. Anyhow, no matter what your purpose for eating them may be, there's a good chance you'll appreciate Erg! raw energy bars.

Why? Because they're food, not a food-like-product. The ingredients of the Cashew Raisin bar are: almonds, raisins, honey, cashews, rolled oats and salt. That's it. They don't have the consistency of taffy or a candy bar. They're not overly processed—in fact they're hardly processed at all. And the little processing that goes on is done in a small kitchen by people who genuinely care about the product they're making.

All three of the Erg! bar flavors are delicious, and none are either too sweet nor too bland for my tastes. As far as the performance benefits go, I can only really make a subjective statement that I think they work. The Erg! website does cite several scientific facts to substantiate their product's claims. For example, they state that raisins are, "High in dietary carbohydrates with a low glycemic index, researchers say raisins may produce lower lactate levels at the end of submaximal exercise."

Erg! bars retail for \$2.25 each. Check out [www.erg-bar.com](http://www.erg-bar.com)



## La Colombe Pure Black Bottled Coffee

Cycling and coffee just somehow go together, so it was no surprise that when the Rapha crew rolled through town that they had coffee in hand. I wasn't expecting bottled coffee however, and was admittedly skeptical of it when I first spied the label. After sampling a bottle however, I'd say I'm a fan of the La Colombe Pure Black bottled cold press coffee, and wish it was available more widely. While it doesn't appear to be particularly new to the market, I've never seen it before but perhaps I wasn't exactly looking for a bottle of coffee either. Now, at least at certain times, I will be.

Check out [www.lacolombe.com](http://www.lacolombe.com)

# nutcase

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## Chrome Citizen Night

Chrome has been at this messenger bag game for more than a minute or two, and in that time their Citizen buckle bag has become a classic. Best known for its iconic seatbelt buckle and bombproof construction, there are countless original Citizen bags in use around the world.

In the past year Chrome introduced the Citizen Night, a murdered out version of their venerable Citizen with an added twist—large reflective panels that are indistinguishable by daylight. Add to that the flat black version of their original seat belt buckle, and you've got one cool looking messenger bag. Not to mention one that seriously enhances nighttime safety.

Like the original, the Citizen Night measures 22" wide, 13" high, 7" deep and is made from 1000 denier nylon with an 18 oz truck tarp liner. The strap features EVA padding and there are enough pockets and organizing slots to keep your life in order. My one nit to pick is that I don't like the way the cross strap comes up so high, feeling more like it's in my armpit than across my ribs. But I deal with that just fine.

The Citizen Night is made in Chico, CA and retails for \$160. Check out [www.chromebagsstore.com](http://www.chromebagsstore.com)

## Green Guru Cruiser Cooler

Green Guru is a Boulder CO based manufacturer of cycling and outdoor gear upcycled and recycled from bits otherwise heading to the landfill. The Cruiser Cooler is made from recycled innertubes and an upcycled reflective Mylar insulated interior liner originally used for compostable cup packaging. Meant as an all purpose glove compartment for casual rides, the \$45 Cruiser Cooler attaches with simple hook and loop fasteners and opens one-handed, with no zippers to fuss with. It isn't as secure as I may personally want given my riding style, but for cruising with a light jacket and lunch, it makes sense. I used the Cruiser Cooler loose in my bag however, as it holds 4-5 12 oz cans or two big 24 oz ones and the Mylar liner keeps them cold far longer than they would otherwise. If I was to use it on the bike more I'd likely want to swap out the stock straps for something more secure and may wish for a snap closure at least. In the bag, it's been more convenient than I expected having a small cooler like this around, and it never fails to elicit comments from other bike folks given the construction. See more and purchase direct at [www.greengurugear.com](http://www.greengurugear.com)



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## SRAM E-matic Electric Assist System

Electric assist hubs are not exactly what most of our readers are into, but for given applications and riders they can be the difference between car and bike trips. For mass acceptance of bikes as transportation in American cities it is my personal belief that electric and electric assist bikes will be an important bridge point for segments of the population, even if I don't know where best to draw the line on power in separated bike facilities. No matter, it will get sorted out, electric assist is here and SRAM is entering the fray in 2013 with the E-matic system.

The automatic E-matic system is meant for getting around town with less exertion—perfect for casual riders not looking to break a sweat on the way to pick up groceries, who would also rather not rely on car transport. It's a hub with a two-speed planetary gear system inside along with a specialty rear cargo rack with a built in slot for accommodating the rider's choice of 6, 8 or 10 Ah batteries depending on needed

range and weight. The hub is part of an otherwise single speed drivetrain—the first electric assist speed helps get up to speed and up hills, the second is for cruising along at a 15 mph limited speed in the USA models. Shifting happens automatically, as does the application of electric assist. No throttle, push to start.

In a quick spin around the SRAM test track, the power was immediately noticeable yet controlled. Pushing it into the second gear in the midst of an office building is fun in its own right, and the actual boost is pretty impressive. It definitely makes me want to try one for a longer period, even if I think I'll be sticking to the purely pedal powered for the foreseeable future. Going fast with minimal effort while still having to pedal is a cool feeling, and I could see it being the thing that gets more people to ditch their car for short trips.

No word on system pricing or original spec yet, but expect to see the E-matic spec'd on some major brands come next year. Check out [www.sram.com](http://www.sram.com)





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# TIJUANA

*Bad rep, bad roads. Good people, great rides.*

Words & photos by Meligrosa

[bikesandthecity.blogspot.com](http://bikesandthecity.blogspot.com)

It was a bright and sunny Sunday morning in May and I was ready to attend two major bicycle events in the city of Tijuana, both the same day. Ciclopista's 8th anniversary ride, and the bi-monthly women only "Ladies Ride *en tacones*" (in high heels). If anyone had imagined 15 years ago a myriad of cycling groups were to gain any kind of momentum, it would have been a foreign thought. Why would anyone not want to move in a car instead?

## Getting Around in the Borderlands

Tijuana is the biggest port of entry into the United States, and San Diego and Tijuana share the world's busiest international border. The last corner of Latin America, the most misunderstood city in Mexico, and where its local community strives to regain its city with violence slowing down, a terrible media reputation and to show both national as well as international tourists, that in its own chaotic way, Tijuana is a beautiful place.

The dirty business of the semi-private public transportation "companies" which are ran mafia-style, is an absolute joke. The transborder linkage between the city of San Diego and Tijuana and their incapability to work together with a functioning efficient urban infrastructure, could be easily described as a time bomb itself.

## Bikes As Transportation

Most people consider themselves beginners but each will let you know they have an important role in the growth of the bicycle community in Tijuana. There are many opportunities to explore the concept of riding a bike by participating in an organized "paseo" (ride) or group gathering around town. Tijuana is not a city where you can easily walk places due to its rapid growth, most roads have been made without pedestrians in mind, never mind bicycles. Sidewalks double as magicians, often you see them, often you don't. Sometimes they suddenly disappear, often you end up having to run to get across the street to avoid getting hit by a speeding car.

Besides having a tough mentality and a few extra inner tubes to change a flat on the go, the sentiment of Tijuana's citizens on bikes is to show their fellow *Tijuanenses* that moving around town on a bicycle is definitely possible. One of the facts that can't be ignored is the rough condition of the streets throughout. Perhaps the most important characteristic is to maintain a positive attitude and also become a skilled rider in detecting the half circle lane divider bumps to avoid falling, those seem to be the worst sneaky enemy.





## Ciclopista

Ciclopista started as a group of friends simply seeking places and spaces where they could ride their bicycles and explore the city and has since grown and established itself as one of Tijuana's largest cycling groups and continues to meet twice per week.

Ciclopista's 8th anniversary was celebrated in May and was heavily promoted throughout local media, social networks and the various groups in town. There were small bike shops representatives, ride organizers and bicycle advocates of all walks of life, a few local celebrities, the local professional soccer team Xolos mascot, families, music and the most positive and vibrant spark of energy that one could experience on an early Sunday morning.

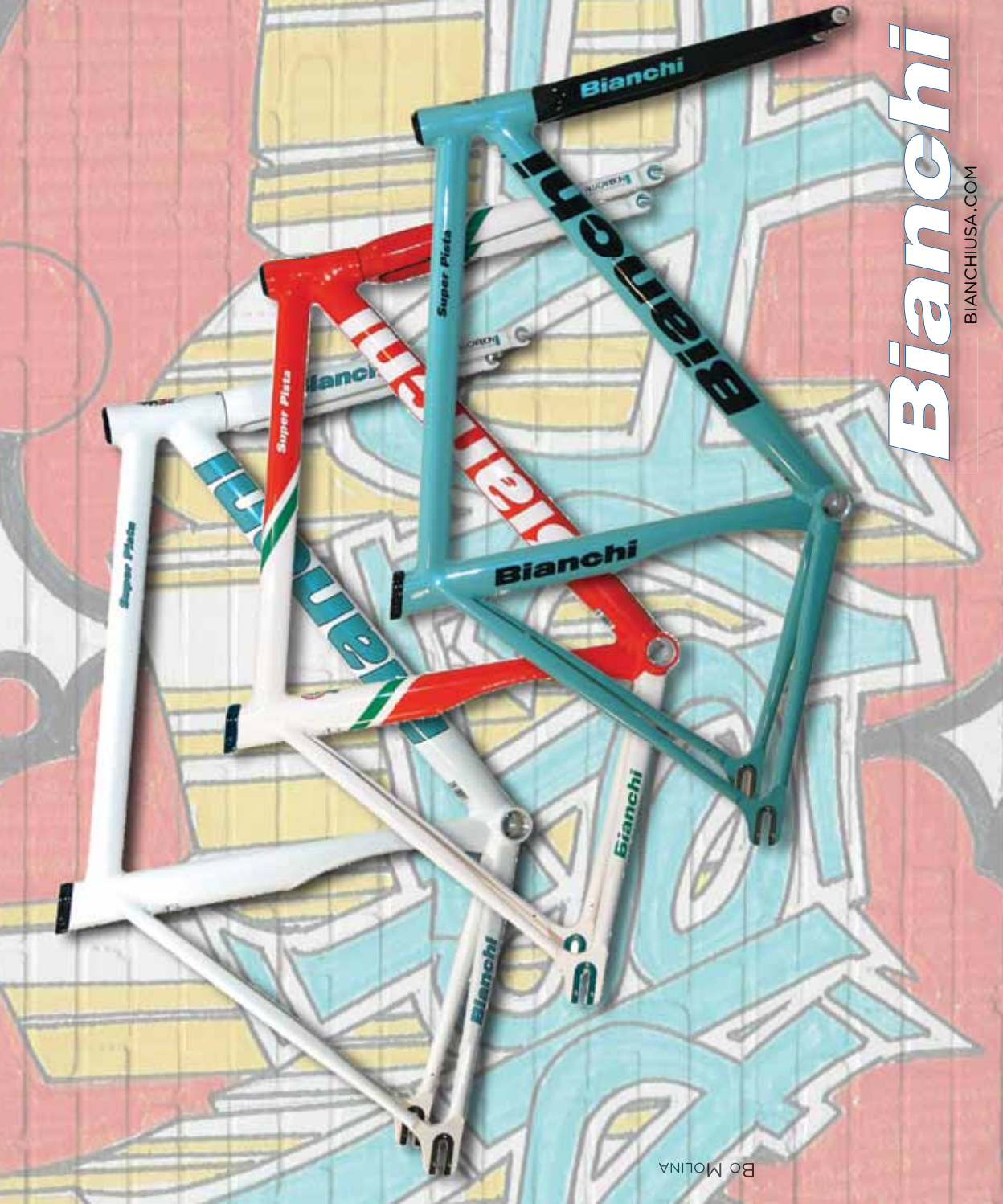
In November 2008 the first official bike lane was

inaugurated, 1700 meters of a bike route in the middle of the Zona Río. The route is a loop with City Hall to the east and the Plaza Río shopping center to the west.

## Rides and Groups

*Paseo de todos* is a ride for all. It began over two years ago as a monthly organized ride described as well-mannered and a heavy welcoming vibe which attracts members of all age groups, levels and categories, including families. Arturo Viazcan is the mind behind this initial idea, and it all started after he visited the south of Mexico and saw other large rides. One of the ride's motto is: "This is a festivity where ALL cyclists and social groups are invited to be a part of and to demonstrate that it is possible to use the bicycle as





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a transportation choice.”

The ride has also attracted bicycle enthusiasts from *el otro lado*, the other side. Members of various cycling groups in San Diego head south and join the hundreds of bikers ready to socialize, learn new routes, see the city from the saddle and roam the city at night while perhaps checking out a new taco stand recommended by a local.

Tijuana has a variety of multiple weekly rides, weekend gatherings and monthly rides and events throughout town. A phase of 3-4 years of violence (2007-2010) has significantly slowed down and community activities have rapidly been on the rise and gaining momentum, becoming popular for all kinds of bike enthusiasts. There is a group called *Los Extreme* and they ride anywhere between 30-50 kilometers on any given weeknight ride, there is a ladies ride on Monday nights where you can find all kinds of cute outfits, fun people and ladies showing off their flirty shoes. Each district and neighborhood seems to have their own ride between the eastbound Otay neighborhood to Playas de Tijuana.

## El Centro

In the last few years the bike population has slowly grown and become a part of family activities, youth and exercise enthusiasts. Besides various rides, bicycle fanatics often have the need to gather at not only bike shops and on the road, but a place where they can relate to other riders, drink coffee perhaps and socialize. Two of the newest local business in the Zona Centro are owned by young business men: Bici Estación/Tijuana Bike Tours and BICA Bikes & Coffee.

## Bici Estación

Talking to Arturo Viazcan is like having a conversation with an old friend, even if you have just met. He is well known in the bicycle community in Tijuana, has met people all over San Diego and the south of Mexico as well as a few co-founders of Critical Mass in San Francisco. It is hard to miss that his positive and mellow attitude towards promoting the use of bicycle comes through across town.

In his mind, he wanted to open a space where people could gather together to use tools and share information—this is how Tijuana Bike Tours was born. “This is a way for people to come and hang out, work on their bikes, and the way we will pay the rent for the space will be to have these bike tours, so people can rent the bikes and get to know the city on wheels. Here you can find friends, rent bikes at modest prices, maps, tips, t-shirts and soon coffee and refreshments.”

Bici Estación officially opened their doors this past May and the yellow bikes can be seen throughout Tijuana along with the groups participating in the tours they offer.

“People were not so used to think about having different options besides getting around by car. We would like to promote that it is possible to get places on a bicycle. The response from traffic, from people in cars is that they are usually happy to see us, they yield and they seem to be pretty supportive.”

After 9/11 the average American tourist numbers in the downtown district dramatically declined and little by little the locals have regained and have started to promote their city with pride, participating in local events taking place in the downtown region, where the local tourism was invisible next to the American crowds. “Before 9/11 the discos and bars would not even let you in if you were a local, recently that has





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done a 180° because these business had no more tourists, the local venues started opening local bars targeted to the local youth and the revitalization of the area has begun.”



## **BICA: Bikes and Coffee.**

The young founders of the hip Tijuana bike shop put it plain and simple, “We love bicycles and we love coffee.” Jesús, Luis and José Miguel Mercado opened BICA on January 20th 2012. It is located right off the sixth street corridor which has been a business boom in the last two years, with a local business renaissance packed with positive energy, a younger Tijuana population invasion on any given night, and the re-ownership of the area which had been formerly flooded with drunk *gringo* tourism.

“I’d say we focus our products and accessories on the fixed gear bicycle almost 80% but we are very friendly and open to all kinds of bicycles. We want people to come and have some coffee and check out some cool gear and accessories.” They often have bike movies on their screen in the back of the store, as well as two couch-style chairs for friends and customers to hang out. There is space where they curate art exhibitions featuring upcoming local artists and are held at least once a month. And something that is not seen on the sidewalks of Tijuana—bike racks and plenty of space for bikes to belong and feel welcome, right outside their shop.

The BICA crew organized an alleycat event in Tecate earlier this year and they were happy that so many riders were able to attend. “We started hitting some blogs and companies we were interested in along the West Coast in California, and we were so surprised a few of them came down and showed their support and even brought gear and prizes to our event. Most recently our friends from L.A. (TRAFIK) came down to check out our opening earlier this year” said Jesus.

BICA has become a pit stop for many visiting international riders wanting to explore what Tijuana and Baja California offer. “Recently our friends from Los Angeles were stoked to be in town, on the weekend of the Rosarito-Ensenada ride earlier in May, we were so proud they got to experience that,” Jose said.

## **Bike Border Crossing**

Commuting back and forth between Mexico and the US on a bicycle has definitely changed, and continues to do so since 9/11. Bicycles used to be able to ride in a car’s lane while waiting to get across which stopped immediately after 9/11 and cyclists were made to head to the front of the line and cross in the pedestrian designated lanes. This caused an immediate reaction and friction between cyclists and the pedestrians, often calling them cheaters or pointing them out to be line cutting by being able to get ahead.

Cyclists are often not considered commuters in the international crossing methods. The average pedestrian wait could be as lengthy as 3 hours during the morning rush hour. Since the implementation of the SENTRI card for pedestrians in 2008, bicycle commuters have found that this is the way to go, however SENTRI application includes a heavy background check, fingerprints, an interview process and after almost \$200 USD in fees, not everyone qualifies for it.

After 9/11 and the end of the bicycle’s availability to take the lane sharing the commute with motorized traffic, a short-lived phenomenon happened. In 2006 the Immigration and Naturalization Service ended the bicycles ability to get ahead of the pedestrian line because it became a business on the south-end of the border in Mexico. It was possibly the biggest opportunity for pop-up bike rental vendors to make quick money, and the quickest way for anyone to become frustrated with the almost dirty business of this prac-



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tice. For \$5-20 USD, one could rent a bike and that would guarantee to get ahead of the 3-4 hour wait. This rapidly turned into a whatever-it-takes attitude and often a person could be seen renting a bike without a saddle, even without pedals, just to get across quickly. Subsequently that ended and now everybody, with the exception of SENTRI cardholders, waits in the same pedestrian lane.

The bicycle community from both sides remains optimistic and continues to be present for important days such as “Bike to Work Day” and they are open to dialogue with the urban planners. It is crucial for both cities to consider a smooth transition of a bicycle lane for both sides which will work as an option for pedestrians to come and go in a healthier way than standing in line for endless hours or idling inside a car for long periods of time.

## TJ en Bici

Arturo (of Bici Estación) alongside other members of the bicycle community in Tijuana founded the group called TJ en Bici, which is entirely dedicated to pro-

mote the use of the bicycle for city transportation. The group has started to meet with transportation management departments in the city, advocating for good urban planning, promoting a healthier lifestyle and that it can be possible that pedestrians, cars, disabled citizens and cyclists coexist and commute on the same roads.

Since its beginnings TJ en Bici has met up, discussed and participated in national forums including Mexico City's BiciRed, and teaming up with IMLAP, Tijuana's Metropolitan Planning Institute, to plan for better bicycle strategies in Tijuana.

“Once there are bikes on the streets, it is a sign that a city is safer and friendlier. That is one of the goals we are after, in a way to let the people own the streets again, similar to what once started as Critical Mass in San Francisco 20 years ago, with an image that reflects from the citizens indicating that by choosing to ride a bike they are proud to be from Tijuana, ride in Tijuana and to take away from people the mentality that they can only move around in their car.” Viazcan said.

The message is clear: Tijuana is more beautiful by bicycle.

**NO EXIT**

© Andy Singer



## Connectivity

Embracing the power and presence of social media, most of the social, leisure and competitive rides that take place in Tijuana and surrounding towns are posted on Facebook. Information, connections and photos are posted shortly after each ride and this tool has played a crucial impulse in the local events popularity.

There are no bicycle festivals or fairs yet, but don't be surprised if recurring celebrations begin to happen. People are always ready to party, to represent their citizen pride and ready to stay-up late if needed. It could almost be said that Tijuana never sleeps.

The city of Tijuana and its beautiful people are ready for you to join them on a bike ride forming its promising future, they are eager to show you the contrary to what many may think “is not the real Mexico.”

There is no place in the world where you can see the density of population covering the Tijuana hills adjacent to the San Diego landscape, experience the tangible hybrid cultures from both countries, and see the Pacific Ocean from the top of the hill while waiting for the sun to set alongside hundreds of people on bicycles.





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# Disc Brake Basics

By Brad Quartuccio



**D**isc brakes became all but standard equipment on mountain bikes a decade ago, and as time has gone on have become more and more prevalent on city bikes. What once was an esoteric piece of equipment that only the most informed or well-to-do had on their bikes, disc brakes have trickled down to the entry-level price range in some cases, and for good reason. Besides the greater stopping power offered as compared to rim brakes, discs work consistently no matter the weather conditions, are less prone to contamination from road grit, and aren't affected by an out of true rim from missing one too many curb hops.

While hydraulic disc brakes are powerful and fairly maintenance free, they are also pricey and not found on many city bikes, at least not yet. And none of the big players have made a hydraulic compatible brifter, meaning that most all cyclocross and road bikes with disc brakes are sporting cable actuated mechanical versions.

Like any braking system, discs convert forward momentum into heat as you pull the lever and clamp the pads together. Much of the mechanical advantage of disc brakes is due to how close the pads sit to the disc, and the relatively large surface area of the brake pads. Most mechanical disc brake systems have an inner fixed brake pad, and an outer pad that moves as you pull the brake lever, flexing the disc as the brakes are applied to provide contact between the two brake pads and rotor. It's a simple design that works remarkably well when set up and maintained properly. When in doubt refer to the manufacturer's instructions for your particular model, but the following tips about checking pad clearance, simple rotor truing, breaking in new pads and avoiding contamination nearly universal in helping to maximize disc brake performance.





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## Pad Clearance

Check pad clearance easily by holding a notecard behind the caliper. Too close and the brake will be noisy, too far and power will suffer. Each brake model has a different pad to disc clearance for optimal performance, refer to the instructions for those particulars.


## Rotor True

It doesn't take much for an out of true rotor to rub one pad or the other, which can be more annoying than anything. You can gently force a slightly warped rotor back into true with clean hands. If it has a sharp high spot from impact, you most likely need a new brake rotor.

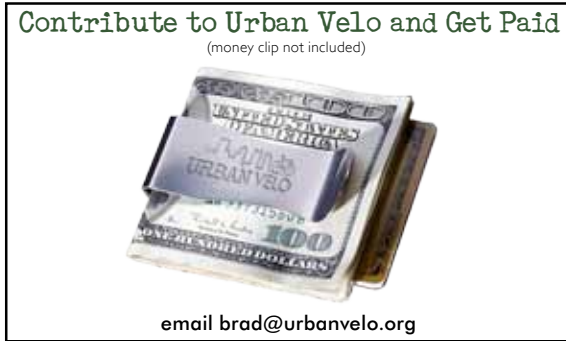
## Break-In

New disc brake pads require a break-in period before they perform to their best. Most manufacturers recommend riding up to moderate speed and coming to an almost complete stop 10-20 times to help clean off the rotor, even out the surface of the brake pad, and transfer a certain amount of the pad material onto the disc rotor itself.

## Contamination

While disc brakes are nearly impervious to bad weather in all but the worst conditions, they are particularly sensitive to oil contamination. It is important to only touch the discs with clean hands, and to avoid any spray lubes or degreasers around them. Disc brake pads absorb oils and grease on the rotor surface and it doesn't take much to render them useless, requiring replacement. 





# DIY Light Mount

By Brad Quartuccio



**T**here are a number of reasons you may wish to mount your light somewhere other than your handlebar. Perhaps you want to save space for other accessories, or use a handlebar bag that interferes with the beam, or want to place it lower to shine across the roadway at a shallower angle. With a scrap piece of 1/8" steerer tube and a headset start nut you can fashion a custom mount that will fit on most any rack or fender mount out there with a long enough matching bolt. The diameter of the steerer is 28.6 mm, right between the two most common bar clamp sizes meaning any universal fit light will fit snug and the scrap can easily be trimmed to length to fit your particular light model or clearance needs.







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