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# URBAN VELO

Bicycle Culture on the Skids

Issue #38 • August 2013

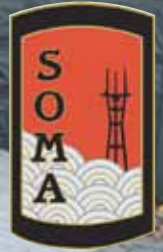
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# URBAN VELO

Issue #38

August 2013

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**Brad Quartuccio** Editor [brad@urbanvelo.org](mailto:brad@urbanvelo.org)

**Jeff Guerrero** Publisher [jeff@urbanvelo.org](mailto:jeff@urbanvelo.org)

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**Editorial intern:** Krista Carlson

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**On the cover:** 2005 Bike Forums Single Speed Fixed Gear Meet and Greet in Chicago. Photo by David Munson, [www.davidrmunson.com](http://www.davidrmunson.com)

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**Co-conspirators:** Takuya Sakamoto, Cynthia Gu, Ed Glazar, Kevin Dillard, Jason Montano, Trevor Hughes, Kurt Boone, Thomas Prehn, Andy Singer, Sam Brasch, Brendan Kevenides, P.C., and Dyami Serna

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Urban Velo, PO Box 9040, Pittsburgh, PA 15224

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

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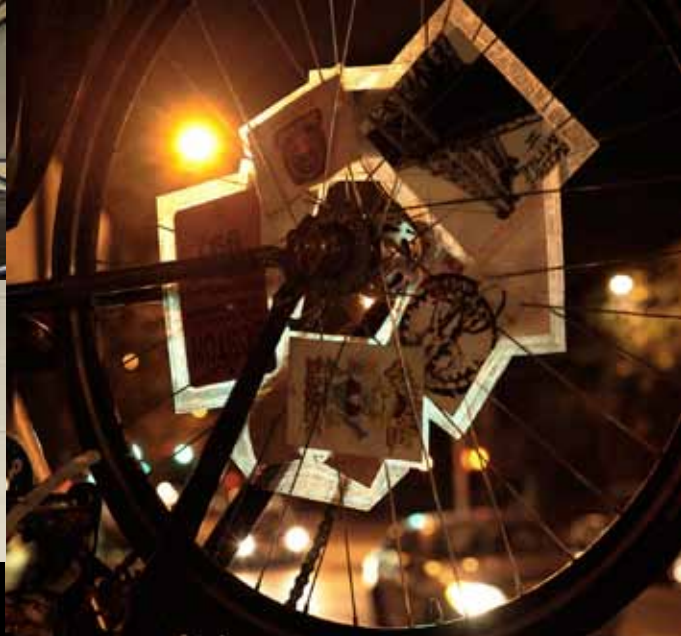


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Alleycat photos from over the years by messenger and photographer, Takuya Sakamoto. See more on page 28.







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# EDITOR'S STATEMENT

By Brad Quartuccio



If you aren't getting dirty, you are doing it wrong. I can't help it—no matter the bike, no matter the ride my wheels get dirty along the road less traveled. You don't have to get your downtube shifters muddy, but no matter where you call home, ride enough and it's inevitable that you'll get stuck out longer than expected, along a tract of dirt where there used to be a road. There is something to be said about learning to love the punishment when you can control the dosage to make the days that the universe dishes it out more tolerable.

Just as not every ride should be a sufferfest, not every ride can be an idyllic sunny day spin. Everyday commuters and working couriers experience the worst of it, with rides determined solely by the clock without concern to the weather or traffic conditions. Even but a cursory acknowledgement from a fellow rider when you're both "in the shit" has weight—misery loves company, as they say.

Sometimes the misery is self-inflicted, with racing being the long-standing go-to competition to test one's limits and build camaraderie. On page 28 our feature story explores the explosion of alleycat racing throughout urban cycling and some of the influence it has had on the culture, moving from the exclusive courier world into the general consciousness. I am but one of many that got seriously hooked on urban cycling partially through alleycats and the people that surround them. While my risk-taking has toned down since I entered my first in 2003, the allure and trepidation of riding fast with friends on someone else's terms remains. The particulars of post-race conversations are lost to the ether, but the bonds over tales of spectacular equipment failure, triumphant routes, traffic close calls and bonking in the freezing rain remain. Not only something to codify friendships over, the experiences make the third flat on a tired rainy ride bearable. At least it's not a race.



We want your words. Send your editorial contributions to [brad@urbanvelo.org](mailto:brad@urbanvelo.org)

rider: Eric Kremin of the Beaver Boys



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# PUBLISHER'S STATEMENT

By Jeff Guerrero



I never cease to be amazed at how many average people—folks who you would never think of as cyclists—are lifelong bicycle enthusiasts. I know I shouldn't be surprised. Learning to ride

a two-wheeler is a childhood rite of passage the world over. I remember growing up in suburban New Jersey, bikes started out as play things and soon became implications of freedom. My friends and I were no longer confined to the yard, or the block. We could ride the mile and a half to buy candy at Wawa, or if our parents were feeling generous we could ride to the pizza shop for a slice. We weren't "cyclists," we were just kids.

I'm willing to bet that I'm the only one of my childhood friends who still rides a bike on a regular basis. Or at least one of the very few who rides for anything other than entertainment and fitness.

It's sad, because as much as bikes are a rite of passage, they're also something that most people feel the need to "grow out of." It's not just about getting a car, but seemingly about acting like an adult. I've noticed something interesting about teenagers that I know—the only ones who endeavor to ride a bicycle for transportation are the ones who could care less about what other people think of them. These kids tend to be wicked smart, reasonably athletic and doggedly independent. So before I move on, I will say that there is hope among the youth of today.

Moving on up into the realm of college kids and other young adults, I notice that there is a lot of interest in using bikes as a means of transportation, but they seem to think that logistics will get in the way.

"What if it rains? Can I really ride that far? What if I need to look presentable?"

The answers, as you and I well know, are relatively simple. Still, with nobody guiding them, most of these folks end up waiting for the bus.

Of course adults as a whole, especially those in the 20 to 40 year age range, represent the largest pool of

potential cyclists. I think it's safe to say that more than 90% of the people I know have ridden a bicycle before. They know it's enjoyable, they recognize the health benefits, they probably wouldn't be opposed to doing something good for the environment. So why aren't more people getting around on two wheels?

People don't believe cycling is safe. And you know what's terrible? The older I get, the more apt I am to agree with them.

The other day a friend of mine confided that she was seriously thinking about getting a bike, but decided that it's simply too dangerous. She would only have to ride one mile to get to work, and just under two miles to class. If she were back in her home country—where city traffic is nothing short of notorious—she wouldn't have to think twice because bicycles are a part of everyday life. But here in the United States, bikes are still the odd man out on roadways.

As much as I would like to encourage her to follow her initial inclination, I find it difficult to do so. When I considered her particular commute, there were virtually no bike amenities to be had. No dedicated bike lanes, no bike trails, barely even any sharrows. She would be faced with some of the most dangerous traffic situations our town has to offer, including roads where there have been numerous cycling fatalities this year. Throw in a few high-crime intersections for good measure, and I'm on board with her plan to renew her bus pass.

But it's a shame, really. Because in the back of my mind I know she would love doing what I do—zooming through the streets after work with the wind in her hair and a smile on her face. Thankfully, I do have hope for the future. That hope is due in large part to the efforts of our local bike advocacy organization. In recent months alone they've been able to influence changes that make the roads safer for my friends and I. And I know they've only scratched the surface. That's why my membership is set to automatically renew, and my wallet opens up every year for the annual fundraiser. I highly encourage you to do the same.



Urban Velo issue #38, August 2013. Print run: 6500 copies. Issue #37 online readership: 55,000+



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# i ♥ riding in the city



**NAME:** Dan Kitchen

**LOCATION:** Kalamazoo, MI

**OCCUPATION:** Co-Founder of Fixed 269

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

I live in my hometown of Kalamazoo, MI. My city is a great place to ride due to the always growing cycling culture and awareness that surrounds us. The city riding is not terribly challenging but a ton of fun. Downtown is all sprawling four-lane one ways with a ton of back and forth cut through streets. If city street

riding isn't your thing, the last couple of years have sprouted the Kalamazoo River Valley Trail (KRVT), which provides a safe two-way path for cyclists from one end of town to South Haven, nearly 70 miles outside of town on Lake Michigan.

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

Being that I have three small children, getting out of town is a little difficult with my bike. So my favorite city to ride in is Kalamazoo. Not only because I live and ride here, but because I, as well as the other cyclists who live and ride here, love our city. There is no shortage of coffee joints, bars and night life to ride to and from; also the summers are filled with downtown festivals that shouldn't be missed.

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

I love riding in the city for the everyday surprises. There is always new pavement to explore, a new route to take, traffic to get around and people to meet. Having a great community of riders here has really brought the consciousness of cyclists on the road to the front of motorists minds so the daily commute or evening bomb around downtown is all the more enjoyable.

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# i ♥ riding in the city



**NAME:** CJ Arayata

**LOCATION:** Philadelphia, PA / Baltimore, MD

**OCCUPATION:** Psych Grad Student, Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia Intern

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

Half of the week I live in northeast Baltimore, MD and the riding here sucks. The roads that I have to travel on are busy, hilly and poorly maintained. Not to mention most streets in my area run diagonally or curve and meander every which way so without a map handy a wrong turn can't easily be corrected as on a grid. I don't ride nearly as much here as I would like, which is upsetting.

The other half I "live" in Philly. Riding here is great! It's 99% flat unless you travel to West Philly, and even then it's pretty manageable. The bike infrastructure is awesome and constantly improving: major north-south and east-west bicycle corridors and buffered bike lanes can get you practically anywhere, and on-street bike corrals have been popping up throughout to city to ease bike-parking issues at hot spots like grocery stores and bars.

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

Brisbane, Australia. Perfect weather, beautiful bike trails and paths that run along and over the Brisbane river, great public transport, and a very small CBD are some of the reasons. But the best part about it was that because there were so few urban cyclists there was no courier/fakenger distinction or related disdain that is so common in other cities. Everyone was welcome, and could just bond over their love of riding in the city.

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

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# i ♥ riding in the city



**NAME:** Avril AVR (left) & Chv Chvasta (right)

**LOCATION:** Atlanta, GA

**OCCUPATION:** Designer, PALACES Bass Player

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

We live in the tiny little town of Atlanta, GA. Atlanta is pretty spotty, with lots of “surprise” hills, tons of hostile angry road raging drivers, drunks, and folks that openly hate bikes/bikers/bike culture in the local media. Despite the “goonery,” Atlanta is a fantastic place to ride! The traffic is insane, the sparse bike lanes are usually full of debris and unusable, but the streets are absolutely the place to be. Honking, revving engines, and death threats? Absolutely! We wouldn't want it any other way. It's what makes daily bike commuting and nightly stomps through town colorful.

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

Well, we have to give props to the Capital of The Dirty South, Atlanta! The urban bike culture here gets more awesome every year. We're coming up on our huge yearly SOPO BIKE Co-op Broken Hearts and Bicycle Parts alleycat, alleycross, and goldsprints event. Folks come from all over the southeast region to participate. There seems to be an alleycat about every month here, not to mention monthly bike “Mobile Social” events sponsored by the Atlanta Bicycle Coalition.

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

As ugly as the streets can sometimes be during the day, night riding in Atlanta is a completely different animal. With some decent illumination, we own the streets after dark in this town! The dense traffic congestion thins out quite a bit after 8 PM, and Atlanta is sprawling! There are tons of great late-night bike destinations: coffee stops, beer stops, bike-friendly music venues, and a brand new paved trail that connects one side of town to the other if you want to avoid using roads.



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# i ♥ riding in the city



**NAME:** Beaux Jones

**LOCATION:** Baton Rouge, LA

**OCCUPATION:** Environmental Lawyer

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

I live in Baton Rouge, LA and riding in the city can be tough due to the lack of biking culture and infrastructure. People often look at me crazy when I walk into work in the morning covered in sweat or when I “click clack” through the line at the coffee shop trying not to slip in my cleats. Many people don’t understand why I ride. But every once in a while I make eye contact with someone in their car and I see that glint in their eye where they rethink the way they are getting around.

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

I choose to live in the city because I enjoy people and I love to ride in the city because I love to connect with those people. In the country (where I grew

up) every person essentially lived on islands that were connected by their trucks. In the city, on a bike, I feel like I understand why people move to the cities—to experience and be a part of their community. On a bike there are no barriers between me and the rest of the world. There are no windshields to “protect” me from the elements. No radio to drown out the sounds of the world.

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

No matter how chaotic the world around me is, when I look down and I see the simplicity of the chain and the repetition of my pedaling it brings me peace. It is like the breath in meditation. If you focus on it, the simplicity will always trump the chaos.

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# PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT



## Retroshift BURD Derailleur

The Retroshift CX integrated shift system reviewed on page 50 has found a number of fans in cyclocross racers, gravel riders and commuters alike. Enough so that just a couple of seasons since their debut Retroshift has introduced the Blatantly Upgraded Rear Derailleur to complement their shifter offerings. The BURD is a custom engraved Shimano-compatible Microshift rear derailleur with replacement pulleys for better shifting and fewer mud complications. Available with Shimano Ultegra pulleys for \$69 or FSA ceramic bearing pulleys for \$89, with a unique \$34 re-build service available for each in the case of a terribly missed shift or crash that bends or breaks the derailleur body. In the gritty and demanding world of cyclocross racing or daily commuting products with a balance of performance and affordability are key—the price and re-build service of the Retroshift BURD make it a contender against the big boys. [www.retroshift.com](http://www.retroshift.com)



## Bern Allston

The long awaited Bern Allston helmet is now available at dealers for \$90. One point of criticism of Bern helmets has been venting and weight, both of which are addressed in the Allston, with 16 vents and a weight of just 13 oz. Billed as their first true cycling-specific helmet, the Allston retains the low-profile urban look and ships with a removable liner for cold weather. [www.bernunlimited.com](http://www.bernunlimited.com)

## Skully Ninlite



With two ultra-bright LED lights for eyes, this little ninja will help you see and be seen. Its silicone body mounts easily to standard and oversize handlebars. Available with white or red lights for \$17 and \$14 respectively. [www.skully.com.tw](http://www.skully.com.tw)

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## Tanaka QR Skewer Fender Mount



The Tanaka QR Skewer Fender Mount can add fender eyelets where there once were none at all and without using unsightly clamps. The mounts accept 5 mm fender stays and fit on any standard skewer and most fork dropouts for a clean attachment. Available for \$12 per pair, buy two to outfit

front and rear. [www.somafab.com](http://www.somafab.com)

## Campagnolo Toeclip Keychains



There seems to be no end of creative uses for repurposed bike parts, like these key chains made from vintage Campagnolo toe clips. Carefully cut and with a polished edge, they make a unique gift for that Campy nut we all know.

[www.etsy.com/shop/orbitingolive](http://www.etsy.com/shop/orbitingolive)



## Ortre BI5 Lock

More secure than a cable but not as theft-resistant as a full size u-lock, the Ortre BI5 (back in five) is a \$40 compact lock great for lower risk locking situations, or as a secondary lock for your front wheel. The lock is a svelte 511 g and slides into a bag or back pocket easier than even the smallest mini-u. [www.ortre.com](http://www.ortre.com)

## The Handleband



The \$25 Handleband is a silicone band with an aluminum spine to securely hold your smartphone onto your stem or bars. As we rely on our phones more for navigation and competition beyond communica-

tion even bicycle luddites have found the need for a bar mount on occasion. The Handleband stretches to accommodate most phone and case combinations, and can also be used to hold a flashlight for bail out night ride lighting. They even put a bottle opener on it. [www.handleband.com](http://www.handleband.com)

## BlinkerGrips

These battery-powered lock-on style grips bring turn signals to your handlebars. Compatible with most trigger shifters and brake levers, they retail for about \$60 per pair. [www.blinkergrips.com](http://www.blinkergrips.com)





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## Traitor Crusade Disc Cyclocross Frameset

Traitor Cycles has been quietly working on the \$600 Crusade Disc frameset featuring fully butted chromoly tubes and rocker style dropouts to allow either single speed or geared drivetrains. The post mount brake on the fork is a sign of the changing times, and the internal top tube routing shows off the shouldering roots. It's definitely more of a race bike than commuter, with but a single bottle mount and no provisions for racks or fenders. [www.traitorcycles.com](http://www.traitorcycles.com)

## Surly Straggler

The Surly Straggler is more or less a disc brake Cross Check with larger tires. The fork features disc compatible rack and fender mounts at the dropout, along with rack mounts mid-blade and on the crown. Disc brake only, the rear brake has stops for full length housing for either mechanical or hydraulic lines. The Straggler is made of 4130 chromoly steel, has clearance for new 700 x 41 Knard tires, and features a proprietary new dropout that can run either single speed or geared drivetrains. It's safe to say that this is a bike that Surly fans have been dreaming of for the past decade. [www.surlybikes.com](http://www.surlybikes.com)



## Handsome Cycles Mud Butler Fenders

Hammered metal fenders have been all the rage the past few years for their durability and classic good looks, but while there are a few silver options available, matte black has been a custom painted option only. Handsome Cycles has introduced the \$60 Mud Butlers hammered metal fenders in 700 x 35 and 700 x 45 widths that have a matte black powdercoat for good looks and durability. [www.handsomecycles.com](http://www.handsomecycles.com)



## Fixcraft Lifeline Dual Pull Cable Kit

The Lifeline dual pull cable kit allows nearly any brake lever on the market to actuate both brakes at the same time—perfect for bike polo or adaptive cyclists. The front is 30", the rear 60", both Teflon-coated and with inline adjusters to fine tune the front and rear feel. Available now for \$28 in either long or short pull at [www.fixcraft.net](http://www.fixcraft.net)

## Pake Pedal Straps

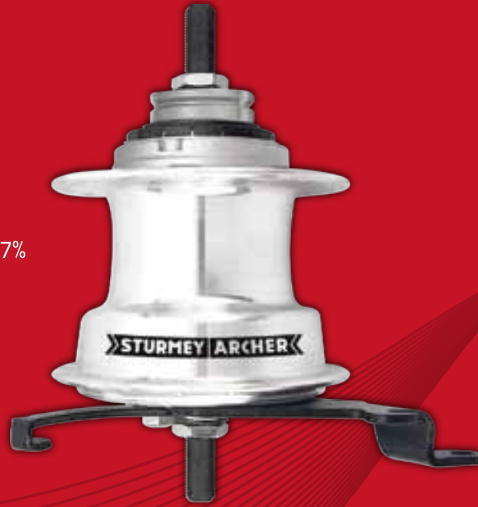
Pake pedal straps feature multi-layered nylon construction, and full-length hook and loop closure for convenience and precise fit. They retail for \$38 per pair. [www.pakebikes.com](http://www.pakebikes.com)



# THE PERFECT COMBO

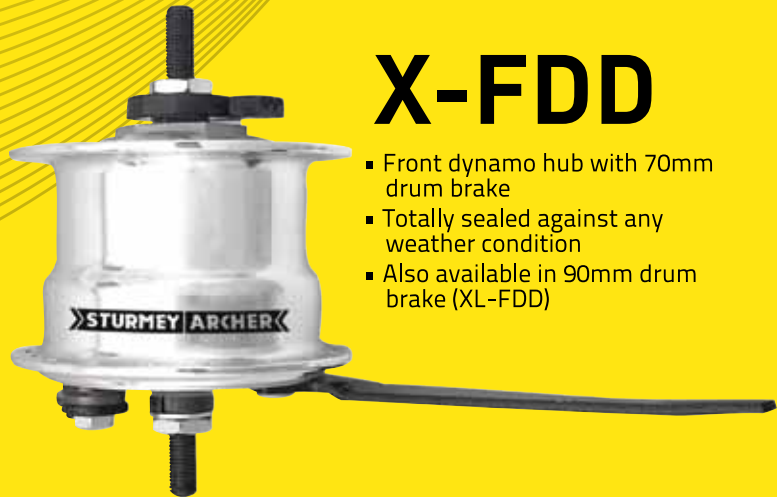
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# ALLEYCAT EXPLOSION

BY KRISTA CARLSON



# FROM HUMBLE TORONTO BICYCLE COURIER BEGINNINGS ALLEYCATS HAVE GROWN TO BE AN INSEPARABLE PART OF URBAN CYCLING CULTURE



BRAD QUARTUCCIO

**T**oday nearly everyone and their cousin has heard stories of infamous alleycat races—of messengers jetting between cars and skidding through intersections, reckless and crazed, like a sharknado on bikes. In the last decade, alleycats have gone from underground to ordinary, almost de rigueur. Races like Monster Track, Quake City Rumble and Stupor Bowl have established themselves as long-standing traditions, while countless others in cities across the country are one-and-done affairs of varying size and intensity.



ED GLAZAR



KEVIN DILLARD

Bike races—just plain ol’ bike races—have been around for as long as there have been bikes. And messenger races—well, they’ve been around even longer (first on foot and then by horse). One of the earliest recorded bike messenger races was the Critérium des Porteurs de Journaux, a checkpoint race in which racers would exchange packages for tokens. Held as early as 1895, the Critérium des Porteurs de Journaux continued for several decades.

“Before alleycats there would be unofficial, unspoken races when you saw someone on the street,” says Corey Hilliard, who began his career as a courier in Philadelphia in 1990. “You give them a look—I’m looking at him, he’s looking at me.”



BRAD QUARTUCCIO

What started out as casual competitions spurred the formation of a community that has served as both a support and incubator of messenger and urban cycling culture. There was an early, informal stage from around '85 to '93, following the boom in the bike courier business in the 1980's, where these races were happening with regularity and spontaneously as messengers would see one another on the street more and more, with the increase in employed couriers. Today pretty much everyone agrees that alleycats as we have come to know them—chaotic, fun, and more than a little dangerous—were born on the icy streets of Toronto.

In 1989 John “Jet Fuel” Englar, owner of Toronto’s Jet Fuel Coffee, dubbed his annual Halloween race the “Alleycat Scramble.” A few years later in 1992, German courier Achim Beier had the idea to hold a world championship event for messengers.

The next year, 500 messengers gathered in Berlin for the first Cycle Messenger World Championships,

giving messengers from all over the chance to catch up, commiserate, race bikes and let loose.

This pivotal event served as a fertile breeding ground for sharing and spreading ideas, and the alleycat was a prime concept to be adapted in cities the world over. An “alleycat” came to be understood as a race held in live traffic, and when Toronto messengers took films of their races to the inaugural CMWC, it set off an enormous ripple effect throughout cities in every developed nation.

Just as wildfire can jump from branch to bush and leave untouched grass between them, the spark of the alleycat leapt from Toronto to Berlin to London and back to North America, to eventually course through the streets of every major city with a cycling presence.

London’s first true alleycat, held on open streets, came a few months after the 1994 CMWC. Putting in much of the work to make the second World Championships a success, “Buffalo Bill” Chidely and Boris

Captain were too busy to actually participate in the CMWC events that weekend, so they took a trip to Toronto later in the year to be a part of the sixth annual Hellowe'en Alleycat Scramble—the event that had truly lit the fuse.

*“It wasn't linear in time or space,”* Chidely wrote in *Moving Target Vol 4 #3* (Spring 1995) trying to recap the Alleycat Scramble. *“It was more like a riot than a race. Obviously, it had a beginning and an end. But in between... I have so many unanswered questions... It was complete and utter urban bicycle bedlam. It was the most fun I ever had on bike. In the cold light of the day, racing illegally at night, through a city centre is plain stupid. But when I was doing it I felt more fulfilled, more alive than I had since, well to be honest, I have never felt more alive. It was the biggest rush ever.”*

About a week later, they threw the Andy Capp in London. Nine people showed up to race. *“Boris, who had organised the race, was steaming mad that so few people made the effort,”* writes Chidely in *Moving Target* in 2008, looking back on the race fourteen years later. *“The week before Boris and I had been in Toronto for the 1994 Hellowe'en Alleycat Scramble, and there had been a HUGE number of riders. So to come back to our own city and see so few turn out was a little demoralising. But hey, London got there in the end.”*



DAVID MUNSON



ED GLAZAR

Squid, who started working as a bike courier in 1990 and is now the man behind Cyclehawk, first heard about CMWC when it was held in London in 1994. “It amazed me, the idea of it. The following year the championships were going to be in Toronto. I’d met some messengers from Boston who were planning on going; they offered me a ride up there, so I ended up going with them. The first time I ever heard about alleycats, and all that stuff was at the World Championships.

At the time in New York there wasn’t a big community. The only time messengers would get together would be for a memorial,” Squid says. “If someone got killed while they were working, so that was the only kind of group event I’d been to before the championships. Going to the Championships inspired me to throw my [first] alleycat.”

A few years later, the Warriors race in New York would be hugely attended. Set to take place overnight and end at Coney Island at sunrise, the ride kicked off with a tug-of-war in the Bronx. Organizers hoped to see at least 200 people, but when the night came more than 600 cyclists would take to the streets in the form of 89 different bike “gangs,” hailing from as far away as Japan.

“For New York that was a big crossover event because so many people came out that weren’t bike messengers. The format was friendly to people... An alleycat can be kinda scary to the individual, but a team event where you’re going out with a bunch of your friends is a lot more welcoming to different levels—so you don’t have to be a badass racer to go to a fun ride with your friends.”



## WHAT IS AN ALLEYCAT?

The defining elements of an alleycat are pretty basic, leaving the design of the race largely up to the organizer's imagination. A lot of the times it's a matter of how to make it as fun and challenging as possible.

"The alleycat is its own special thing, the perfect combination of these skills that you just kind of develop riding around and getting to know your city," says Jeff Frane of All-City Cycles and Bike Jerks Minneapolis.

The basic structure includes a manifest, checkpoints, and challenges; like a scavenger hunt, you have a set of locations to get to, but you can get there any way you want. On top of being laid out on the most challenging streets, add into the mix a host of checkpoint challenges. Just about anything that you could think of making someone do is fair game for an alleycat challenge.

When we started it was very basic," says Squid. "The first Halloween one that we did, everyone put in \$5 and it was winner take all. After a while different cities started doing stuff that was a little more fun or different. The Boston kids were probably wackier than most. One time there was a checkpoint a block away from a police station and they had boxes of donuts, and you had to take a donut and throw as close to the police station as you dared."

One popular sentiment in alleycat culture is that it's fun to suffer. What that translates to in the alleycat community is races scheduled for the most grueling time of year, in the dead of winter. The long-standing St. Valentine's Massacre Race was among the first to set this precedent.

"Race to a checkpoint, drink a beer, do something silly, fix a flat, answer a question, play hopscotch—whatever you need to do to get your manifest signed to head off to the next checkpoint or a race meant to simulate a day in the life of a working messenger, for example, picking up packages or envelopes and routing yourself to the next pickup/drop location," says Sean Martin, describing some of the possible challenges that face alleycat racers. Martin, who hosts the grueling Lord of Griffith fixed gear hill race every year, began throwing races to pass on the fun he'd experienced at messenger-hosted events.





## GROWTH AND SPONSORSHIP

Sponsors have been involved since the early days, but as the scene grew organically by word of mouth, more companies found reasons to get involved. The first major sponsor on record is Dunhill Cigarettes who lent their support to the Toronto alleycat scene.

“In 2003 we did a dispatch-style race with Body-glove... for some reason they thought New York messengers were tough or something like that, so they wanted to do an event that had a lot of messengers showcasing their gear,” Squid reports. “We helped them get a ton of messengers together and rock their jerseys and do a ‘work challenge.’ Basically an alleycat, but we made it look legit. The way I look at it is it’s good exposure for cycling and if big companies are gonna help us out, it’s up to us make the best out of it, ya know?”

In 2004 Puma approached Squid and several other NYC messengers about putting together a track team. The following year, the company sponsored CMWC in New York. Over time, others in the bike scene started throwing alleycat-style checkpoint races. Although messengers have a familial community, it’s certainly not made up of exclusively messengers—family, friends and the like have always been involved to help run checkpoints and generally be a part of the fun.

“Fast Friday was started by Dustin [Klein] but was assisted by non-messengers,” says Martin “It was the community getting behind each other and progressing the fixed gear scene. It wasn’t about messenger or non-mess, it was about the bike, the fixed gear and what could be done with it.”

The emergence of localized bike forums online opened up a new channel for people to find out about and organize events everywhere.

“People on the Bike Forums Single Speed and Fixed Gear board put together a full-scale alleycat in Chicago in 2005,” David Munson, long time Chicago area rider and photographer, recalls. “It was primarily a non-messenger crowd. People came from all over the country. It was the ‘BFSSFG Meat and Greet’ with meat spelled like animal flesh because we were all meeting up in meatspace. It was the first time I think I really saw that a not-necessarily-messenger urban cycling event could actually work.”

With the support of these forums races grew in attendance and frequency, and the first decade of the 21st century saw the streets blush with fixed gear fever. It wasn’t always that way, though.

“A lot of guys are trying to do all these alleycats on brakeless track bikes,” say Hilliard. “When [alleycats] started out messengers would just ride whatever two-wheeled thing they could throw together.”

“Nowadays, everyone worldwide are throwing street races,” says Martin “It was a natural progression from what messengers were doing worldwide back in the day. Riders wanted to show their bikes, tricks, bike handling and of course who was the fastest. There was always non-messengers racing alleycats throughout the years, but the explosion of the fixed gear bike through blogs, forums, word of mouth, shops, etc. really made it accessible those who didn’t know messenger culture.”

The downside is races getting blown out when they get too big to fly under the radar, cyclists coming out just get prizes, others overestimating their handling skills or underestimating the force of a car that has the right-of-way.

“An alleycat is typically an illicit thing, and is best manifested in a subculture that’s not going to spend a lot of time blabbing about it online before the fact,” says Munson. “The more popularity grows in more mainstream parts of the culture, the more at risk the tradition is put. There is real fallout from it. Word got around a bit too much in Kyoto in 2009, for example, and the main race of Kyoto Loco had to be cancelled because authorities had caught wind and leaned on the organizers to stop it.”



BRAD QUARTUCCIO

## RISK

In some ways, the takeoff of alleycat style races has helped to validate the physically and mentally demanding work of bike messengers. At the same time, the mystique built up around alleycats likewise involves running red lights, riding against traffic, and heavy drinking. Some people hate alleycat racers for their devil-may-care notoriety; others fantasize about having the skills to carve a path through unpredictable traffic. As multimedia technology has grown more accessible and social media more inherent to everyday life, the apparent daredevil moves have enchanted a wider audience of novice cyclists bent on getting in on the action.

"I'd be in a few events where a police car is chasing us...but they can't really catch you," says Squid. "You kind of just disappear into traffic." Not everyone is so lucky though, and it's not unheard of to get a ticket in the midst of all the excitement.

For the most part cops don't bother with the races. The greater concern is safety for those involved, and others using the streets for regular travel—rather than as a race course. Most of the time, no one gets badly hurt and everyone has the best time ever. Someone has a brush with a car on occasion.

It was in Chicago in 2008 that everyone's worst nightmare took place: "I was living in Texas but heard immediately about Matt Lynch's death in the Tour da Chicago. I knew that intersection. I knew other people who were racing that day," says Munson. "There was a definite reaction. People lashed out against alleycats, against people riding dangerously in traffic. Other races got cancelled, some were changed in format to minimize risk, but ultimately, it seemed like very little actually happened. For those of us who have long-riden in traffic, especially in a place like Chicago that's an endless freak show of bad drivers, it does underscore the real risk of riding. Not just in races, but in traffic on an everyday basis."

"It's super easy to fall into this cliché that it's this ridiculous thrill-seeking, adrenaline junkie thing—the number one thing in mind when I go out to race is to keep myself as safe as possible," Frane says. "People say there's 'hellions on the streets'—it's so much more nuanced than that. People miss that because they see it as reckless behavior, but it's not reckless behavior at all. It is the precise expression of this unique skill set. When you cut some beautiful lines through downtown traffic, it just feels great."





ED GLAZAR

## PAYING IT FORWARD

The appeal of alleycats is more than just riding fast through traffic—the real clincher that makes people fall in love with the experience and share it with others is the camaraderie. It's everyone doing it together, in the same city, on the same streets, celebrating the bike and celebrating what can be done with it (and how much abuse in the form of bike wrecks and boozing a body could take).

“We only ever started organizing alleycats as a means of starting a sense of community amongst messengers, not to be ‘bad-asses’ or to be ‘really rad,’” says Chidely.

When Bodyglove asked the New York messengers who had been a part of the “work challenge” how they'd like to get paid, they asked for help in establishing official nonprofit status for the New York Bike Messenger Foundation.

“That helped us rally the community behind the whole thing, going ‘Hey, it’s not a couple messengers getting paid by a corporation, it’s us using this connection to make something happen that will last a long time and benefit people over a number of years,” says Squid.

It’s not unusual for an alleycat to have a community-oriented goal, whether it be raising money for the local messenger association or the Emergency Messenger Fund, to raise awareness for a cause such as the Global Warming Alleycat, or donate to charity as Cranksgiving does. An alleycat in which racers gather food to donate for Thanksgiving, Cranksgiving has been adopted in dozens of cities and continues to be one of the most popular alleycats anywhere (For more on Cranksgiving see Urban Velo issue #35).



# All-City <sup>MPLS</sup>

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KEVIN DILLARD



JASON MONTANO

## MOST FUN WINS

The alleycat scene has grown and matured simultaneously with the contraction of the bike messenger industry that spawned it. Despite the valid criticisms of the renegade events, over time they have become an inseparable part of urban cycling culture. They have provided an accessible competitive outlet for a wide range of people who might never have found themselves engaged in racing or bicycle culture otherwise. The challenge and community has brought people together, with the last decade's alleycat boom providing a jumping off point to a bike lifestyle for many riders.

"The track bike was the way in, and now everyone is stoked on road and 'cross bikes, and that's a wonderful thing. So many people have rode in an alleycat, had some fun, decided they wanted to try harder—and now those people are racing road and on the track and in cross and because it is so accessible," says Frane. "You can get last place in an alleycat and no one gives a shit. Most fun wins."





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by Trevor Hughes



Photographs are from between 1992 and 1998, taken while I was working as a bike messenger in Toronto.





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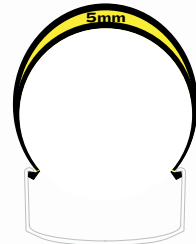
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# The Bike Messengers (1992-1998)

by Trevor Hughes





# The Bike Messengers (1992-1998)

by Trevor Hughes







## Fyxation Quiver

I'm going to start this review out with a pretty bold statement: I've never felt so immediately comfortable on a road bike before. And for serious commuters, comfort is absolutely key, not necessarily because you're riding long miles but because you're riding every day, several times per day.

The Quiver is Fyxation's do-it-all chromoly commuter bike. The name comes from the fact that this one frame can potentially be any number of bikes—single speed, fixed gear, internally geared or fully geared road bike. This flexibility comes via horizontal dropouts (track fork ends), 132.5mm spacing, and a proprietary CNC-machined removable derailleur hanger.

This might be a good point to address the comment that I heard over and over again: Isn't Fyxation a fixed gear company? Obviously, they're not willing to be pigeonholed. And that's a good thing, because while

fixed gears are cool, so are geared bikes. In fact, all bikes are cool. But I digress...

Should you indeed want to run the Quiver as a fixed gear, you'll be happy to know that the cable stops are all removable for a clean look. Fyxation was sure to include dual eyelets in the rear for a rack and fenders, though, as well as eyelets on the matching straight blade 4130 fork.

In my humble opinion, the Quiver is one good looking frame. It features clean TIG welds and a smooth gloss black paint job. What you don't see, however, is that the frame features an electro-deposited undercoat. This means the tubing is protected from the elements inside and out. So bring on the rain!

Speaking of rain, the Quiver has massive clearance that allows you to still run 35s with fenders. Without fenders you can run up to 47s. Want to go play in the woods? Slap some cross tires on and have a ball.

Of course no bike is absolutely perfect, and I do have a few nits to pick with the Quiver. I've got a 28" inseam and the standover on the 49cm frame measures just under 30". This is to be expected from a bike without a sloping top tube, though, and I'm perfectly capable of dealing with it, but other short riders might want to take note.

The removable derailleur hanger worked a lot better than I expected. In fact, it was virtually flawless. But roadside tire changes are not exactly facilitated by the derailleur coming off when the quick release skewer is removed.

Of course, most people will pretty much shrug off my complaints when they learn that the Quiver frame retails for under \$300.

My test bike represents a fairly typical build, but it is a custom component group so I won't harp on too much about the parts. The frame and fork weigh 5 pounds, and of course your complete build will vary. Still, there are several things that deserve a mention.

The SRAM Apex drivetrain was absolutely awesome. Nothing but crisp, positive shifting, day after day. The stuff looks great and seems like it's built to last a lifetime.

The A-Class ALX 220 wheelset is a smart choice for a commuter who rides well enough to avoid potholes, but knows better than to spend too much on a commuting wheelset. Watch for a separate A-Class review in the near future.

The Tektro R559 73mm long-reach caliper brakes did a great job in all conditions. You know I couldn't help but take the Quiver off-road (even with slick tires) and I never felt at a loss for braking power.

Fyxation makes handlebars, but for now they've yet to enter the road bar category. As such, they've deferred to Salsa for my test bike, and I couldn't be happier because they know a thing or two about bike components.

Finally, Fyxation rounded out the build with several of their own house brand components including pedals, straps, stem, seatpost, saddle, bar tape, bar plugs, and of course tires. Everything worked as expected, and I can never really say enough about their tires. They're simply hard to beat.

[www.fyxation.com](http://www.fyxation.com)





## Wyatt Street King

An increasing array of single speed bikes offering flip flop free/fixed hubs are on the market these days, as the ease of riding and maintenance grows in popularity among riders old and new. Whether you don't understand gears or just don't want to deal with them, the single speed Street King is a no-fuss bike made with the commuter in mind. It's both stylish and practical, with thoughtful accents like two brakes, brushed metal cable guides and built-in chain tensioners, with a reasonable price point of \$449.

The Street King is ready to ride in short order. Practical features include rack and bottle cage mounts, and the inclusion of both a fixed cog and freewheel, giving this Wyatt a leg up on many bikes being designed for urban riding which tend to lack the more utilitarian braze-ons. Another nice thing about it is that it ships with two brakes—the Street King certainly doesn't forfeit any stopping sensibility in the name of fashion.

It's a solid machine, built with 4130 chromoly frame

and fork, and weighs in at 25.5 lbs. with semi-aggressive geometry that makes it good for both cruising and crushing on the street. The frame design mimics sleek aluminum track frames, with a large diameter downtube, but being that it's not made of aluminum or intended for track racing it seems like an unnecessary flair that adds weight more than anything else. That said, the bike is not cumbersome to ride, nor particularly sluggish when cranking up hills—and it did generate a host of compliments out on the street.

It handles nicely. The Street King is a solid single-speed with a tight rear triangle featuring 405 mm chainstays behind the 74° seat tube and a 73° head angle with a 45 mm road-offset fork up front, making for fluid turning. The 50 mm of bottom bracket drop helps to keep pedal strike under control and the bike feeling responsive at low speed while sacrificing some of the stability that a lower bottom bracket would lend.



With 46x16 gearing it's a reasonable city gear to pedal, riding fixed or freewheel. The 28c tires are great for getting around town, but they also wide enough to take a ride on some dirt or gravel without feeling wary, especially seated in the double-walled 35 mm deep V Street King wheels. The chain tensioners built into the dropouts make for easy wheel alignment, though the rear hub is not equipped with proper track nuts, which is a drawback that almost cancels out the presence of the tensioners. Sealed hubs and a cartridge bottom bracket (along with the single speed drivetrain) ensure that the bike won't need much major mechanical work for a good while.

One of the less appealing features of the bike is the clunky plastic department store pedals. Toe straps would be an ideal addition to this build, since riding fixed without pedal retention is not the best idea. The other parts on the bike are standard for a bike in its range, of decent quality—that is nothing exceptional but entirely reliable and functional OEM parts. All parts come with a 45-day warranty and the frame and fork have a limited lifetime warranty.

The Street King comes in six standard colorways, including three single-color setups that feature matching rims and chain—white, black, and lime green—and three two-tone options: pink/blue, yellow/blue, and silver/orange. If none of those suit your tastes, you can pick the individual colors of the frame, fork, rims, seat, chain and decal on your own Street King for the same price as the standard models.

[www.wyattbikes.com](http://www.wyattbikes.com)





## Retroshift Levers

The Retroshift system was born from the desire for a simpler, more dirt- and crash-resistant system than STI, DoubleTap or Ergopower combined shift and brake levers for the muddy cyclocross courses of the Pacific Northwest. It just so happens to make a reasonable alternative for commuter, adventure and other riders more interested in long term durability than the most race ready shifting. At it's most basic, the Retroshift is a Tektro brake lever with a (patent pending) machined aluminum mount added to the front to accommodate a downtube or bar-end shifter.

Reliability in the face of abuse is a primary goal behind the Retroshift design. Rain and mud won't clog the shifters and render them inoperable, laying the bike down is less likely to damage the Retroshifts as compared to more fragile combined road levers. They are even a few grams lighter than most other systems at 380g for the pair.

While interested in the Retroshifts since the moment I first laid eyes upon them, I'll admit I was skeptical of their placement. I'm a big fan of top-mount thumbshifters and have them on a couple of my personal bikes, using models from the 1980s and retrofit mounts that use downtube shift levers to replicate old models, similar to the Retrofit mounting system. Perhaps the main downfall of this style of shifter is the range of motion required due to the lack of any ratcheting system—one thing on the top of the bars, another all together on the front of drop bar levers. I was concerned about inadvertently activating the brakes, or being able to reach to shift through all of the gears.

Once installed a single ride is all it took to get used to the shift action, with my fears of braking interference immediately set aside. If you ride primarily on the hoods and like the feel of top-mount, bar-end or downtube shifters you may find yourself in love with the Retroshift system. You can easily shift through the entire cassette range with a single swing of the right shifter, and the left friction shifter works double or triple ring setups with the trim adjustment to make every gear silent. While rear shifting is snappy and easy the range of movement and force required for front ring shifts can be trying, especially deep into an all-day ride I wish the front shifter had a shorter throw. Shifting from the drops is near impossible, even with my giant hands. From the hoods however it's an easy reach, and I happen to prefer the Campy-like shape of the Tektro hoods over more narrow types. I'd prefer that the shift housing could run under the tape for a cleaner look and to not interfere with a handlebar bag, but such a change would invariably alter the simplicity of the entire arrangement. Given my style of riding (ie. on the hoods, not racing), the Retroshifts have found a permanent home on my bike.

Buy the Retroshift CX2 nude for \$130 and use them with your own Shimano-compatible shift levers or buy them complete as tested for \$190 with Retroshift branded Microshift levers pre-installed. The V-brake compatible CXV is available for \$10 more, the single front ring CXI for \$40 less. Break or bend any of them in a crash and Retroshift will repair the damaged brake body, lever or shifter mount for \$24.

[www.retroshift.com](http://www.retroshift.com)



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## Light and Motion Vis 180

Rear lights are cheap insurance against getting rear-ended, with brighter options available year after year as LED and battery technology continues to improve. Light and Motion specializes in rechargeable lights, and the Vis 180 Micro is their take on a USB rechargeable compact rear light to keep other road users off your back.

Unlike other “blinkies” the Vis 180 Micro does not blink but rather pulses—less blinding than a high powered blink, but just as eye catching as it takes approximately one second to go from bright to dim and back, never fully turning black. As the name implies, the Vis 180 Micro has 180° visibility thanks to internal reflectors and side cutouts for the secondary yellow LED, and while more visibility is always better I question if sidelights prevent broadside collisions given the way

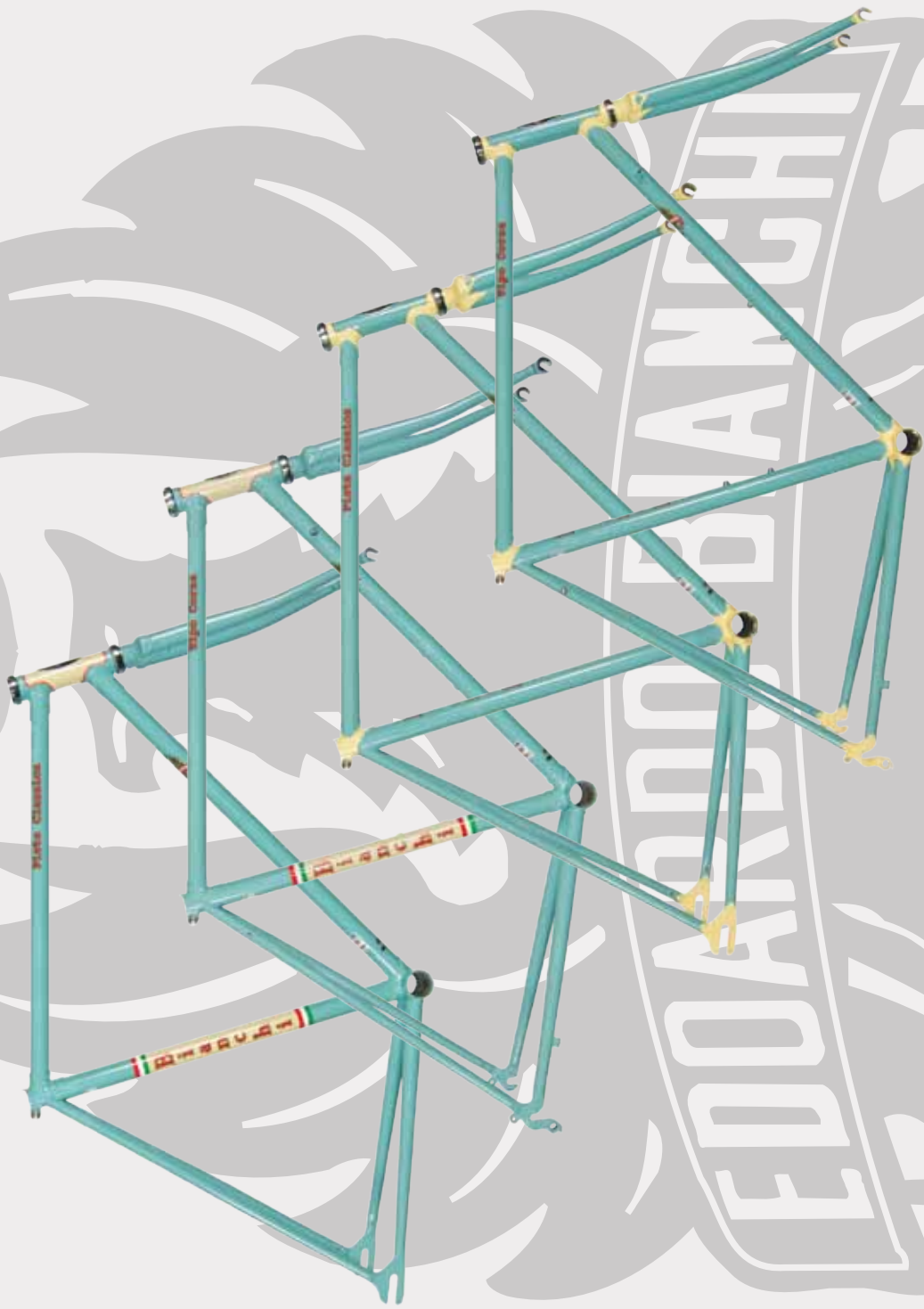
they tend to occur at intersections. Four modes give you a few light options—high pulse, low pulse, high and paceline mode. High pulse and high set the red LED at the full 25 lumen brightness, with low pulse halving the power and paceline cutting out the main LED altogether for riding in a group where the Vis 180 Micro would otherwise blind the following rider. Even with the light in the constant high mode you can expect about 4 hours of runtime out of the Li-ion battery, with high pulse clocking in about 6, low pulse 12 and the paceline mode a reported 20 hours of light. By far the longest running (bright) rechargeable rear light I’ve yet used, I easily get a couple of weeks of short evening commutes out of it on my backpack.

The Light and Motion Vis 180 Micro has a hinged mounting clip that clicks closed, providing a secure mount that has yet to eject from my backpack as so many lights with simpler slide-on clips have. The clip hinge has positive detents to keep it in place on a back pocket (though I wish it locked in place even more securely in the closed position), or you can use the included silicone strap to mount the light to your bike. A rack mount is available separately.

Even after a year of being set down on countless floors and rough surfaces I’ve yet to crack the clear housing of the Vis 180 Micro mounted on my backpack. Light and Motion considers this light weatherproof and water resistant but not fully submersible, and even though the rubberized on/off button covering came off within a month of using the light I’ve not had it malfunction because of it. I’ll be the first to admit that I do my best to avoid riding long distances in downpours but it does happen on occasion, and the Vis 180 Micro has not let me down because of it.

Given the USB recharging capabilities, long runtime and excellently designed mounting clip the few dollar premium over other high end non-rechargeable tail lights seems reasonable for the \$50 Vis 180 Micro. While carrying the “made in China” label due to some internal components, like all Light and Motion products the light is designed and assembled in Monterey CA with as many bits and pieces created in-house and locally sourced as possible. If you ever have issues with the light, Light and Motion is but a phone call away and provides repair service in house.

[www.lightandmotion.com](http://www.lightandmotion.com)



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## Portland Design Works Excalibur

While nothing keeps water off of your bike and body better than full wrap fenders, there is a time and place for clip-on or seatpost mounted versions. Whether for aesthetic concerns, compatibility issues, total lack of mounts or just plain simplicity seatpost mounted fenders have been popular for years as a convenient way to keep the reverse skunk stripe of riding on wet roadways to a minimum. Portland Design Works introduced its second generation seatpost fender the Excalibur this past season, and I've been using it throughout the winter, spring and early summer to keep road spray to a dull roar.

The Excalibur fender is made from aluminum alloy, extending a full 20" back from the seatpost with a 70 mm wide profile. The clamp is doubly hinged to fit any size round post and includes both a QR lever for quick deployment or a 5 mm allen bolt for theft resistance. It overall looks fast for a fender, with a sleek form that is as easy on the eyes as a clip on fender gets.

In use you can't expect a seatpost mounted fender to block the same amount of water and road grit as a full coverage, closer fitting fender, but the Excalibur does block a significant amount of grime from reaching your bottom. It doesn't block all of the overspray and

does nothing to keep your feet dry, but does a pretty good job of preventing a butt-stripe when blasting through a puddle on the way to the office. It's pretty nice being able to quickly move the fender between bikes no matter the seatpost size, but on smaller diameter posts the QR lever bolt is long enough to snag my shorts. Easily cured with a hacksaw trim, such is the cost of compatibility.

PDW designed the Excalibur with road and city bikes in mind, so try to avoid the mountain bike trails with this one. I did not heed their warned and broke my previous generation Machete fender hopping curbs and while the Excalibur solves the pinned weak point of the earlier design I've learned my lesson. While there is a certain allure to the seamless form of the Excalibur I ultimately wish that the angle of the fender was adjustable—I'm a tall guy, and on my bikes the fender is positioned far enough away from the tire to experience overspray. Given how far away the tip of the fender is from my rear tire I have found that I ding it when mounting and not thinking about it, not a pleasant sensation of jamming my ankle on the metal end of the fender. That said, the Excalibur is rarely not mounted to one bike or another—I use this fender a few times per week without fail.

The Excalibur weighs 260 g and is available in either black or silver polished for \$48.

[www.ridepdw.com](http://www.ridepdw.com)



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## Planet Bike Blaze 2W Micro

Planet Bike has been at it for years making affordable commuter lights and blinkies, incrementally stepping up the light output as LED technology has evolved. The Blaze 2W Micro is a 139 lumen output (reported) light that will make sure you are seen by anyone that is looking, and is bright enough to navigate dark streets and paved bike trails on night rides and the commute home.

The \$40 Blaze 2W Micro is both a be-seen and help-to-see light with three modes depending on your ride needs. Switch between steady high and low beams to light your way, move over to the Superflash mode for a pulsing pattern bright enough to be seen in direct sunlight. Getting caught in rain at dusk or dawn can be one of the most dangerous situations to find yourself in on the road, and the Superflash mode seems made for making other road users aware that you are pedalling along. Back in steady mode, the light is bright enough to ride with at commuting speeds in town, especially with a bit of ambient city light pollution. You might have to slow down a notch on completely unlit roads and trails, but continuing the ride safely is doable with the Blaze 2W Micro. The beam pattern on the light is even, but perhaps more of a spot focus than some would prefer. Mounting couldn't be easier with the QuickCam

bracket—no rubber gasket needed, and the quick release mount fits any common sized bar without tools. Not only does the light slip from the mount quickly and easily, the mount itself can be moved bike to bike easily, or another one purchased for \$5.

While internal rechargeable batteries are all the rage, the Blaze 2W Micro uses a pair of standard AA batteries. Sometimes I prefer alkaline batteries, both for run time between outages and shelf life between rides. Rechargeables with best-case 2 hour run times have left me in the dark on rides more times than I can count, while alkaline batteries seemingly last forever and tend to dim as they reach the end of their life rather than just go out completely. Planet Bike quotes 60+ hrs of run time per pair of batteries in Superflash mode with roughly 5/12 hours on high/low steady beams modes, perhaps requiring battery replacement more often than is ideal, but a 4-pack of rechargeables is fairly inexpensive for the regular night commuter. The Blaze 2W Micro is available in black or red housings for \$40, or packaged together with the industry standard Superflash Turbo rear blinkie in white housing for \$75. Like all Planet Bike products, 25% of profits goes to bike advocacy for a better tomorrow. [www.planetbike.com](http://www.planetbike.com)



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## Green Guru Ruckus Backpack

Green Guru has been recycling and repurposing durable but discarded materials into useable items for some time, learning and refining the process along the way. From simpler beginnings the line has grown to include full feature bags, such as the Ruckus Backpack.

The bag is made from six repurposed bicycle inner tubes and recycled PETE fabrics and features a large overlapping flap closure, with multiple pockets for easy organization and a built in laptop or document pocket for the commute. The back is heavily padded mesh with large channels for airflow, reducing the feeling of wearing a giant piece of impermeable rubber against your back and also has removable waist and sternum straps for stability on the bike or on your feet. A sleeve accommodates a hydration bladder, but the paranoid person inside me doesn't like the idea of mixing a bladder and the electronics many of us tend to have on board. The stated size of the Ruckus is 30 liters, expandable to 41 liters, with the unorthodox test of 12 oz glass bottles coming in at just one or two short of a case. It's a big bag, capable of carrying most everything you need for the day. Zippered pockets help to keep important things in place, and Green Guru didn't forget the pen holders so many new bags are ditching. The light colored liner with drawstring closure is welcome, as dark bags can form an abyss that can easily swallow keys and wallets out of sight out of mind.

The bag itself is somewhat heavy at 3.5 lbs, but unlike other materials that can absorb water when wet the recycled inner tube construction doesn't get soggy. Even the extensive mesh back padding doesn't absorb water in heavy downpours. After months of mid-Atlantic winter and spring commuting the bag itself is holding up well, even if some of the nylon clips have broken. Perhaps a bad batch of clips, either way Green Guru stands up for their gear and will replace broken hardware without fuss. The friend that has done the bulk of the riding (and the carrying around of cases of bottled beer...) reports that the stitching is solid, the laptop compartment fantastic and trustworthy in the rain, and that besides those clips the bag is holding up to his ongoing abuse. Even when loaded down, the shaped and padded straps and yoke have proven comfortable. The Ruckus backpack retails for \$140, in my estimation a fair price for a sustainable, made in the USA backpack of this ilk that carries a lifetime warranty against manufacturing defects. Available in any color of black bicycle inner tube you'd like, with smaller day backpacks, commuter packs and messenger bags also available. [www.greengurugear.com](http://www.greengurugear.com)

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## Fix It Sticks

Fix It Sticks are geniusly simple modular tools—a Y-wrench in a multitool, with two identical aluminum wrench bodies fitting together to form a T-shape that can deliver four flavors of torque far better than folding versions. Each pair features four different non-removeable bits with no small parts to lose, available in common combinations for \$30 per pair or with custom bit combinations for an extra \$5. Start bolts by spinning the body in your hand, tighten them down using the T-shape, easily applying up to 15 Nm of torque (enough to meet most bicycle torque specs). The Fix It Sticks make quick work of roadside repairs and adjustments, but given the torque limit of the wrench body it's best to use shop tools to break free stuck bolts as I cracked the Fix It Sticks body trying to loosen a stuck quill stem bolt. No tool fits every bolt, but it's hard to find a place beyond a bottle boss or inconvenient rack mount that the Fix It Sticks can't reach. At 51 g per pair the Fix It Sticks are a lightweight addition to the travel kit—combined with a chain tool and a wrench fitting your axle bolts of choice you should be able to fix most any roadside mechanical. Increase the torque spec to be able to handle stuck bolts and I'd be among the first to outfit my workbench with a full assortment of Fix It Sticks. [www.fixitsticks.com](http://www.fixitsticks.com)

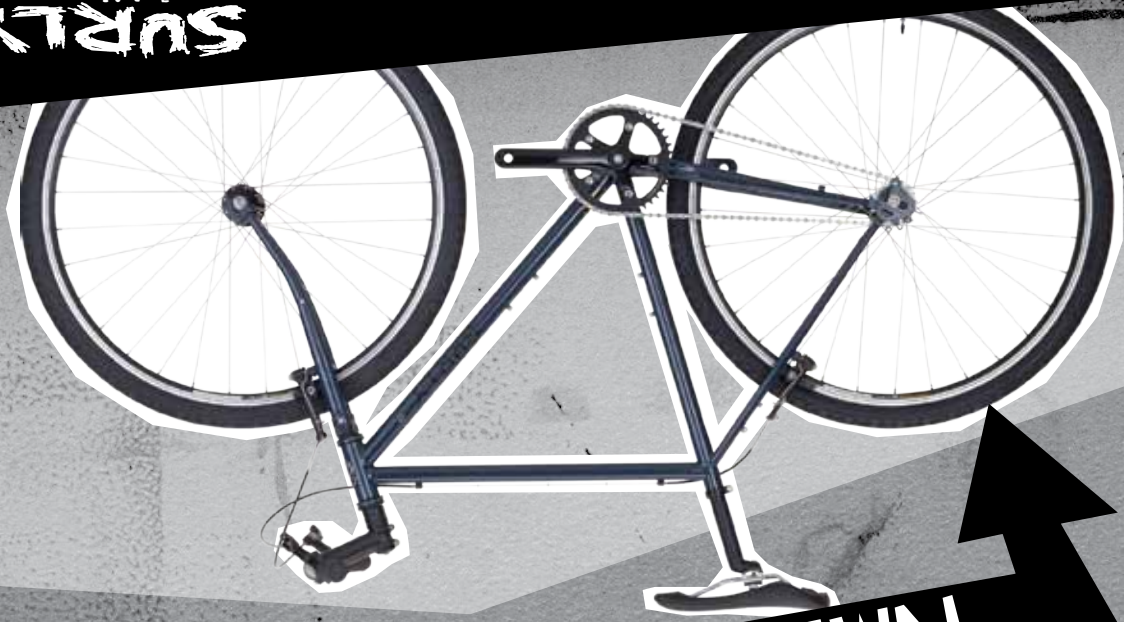


Photo by Cynthia Gu

## Giro Ride Jersey

As the name implies, Giro's New Road collection was designed with road riding in mind. They've put an emphasis on fashion, creating a high-end alternative to gaudy lycra and spandex. Giro took the approach of making high-performance cycling wear that makes no bones about what it is, but simply looks so nice that you wouldn't feel self-conscious wearing it into the café. Made from a merino wool blend the Giro Ride jersey features an eight inch zipper and three rear pockets. The fabric looks and feels like high-quality cotton, but performs like the original technical fabric should. Other features include forward facing vents on the shoulders and a rubberized elastic waistband. The jersey is not quite form-fitting, but it's far from baggy. The blend of 80% wool and 20% polyester makes the Ride Jersey significantly more durable than 100% wool garments, thus it can be machine washed and tumble dried. The \$150 Ride Jersey was sewn in California from imported raw materials and is available in sizes XS-XXL in four colors. [www.giro.com](http://www.giro.com)

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# The Cheetah

## NELSON VAILS

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By Kurt Boone

[www.kurtboonebooks.com](http://www.kurtboonebooks.com)

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**N**elson Vails got his nickname “The Cheetah” from an announcer at a race at the Lehigh Valley Velodrome in Trexlertown, Pennsylvania early in his racing career—a career that includes racing professionally in Europe and Japan, induction into the Cycling Hall Of Fame, a silver medal in the 1984 Olympic Games, and it all began as a bicycle messenger. I met him at Toga Bicycle Shop in New York City, where Nelson Vails was having a party to preview his cycling clothing line and working with a film crew on a documentary film about his life called “The Cheetah: The Nelson Vails Story.”

Nelson grew up in 1960s Harlem, on 115th Street and Lenox Avenue in the iconic Northern Manhattan

neighborhood. He attended Catholic school and began riding a bicycle like many of his generation, atop a Schwinn banana seat, exploring Harlem with his friends. At fifteen years of age Nelson started developing a love for cycling. By the age of eighteen he knew he could be a successful racer. He joined the Toga Bicycle Club Team and soon after that Larry Preheim, owner of Toga Bicycles, first took him and the rest of the team to the Kissena Velodrome. In addition, Larry would introduce Nelson to an owner of the bicycle messenger company Cycle Service, where Nelson found work as a courier.

It was around this time, in the early 1980s, that I learned that Nelson Vails was a bicycle messenger

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“Being the first African American to win an Olympic Cycling Medal and one of the first to race on the international circuit I never looked at color because I was just a member of the team. I was a member of the US National Team and a member of the Toga Team. There never really was a color barrier for me because I didn’t see beyond that as being the only black guy racing at the time.” –Nelson Vails

---

and an Olympic Team hopeful. Nelson became good at courier work, bringing in at least \$500 a week and earning the reputation as the fastest bicycle messenger in his company. He was also attracting the attention of the New York media.


“It was like reality TV today, pretty much,” Nelson says. “It was the pressure of maintaining my focus on my racing and my training to prepare for the next race. So I always worked on staying focused on that.”

Long before the widespread use of fixed gear bikes on the street, Nelson rode an old Bianchi frame with a single gear and two working hand brakes to work on his cadence while on the job. By combining training with the Toga Bicycle Club and working as a bicycle messenger, where he had to stay alert and very aware of his surroundings in the hectic and dangerous New York City traffic, Nelson became an accomplished regional racer.

Racing in New York City he competed in road and crit races and all nine track disciplines, leading him to national success at sprint events and culminating in a silver medal in the match sprint at the 1984 Olympic Games. Nelson’s podium achievement made him the first African-American to win an Olympic cycling medal. While competing in the 1984 Olympic Games a movie producer from Columbia Pictures contacted him about the upcoming movie production “Quick-silver” eventually casting him as a bicycle messenger

opposite Kevin Bacon and Laurence Fishburne, further securing his ‘80s cycling courier legacy.

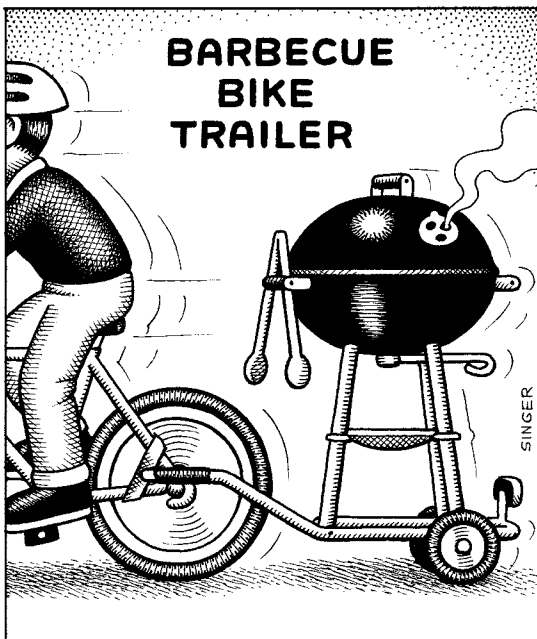
“I trained [the other actors], so we were in a situation where I would tell them how to ride their bikes with a little bit of technique,” he says. “That was kind of cool.”

Nelson moved to Belgium and turned pro in 1988, living in Europe for the next eight seasons while pursuing his racing career. During the off-season he would go to Australia, then back to Europe, Japan and the United States to race. From the six-day circuit in Europe to Keirin races in Japan, he travelled the world competing until his retirement from the professional ranks in 1995. The US Cycling Hall of Fame recognized Nelson’s accomplishments with his induction in 2009. After some time away from the bike, these days you can find Nelson out riding and at events across the country sharing his love and knowledge of cycling with the next generation. 

Visit [www.nelsonvails.com](http://www.nelsonvails.com) for more information and a gallery of historic images.

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# Denver's **RECYCLERY** Café

By Sam Brasch



**M**y first step into the ReCyclery Café caused a moment of gear-head geek out. Just about everything was once another man's trash and, in most cases, that trash was a piece of a bicycle. Combination bike and coffee shops aren't new in Denver, entrepreneurs have begun to realize they can squeeze everything Colorado cyclists want into one storefront: coffee, beer, quick healthy food, and a solid repair shop. The ReCyclery Café in Denver's thriving Capitol Hill neighborhood stands out among the pack.

Owners Brian Clees and Justin Worrel built the tables by taking old wheels, encasing them in concrete, and then coating them with a high-grade epoxy. The barista doesn't slide your coffee to you over the counter; he swings it to you atop another bike wheel that has been refashioned into a Lazy Susan. Even the clocks are made from old gears and spokes.

Yet the aspect that makes the ReCyclery Café a treasure among Denver's bike-coffee combos is the complete absence of any cyclist snobbery. As Clees



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put it, “We don’t care if you come in with a Mongoose from Kmart or a Pinarello. We try to treat everybody here with the respect they deserve.”

The democratic attitude translates to the shop, where you are inclined to linger awhile before pedaling on to work. And if you do decide to cash in some flex hours and stay, you’ll see a panorama of Denver’s cyclists. The morning I camped out at one of the café’s enormous windows I watched a string of retirees, fixed-gear couriers, and spandexed athletes rotate through the shop. A man towing his sleeping bag and food with a rusted mountain bike used the shop’s sink to fill a dog bowl. Brian and Justin greeted every customer just the same.

This isn’t the first time Brian has owned a bike shop. His old shop, which he sold to another group of mechanics, is just a few blocks to the south and a few price brackets upscale from the ReCyclery. For the most part, he sold new bicycles.

Today, the ReCyclery almost exclusively carries secondhand bikes. “The majority of our inventory is used and arrives in real bad shape,” he told me, rolling a refurbished Schwinn up and down the sidewalk. “We’ll take it, shine it up, put new tires on it.” Brian now wants to start aiming at higher level clientele, bringing in the top products for the cyclist planning on a handful of mountain centuries this season, but for now he likes the look of the reborn Schwinn.

Then again, the ReCyclery Café could be perfectly tuned to the future of cycling culture in the Mile High

City. Colorado is a capital of high-end recreational cycling, and for good reasons. Trails lead to roads that can take you as far as Aspen. Despite the snow that falls on the Broncos whenever they play on national television, Colorado gets over 300 days of sunshine, which is part of the reason the state hosts the USA Pro Cycling Challenge, America’s answer to the Tour de France. In a given bike shop, especially in the eco-*de* France. In a given bike shop, especially in the eco-*de* France that is Boulder just north of Denver, it isn’t uncommon to hear strangers trading their VO2 maxes as a point of conversation.

At least in Denver, a greater number of people are mounting bikes to get around the city rather than to escape to the mountains. BikeScore named Denver the third best city for two wheels this year, just behind Portland and San Francisco. Denver’s B-Cycle sharing program has won increasing numbers of members and stations since its inception in 2007. Brian and Justin have recognized that you don’t need a top of the line machine when your objective is getting to work or the grocery store.

In fact, they’ve designed their menu around cyclists on the move. “All of our salads are hand held, in a wrap and sealed with a Panini grill, so you can eat while biking down the street,” explained Justin. The shop plans on opening the city’s first “bike thru” window this summer. The owners had no comment when asked how quickly one can bike while eating.

They also each wore a quiet smirk when asked about their expansion plans, but spilled the beans after some prodding. The two have leased the area above the shop to build a yoga studio and a stage for open mics. The City of Aurora, a suburb to Denver’s east, approached them about helping revive their downtown with a new café. “We might be talking about a franchise,” said Justin.

For now, circles of reuse and repurpose keep the ReCyclery rolling. Coffee grounds and compost go to an urban garden a few blocks away and return as fresh produce. With a little love and labor, used frames become ways around the city for a customer and a profitable mark up for Brian and Justin. Just as the owners had hoped, a community has found a home in the center of those circles.

“Makes you want to play that opening song of the Lion King or something,” said Brian. “Yes, Simba. Everything the sun touches is ours.”



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# Cycling Legalese

By Brendan Kevenides P.C.

*Cycling Legalese is contributed by everyday cyclist and Chicago-based injury lawyer, Brendan Kevenides. He is the creator of popular law blog The Chicago Bicycle Advocate ([www.mybikeadvocate.com](http://www.mybikeadvocate.com)) and is a Certified Bicycle Instructor by the League of American Bicyclists. His Chicago law practice is dedicated to representing cyclists injured by the negligence of drivers, government officials and equipment manufacturers. In this installment of Cycling Legalese Brendan tackles reader questions about the unseeing eye defense and biking under the influence.*

**I've heard drivers claim that they often just can't see cyclists. Is that really a defense a driver can raise following a crash?**

Brendan Kevenides, P.C.: The most common "defense" in bicycle crash cases is no defense at all. Let me be blunt: "I didn't see Mr. or Ms. Bicyclist," is not a defense, it is an indictment. Nevertheless, it is a so-called justification for causing a crash that I hear over and over in my law practice—the ol' "unseeing eye" defense. It is often raised in intersection cases and it goes a little something like this: The motorist asserts that he or she entered the intersection while carefully looking in all directions before beginning to turn. No bicyclists were seen. As the motorist executes his or her turn, however, the bicyclist materialized, seemingly out of nowhere. The defense asserts that the collision itself notwithstanding, the motorist was careful, not negligent and, therefore, should not be held responsible for the bicyclist's injuries. It was just one of those things...

Several years ago I represented the family of a

man who was hit and killed by a motorist in a small town in central Illinois. At the time of the collision, the man was riding his bicycle slowly and carefully across an intersection with the light in his favor. He was 80 years old, and in excellent health. The bike was of the cruiser variety, was bright orange in color and had a big orange basket on the front. He was legally riding within a crosswalk in the middle of the day. (Doing so may not be legal everywhere, but it was in his town.) The driver that struck him was making a left turn and said that she did not see him until, tragically, the man's head shattered her windshield. He died a few hours later. This bicyclist could not have made himself much more visible to drivers had he worn antlers on his head and a flashing sign that said, "Don't Hit Me!" The driver, whom we sued, testified in her deposition that she felt that her minivan's internal roof support beam obscured her vision of the cyclist. "I didn't see him," she sobbed. I am sure that she indeed felt horrible about striking the man. There was no allegation or suggestion that she did so purposefully. But in a civil lawsuit alleging negligence, intent is irrelevant. If she could not see adequately in the direction of her turn she should have slowed down, stopped, craned her neck or have done whatever else it took to proceed with full view of what was in her vehicle's path. To be negligent is to fail to act with due regard for the safety of others and is very much dependent on the circumstances. If it is snowing, slow down. If your vision is obscured for any reason, be extra vigilant.

Long ago, courts in my home state of Illinois recognized the importance of claiming to have looked

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but not seen. In 1965, the Appellate Court of Illinois, stated, "It is well settled that one may not look with an unseeing eye and be absolved of the charge of negligence by asserting that he maintained a continuous lookout, yet failed to see that which he clearly should have seen." *Payne v. Kingsley*, 59 Ill.App.2d 245 (2nd Dist. 1965).

Often, in my experience, the reason offered by the motorist for having not seen the bicyclist is no justification. Traffic was blocking my vision. The sun was in my eyes. My van's support beam obscured my vision. Lame, and of no legal consequence. To state what should be obvious, drivers must be able to see where they are going. They must be able to visualize all potential areas from which bikes, cars, pedestrians, motorcycles, etc. may emerge. If they cannot, then they may not proceed.


**Q: I love fueling my rides through the city with beer but I'm wondering; could I get in trouble for biking under the influence?**

Brendan Kevenides, P.C.: The degree to which you can find yourself in legal trouble for cycling while intoxicated varies depending on where you are. In some places, bicyclists cannot be charged under a particular state's DUI law. In Illinois, for example, the appellate court decided in 1995 that the state's DUI statute only applies to a "vehicle." Under the Illinois Motor Vehicle Code a bicycle is not considered a vehicle. Therefore, cyclists may not be charged under that particular law. The same is true in New York and several other states. However, if you are drunk and acting a fool you may still find yourself in trouble for violating local public drunkenness and/or disorderly conduct laws. These laws generally do not carry penalties as great as DUI statutes; still, you could wake up the next day with a real legal hangover.

On the other hand, there are states that do not bat an eye at charging cyclists under DUI laws. If a police officer in Oregon stops you after knocking a few back do not expect a Kumbaya moment. In the home of Portlandia bikes are considered vehicles and a cyclist may face the same penalties for pedaling non compos mentis, as would a motorist. The same is true in Pennsylvania and Florida.

California is special in that it does not mess around with the "is a bicycle a vehicle or not" distinction. Its

legislature passed a law just for pissed pedalists. It plainly states that, "It is unlawful for any person to ride a bicycle upon a highway while under the influence of an alcoholic beverage or any drug, or under the combined influence of an alcoholic beverage and any drug." Hard to find any wiggle room there. On the other hand, the consequences in California for BUI are not the same as for driving under the influence: "A conviction of a violation. . . shall be punished by a fine of not more than two hundred fifty dollars." The State of Washington has also taken a somewhat unique approach to drunk cycling. In 1995, that state's appellate court held that the DUI statute did not apply to bicyclists. So, in 2000 the legislature passed a new law permitting police officers to take a real hands-on approach. If an officer believes a cyclist is drunk they may offer to "transport the intoxicated bicycle rider to a safe place; or release the intoxicated bicycle rider to a competent person." The cyclist has the right to rebuff the officer's offer of assistance. However, if the officer believes the bicyclist possesses a "threat to public safety" the bicycle may be impounded.

For some reason biking and drinking tend to align like mustaches and irony. These days bikes, bicycling and alcohol are often marketed together as if the one experience implies the other. Perhaps, it is the meme of vitality, youth and freedom that cycling and conspicuous drinking share. Regardless, there are potential consequences, legal and otherwise, to biking drunk. Alcohol is involved in more than one-third of all bicyclist fatalities, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. 

Read more Cycling Legalese and submit your own questions for Brendan Kevenides at [www.urbanvelo.org](http://www.urbanvelo.org)

*Nothing contained in this column should be construed as legal advice. The information contained herein may or may not match your individual situation. Also, laws differ from place to place and tend to change over time. No reader should act or refrain from acting on the basis of any information presented herein without seeking the advice of an attorney in the relevant jurisdiction. This column is meant to promote awareness of a general legal issue. As such, it is meant as entertainment. It does not create an attorney-client relationship between the author and the reader.*



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# Rim Brake Maintenance

By Brad Quartuccio



**R**im brakes are the original disc brakes, with the rim itself acting as a large disc rotor in addition to being a structural part of the wheel. Even as disc brakes continue to move deeper into the market as performance improves and entry price drops, rim brakes remain a popular choice on new bikes and, aside from mountain bikes, standard issue on most any bike more than a few years old. Simple in design and operation, rim brakes work perfectly well to control speed and stop under most riding conditions, and with a bit of attention will remain a reliable system for years to come.

**Brake Pad Choice** - The pads that come stock on most bikes are notoriously bad—replacing OEM brake pads with higher quality aftermarket shoes can go a long way to improve brake performance. There is a wide variety of pad choices available, with softer compounds generally working better but wearing faster. Be

sure to choose replacement pads compatible with your brake arms and to install them in the correct direction for models with slide-in shoes (the open end of the brake pad holder should face the rear of the bike).

**Pad Condition** - Brake pads wear away with use, sometimes surprisingly fast in wet conditions. Inspect regularly, replacing them when they wear past the printed limit. Carefully remove any small bits of aluminum or debris embedded in the brake pad surface with an awl. Brake pads can develop a hard, shiny surface—a light file makes quick work removing the glaze and improves brake performance.

**Rim Condition** - It should go without saying that rims should be straight and true—a bent rim is going to cause the brakes to grab and chatter and not work as well as they otherwise could. Clean rims can help prevent brake squeal, stop better and last longer. Rims build up with a fine, dark powder that degrades brake

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Brake pads should contact the rim in the middle of the brake surface.



Rims require replacement when the wear line or dots disappear, or the brake surface feels concave.



File the hard shiny glaze from brake pads to improve performance.

performance, especially in wet riding conditions, and oils can accumulate on the rim from handling, road spills and chainlube overspray. Wipe rims clean with a fresh rag and an oil-free solvent to remove deposits and debris. Rim walls wear away over the miles, and at a given point require replacement even if the wheel is otherwise straight to prevent a potentially sudden rim wall failure. Some rims have dots or wear lines to indicate replacement when they are worn away, otherwise rims require replacement when the sidewalls feel concave between thumb and forefinger.

**Brake Pad Placement** - Brake pads should contact the middle of the rim surface to prevent contacting the tire and causing a flat or diving under the rim and locking up the rim without warning. Particularly on cantilever brakes the brake pad contact patch moves down the rim wall with use and may need to be adjusted before the brake pads require replacement.

**Brake Pad Toe-In** - The brake pad should be set so that the front of the pad contacts the rim just before the rear of the pad (see image page 74). Toe-in helps to prevent brake squeal, and when set up correctly wears flat with use. Every brake system accommodates toe-in differently—some have conical pads, some have adjustable arms, other older models require the brake arms or pad posts to be bent.

**Cables and Housing** - New, clean and unkinked cables and housing is an inexpensive upgrade that ensures your brakes are operating as they should. Rust, kinks or broken strands call for cable or housing replacement. Gritty feeling cables can be removed from the housing and cleaned with a light degreaser and rag but you should resist lubing the housing as it attracts dirt in the long term.

Rim brakes vary in quality and construction, and sometimes no amount of adjustment can quiet a squeal or overcome poor stopping power. Every brake has nuances in setup that can drastically affect brake performance. Stopping is important, when in doubt consult your local bike shop.





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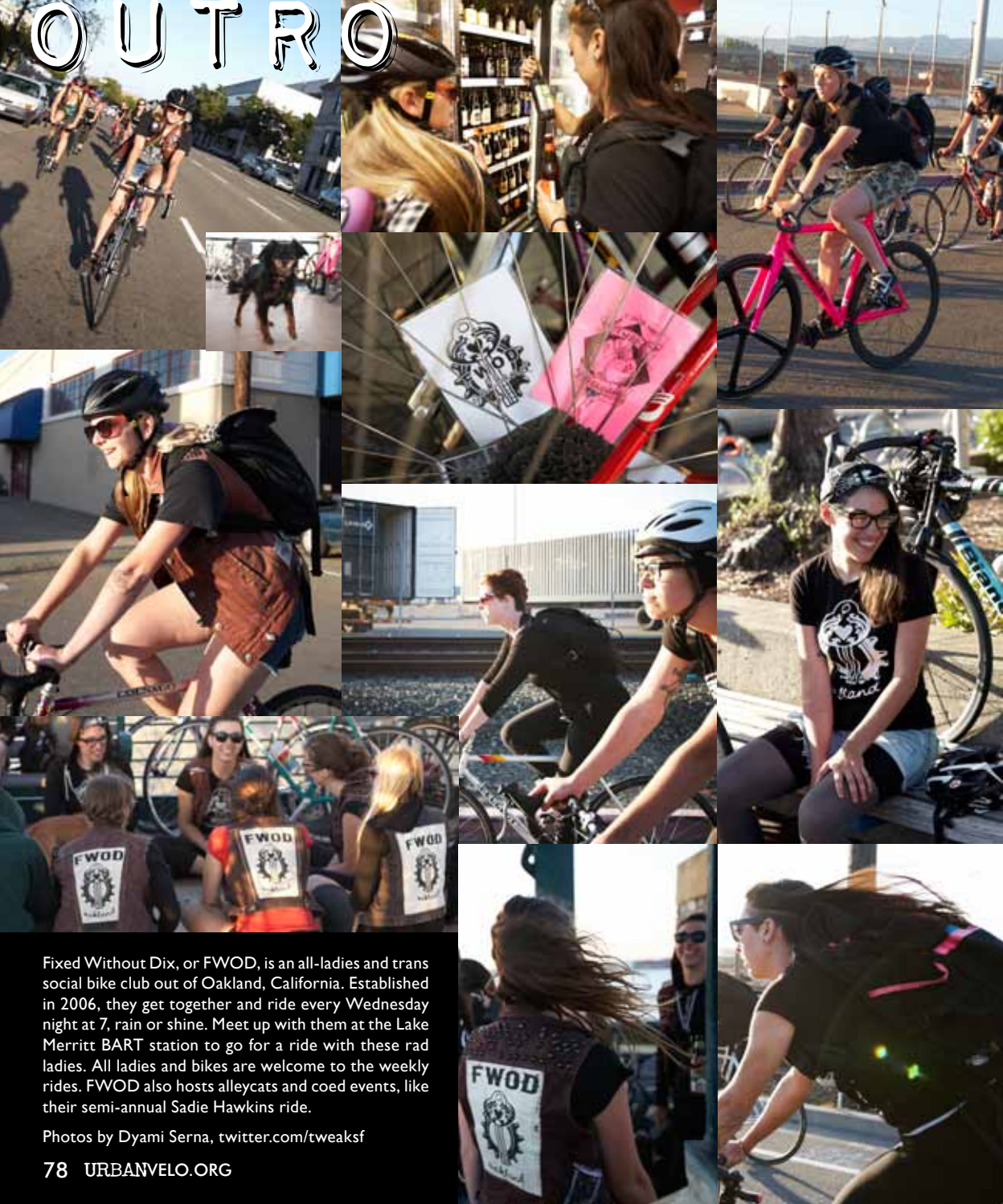
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# OUTRO



Fixed Without Dix, or FWOD, is an all-ladies and trans social bike club out of Oakland, California. Established in 2006, they get together and ride every Wednesday night at 7, rain or shine. Meet up with them at the Lake Merritt BART station to go for a ride with these rad ladies. All ladies and bikes are welcome to the weekly rides. FWOD also hosts alleycats and coed events, like their semi-annual Sadie Hawkins ride.

Photos by Dyami Serna, [twitter.com/tweaksf](https://twitter.com/tweaksf)

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