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Welcome to the May 2007 issue of The Derailleur. The Derailleur is an unofficial publication of Chicago Critical Mass (chicagocriticalmass.org). Sit down someplace comfy because this issue is full of bike love. We begin with John Stoner's story about his bike, The Bike of Steel. Then, Steven Lane tells us about his first bike (or rather, his first trike). Daisy Elliot's Revenge, by Gin Kilgore, reminds us to take care of the bikes that take care of us. After that, Professor Johnny Payphone gives us all a history lesson about freakbikes. Dan (Korny Rat) then describes his love of tall-biking, specifically, his love of his H2 SUV. Death is creeping up on Chicago Critical Mass, but that's not getting Jackie Combs Nelson down because she has written a poem about the joys of riding her bike. Mark your calendar for upcoming events such as the Mini Ride for Climate, the lecture Let's Talk about Global Warming, and get ready to bare as you dare on the 4th Annual World Naked Bike Ride Chicago. Be sure to say hello to Joey (pictured on the back cover) and Kathy on tonight's ride. Go on now, get into a comfy spot and enjoy what these wonderful contributors have to share with you about bike love.

This issue was compiled by Willow Naeco and edited by Bob Wright.

Willow would like to thank everyone (you too, Da' Square Wheelman) for their contributions of words, images, copies, assembly help, and good old cash. Your support is greatly appreciated.

If you would like to contribute articles, illustrations, ideas, etc., send them to TheDerailleur@gmail.com. Complimentary copy available upon publication (sorry, no payment).

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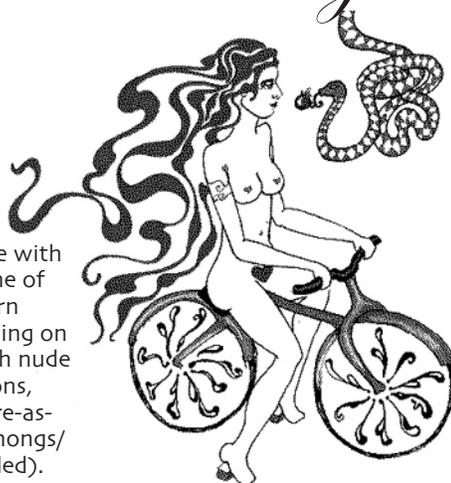
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4th Annual World Naked Bike Ride Chicago

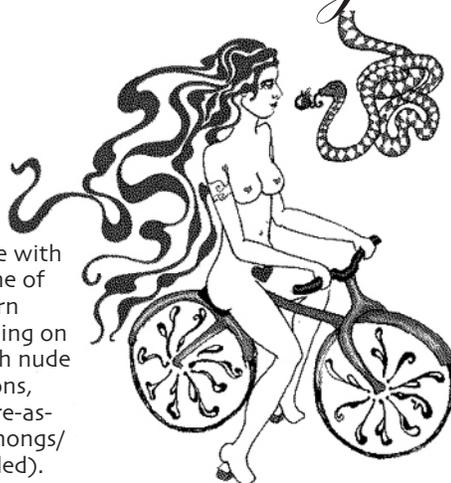
This ride is a protest to bring attention to oil dependence. It is international in scope with Chicago being just one of several dozen Western Hemisphere cities riding on the same day. Though nude is legal in many nations, the U.S. requires "bare-as-you-dare" caution (thongs/g-strings recommended).



Previous years were a blast with several hundred riders as well as numerous inline skaters participating. **Join us Saturday, June 9th at 6 p.m. for gathering/pre-party/body-painting fun. The ride departs at 9 p.m.** The starting point will be announced soon. The ride will be about 20+ miles through major tourist and recreation areas including Rush+Division, Wicker Park, Michigan+Chicago, Millennium Park, etc. Join the Yahoo Group at worldnakedbikeride.org/chicago or call the hotline at 312.480.0475 for more info.

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miles. It will take a long time since we will stop to talk about the projects we encounter and about Global Warming. We'll also stop somewhere for lunch. Free Larabar bars to 50 riders. The ride is free but bring cash or food for lunch. PLEASE WEAR YOUR BICYCLE HELMET. R.S.V.P. Kathy Schubert at 773.248.5499 or at kangarookathy@yahoo.com.

*aka the GREEN RIDE



There is also a lecture being given by the two Global Warming experts on Wednesday, May 30:

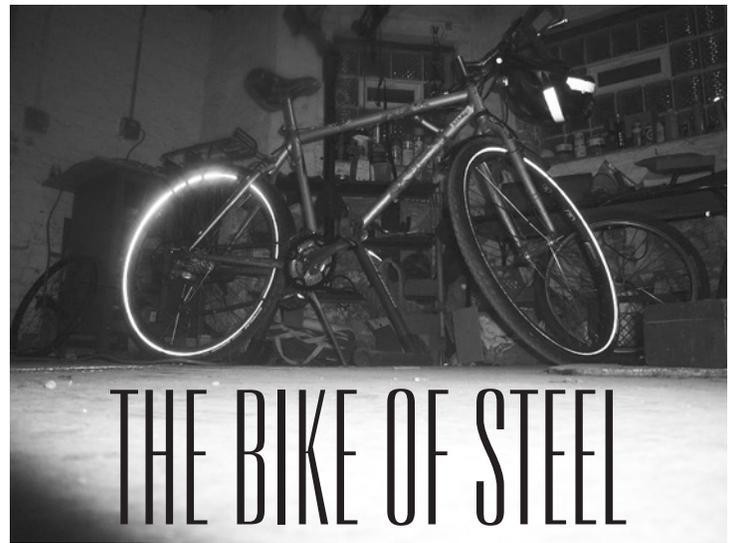
LET'S TALK ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING

Two Global Warming experts are riding across the U.S. on bicycles, stopping along the way to raise awareness about this subject. They'll be presenting in Chicago on Wednesday, May 30th. You're invited to hear David Kroodsma and Bill Bradlee, the experts who are riding cross-country.

"Unfortunately, less than half of Americans believe that it [Global Warming] is human-caused," says Kroodsma. "Many solutions are available to develop clean and safe energy, become more energy-efficient, and leave a healthy planet to our children," says Bradlee.

Come hear about their bicycle journey and about the international consequences of Global Warming.

Wednesday, May 30 at Lincoln Park Library, 1150 W. Fullerton, Chicago. 7:30 p.m. (or 7 p.m. if you want to network with those who got an announcement with the earlier time). To R.S.V.P. call 773.248.5499. Visit www.RideforClimate.com for more information.



The manager wrapped up. We killed time before the next interviewer.

She said, "I hear you're a biker." She mentioned something about her triathlons.

I blurted out, "My bike has hydraulic brakes and a trailer hitch."

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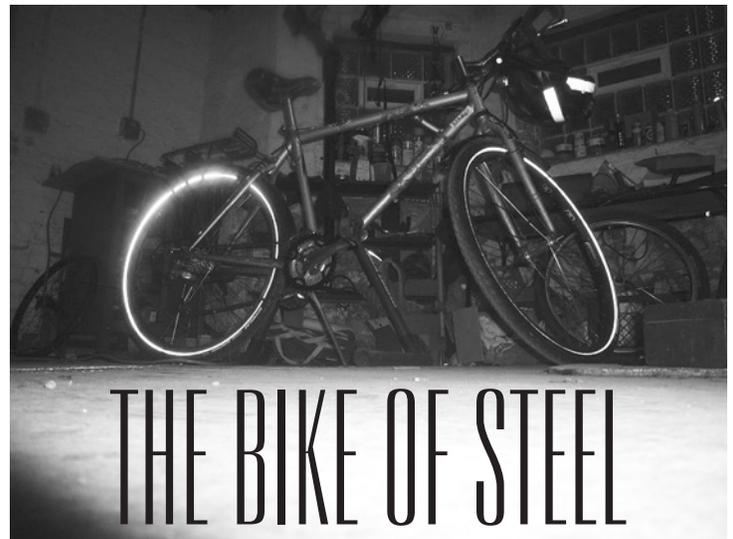
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I am proud of the Bike of Steel. He (yes, he) does confer awesome bicycular powers: not high speed, but awesome stopping power, stout hauling, and reliability in all neighborhoods under all conditions.

I've ridden the Bike of Steel for almost ten years. We've been all over this city, from Evanston down to the far south side, from Oak Park to the lake, from bike lanes to left-turn lanes, from the now-fresh pavement of Milwaukee Avenue to patches of windshield glass and rough rail underpasses everywhere.

Gray, with duct tape and dirt: a low-profile Trek mountain bike. Bike thieves have been passing him over for ten years. Made in America, back when Trek still made bikes like him here.

I've adapted him over the years. Kevlar road tires prevent flats in bad neighborhoods. I built him new wheels recently, and replaced the drive train.

And he's stood up well. We've been hit three times. We've been doored on Clark. We've been chased by bored teenage boys on summer nights on the West Side. We've been through downpours, snowstorms, and heat waves. We've hauled 150 pounds of kitchen tile 50 blocks.

There are many bikes made of steel, but there can be only one Bike of Steel. Through years of service, he's earned his name.

—John Stoner

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HAVE BIKE, WILL COMMUTE

Before, walking home from the train station
I would feel a tad depressed
Making my way home night after night
Two years ago Metra liberated me
Letting both the bike and me enjoy the ride
From Park Ridge to Michigan Avenue and back
Now I have more friends, more fun
With various train/bike commute combinations
Riding a bike, I am no longer anonymous in the big city
Riding a bike at 60, I feel like a kid again
Riding a bike, I am stronger, surer
Grateful for my 34-mile round trip days!

—Jackie Combs Nelson

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chicagocyclingclub.org & cyclingsisters.org
Present the MINI RIDE FOR CLIMATE*

Join two Global Warming experts who are cycling across the country to promote discussion of Global Warming for a tour of Green initiatives in Chicago. See recycling, reusing, wind turbines, solar panels, permeable alleys, bumpouts, roundabouts, gardens replacing concrete, a riverbank reclaimed by citizens, car-sharing, our state-of-the-art bicycle station, and much more.

The Mini Ride for Climate will be held on Memorial Day (Monday, May 28) at 9:00 a.m. Meet at the Waveland Clock Tower, 3700 N. Lake Shore Drive. Pace: 10-14 mph. The ride is 40 miles with a shorter option of 18

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On the other hand, maybe I need to just accept the fact that I've ridden the old horse into the ground and it's time to get a fresh start. With Sam's help (once again), I can certainly build a new bike, and it can be more reliable and maintainable, and it can even reuse some parts from the H2.

So, I'm once again at a crossroads. Has the H2 had its last hurrah? Is it time to start a new story with a new bike? Or will this steel beast once again rise up from the ashes?

I hope that by the time you read this issue of the Derailleur, those questions will be answered. Memorial Day weekend features three "can't miss" rides: Critical Mass on Friday, the 12th Ward Bike the Boulevard ride on Saturday (which goes right past my house), and Bike the Drive on Sunday; and it just wouldn't feel right not to do them on a tall bike. If you're going to ride on LSD (Lake Shore Drive), you might as well ride high. So, look up and you'll see me. Not a bird, not a plane, but Superman will be flying again.

Rubber side down,
Dan
(Korny Rat)

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MY FIRST BIKE, OR TRIKE, STORY



It looks like I knew bikes were way more fun than cars at the tender age of five back in 1973. It's strange that it would take me 25 years to refigure that out. The photo of me as a toddler behind the wheel of a toy car on a merry-go-round nicely captures my lifelong fear of amusement park rides; I always felt trapped inside machines. Christmas morning 1973 would set my true course: pedal power all the way!

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DAISY ELLIOT'S REVENGE

I wrote this for my 6th graders when we were studying the Odyssey. (I had asked them to write about a peril-filled journey.) –Gin Kilgore

After another long Bike Winter, Daisy Elliot's wounds and filth revealed that I had once again relentlessly dragged her through slush and salt, pushing her to keep going, even as she gasped for an oily drink to relax her joints. At her annual check-up at Boulevard Bikes, Doug, who had healed my abuses just one year before, shook his head and again urged me to take better care.

And I did, lubing her chain twice (ok, maybe once). It's just too easy to hop on my sturdy commuter bike every morning and go. I ignore her aches and pains, and she trudges along, perhaps too reliable for her own good.

But one day, her arthritic brakes refused to budge. Her tires sagged and sighed with exhaustion. Did I drop everything and tend to her wounds? No. I had to be somewhere, so I simply pulled out...Fastbike.

Now Fastbike is a fine bike. She's my touring steed, the one I turn to when I need to cover some distance. But she isn't designed for daily commuting and carrying: no chain guard, fenders, or baskets. But I needed a bike to ride to work, and I didn't have time to fix up Daisy Elliot. I just took Daisy's rear basket off and plunked it on Fastbike.

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awkward spasm). The original front wheel got taced in a crash when I hit a huge pothole in an underpass while pulling a trailer.

But the main problem was the crank. That beautiful old J.C. Higgins signature cotteder crank had a bad cotter pin on the left crank arm from the beginning. At first it was just a minor annoyance, a slight hitch in the giddyup. Over time, though, especially since I use the left pedal to mount the bike, it got more worn and bent. Now there's about ten degrees of play in the left crank, which makes pedaling a herky-jerky motion. The cotter pin is so bent that it's stuck, and it might have to be drilled out to replace it, which may damage the crank itself, if it's not already too far gone.

Then, a couple of weeks ago, my chain, which I hadn't cleaned or lubed much at all over the winter, broke on me. I didn't even realize it was broken at first, as it was still holding together, but the broken link made the chain too long and it kept falling off. (Unless you use a derailleur, or the "triangle chain" method with the crank arms from both frames, the chain tension on a tall bike is very hard to adjust, because the dropouts for the rear wheel run almost perpendicular to the crank on the top frame.)

Now, finally, the bike has crossed the threshold where it's more trouble to ride than fun. So now my bike is sitting in the basement, facing an uncertain future, and for the time being, I'm back on a "short" bike. But I long to ride high again. Sam has been encouraging me to build a new, more durable tall bike for a long time now. And like all Rat bikes, the H2 will eventually return to the glorious trash pile from whence it came.

However, I'm not sure I'm ready to give up on it just yet. I can certainly replace the chain. I can try to fix the crank, even though I might just have to weld the arm on to work around the broken cotter pin. I could even replace that old red front fork, which Sam has been saying for months is the weak point of the bike, but which is one of the only parts that hasn't

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even completed their excellent Build a Bike class at West Town Bikes, I'm not much for doing maintenance on my bikes. It's partly a matter of time, partly a Rat Patrol "just use duct tape and zip ties" ethic, and part simple laziness. With the exception of rebuilding the rear wheel after having multiple broken spokes (the sheer weight of the bike was too much for that old 26-inch road bike wheel, necessitating a rare foray into new parts), most of the maintenance on the bike has been bodgered together, and parts have been replaced with other old parts. I had to re-weld the bike once, not where Sam's welds were, but where the original factory brazing had failed. I had a lot of flats, until I gave in and bought heavy-duty lined tires. And there are probably two whole rolls of duct tape on the bike. But it's mostly held together.

Also, over the last couple of years, the bike has been outside almost all the time. It's a pain to lug it up and down the stairs to our basement. Plus, I kind of like having the bike locked up outside, almost as a masthead for our building. But the elements have taken their toll. What used to be a beautiful, if slightly worn, J.C. Higgins frame is now badly rusted, as are most of the parts. But it's not all bad: the rusty, well-worn look is kind of cool, especially if the bike operates better than it looks. This is a Rat bike, after all.

However, with time, the bike also developed some mechanical problems. The front brake worked pretty well initially, but it was never quite enough when the roads were wet. The zip tie holding the rear fender let go one day on the way to work, which planted me on the ground, but the good news was that it freed up the rear wheel for much more effective foot braking (a feature unique to tall bikes, although you do go through shoes more quickly). The three-speed hub and its cable were constantly getting out of adjustment or rusted up, making shifting problematic (and sometimes causing the hub to slip into the neutral setting between second and third gears, usually when I was pedaling hard, resulting in a very

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This is the story of Daisy Elliot's revenge for my traitorous ways.

The first few days of riding Fastbike to work were great. Smooth and quiet, Fastbike melts time and traffic. And, with the back basket, she was carrying pretty much everything I needed. I shaved five minutes off my already short commute.

Daisy must have sensed that I was starting to prefer Fastbike. From the dark corner of the basement, she called on Schwuess, the god of commuter bikes. "If Gin comes home today, let her be cold, wet, late, and frustrated! Let her regret the day she cast me, her loyal ride, aside!!" And the faint ringing of a bike bell sounded in the skies. Daisy Elliott knew her plea had been heard.

Later that day, I opened the doors of Mitchell School to begin my journey home. Huge snowflakes and chunks of hail plunged like torpedoes. We were going to be pedaling into a fierce, cold headwind. I sighed and rolled out Fastbike, who was not looking up to the voyage. Her skinny tires were shivering. I thought to myself, "Man, I wish this bike had some fenders—I am going to be eating street slush for dinner."

We nudged into the wind. It was slow and painful riding, but manageable. But then we turned, and the wind was punching us from the starboard side. Fastbike's frame lacked the heft to help me hold the line. We were rocking back and forth—I feared we would be blown into traffic. Suddenly, I heard a grinding noise behind us: salt truck! It spewed forth its payload, spraying me, my bike, and her pristine gears. "Daisy Elliot probably would have had me home warm and snug by now," I sighed.

Despite the vengeful blizzard, we inched forward. On Western, we wriggled through the long line of cars whose owners seemed to be suffering even more (at least we were moving and could taste the

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Despite the vengeful blizzard, we inched forward. On Western, we wriggled through the long line of cars whose owners seemed to be suffering even more (at least we were moving and could taste the

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snowflakes—the drivers must have done something to really irk Schwuess.) Eventually, we reached Armitage. The neighborhood was sparkling quiet. Home was in reach. I was feeling great and impressed at how Fastbike had persevered. I started composing yet another ode to Bike Winter.

The thing about getting a flat in a snowstorm is that it's not obvious. That dragging feeling—well maybe it's from being so cold and tense. That thwunka thwunka? Perhaps the sound of your wheel crushing the snow. Eventually, even the most optimistic rider has to give in, spare the rim, and face the flat.

I wonder—if I had learned my lesson then, and renounced Fastbike and her flimsy tires, would Daisy have held back on my final punishment? Alas, I wasn't in a renouncing mood. We were only four blocks from home. I don't mind walking in a snowstorm, so we carried on in fine spirits. I was feeling so good, in fact, that I decided to fix the flat right away.

I didn't see Daisy trembling in fury in the corner as I gently attended to Fastbike's wound. (And really, my motivation had less to do with preference than necessity—I could not have two bikes down, and I was in no mood to start commuterfying Fastbike, which lacks a rear rack and suitable pedals for work shoes.)

And so, while the blizzard yielded to a more gentle sugar dusting and the other hapless commuters safely made their way home, Daisy Elliot called on Schwuess once more. What should have been a simple 10-minute repair job turned into a bungling, 90-minute epic. Why?

- 1) While I had plenty of spare tubes that would fit Daisy, I could find none that fit Fastbike.
- 2) I was out of practice because Daisy never gets flats.
- 3) It was the rear tube, which meant that getting the wheel

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find convenient things to lean on like trashcans and signposts. No, the real danger, as with all cycling, especially on the streets, is cars. And on a tall bike, you command a bit more respect from drivers. Or at least amusement, and in their bewilderment, they kind of forget that they are supposed to try to run you over. Or maybe it's just that they don't want me to fall on them and damage their cars. Or they just think I'm crazy and don't know what else I might be capable of. Whatever the reason, with the exception of the paparazzi who sometimes drive too close trying to get a picture, and the occasional kids who think it's fun to try to knock over the tall-biker (fortunately I'm faster than they expect), I find that people tend to give me more room, and a more positive reaction overall, than when I'm on a regular "safety" bike.

My bike and I have been through a lot. In almost three years, I estimate I've put about 2,000 miles in the saddle, with the longest single outing being the 2005 Perimeter Ride, which I bailed on after about 60 miles. Most of those miles have been commuting. My current commute is about five miles each way from Little Village to the Loop. I sometimes take the CTA (either on foot or lugging the tall bike on the Pink Line), but I average about four days a week riding the bike at least the full five miles each way. Throw in errands (it's a great bike for pulling a trailer, especially since Sam helped me rebuild the rear wheel with a new heavy-duty rim around the three-speed hub), other recreational rides, including many CCM and Pilsen Circular Mass rides, some Evanston and Oak Park CM rides, two Bike the Drives, a few Rides of Silence, a bunch of Rat Patrol rides, some parades (tall bikes are awesome for parades!), a couple out-of-town trips, and just riding with my wife or with friends for fun, and I have a lot of miles and great memories.

Unfortunately, even though I now live in the HUB Co-op with seven other transportational cyclists, including Sam and Sarah, both professional bike mechanics, and have access to their full set of tools and parts, and have

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When it was done, I had a bike that was both functional and beautiful. The original J.C. Higgins frame was intact, including the eponymous crankset. I added a front basket, both to save my back from the weight of my bag and to even out the balance and stability. (Tall bikes have a tendency to be rear-heavy and wheelie-prone because of the angle of the seat post; note that the seat is almost directly over the rear hub in the photos.)

This was a great bike to ride. Like the Contusionator before it, the H2 became my primary

means of transportation, for commuting, shopping, and recreation, year-round, except during the heaviest snow. Tall-biking is something that gets in your blood. It's the only way to fly.

Contrary to popular opinion, I actually find tall-biking to be safer than riding a conventional bicycle. For one thing, you're more visible, and you have more visibility yourself. My first ill-fated experience on the Contusionator notwithstanding, falling off isn't really an issue; once you're used to it, it's really not much different than riding a regular bike, and bailing out isn't much harder than hopping off a chair. (A double-decker tall bike is certainly easier to ride than an old penny-farthing style bike, which is kind of like a big unicycle with a little training wheel.) You don't even have to stop and jump off very often if you can learn to time the red lights and



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4) Vengeful intercession?

After the third patching effort failed, I shamefully looked towards Daisy. I vowed to never again take her for granted. I would sing her praises and begin to repent by chronicling my comeuppance so that others might be moved to give their sturdy vessels more care.

The curse was broken. When I pumped the tube up again, a second hole (very close to the first—snakebite??) was gaping. How could I have not noticed?? I applied a second patch, and the tube swelled triumphantly.

I wish I could say I immediately brought Daisy in for some TLC. No, the patch held well, and I continued with Fastbike through the end of the school year. But I finally did bring her into the shop for a long overdue spa session. Doug shook his head again. I promised to take more care. And I did, lubing her chain four (ok, maybe three) times the following year...

The First Freakbike?



When considering freakbike history, we must take into consideration that the vast chronicle of pedal-powered contraptions from the last 200 years is largely unrecorded. It's difficult (and usually pointless) to say that something is the "first" or "tallest" of some version of bike, because inevitably you'll find that some wacko did it 100 years before you did. Guinness considered the World's Tallest Bike to be 11'6" up until the last couple of years; however, old photographs from Chicago

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(<http://www.johnnypayphone.net/tallbikes/>) show that record to have been smashed 100 years ago! When Third Circle Operations showed up on Chino's with their vertical tandem, we were all impressed. Imagine my surprise to find a video of one from 1915! (Visit <http://www.johnnypayphone.net/tallbikes/ssfCYCL1915.AVI>.) Suffice to say that since the first hobby horse there have been individuals constructing all manner of contraptions and that most of those designs have been lost to history. What we can do, however, is classify trends in the larger public realm of bicycle construction.

In earliest times all bikes were made from raw stock. Regardless what was made, these weren't "freak" bikes because there was no standard to compare them to. In order for a bike to be a freakbike or mutant bike, its modification has to be aftermarket (and presumably also has to make the bike less efficient in some way). Otherwise, the builder is a craftsman making vehicles from scratch, no matter what they do with it. In video footage found at youtube.com/watch?v=j-LqaiQATgg, is the bear's tallbike a freakbike? Not really, it was made from scratch for a commercial purpose. Still, it's pretty cool that you think you're so awesome because you can ride one of these things, but a bear can do it too, and they're not exactly nature's most agile creatures. You suck.

World War II was really the beginning of the era of having junk bikes lying around. There are certainly cases of freakbikery before that, in special circumstances. Early tallbikes were very often displayed at fairs or used to



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A couple hours later, with Sam's welding skills and his knowledge of the ancient secret Scallywag art of freehand, tall-bike, head-tube alignment, my new bike had taken shape. A merger of two former department store bikes, the J.C. Higgins, from Sears, and the Hawthorne, from Montgomery Ward's, resulted in what could have no other name than the H2.

This name was appropriate for several reasons: The Higgins/Hawthorne (H+H) combo; the excellent cargo capacity, with the rear triangle and rack of the top frame intact, and of course, the ostentatiousness of yet another ridiculously large vehicle to be unleashed on the streets of the city. It was definitely a Sport Utility Vehicle.

As much as I missed the Contusionator (you never forget your first love), the H2 was a superior bicycle in many ways, and had the potential for even more great tall-biking miles than the 500 or so I estimate I put in on the old one. The internal three-speed Sturmey Archer hub was ideal for a tall bike. No more trying to futz with a derailleur at the wrong angle. No more dealing with the extra bracing for the seat post, since the rear triangle was left intact. No more bent-up handlebars from dropping the bike (at least initially). It was a bike built for everyday use, a practical take on the generally whimsical nature of tall bikes, and Rat bikes in general. It was my new pride and joy.

But there was still some work to be done. After the welding, the bike still needed to be finished. I put together a chain, ran a cable for a front hand brake, rerouted the shifter cable for the three-speed hub (putting the original wheels from the Higgins onto the lower frame), and, with the help of Owen Lloyd from Working Bikes, re-lubed the headset and crank where the grease had been burned out by the welding process. I even put on the old rear fender from the J.C. Higgins. (Even on a tall bike, that water can climb up and give you the old stripe up the back when the streets are wet.)

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The H2 – my SUV



I was the first one on my block to have an H2 in my living room.

Out of the ashes of the purloining of my first tall bike, the Contusionator (dankorn.com/Suckered.html), my new tall bike, the H2, rose like a Phoenix. Or whatever the Ratty version of a Phoenix is. Maybe a vulture. (I'd say a pigeon, but that name's already taken.)

A couple of weeks after the demise of the Contusionator, I headed up to George Whipple PFC, home of the former Scally Sam and some of his messenger mates, for a build session.

Sarah Kaplan built a hot pink chopper called, appropriately enough, Pinky.

I arrived with a beautiful old J.C. Higgins three-speed cruiser, a gift rescued from the trash by the one and only Jane Healy, and a Cannondale mountain bike frame, also rescued from the trash. Sam immediately noted that the aluminum frame of the Cannondale wouldn't work for welding. (As Johnny Payphone says, "If it ain't steel, it ain't real.") Fortunately, Sam had a spare Hawthorne road bike frame that would pair up perfectly with the J.C. Higgins. He also had a lovely red front fork for it.

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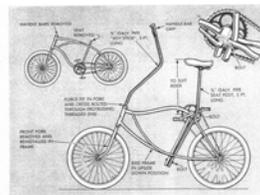
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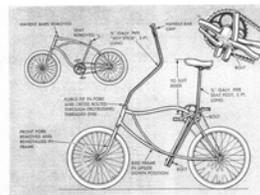
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But it wasn't until the postwar 40's and 50's that motorcycle gangs arose and chopped motorcycles. Returning vets got bored and started "bobbing" motorcycles by removing everything unnecessary to make them faster. On the Fourth of July weekend in 1947 in Hollister, California, 4,000 bikers roared into a small town over a two-day period and overwhelmed the facilities. This was dramatized in *The Wild One*, in which Marlon Brando plays Johnny Strabler, who brings his gang into a small town and tears shit up. The movie basically let the world know about biker gangs and inspired many more of them (and, incidentally, featured Chino, who is the inspiration for the St. Chino's Run).

Meanwhile, hotrod culture blossomed into something more than a search for raw speed, and the custom or low-rider culture was born. This caused tons of kids to start modifying their bikes in admiration of the big boys, and bicycle manufacturers took notice and started churning out store-bought choppers. This made even more kids chop up their bikes, and freakbiking entered a Silver Age. Somewhere along the line some kids on the west coast took old bicycle polo seats and put them on their bikes, and the banana seat was born.

There seems to be some essential element of inefficiency necessary to create a mutant, probably because anybody increasing efficiency is in the business of doing it. For example, Schwinn's first frame builder was



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Oscar Watsyn's dad; Oscar built lots of track bikes that went on to win world records. Now you can go up on Fullerton and see them hanging on the wall. They are no-nonsense bikes. Nobody would argue that they are freakbikes. But the 1964 Popular Mechanics article that shows you how to make a tallbike; that's clearly ridiculous and clearly a mutant bike.

Before all that, there was the hotrod culture and biker culture, and both those things started with a need for speed (bobbers and rat rods), and kustom culture didn't exist until people started to paint flames on hotrods and somebody somewhere took a bobber and gave it a long fork. Why did they do that? It makes it harder to ride, gives it a wider turning radius, slows it down. But damn does it make it more fun. A custom-made vehicle implies that it's made just for you, and that brings some sort of unquantifiable benefit that cannot be manufactured. If we presume that this element in bicycles came from cars, then it can be directly traced to the king of kustomizers (and the guy who put the k in it): George Barris.

If you don't know his name, you know his chops: He made the Batmobile, the Munster's car, the Green Hornet's car, Kitt, the Duke boy's car, the Back to the Future DeLorean, and all those crazy hot wheels you used to have. He got that job by being THE man of kustomizing, starting in Los Angeles in the 1930s with his Kustoms Car Club. That chopped and dropped Mercury that you always see? He made the first one. Before he was old enough to drive, though, he was pimping his bike. Starting with his very first bike (just like me and many others in the freakbike world), he did things like replace the fender bolts with drawer knobs.

Fast forward: Barris is the king of kustom. Legions have begun to customize cars, and both Hollywood and Detroit are listening. Even the Beverly Hillbillies had to have a hotrod kustom, remember? Detroit starts making all those crazy space-cars from the 60's, basically copying Barris. Kids are imitating the car world with their bikes, and Schwinn comes

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up with the Sting-Ray. They're going to do something unheard of: sell a pre-made, hotrod custom bicycle. They go to Hollywood and arrange to have Eddie Munster have one. They get Barris to gussy it up for him, and he does, and every kid in America wants a Sting-Ray. Schwinn makes and sells more bikes than any bike before or since.



This bike is considered to be the first low-rider. So low-rider culture springs from the Munsters, and Schwinn sells a bunch of Sting-Rays, and kids get to jumping them, and BMX is born (as portrayed in the movie Joe Kid on a Sting-Ray). Kids also get Sting-Rays and start jamming forks onto other forks, bolting chopper forks, making crazy apehangers and sissy bars and banana seats. Even crazier production choppers come out, some of them made by Barris himself. The Silver Age of Freakbikes lasts from the 1960s until the late 1970s, and then things get quiet for a little while until Jake takes that Popular Mechanics article over to Per around 1990. But that's another story.

So you see how a jerk in Europe started a war, and we sent a bunch of boys over there, and they came back with motorcycles (or maybe they just came back addicted to the speed of a Sopwith and wanted to see how fast they could go in their Ford), but this guy George has been making the hotrods more cool than fast, and pretty soon everyone's doing it, and it spreads to bikes, and George makes a sweet bike for Eddie Munster that ends up spawning both the low-rider and BMX culture (and, to a lesser extent, the chopper bicycle culture). That Eddie Munster may just be the Johnny Strabler of bike clubs.

—Johnny Payphone

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