

Maddog Unleashed

Some Hair of the Dog: Another Cutting Bit Of Razor-Sharp Wit



*Babies haven't any hair;
Old men's heads are just as bare;
Between the cradle and the grave
Lies a haircut and a shave.*

—Samuel Hoffenstein, Songs of Faith
in the Year After Next

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

Anybody feel like less of a man when he's tugging some slinky Lycra over his hairy thighs? Besides me, that is?

Call me old school, but I think leg hair and cycling kit go together as well as Lance Armstrong and Ashley Olsen. In a sport with more unwritten rules than the theory of the unitary executive, "shave your legs" is one of the few I follow. Watch your line. Take your pulls. Shave your legs.

When non-cyclists ask me why we shave, I explain that there are several theories. Some believe a smooth surface helps reduce friction in a crash, minimizing road rash and subsequent infection. Others argue that soigneurs prefer massaging hairless legs. I say that if we don't shave, all these gross little hairs poke out of our pantyhose.

The real reason, of course, is vanity. The only bits that look good on the fittest guys in Lycra are those muscular, gleaming legs. The arms recall Gumbly, the hairdo is a train wreck, and the package, well—otherworldly, that is, something out of Robert Heinlein's "The Puppet Masters."

Well, mine is, anyway. Sorry about yours.

Hey, Slick. Like the rest of me, my legs do not shout to the casual observer, "Wow, how many miles a week you think he rides?"

If you take off your glasses and stand across the street from me, squinting, I might look like a casual cyclist. But inside my head, where I spend most of my time, I am a serious cyclist, a guy who could get back into racing just like that if it weren't for the pain, the suffering, the peals of derisive laughter.

So I shave.

It got out of hand for a while. I once had a head of hair with beard to match, but when the hair started thinning, I shaved my head, leaving the beard with no hairline to cling to. So I throttled the beard back to a Van Dyke, and suddenly I was shaving my head, cheeks, throat and legs. It took hours, and every time I got started I was afraid I might never stop. This may be what happened to Moby.

Shave and a Haircut. So I've dialed it down a bit, like a slovenly homeowner intermittently trimming the shrubs to let his neighbors know he isn't dead, with the cats eating his lips. The wife runs the clippers over my scalp now and then, and I shave my face every few days in order to sport that fashionable stubble that says a guy sleeps in a refrigerator box under a bridge with Aqua Velva on his breath.

I'll even let the legs go for a while, if I'm cycling solo. But bringing hairy legs to a group ride is like fetching a knife to a gunfight. You may be a samurai, but evildoers will shoot at you anyway, just to see how fast you can dance. Dance! Pow! Dance! Pow!

And if you can't dance? Well, that brings us back to vanity. If you look like a gunfighter, you're less likely to be invited to draw. Or worse, mistaken for an innocent bystander, as I was recently after letting the leg razor lie.

I was chatting with a friend whose "training" is even more casual than mine, talking about having a few drinks, maybe dinner, when he suggested that we go for a ride sometime.

Looking down, he said, "You're not shaving your legs or anything, are you?"

Oh, yes, I am, I thought. Just as soon as I get home. A man needs something to hold onto in these trying times, and my something is a leg razor.