

Maddog Unleashed

New Year, New Prez: How to Keep Wheels In the White House



"I try to do clean riding without receiving the advantage of anything or from anybody. I only ask from them the same kind of treatment which I give and am willing to continue to give."—Marshall "Major" Taylor in his self-published autobiography "The Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World"

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

OK, who's laying a free bike on my man Barack Obama? The last president got more than one from our industry, as I recall, and about the only time I felt safe during the past eight years was when he was in the saddle, hurting himself instead of the rest of us.

Happily, that bozo will be far from the levers of power for the foreseeable future, dodging subpoenas, selecting comic books for his library and in general restricting his screwups to his own affairs.

But I'd still like to have a cyclist in the Oval Office. And while Obama's sport of choice is hoops, he seems like a smart guy, for a smoker. Anybody who can persuade Americans to elect as their president a half-black, crypto-Muslim socialist who pals around with terrorists should be able to figure out the whole cycling thing in short order.

Being as he's a Chicago man, I'd like to see Obama on one of Richard Schwinn's Waterfords, maybe a T-22 Touring with a SRAM gruppo and S&S couplers so the First Bike doesn't take up too much space on Air Force One.

But hey, he's a man of the world, and our industry spans the globe, so don't be shy, even if you're an unemployed arc welder in Spaminacanian trying to make a sweet fixie out of a dismantled swingset, a broken wheelchair and half a can of black Rustoleum. Whip something up.

Spreading the Wealth. As a retired Communist turned registered Democrat, I'd gladly lay a bike on the prez myself, of course. From each according to his ability, to each according to his need, as the unfunny Marx brother, Karl, once put it.

But Obama is an inch and a half taller than me at 6-foot-1 and change. The weight of the gig is certain to stoop him somewhat, but that will take a while, and until he loses a little altitude he'll need something a bit bigger than one of my 56cm frames, all of which are fairly well battered in any case.

Come to think of it, he may not even have time to ride an actual bike. With two wars, the economy shrinking faster than a spider on a hotplate and pirates—actual pirates, not the Johnny Depp/Disney World variety—attacking everything from oil tankers to cruise ships, it seems likely that the new prez will be spending more time on the clock than did the last guy, who was a notorious serial vacationer. So Obama might get more use out of a stationary trainer, like the LeMond Fitness G-force UT.

Commander in Chief, Meet the Major. Hey, wait a minute—here's a thought. It might be the perfect White House warming gift from our industry to this president. We could present Obama with a first edition of Andrew Ritchey's "Major Taylor: The Extraordinary Career of a Champion Bicycle Racer."

It seems appropriate for a number of reasons. Both raced and won despite long odds and an often-unhinged opposition. Both embraced the cheers and endured the jeers. And both found themselves facing unexpected financial crises. Obama's is global, but Taylor's was personal, and a stark reminder that glory has a short shelf life.

The fastest bicycle racer in the world died a pauper at age 53 in the charity wing of Chicago's Cook County Hospital, undone in part by an event that no longer seems merely historical—the Wall Street crash of 1929.