

Maddog Unleashed

What Is the Sound Of One Hand Typing? You're Listening To It

I have spent too much of my life opening doors for cats. I once calculated that, since the dawn of civilization, nine hundred and seventy-eight man-centuries have been used up that way. I could show you the figures. —Dan Davis in Robert A. Heinlein's "The Door Into Summer"



BY PATRICK O'GRADY

Our large and ferocious cat Turkish and I have a couple of things in common. We both have blue eyes and bad attitudes, and we hate to be stuck indoors.

The Turk'—a.k.a. Turkenstein, the Turkinator, Mighty Whitey the Blue-eyed Bully of Bibleburg, Big Pussy, et al.—commences his daily ritual of demanding to go outside about 10 seconds after I crawl out of bed.

Despite his bulk, the Turk' doesn't have a manly meow—his voice is this tiny Mike Tyson squeal, and we will hear it without respite until one of us finally opens a door for him. Turkish would gladly do it himself—he knows how a doorknob works, and tries desperately to turn it using massive forepaws—but he lacks the primate's opposable thumbs.

If it's a warm day, Turk' rewards me by performing the Roll of the Happy Cat in some sunny spot. If it's wintry, he pretends to be enjoying himself until pretense becomes absurd, then slouches back in to deliver a withering critique of my weather-management skills before soothing himself with a relaxing nap or snack. Then the process begins again. Squeal, release, return, repeat. Like Dan Davis' cat Petronius the Arbiter, Turk' never stops searching for the Door Into Summer.

Get Your Motor Running. I sympathize with the Turk' because I too want out, weather be damned. I have taken my exercise indoors, and will again, but that doesn't mean I like it. Stationary trainers, exercise bikes, treadmills, weight rooms—none of them compare with being out in the open air, where the fun is.

So yesterday, after pounding out a column I didn't like—yeah, even I think they suck now and then—I threw myself outside in search of inspiration following a couple rounds of "Let Me Out, Let Me In" with the Turk'.

Head Out On the Highway. We had gotten a few inches of snow a couple days earlier, heavy, wet stuff that was still hanging around in shady places. But it was a sunny 50-something, and I didn't feel like running through the muddy puddles at Monument Valley Park, so I broke out the Voodoo Wazoo, my bad-weather bike.

The Wazoo is a seven-speed, single-ring Frankenbike straight out of the parts bin, with bar-end shifters, canti' brakes and fenders—just the thing for a sloppy ride through a dead-broke town that didn't plow many of its streets before the budget went blooey and voters massacred a property-tax increase.

I rode one of my usual loops, and it took some doing. Heaps of dirty snow erased bike lanes, the paths bore long stretches of slush and ice, and any north-facing bits were more or less impassable.

Looking for Adventure. I soldiered on, though, switching from bike lane to street to sidewalk as conditions dictated and getting off to walk the really dicey bits. Alas, I didn't get off often enough. I wanted back in, and blinded by that desire (and a low-hanging afternoon sun) I overlooked a sheet of ice overlaid by a puddle.

Wham! Down I went, dislocating my left middle finger, which I immediately popped back into place with an audible crack and an oddly Turk'-like squeal, only louder. Much louder. And thus here I sit at my desk, typing this column with one hand. The other is on sick leave, wearing a splint and an icepack.

And wouldn't you know it? It's a beautiful day. Naturally, the Turk' wants out. And so do I. Happily for both of us, I still have my thumbs and running shoes, and I only need one forepaw to turn a doorknob.