

Maddog Unleashed

Wanted: A Candidate Cyclists Can Vote For Rather Than Against

"I sure miss playing basketball. I got depressed as hell when my athlete's foot and jock itch went away."—Cyril in "Breaking Away"



BY PATRICK O'GRADY

I've been paying only casual attention to the 2008 presidential campaign, because I intend to vote for whichever battered, bloodied Democrat finally gets the TKO at the national convention in Denver.

Toeing the party line isn't my style—I've voted for Democrats and Greens, Libertarians and independents—but given what we've endured the past seven-plus years, I'd cast my ballot come November for just about any Jackass whose name isn't Joe Lieberman.

Hell, I'd vote for a bag of hammers if it sported a "D" on anything other than its college transcripts. Compared to the current occupant of the Oval Office, a bag of hammers looks like a double Stephen Hawking.

And unlike Mr. Mission Accomplished, a bag of hammers could really change the tone in Washington, D.C., if you emptied it from a black helicopter hovering 500 meters over a GOP prayer breakfast.

Walking the Walk. My wife and I voted for Barack Obama during the Colorado caucuses in February, along with some other local bicycle people.

My vote was based more on instinct than investigation. Hillary Clinton talks tougher than Darth Cheney around a cage full of quail, but in the general election the right-wing priesthood's invocation of the name "President Hillary" seems certain to cause dead Republicans to rise from their graves and pull the lever for John McCain, along with some live Democrats and independents who've failed to notice that Mr. Straight Talk strides boldly off the beaten path about as often as a carousel pony at a shopping-mall carnival.

Thus, Obama. He didn't exactly have me jumping for joy, but neither did he have me thinking about selling everything and moving to Costa Rica.

Nevertheless, I've longed for a candidate I could vote for instead of against. So I searched the Big Three's Web sites for their positions on cycling—not as a respite from dismantling the Republic, as with the reigning chief executive, but as an alternative to turning dead dinosaurs and cornfields into greenhouse gases.

And whaddaya know? I found a reason to believe.

Talking the Talk. McCain's "Environment" section says nothing about cycling. In fact, it says mostly nothing, period, unless you think GOP talking points about market forces and national security constitute straight talk on the environment.

Clinton, meanwhile, serves up a 15-page PDF explaining in excruciating detail how she would "promote energy independence, address global warming, and transform our economy." Seven thousand words. None of them "bicycle."

But Obama's transportation plan discusses his support for the Complete Streets Act of 2008, a measure authored by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) to ensure that all users of the U.S. transportation system, including pedestrians and bicyclists, "are able to travel safely and conveniently on streets and highways."

And he even broke away from his hectic campaign schedule ahead of the Indiana primary to visit the Little 500 women's race in Bloomington, where he graciously declined to interrupt the festivities by cranking up the chin music.

Now, Obama is no Dave Stoller. Like Dave's buddy Cyril, his chosen sport is hoops, not cycling. So we probably won't see him posing for the press with a Serotta or a Trek anytime soon. But he is talking about bicycling as something other than a presidential play date. And even a sour old cynic like me finds that vaguely audacious and hopeful.