

# Maddog Unleashed

## Extolling High-End Bikes In a Low-End Economy Causes Great Depression

*The chief enjoyment of riches consists in the parade of riches.* —Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*



BY PATRICK O'GRADY

It's been interesting to read the news from the real world—the one in which California pays its bills with IOUs, Colorado is hundreds of millions in the red and nobody cares because Michael Jackson Michael Jackson Michael Jackson!—and compare it with the dispatches from the bicycle world, a diamond-studded, gold-plated Neverland whose moonwalking, monogloved denizens all apparently enjoy the purchasing power of the late, great King of Pop.

Even a casual glance at *BicycleWorld* takes in review after review, in magazines and on the Web, extolling the virtue of \$7,000 bikes, \$4,000 gruppos, \$1,300 wheelsets, \$1,100 forks, \$600 cranksets, \$500 jackets, \$400 brakes, \$320 seat posts and \$75 tires.

Um, forgive me for my appalling ignorance, but just who the hell is supposed to be buying all this top-shelf stuff? I know it's not me, because I'm still alive, which I won't be about 15 seconds after bringing home a \$7,000 bike. And I'm pretty sure it's not Michael Jackson, because he's dead.

**It's Only Money—Lots and Lots of Money.** Seven thousand dollars for a bike? Puh-leeze. I never spent more than half that amount for a two-wheeler, and it came with an engine. Come to think of it, I once bought a four-wheeled vehicle for a thousand dollars less, and it came with a stereo, a long bed for carrying stuff and four-wheel drive.

I understand why tech editors like to write about pricey toys. There's a lot of wowie-zowie involved in straddling a bike that represents six months' worth of mortgage payments and weighs less than the notarized contract for same.

And don't forget the "I'm cooler than you" factor. I recently read a review of a shoe whose extremely limited production run meant the reader could get one only at gunpoint, from a tech editor.

Had I been the line editor on that one, I might have run a sidebar on an affordable firearm. MasterGun®—don't leave home without it. Not if you want a rockin' pair of kicks, anyway.

**Pedaling for the Penny-Pincher.** All this is the long way around to saying I was delighted the other day to see *Bicycling* run an online feature, "Road Bikes for Under \$1,000."

Nothing fancy here—Tiagra and Sora, more aluminum than carbon, even a couple eight-speed machines, some with triple chainrings. Imagine that—a bike that some impoverished, hairy-legged fat bastard like me might be able to (a) afford and (b) pedal up a hill without catching a tow from a passing car.

Over at *Bicycle Times*, meanwhile, graphic designer Matt Kasprzyk has been discussing his build-up of a Soma Double Cross DC frame as a commuter-slash-cyclocross bike. A laudable, affordable project, and one that struck a chord with me, because I built up a pair of Double Crosses back in 2007—one for the wife and one for me.

Mine is an eight-speed, Tange-steel Frankenbike, an amalgamation of parts from other machines—by far the cheapest bike in the garage, but one of my favorites, in part because I didn't have to sell a healthy organ to get it.

So chapeau to *Bicycling* and *Bicycle Times* for realizing that the market for the unobtainium wonderbike is mostly a select group of pros that gets them for free. Here's hoping more cycling journos begin writing about bikes their readers can afford in this world—because Michael Jackson will have an immortal lock on all the cool toys in the next.