Maddog Unleashed

The Accidental Tourist: Enjoying a Road Trip, If Only Between the Ears

For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel’s sake. The great affair is to move. —Robert Louis Stevenson, “Travels With a Donkey”

BY PATRICK O’GRADY

Ever find yourself trudging along in a rut? Doing the same ol’, same ol’, day in and day out? As stale as jailhouse bread? That’s me lately, and it doesn’t exactly feed the old comedy beast.

That this has been an exceptionally damp, cool summer has not helped. In truth, we never really had one. Monsoon season we got—nearly twice as much rain as is normal in July. But summer? Not so much.

Rain drove me out of Oregon back in 1983. Here, where I am tethered to property, it could only drive me out of my mind. I came to feel a bleak kinship with my paternal grandfather, who fled soggy auld Ireland for the sunny shores of America. The whiskey wasn’t nearly as good, but at least it wasn’t pissing down rain all the bloody time.

A brisk ride usually jolleys me out of a black Irish funk. But after abandoning cyclocross racing some years back I became a fair-weather cyclist and thus my bikes grew moldy in the garage. Then a dodgy knee curtailed my running, and so I took to hiking—stumbling along in actual ruts from the heavy July runoff instead of the figurative ones in my skull.

To the Nuthouse, Harch. Actually, the two journeys are conjoined, because an irritable man who walks a lot has plenty of opportunity to take cadence count from the voices in his head. There are no texting drivers to dodge, no shambling plodders to skirt, and one’s superfluous vigilance can be redirected inward.

My voices told me that I had more than rain on the brain; there were a couple tricky links in my rusty cerebral chain. The racing scene was Lance Armstrong ad nauseam, the industry news wasn’t exactly a bouquet and a spritz of champagne, and here I was, up to the hubs in cranial sludge, a poor schlub trying to hitch a ride to Giggle City from the corner of Tedium and Gloom in Downsville.

Time for a career change? Maybe. More than a few readers and an editor or two might say so. But there aren’t any jobs around here, much less careers. And anyway, I still like cycling, when it’s not raining, and I like writing about it, too, even when the reviews involve the kind of rave one has come to expect from a health-care rally.

It’s Not a Job, It’s An Adventure. And then, out of the blue, came a note from Michael Deme, editor of Adventure Cyclist, the magazine of the Adventure Cycling Association.

“Ever done any touring?” he asked.

Well, no. I’ve cycled for transportation and exercise, for yuks and giggles, ridden uncounted centuries and races—but I’ve never loaded up a bike with paniers full of this and that and trundled off in search of adventure, or taken part in a supported tour.

Anyway, we exchanged a few e-mails, discussed a couple of story ideas, agreed to talk more later. And while nothing may come of it, the thought of exploring a road less traveled, examining a different type of cycling—and casting the wide loop of my belligerent ignorance over a herd of unsuspecting cyclo-tourists—cheered me right up. There was a whiff of vacation about it.

A guy needs something to look forward to, especially if it’s late August and the furnace has just clicked on. You know what that means—winter, which means snow, which is basically really cold rain that you have to shovel.

Toga’s Rescue Vehicle Generates Goodwill

BY RAY KEENER

Toga Bike Shop’s three locations cover a wide area. With two stores in Manhattan and one in Nyack, owner David Nazaroff identified a need: Helping customers stranded in between on Highway 9W.

To fill this need Nazaroff conjured up the Rescue Vehicle, a roving repair shop for stranded cyclists. The idea was to fix people’s mechanical problems on the road or take them to the nearest Toga shop for more involved repairs. Toga charges for the parts and labor but gives riders a lift for free.

A side benefit to the Rescue Vehicle is name recognition.

“We started off with a boxy Scion when they first came out and got a lot of attention,” Nazaroff said. “This Smart Car convertible is our third vehicle. People just have to look at it, and when they do, they see our logo.”

The service is marketed through the local cycling clubs, Toga’s Web site, a special red business card and by word of mouth.

“You can be sure that anyone we’ve ever rescued becomes a customer for life,” Nazaroff said.

Number Crunch

Distribution Studies Chart Retail Patterns

BY RAY KEENER

Total specialty sales in 2008 totaled $2.913 billion according to a report recently released by Leisure Trends. The Leisure Trends distribution study found 57 percent of those sales came through the single IBD, 22 percent through retailers in the other category, 11 percent through specialty sports, and 10 percent through pro custom.

Leisure Trends asked a representative sample of 423 retailers (out of an estimated 4,800 shops nationwide) to select a category for their store: pro custom, single IBD, specialty sports, and other, which includes local, regional and national chains.

As anticipated, big stores do most of the industry’s business. Thirty-four percent of the dealers (1,632 stores) represent 67 percent of the sales ($1.952 billion). To illustrate this another way, the top one-third have average annual sales of $1.196 million per door, while the bottom two-thirds have average sales of $303,000.

Why did Leisure Trends separate pro custom stores from “regular” IBDs? “We’ve seen this retail differentiation in other industries we serve and wanted to determine if there were similar patterns in the IBD channel,” said Charlie Cooper of Leisure Trends. “We wanted to see if high-end shops differ in their sales pattern from full-line specialty dealers.”

The one figure that remains constant across the different store categories is the percentage of total sales represented by bicycles: 42 percent for pro custom, 42 percent for single IBD and 41 percent for specialty sports.

The figure that varies the most is aftermarket parts sales. These make up 20 percent of total sales for pro custom shops, 13 percent for single IBD stores and 10 percent for specialty sports.

Both Leisure Trends and Gluskin-Townley have recently released distribution studies on the specialty bicycle retail channel. Next month we’ll look at numbers from the Gluskin-Townley study commissioned by the NBDA.