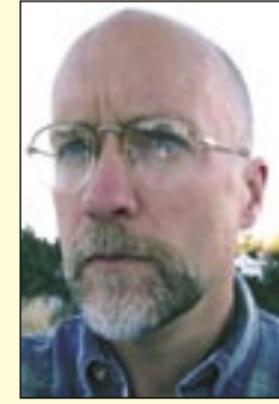


Maddog Unleashed

Early Winter Helps An Old Dog Re-Learn A Long-Forgotten Trick

Cross-country skiing's not a sport, it's how a f---ing Swede goes to the 7-Eleven. —Dan Jenkins, "You Gotta Play Hurt"



BY PATRICK O'GRADY

I see from our January issue that road bikes aren't moving quite the way we'd like. Mine sure isn't. It's in the basement, clamped to an old Cateye wind trainer, where it serves as a drying rack for damp laundry.

Winter came early to Colorado this year, meaning it was on time for a change. This was a real blast from the past—you know, the good old days, before the ozone layer got perforated like one of Dick Cheney's hunting buddies and polar bears started raiding 7-Elevens for sunscreen.

By early January, a series of snowfalls had stacked up on our unplowed streets, rendering them largely impassable by cabin-feverish, baldheaded fat bastards hoping to sweat out a few holiday excesses through vigorous cycling.

Still, a man can't cower indoors. Not in a 1,100-square-foot house full of critically appraising wife, anyway. So one day I outfitted a lesser 'cross bike with some plump Maxxis Raze knobbies, pulled on the Lycra and neoprene, and navigated warily to a nearby park for a bit of the old run-and-ride.

Like a Vanilla Milkshake, Only Crunchy! This proved unwise. Crossing through this crusty snow was like trying to pedal through a meat locker full of Styrofoam. The mountain bike proved better suited to conditions, but only if I stuck to the streets, where the crazy people were.

Back-to-back snowstorms took a frosty dump on many a motorist's Christmas and New Year's Eve, and it is not health-enhancing to share a slippery street with a cranky Yukon jackass whose plasma TV and/or sloppy midnight kiss from a drunk wife not his own remains undelivered.

So I laced up the Sauconys and went running, but that was nearly as sketchy as cycling, since the Aztec sun god Tonatiuh has been unavailable for sidewalk-clearing since he got snagged by la migra and deported to Cancun. If you're wondering, that's how my road bike wound up clamped to the Cateye.

A Giro d'Basement Is Abasement. And that's where it sits today, covered with dust and damp socks. Because while dragging bikes out of and back into the garage, I stumbled across my cross-country skis, which hadn't seen daylight in five or six years.

Having skis and snowshoes were a must when we lived in the mountains, until the snow went elsewhere for several years running. I never got good enough at the sport to justify the long, hair-raising drives to glitzy ski towns with groomed tracks, and with a succession of dry winters there was no need for an alternate off-season activity—I could ride and run year-round, and did.

So when we moved downhill to Colorado Springs, the skis went straight into the garage. Until this winter, when cycling started to look like an indoor sport.

There's More Than One Way to Snowplow. One good thing about roads that never get plowed is you can ski on them. So we did, for a while, until I remembered how badly I ski, how hard the asphalt is under its snowy blanket, and how loudly my insurance company would laugh when I explained how I got run over while skiing the streets.

So we relocated to a nearby grassy park. I laid down a meandering track that took about 20 minutes to cover and we did laps on it for a solid week, until a brief heat wave made diagonal stride feel like running on Astroturf in Velcro-soled clown shoes.

Now we're mired in slush season. Skiing is impossible, and cycling is like getting a power washer full of lapidary grit up the bum. Running sucks, just like always, but now it's cold and squishy too. There's always the trainer, but damn.

The good news is, I know somebody sold at least one road bike this past Christmas season. A neighbor kid got it, and he's been riding it up and down my shoveled walk while he, like the rest of us, waits for the annual harbinger of spring—the re-emergence of asphalt.