

30. Elusive Spin

As far back as Al could remember, always told mom, pop, siblings, or spouse he was going out for a “spin”, instantly recognized as a short duration aimless *dérive* for pleasure outdoors. “Abstract, wordless movement” elevates you, opens your eyes, just as those two women in film *Tax Day*. The intellectual version of this, *following your bliss*, leads to either enlightenment, as some claim, or subtle distortion of facts, called *confirmation bias*, where embarrassing details are ignored and only those that support your arguments are accumulated. With demonic persistence, you can convince anyone of anything, including black-is-white lies and mass automotive delusions. Come Fall, today’s women talk of *spinning*, a new meaning of this word, once turning fluff into practical yarn to be knitted, purled and stitched into pleasant erratic and repeat patterns, now pointlessly cranking pedals at high cadence, more than 90 revolutions per minute, indoors. Women are particularly suspicious of riding outdoors among men who might overpower them and a society that doesn’t empower them. You will always wear out your legs quickly if you force a high cadence, as well as run out of breath. Peak efficiency is in a narrow range centered around 80 rpm. He liked to coast whenever possible; credited it with how he managed to ride over 5,000 miles/year. Yet he was greeted with arguments that free wheeling is inefficient, squashed tender bits, slowed you down. Witless detractors even suggested that heavier riders descend faster than lighter.

For those who skipped Physics 101 and wouldn’t happened to have minored in the history of science, Galileo disproved this “extra gravity” effect nearly 500 year ago. Gravity pulls all objects equally everywhere. Newton later wrote it all up, and garnered credit. He had better publicists, such as Poet Laureate James Thompson, hardly remembered today. That was the English for you, disrespecting their Catholic European counterparts, rivals mired in millennia of rigid doctrine, and flaunting their Protestant imperial jewels. Descartes and Galileo endured religious persecution for their earlier, inspired, selfless efforts, only recently exonerated by their Church. “Better late than never,” he supposed in bitter irony. That’s how governments and institutions treat noble souls. No point insisting on progress when those in charge exploit status quo and torture anyone who rightly dissents. Better to be blest with luck and undeserved privilege than brains, yet for society this leads to long spells of ignorance.

There's a simple explanation for a seemingly gravity-defying experience. For example, a lighter rider ahead appeared slower, so heavier one trailing crept up on him and had to brake repeatedly. What they didn't take into account was leader was slowed by air friction, while trailer, in his slipstream, would naturally descend quicker. Riders by themselves can also experience this. While steadily descending (on good pavement), watch cyclometer and simply sit up. You will slow considerably. Then crouch and note acceleration. Increased air resistance is why a larger feather falls slower than a smaller pebble, not differences in gravity but wind resistance. Side by side, any smaller rider would actually go faster than a bigger one simply due to less surface plowing through air.

Theoretically, heavier riders should go slower because of additional friction where rubber meets road. There are advantages to better hubs, momentum and narrower tires, but hardly enough to notice on steep descents. If you crest a hill at a higher speed than next guy, you may accelerate at an increased pace, perhaps reach a higher overall velocity downhill. Starting with more speed, it's easier to gain more. But this has absolutely nothing to do with comparative mass. Observations may vary, but the physical laws behind this phenomenon don't, unless you dismiss 500 years of science, which eradicated plagues, explored solar system with robots, extended life expectancy, mapped human genome, pushed boundaries of all human understanding, and put men on the Moon. But what do scientists know? Dumb luck? Mere speculation? Those who claim scientists know nothing know even less. Meanwhile they're quick to pop newest pill or purchase latest technological toy, if not succumb to religious bigotry of their own.

While effective on level stretches, if you can find any, nobody spins on steep descents, where it doesn't help and one coasts while resting weight on pedals, not saddle. On ascents, more often one experiences tire suck, that leaden feeling in your shoes, which hints of grades against you. You're often fiddling for a better gear combination rather than worrying about cadence. Those who weigh more shift more often, constantly trying to restore equilibrium. Can't spin much uphill. Spinning may occur between rollers, rather than shifting, because you'd just have to shift again in a few seconds. If grades are especially shallow, spinning is a good way to preserve quads during a long ride. Best to maintain some resistance, then react to, even expect, a slower cadence, yet not overreact to hills that often look worse than they are, a disheartening glimpse ahead at what looks insurmountable but turns out to be easy.

Riding on varied terrain, you'll encounter climbs so steep you can barely crank, corners or descents where pedaling is superfluous, possibly even dangerous, where you should level pedals to avoid jamming them into bumps or curbs, and traffic, which might force you to hover or stop, but certainly few chances to spin. Spinning is fine on flats, like on bikeways between crossings, but you hardly ever think of it while riding on real roads except on prairies. Your normal tendency is to shift to as high a gear as can be tolerated. But higher cadence in a lower gear will actually increase your pace. Generally you upshift to keep up revolutions per minute, downshift to increase speed at same cadence. Racers talk of cadence spins as something to do during off days, easy steady rotations resulting in slow overall speed. Ordinarily, intent on building strength, they use hard gear combinations to do everything. They won't use big cassette gear or small chainring even on the most challenging hills. Lean and light, they seldom need to. Fantastic athletes can maintain a cadence of 150 rpm and speeds up to 35 mph for hours; average individuals might be able to for a few minutes. It's highly aerobic and requires excellent cardiovascular health, expanded lung capacity, peak physical conditioning. To do so, a body has to exhale carbon dioxide at unusual rates and inhale gallons of air to pump oxygen forcibly to extremities.

As he pedaled harder, his ass hugged saddle all the more. That's why saddles had wings, to catch butt cheeks, so you don't push right off back but sustain thrust. Some saddles are skinny and straight and insist you lean forward and thrust downward to pedal hard, stand instead of using your butt. The more you're rigged for speed, the more up front you're positioned, weight right over pedals. But for touring, it's more comfortable, less exhausting, and usually safer to sit back, especially descending slippery slopes or when chain slips or crank arm breaks. Derailleur stops are supposed to keep chain from jumping off gear then jamming up in frame and tossing you off, but they don't always work. Cyclists know chains are wicked and willful. Spinning and standing burn more energy, deplete fuel faster, perhaps better for short rides, but you'll bonk early while touring. This is directly analogous to horseback riding. Jockeys post, stand in stirrups, because ride is only a few minutes. Cowpokes sit, because they're stuck in saddle for 8 to 12 hours at a time; there's no one alive with legs strong enough to stand bowlegged for that long, day after day.

Spinning, therefore, is something best done in a gym on a machine. It may have minor merit as exercise, but what of bike fit? Joint damage? Short duration? Does it really help you achieve

anything useful for bicycling? Or does it take time away from the real thing? Being cooped inside comes to resemble imaginary horrors of “Stationary Bike”, Stephen King’s novella, “Certainly better than nothing, but also knowing it was about all he could stand for... 15 minutes was not enough to tire him out. It was just boring in the basement. The whine of the wheels combined with the steady roar of the furnace quickly got on his nerves. He was all too aware of that he was doing which was going to nowhere.” Why not just ride for real? Nothing quite like being far from a destination at dusk or on verge of a storm to motivate extra effort. No indoor rollers or wind sprinters are going to provide such incentive. He rode outdoors except on icy days, when he rested. Rest is good, too. Spinning in place seems too odd given almost any imaginable circumstance. Where are its revelations? Its auto-hypnosis drains your brain and leaves you dull and inane.

Not so totally elusive, spinning is something everyone does every moment of every day. He’d certainly spun a lot of CDs, put a new spin on just about every idea, spun his wheels for decades doing unloved acts for a living. Space you occupy is never the same. Earth spins on its axis, travels around Sun, while Sun spins around galactic center. Since the Milky Way is expanding, well, you see, you never precisely intercept the same space ever again. You might not get out of bed for days yet you’re racing through a continuum at an alarmingly fast rate: 1,000 miles/hour of rotation, 300 miles/second around sun, further hurlingly spinning and hurtling through space/time, away from original Big Bang. Makes you dizzy.

Boards of directors spin webs of deceit. In Forq’s 2006 proxy, they asked shareholders to vote, not for directors for which they had no choice, but for referenda. They expected shareholders to agree they didn’t need to adopt a plan to provide 1 vote per company share, nor disclose officers’ compensation, nor maintain references to sexual orientation in Human Resources policies, nor report on lobbying efforts, nor tie executive compensation with a reduction in greenhouse gases, nor publish a report on its effect. Obviously, how these issues are presented, as cost increases that effect their bottom line and therefore detriments to business, pits ethical behavior against self-interest, which is the very core of capitalism. And you still think “corporations aren’t the enemy”? Since no dividend was forthcoming, might as well vote for implementing these referenda against recommendations. About the only reason to hold their stock is to keep an eye on how executive perks negatively effect society. You need not hold many shares to do so.

Congress, too, needs oversight. Resolution 305 was not what he wanted. Yeah, to be sure, complete streets; interconnect states; speed up urban planning of bikeable villages. But do you need long, separate bikeways to accomplish this? No, you need to conserve flat terrain on the watershed model, so you're not forcing bicyclists up steep hills away from bus and train terminals and letting motorists race along flats. This resolution wants to link funding to wherever bicyclists die a lot. Sounds like a ploy to favor tourist traps versus northern states and urban jungles. Conservation areas already exist for mountain biking, and you can't ride far on dirt anyway. More accidents occur where riding seems safe; where more riders do, more accidents occur. Where there's traffic congestion, you need bikeways. Infrastructure improvements must focus on alleviating fears, where fewer ride out of fear, wherever really needed. Why reward businesses or individuals? That's corporate and personal welfare. Bicycling is its own reward. Why not a percent-for-bicycling plan attached to all urban road building? Lobbyists had a lot to say about this meaningless resolution, which doesn't affect existing pro-cycling laws that aren't enforced anyway. Leave it to government to mess up something simple. They give tax rebates for nothing rather than a stimulus for exploration of alternative energy. There should be prizes for individuals who come up with new technologies. Instead corporations look to lock up patents and write off research costs, which only limits future competition. Who needs VMT (Vehicle Miles Traveled) targets? You can easily reduce miles driven by simply revoking licenses; those who don't know how shouldn't be allowed to drive. Concerned with air quality, Massachusetts began to weed out stink pots by raising emissions bar. Motoring is a privilege, not a right of passage. With pump prices out of sight, who can afford driving? For instant improvement, all they have to do is replace USDOT Director with someone who isn't a moron appointed by a corrupt petroleum puppet. Sure, if bicycles officially play no part in transportation, despite tens of millions commuting every day with them, then bicyclists don't have to obey traffic laws, either, do they?

Since Congress permitted a radical increase in prices for petroleum, then it must match it with a radical increase in minimum wage. Rightly, individuals shouldn't have to budget more than 20% of their net income on transportation. If it costs \$100 to fill your tank, the lowest paid employee needs to clear at least \$500 each week, or \$12.50 per hour net, which means -\$15 per hour minimum. This doesn't even take into account all motoring costs, which range in estimates from \$5,000 to \$8,000 per year, as much

as 50% of net income. If a wage increase is impossible, they should cut highway spending commensurately. Most of it lines pockets and never reaches construction workers anyway. Instead of \$600 billion on roads per year, how about \$100 billion, and the rest for other modalities: airline subsidies, bullet trains, mag-lev subways. After motored isolation, how do you get public to accept close promity? Deodorant subsidies?

Rail talk is all the rage. Some criminal newspaper editors have suggested returning all your bicycling infrastructure, painfully established through decades of dedicated activism, to trolley lines. He had no problem with elevated monorails using the same rights of way, but anything that discourages bicycling is already illegal. Rail enthusiasts refuse to welcome cycling as a modality that could actually increase train ridership. Tax subsidized AMTRAK doesn't provide suitable bike accommodations: bikes on board cars (during all runs) or station bike racks including enclosed, locking storage. They are better at closing bridges you need to cross this monolithic impediment and creating intolerable detours for bicyclists.

With \$500 billion freed up annually, they could buy up undeveloped rights of way, construct bikeways and bike/ped bridges over rails and roads, and make all, which compete for flat terrain, coexist nicely. They could offer incentives for logical urban planning and policies. What America is now witnessing is the results of excessive corporate freedoms. Most traffic is the fault of corporate sprawl. Were they to relocate in population centers, commutes and trucking routes would be shorter. Their response to date has been to avoid regulations by offshoring. Where's the Congressional resolutions against such intentional waste? Nobody acts responsibly.

Songwriters try to make sense of Man's incessant search for truth. If *nothing from nothing*, there's no dinner, no pay, no respite, no transcendence. Hypnotized, sleepwalking through dead air, downtime, and stolen moments, all is yet in motion, but you're not supposed to remain so still as to actually feel or hear it. This lonely space in restless motion might someday collide with an alternate reality, intercept a dark nebula, Earth's orbit transferred to another star not optimally suited to sustain biologics. Earth's atmosphere might be boiled off, or some other such grand anxiety, but probably not in one's lifetime. Meanwhile, he went out alone in the universe for many a short forgettable spin.

