20. Fashion Passion

Regalia of elites makes your head swim. It's not only forks, frame, gruppo, pedals, saddle, and wheels, options which make up a bicycle itself, it's also helmets, jerseys shoes, and tights, among other things. Insiders talk of how many holes there are in their Giro and sport an endless wardrobe of fancy togs. They ratchet up their Sidis for exact ankle fit in such a way everyone notices, akin to pumping up Reeboks in the 1980's. Think this makes them somehow better and cleverer. Chumps.

There are real choices with practical consequences. The elite only choose what's most expensive, wouldn't be caught dead on last year's style. Face the fact that everything involving bicycling makes you appear idiotic—a fat sausage in garish apparel and unflattering tights on a frail conveyance. Appearance shouldn't be your prime concern. Equipment material and maker expertise matter. If you ride an aluminum or titanium frame, you don't have to wash as often. But aluminum frames must be inspected weekly for cracks, a nuisance best done after washing, while drying. Without tensile strength of steel or TI, aluminum doesn't deform, it just breaks, and bauxite smelting is toxic to surrounding community. Iron is world's most plentiful metal. Good old resilient steel has to be washed and primped religiously, as nicks and rust from salt are constant threats. Obsessive compulsive? No just a good strategy for a heavy metal rider.

Some of the most expensive frames by top designers were custom-made steel. Their reinforced joints are detailed with extra special painting and fancy decals, tailored handlebars cork wrapped and varnished. Custom makers are a rare breed: California's Baylis and Hollands, Colorado's Murphy, Reno's Della Santa, Connecticut's Sachs and Weigle, Massachusett's Mooney and Vandermark, Pennsylvania's Kellogg, Rhode Island's Circle-A-Cycle, and Seattle's Erickson, who together hardly cover USA. Even the best turned out less than 100 frames per year with economies stacked against them. Besides making other elites drool with jealousy, such bikes should last a lifetime with logical repair or thoughtful care. With carbon fiber or titanium, you pay extra for convenience, lightness and strength, but neither are unbreakable or upkeep immune by any means. On the other hand, if you can't

afford a Ferrari, a custom frame that suits you flawlessly is a fantastic extravagance on a $5,000 budget and far more practical than a diamond, the shape of which it resembles. Steels trumps carbon.

Unlike yesterday's antique cars, bikes today don't make good investments. Not yet, although collectors might pay a hefty sum for a lightweight Legstrong cycle used to win Tour de France. Basically, buyers want brand new, chains and components wear too quickly, and old frames assume owner's own personality. There's slight irony in how featherweight bikes are exclusively used by elite, lightest cyclists, while flabby sluggards who need them more generally push around heaviest iron. Racers once drilled holes in gears and rings to remove weight and thereby gain a slight edge over equally matched competitors. But only they were capable of converting shaved ounces into victories, thus warranting their expensive experiments. Sluggards should take advantage of extra bike mass to build muscles and gradually tune their bodies for increased efficiency rewarded by future upgrades and more miles without painful repercussions. Instead they hurt themselves and soon give up.

No matter what frame, every 200 miles or so a bike demands cleaning, if only to degrease and lube chain or wipe down brake glaze on rims with isopropyl alcohol. Afterwards, it's a snap to wipe entire bike with a damp, soapy rag stored in a bucket or plastic bag ready for reuse. Lube shouldn't go where it doesn't belong, i.e., eating away nonmetal components or gumming up active mechanisms. Best to complete cleanup right after a ride. A clean bike keeps your transport vehicle clean, too. Some riders were so cleanliness careful they never rode unless pavement was parched. No matter how arid, there were always car washers, lawn sprinklers, and other wet situations that left deposits. Not only constant washing, there was picking embedded glass from tires; why wait until a shard works into tube? Lube, pick, wipe: Always something to do.

Personally caring for your own bike is just like packing your own parachute: recommended if you value your life. While sagging charity events, he'd been appalled by others' bad brakes, improperly mounted wheels, loose spokes, and soft tires. Reached out to fix, only to withdraw in fear of civil suits and criticism. Yet everyone survived. They'd never get away with this in mo-ves, another reason bicycling is better than driving. Still, wouldn't have much confidence at burst speeds over 30, typical of club rides, on a unit poorly

cared for. Neither would he feel at ease without carrying a complete tool kit. Obeying Murphy's Law, emergencies always occur when you're as far as you'll be from any help. A kit minimally includes a chain tool, index of hex-Allen wrenches (as most things adjustable on bike use cap type hex screws), inflation system (either CO_2 cartridge type, or combination unit with both cartridge and hand pump), Leatherman multitool (with knife, pliers, and screw drivers), spoke wrench, tire levers, and 2 or more tubes. For longer rides consider a spare tire; Al kept one folded into a conveniently tall, light weight, nontoxic PETE bottle.

Riders can be categorized into 4 types: a) average racers and roadies who go long distances or ride fast on good pavement; b) BMX'ers and MTB'ers who look for and enjoy undeveloped roads, trails amd trick parks; c) commuters who ply city and suburban streets, and d) practical and recreational riders who go short distances. There are 8 styles of bikes specially adapted for these types of riding.

1) *Road* bikes are for average "alpha" roadies and elite racers. They are characterized by an aerodynamic lightweight frame, downswept handlebars and narrow 17 to 25 mm tires. They emphasize speed for criterion races, day trips, or time trials. Several custom frame adaptations suit each type of use, such as more vertical seat tubes or forks for use on tracks. They are generally stripped except for bottle cage(s) and a fanny pack of tools under sleek, thin saddles.

An offshoot of road is 2) the more rugged *touring* bike, used over multiple days on varied terrain, over hills and through dales. They add braze-on lugs for mounting side bags, called panniers, and are generally equipped with a triple crank and slightly wider tires, 25 to 28 mm. Frame tends to be a little longer, which helps absorb shock over extended tours. Common are fenders, leather saddles well-prepped for maximum comfort, and lights, because trips could be so long that night falls or weather becomes unpredictable. This is a good choice if you don't expect to own more than 1 type yet intend to go reasonably far.

3) *Hybrid* styles, with plush saddle and straight handlebars, are first choice among "c" and "d" riders because they're more adapted to commuting or recreation. They become uncomfortable when distances exceed 25 miles. Hybrids combine some advantages of a roadie, like sleeker profile for speed, and a mountain bike, like upright posture for better vision, tire options, and a small, third

chainring for easier climbing. *Utility* bikes, unlike hybrids, have backwards curved handlebars, carriers and/or panniers like a touring bike, fenders over chain and wheels, kickstand, and remain popular in Europe, where for a century they've been in arrested development. Front baskets optimally hold load, since you can do a little wheelie and carry it over obstacles, which you couldn't if over rear wheel. For both, what you gain in ruggedness, you sacrifice in speed. Additional subcategories include: adult *trikes* (for the balance challenged), *handcycles* (for people with little or no leg strength), and *recumbents* (sit lower and pedal out in front, which riders with back or neck pain find more comfortable). Suppose one could include *novelty* bikes, such as ice cream vendors, pedal taxis (aka cyclos), or one he saw that had a shopping cart welded in front.

4) *Cyclocross* are hybrids or touring bikes with special tires knobby enough to grip slippery surfaces and possibly nylon spokes. They are for off-road races that involve carrying, and riding bike through fields with mud, over obstacles steeplechase style, as well as on pavement, so must be light yet rugged. A wide variety of configurations are used depending on racer's strengths. They may have a single chainring flanked by a bash (chain) guard to avoid fouling under harsh conditions, snagging clothes, snapping off teeth, or stabbing flesh.

5) *Recreational* bikes for "d" riders can include any type, but, for this discussion, is a catchall for the rest: 1-speed, 10-speeds, 3-speeds, or those with automatic transmission drivetrains, art bikes, small bikes (some so tiny you can tuck into a knapsack), tall bikes (homemade aberrations with extra frame members and chains so riders can sit really high), the type adults or kids use for scouting their backyard or going to local store, and those with bunnies painted on them. They aren't much use in racing or randonneuring, long distance riding, but generally offer a cheap, possibly unreliable introduction. Baskets are common, as well as fenders, kickstands, and wide saddles. Banana seat minis, breezers, and cruisers all fit here with a realiability upgrade. Ultimate wheels and unicycles aren't mentioned, since, technically speaking, they don't have the minimum requirement of 2 wheels.

6) Fixed gears, aka fixies, are road bikes stripped of almost everything except a frame, bars, saddle, and a single gear combination. Sometimes a single brake caliper is added or a reversible rear wheel with 2 different size gears, in case you're caught on terrain unsuited to its primary gear arrangement. Rear wheel lugs have rear

facing horizontal slots to take up chain stretch. Bike messengers and urban commuters often use them, admittedly an acquired taste. They are light, uncomplicated, and, thus, simple to maintain and unlikely to be sabotaged or stolen. Fixies give controlled descents, although they are lousy on steep grades. A higher tech version is used for velodrome racing. Unlike a 1-speed, you cannot freewheel. You crank quicker or slower to regulate speed. This offers an advantage: You can crank back and forth slightly to hover upright, ready to go at an intersection or race start. a so-called *track stand*. Users claim they build muscle faster and lead to a disciplined cranking technique, although they just as often result in knee injuries. Oddly, some fixies are set up with left side drive. Zealots avow riding a fixie or mtb with wide tires is holier than a road bike or thin tires. Nonsense. You'll suffer less on better equipment built with technological advantages and try more miles. But number of miles is irrelevant, too. If you miss your ride quota, who's to know? Doesn't matter, unless you race for a living. And someone is bound to cheat by taking hemocrit or steroids, then beat you anyway.

7) Mountain bikes (aka mtbs) are specially adapted with heavier brakes, hubs, knobby tires, spokes and sometimes frames which makes them suited for loose sand and gravel, powdered snow, and rough use, like descending and jumping along double and single track paths. Other bikes are only suited for hard packed and paved surfaces, so mtbs fill a niche. Antifouling disk brakes are frequent accessories, as well as fork and frame shock absorbers. There are versions of mtbs specifically devoted to downhill trail racing at high speeds; these have heavy duty brakes, shocks, and wide, knobby tires and aren't much use for any other modes of riding. BMX (bicycle motocross) bikes fit somewhere between 5 and 7. They are generally small, stripped 1-speeds used for freestyle acrobatics off downhill jumps or halfpipes or racing on special dirt courses.

8) Finally, tandems are bikes for two riders, a captain in front and a stoker in back. Captain gets a better view but must take on additional responsibilities of planning ahead and steering wide on corners. Stoker adds horsepower. This pairing is more efficient than two riders on separate bikes, but each has to work in unison to avoid mishaps and squabbles. Bike itself is configured similar to a hybrid, except for additional length, and an extra crank, chain, and saddle. Wheels are usually heavier duty with extra spokes and

sometimes wider tires. Handlebars are fixed and minimal on rear position, something merely to hold onto, not steer with.

Best place to get a bike is wherever you can. Competition of many small shops doesn't drive down prices, just makes it harder to find apparel, parts and supplies, since no one carries a full line and those well equipped fiendishly charge a premium for 1-stop shopping. So, you wind up paying $300 for a cassette set or jersey, 6 times its real worth. At least in a shop, though, you get "advice", a small percentage of which is useful.

Didn't mean this as a bicycling bible, compendium, or knobology, but it doesn't hurt to abbreviate what you might read in depth in any of countless catalogs or websites. Did include a bicycle lexicon, or bixicon (bikes-eh-kon), a term he coined; in street prattle, bix is short for bitches or vaginas or yoni, as if in reference to the neighborhood bike, so it came together nicely. An appended bibliography included well illustrated books which clearly distinguish a down tube from a seat stay, opposite sides of a parallelogram. Through all his research, he just hoped readers could see though another's eyes, at least learn some sensitivity to another's struggle. As a sport it was more information rich than most outsiders would guess. No 2 bikes were quite the same, and sometimes a trained eye could tell 1 from another. At a glance he could tell a rider's life situation from what's ridden or worn: established businessman, former cyclist again dabbling, homeless vagrant pushing a filthy 40-year-old 10-speed covered in plastic shopping bags, lonely divorcees, middle-aged health mindful, serious randonneur, Third World deprived, twentysomething racer, vile characters trying to flaunt or hide origins.

Bikes match mo-ves to those not wrapped up in racing. No need to kowtow to consumerism. No need to even buy a bike. In Austin, Philadelphia, Provo and other places, Yellow Bike Project members spray serviceable units yellow, then allow anyone to simply ride them around. Their only caveat is that each be left in an obvious spot for next rider. This came from 1970's Holland, only there loaner bikes were painted white. Along with a map, it's all any healthy person really needs to get around town independently. Many city dwellers don't own cars, use subways and taxis. Free bike loans probably wouldn't be practical anywhere but small villages with narrow streets where taxi service was inefficient or nonexistent, or started in response to exorbitant fares. It wouldn't be wise to purchase a white or yellow bike unless you intend to share it. At

train stations in cities like Amsterdam, where there are literally more bikes than people, you might not be able to find your own amidst of sea of others. A unique color on your bike might help it stand out. Reflective colors on tires might become doubly useful.

Snobs are slaves to fashion, have to have the latest whatever. Didn't at some point craftsmen get it totally right? Shouldn't people just stop innovating right there and sustain this standard, turn attention to other more pressing issues? With bicycling, the norm is endless experimentation and tinkering at bicyclist's expense, an R&D function paid for by all too eager participants who imagine there's yet an undiscovered way to speed up by making pedaling somehow easier. You'll pick up your pace even more if you eat right, get on your bike and ride daily, learn by frequent experience, never give calves and thighs time to get flabby, trim out your own equipment to maximize its efficiency, and wear suitable garments. A few cyclists actually go the opposite way, buy heavier, harder to pedal mountain bikes to avoid frequent flats and repairs. Sure, get a beater bike; get 2 or 3. Pretty soon inflation will make this impossible. When fuel is $5 a gallon, what do you think will happen to the cost of goods dragged here all the way from China and Europe? Or the value of bicycles? Living near points of entry saved a little, but housing there costs more and risks abound. There's no free ride for anyone.

Clubs gave out cotton tees to publicize their fundraisers, not something serious riders would actually wear while pushing pedals, since they prefer form-fit polyester jerseys to tame drag and temperature, and would only wear cotton when not riding, which means practically never... no advertisement value in that. Why give tee shirts at all? Product branding that plasters advertisements all over humans as if they were billboards is intolerable. Damn you, Calvin Klingon! Fashion designers are intent on causing discomfort, charging as much as possible, and ensuring you look like a fool for their own amusement. He purposely sought out clothing that was nondescript with concealed labeling, although performance was still his highest criterion.

Bike weenies shop for $300 branded bib tights in primary hues, brightly colored wool togs, club branded race wear, fine wool underlayers, flashy silk jerseys. Sorting through arm/leg protectors, balaclavas, booties, calientoes, $300 cleated shoes, gloves, helmets matching color with outfits, masks, reflective rainwear, ventilated jackets, you could spend a fortune and so much time bragging

about your purchases that you never pedal. The more you spent, the more ridiculous you looked, anyway, a clownish harlequin festooned with someone else's brand names begging for attention amidst distracted motorists and snobbish cyclists. When you arrive at work thus attired, bosses suspect instability then begin to question why they have you around at all.