THE CYCLING QUARTERLY

Conquista

ISSUE 27

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Editorial

Skipping Merrily to the Next New Normal

Given the volume and scale of changes to our daily routines that we have all experienced since spring 2020, we might easily be forgiven for not really understanding what is normal anymore. Hopefully, we can quickly slip through this current nightmarish version and arrive at the next, upgraded version of normal soon.

When not hiding in a fridge, being ambushed by Battenberg or wheeling wine-laden suitcases past sleeping policeman to work events at 10 Downing Street, the UK government have vocally celebrated 'getting Brexit done'. As long as they continue to pretend this monumental act of selfish opportunism is a victory that will lead this island to long-term prosperity they will not apologise to our European customers. So we will do so on their behalf. We are sorry for this shitshow that has hindered our ability to deliver to you in a timely and cost-efficient manner. Whilst they persevere with the idiotic notion that leaving the European Union is a thing of the past, the UK's withdrawal from the Single Market continues to present challenges to small businesses trying to export from the UK, with more revised legislation coming into effect in January and July of 2022. It's a moving feast and we are doing our best to adapt and evolve. To our European friends, thank you for your patience. And to all our loyal readers, thank you for your continued support through these unprecedented times of change. We hope to get our wayward publishing schedule back on track in 2022.

In the meantime, let's take a look at what's inside this issue.

Russell Jones returns with 'Velobike – Not Quite a Number 8 Wire Story'. A tale of Kiwi ingenuity that started with an idea during a Zwift ride and ended up as a UCI-approved product used by an Olympic gold medallist in Tokyo 2020.

In part one of 'The Kalas Story', we take an in-depth look at the origins of the family-owned sportswear company that was born out of a chance meeting in 1990, and today has risen to become one of the most respected brands inside the pro peloton, suppling kit to the likes of Mathieu van der Poel, Sanne Cant and the Great Britain Cycling Team.

Whilst we were behind the Iron Curtain in pre-Velvet Revolution Czechoslovakia, it seemed appropriate to call in on the Peace Race. Marcos Pereda examines the event that was

devised shortly after the second world war to foster solidarity between Central European states and others the world over.

Suze Clemitson delivers another of her epic features, in 'Sex, Culture Wars and Toxic Masculinities'. Why isn't the men's elite peloton more diverse and inclusive? Maybe we need to look no further than the organiser of the first Tour de France, Henri Desgrange.

Many issues ago, Matthew Bailey set out to write all he could on Japanese keirin racing. His feature was so well received by one publisher that they invited Matthew to write an entire book on the subject. That side-project never came to fruition as Matthew believed he had already unearthed all he could on this fascinating sub-culture. However, Justin McCurry picked up that gauntlet and has delivered a superb volume of work from his perspective as a journalist living in Tokyo for over 30 years. For your pleasure, Matthew has reviewed Justin's book *War on Wheels* – now available in all good book shops, and some rubbish ones too no doubt.

Just as autumn slips into winter, the UK cycling scene experiences a short and bewildering phase known as Hill Climb Season. In 2021 the National Hill Climb Championship returned to Winnats Pass in the Peak District of Derbyshire for the first time since 1977. Paul Jones decided to scratch a decade-old itch and remind himself how this short, sharp shock to the system feels. Photography is by James Lucas and Paul Jones.

Coming out of lockdown highlighted inherent weaknesses in the way we travel throughout many cities all over the world. Restrictions on numbers allowed on public transport forced everyone to think more about how they get around. Used car sales spiked, causing increased road congestion and pollution - in sharp contrast to the cleaner air and clearer roads of the lockdown that were such an oasis for cycling. As this subject grows we will in future dedicate more space in our publication to the subjects around active travel and integrated transport solutions for healthier cities. We kick off with a look at the LAVO bike, a hydrogen cell-powered cargo bike with zero emissions. Photography is provided courtesy of Maarten van der Wolf via studioMOM.

On that optimistic note, with hope for a cleaner, greener, less-congested, carbon-neutral, emission-free, frictionless-trade future, we'll hopefully see you all back on the road soon . . .

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We have some back issues available in print still. Please check our website for availability. Some of the more popular issues are unfortunately sold out.

However, we intend to introduce a Print-On-Demand service that will enable single isses of all back issues to be ordered, printed and delivered within a few days. Please check our website for this and other announcements.

Contributors

Conquista is nothing without our wonderful contributors. They fill our pages with words and pictures from every corner of the globe, bringing tales of conquest and achievement to inspire us all to get out on our bikes and explore the world outside our door. If you enjoy their contributions here you may wish to explore some of their other work.

Matthew Bailey

Matthew has been writing and taking photographs for Conquista since 2015 and is entirely to blame for any typos you find.

Pip Claffey

Pip is a freelance illustrator and print maker based in the north-west of England. When not sketching, getting inky in the print studio or under a veritable mountain of pressing deadlines she likes to ride her bike or linger in art supply stores. If you have a project in mind you can find her at rune-creative.co.uk.

Suze Clemitson

Suze Clemitson is the author of 100 Tours, 100 Tales. P is for Peloton, Ride the Revolution and A History of Cycling in 100 Objects. She occasionally rants in the Guardian and on Twitter and is still working on a book about Marie Marvingt.

Trevor Gornall

Completer of Rubik's Cube. Creator of typso. Unfathomably early, yet at the same time, somehow unfashionably late. Maker of mistakes. Reluctant benefactor of hindsight. Legs too long for his body. Trying.

Russell Jones

Originally cutting his teeth riding and pretending to race the lanes of the Wirral, England, Russell now does the same around his adopted hometown of Cambridge, New Zealand. Author of 'The Swart Brothers, Jack and Stephen', the eighth in the New Zealand Cycling Legends series, Russell has contributed since Issue 13.
bicicletta.co.nz/
instagram.com/_bicicletta

Paul Jones

Paul is an occasional racing cyclist who struggles to balance the demands of writing about cycling with doing some actual cycling. His first book explored the niche and deranged world of the hill climb and is seen as the definitive (and only) work on the subject. Beyond that, he has an obsession with time, social change and people, and tries to explore this in his writing. In his spare time he is an English teacher.

Marcos Pereda

Marcos writes a lot, for newspapers and magazines all over the world, and trains very little. He has published books about Pedro Delgado and Vicente Trueba and also a collection of short stories concerning apocalypses, pandemics and the living dead. All with a sense of humour, of course. He lives very close to Peña Cabarga in Cantabria, but since it has a maximum gradient of 20% he doesn't ride up it very often.

Simon Wilkinson

Simon's company SWpix is an independent sports picture agency. Their archive holds nearly a million images. They combine brilliant blood and thunder action pictures from live sport, intelligent creative imagery and impeccable service. Their pictures tell stories. Take a look for yourself at SWpix.com.

Contents

VELOBIKE

Not Quite a Number 8 Wire Story

Russell Jones
Photography by Glenn Catchpole, Russell Jones and SWpix.com

There's an old saying bandied around here in New Zealand: 'Good old Number 8 wire Kiwi ingenuity'. Originating from the resourcefulness of making do with what you had to hand, it was updated in the mid-19th century to reference a low-budget sheep farming fence wire, the product strong and malleable enough to be repurposed for multiple uses, its capabilities only capped by your own creativity.

Unsurprisingly, this self-reliance has produced a nation of garage tinkerers. Glenn Catchpole is one of them, albeit utilizing modern-day versions of the infamous Number 8 wire.

After a roller racing performance in the pub someone suggested he try track cycling. Then a student of Industrial Design at Masset University, Wellington, he soon started to channel his knowledge and resources into his newfound passion.

"When the track season started, I jumped on a club bike and gave it a go. I always loved the sport from watching the Olympics when I was kid, but it was just like 'This is for me!' I was hooked."

"From there I started to sketch concepts and different ideas that could be applied to track cycling, but I didn't have any manufacturing experience so none of those ideas were ever made. It was only after I had finished uni and then followed on to do my master's degree that I got some prototype chainrings machined. A few people thought they were cool and asked if I could get some for them. That sparked the whole thing really."

After finishing his studies Catchpole moved up to the Taranaki region to work for a design consultancy firm. There

he continued to gain experience of how to turn ideas into concepts and then into reality, rebooting his hobby chainring business.

One step at a time

"I needed a few more chainrings, so I thought I'd get a dozen made and sell the rest. Did that, put them on Facebook and they all got snapped up. So, I reinvested all those funds into the next batch, and so on and so on. I saw it as a ladder system. I was starting on the first rung and reinvested that to get up the next rung, and then the next rung. With each batch I was slowly improving, be it the tooth design, the quality, the anodizing, laser engraving, and through my day job I was learning about making various things that I could apply to cycling."

Branching out, Catchpole started to add to his collection, importing a few items he was after – "Torque wrench, a few tools" – while utilizing some "hackery" to design and commission trainer adapters for fixed geared track bike spacing. "I had a LeMond trainer, but the adapter is no longer available, so I made five, kept one and sold the rest. I thought if I could do it for the LeMond, which is a really old school trainer that is hard to find, why can't I do it for a modern trainer like a Kickr?"

The ladder scheme continued, as did his product listings. "It was a constant evolution and a lot of learning during that. So, I suppose one of the key things that I do is adapt things that aren't necessarily designed for track cycling to work with track bikes. That's always been the core of the business."

Riding on his trainer towards the end of October 2019, Catchpole had another of his ideas. "I was on Zwift on the track bike and had my hands on the top of the bars and just thought, 'Hang on, I wonder if you could attach hoods onto track bike bars?' I quickly researched the UCI rules and you couldn't, but then I wondered about a concept where they were molded in. So, I sketched and quickly 'CAD-ed up' a set of these handlebars. It was very crude, but I put together a blog post and shared the 'real-looking' CAD render on my Facebook page."

Jordan Kerby, one of the New Zealand endurance riders, messaged him, saying he was going to share the post with members of the team. "The next day Ben Rowell [Lead Team Mechanic of Cycling New Zealand] rang me and asked if I could make some for them

as they would be interested in running them in Tokyo. The only catch now was that I had just over a month to make them! The Cambridge World Cup was December the 8th and it was the last chance for the UCI to sign off equipment for the Olympics."

"I pretty much dropped everything. I managed to convince my boss that this was something I needed to do, so I was able to use work hours to design the bars and carried on at home. I pulled all-nighters and worked almost 24/7 for about a week on the design, because designing something is one thing but actually making it is another. I put them through a little bit of FEA ['finite element analysis', strength testing using computer software simulation to identify any potential areas of fatigue] and CdA analysis ['coefficient of aerodynamic drag analysis', used to see how aerodynamic something is], tweaked a few things then made a 3D-printed prototype and sent it up to Cycling New Zealand. It was a quick and dirty prototype, just some plastic held together with some dowel, but it showed the concept."

"They were like 'Sweet, but there's a few tweaks that need to happen. Can you make this longer?' that kind of thing. So, this was about two weeks into the five-week time frame. I'm not a carbon fibre expert and I needed to get something made, quickly. So, I asked around all the carbon fibre companies I could think of, but they all laughed at the timeline. I stumbled across a hobbyist down the road here in Whanganui, and after some um-ing and ah-ing I managed to convince him to help me make the thing. I sent him the updated 3D-printed version, but with all the tubing undersized so he could wrap it in carbon. By now we pretty much had one shot at it, but then he wasn't happy with the first one he did and asked for another one to try again!"

"I pulled another all-nighter trying to get another one together as time was running very fine, and got it sent to him. That next day he did it again, and this time it was better, but still pretty rough-looking.

"I had to quickly sand and file down the lumps of excess resin, so they looked presentable, then I gave them a quick spray of black paint. I even had to suspend the bars in a box I'd made so to allow the paint to dry during the overnight shipping to Cambridge."

Catchpole drove up to the velodrome in time to see them


3606
UCI

raced by Kiwi rider George Jackson in the scratch race. "I was holding my breath the whole time! I wasn't in full control of the manufacturing process, so I didn't know what potential defects were in it, but I did know how rushed it had all been. It got through really well, thankfully, and they were signed off by the UCI. We were now ready to go for production and Tokyo."

With Cycling New Zealand helping out with the required UCI paper-pushing and box-ticking, Catchpole could focus on finding a factory for mass manufacturing. "They are made in Asia, using the factory that makes equipment for Argon 18 and a few other well recognized components for track and road bikes. It took a few months for tooling, and we had a few prototypes and samples to refine, but as soon as the clock hit midnight for January 1st 2020 we launched the product online as a pre-order. Within that first week we had already sold maybe three or four sets to riders around the world."

With production now in place, everything was lining up for the Olympic debut of the Bunch Bars. What could possibly go wrong?

Worth the wait

They say every cloud has a silver lining. With the Olympics delayed a year due to a worldwide pandemic, the mechanics and riders now found themselves with more time to test and select the best product when competition was allowed again. "By the time Tokyo 2020 was finally cancelled a bunch of other teams from around the world had already jumped on the bandwagon, getting in touch and wanting some to run them for when they could race again."

The trend continued, Catchpole shipping his Bunch Bars to some familiar-sounding locations. "I'd see a name I didn't know but the shipping address was the Manchester velodrome or something like that. They all bought them legitimately, very few discounts given.

"Although a lot of the teams are quite secretive with their data and testing, there was some good feedback saying that they were quicker than a lot of other bars they've tested. In the rush because of the UCI urgency I didn't really have the proper time or the funds to do any in-depth aero testing, so this was some great validation."

The extra time gave Catchpole the opportunity to extend his product range too, working


LOTUS
adidas
LOTUS


TOKYO

with Cycling New Zealand to produce a 'Longboi' stem and tweak the design of his Velcro pedal straps. "The stems were custom-designed for each of the riders, specific angles and lengths. Ben [Rowell] listed off a few requirements, like how they needed to be low-profile, they had to fit with the Avanti top tube, the screws on the stem not the cover, quite a flat blunt front so to create a shroud of a high pressure zone right in front of the rider . . . Just a few things like that."

Velobike Bingo

With the bars and other parts still shipping around the world and little competition beforehand, Catchpole approached the Olympics fairly blind to who else was going to be running his components, spotting what he could via social media with occasional tip-offs from insiders.

"Ben sent me a photo taken during one of the practice days before the Olympics of the GB Hope/Lotus bike with my bars on it. I was like 'Holy shit!' That was the moment, I suppose. I hadn't really felt a feeling of 'made it' with this project, just flying by the seat of my pants. True Kiwi ingenuity, just hacking things together, right? But with the Hope bike it's obvious there's so much development and money has been spent on that project. It just reeks innovation. My product paired with that. It was just phenomenal."

"By that point I had a lot of confidence in the bars. I knew the manufacturing processes were dialed and the requirements that we specified had been met, so it was all go. It was now time to see if the bars performed, and that was someone else's job."

Planning to play Velobike Bingo to spot who was riding his components, it was actually easier just to see who was getting to the finish line first.

"Both a gold and silver in the Men's omnium [Matt Walls and Campbell Stewart] and a gold and silver in the men's Madison. In the Madison it was only Lasse Norman Hansen who was riding them for Denmark and Matt Walls for GB, so it was only one rider from each team. Both riders in the New Zealand team, Campbell Stewart and Corbin Strong, rode them too."

"There were maybe a total of a dozen bars in competition. We also got two more silvers and a bronze from our other equipment. The stem, the straps, and we did a custom

Opposite: Matthew Walls of Team GB (above) and Campbell Stewart of New Zealand (below)
Photography by SWpix.com

Although a lot of the teams are quite secretive with their data and testing, there was some good feedback saying that they were quicker than a lot of other bars they've tested.

wheel axle for the Danish team, which they used in the team pursuit where they got silver, and then they used it in the Madison too. You can't see it, it's an axle, so it wasn't so obvious."

"It exceeded expectations. I was happy just to have the bars there. To then win the medals too . . . What was interesting was that the components were ridden by the riders who got the medals, the riders who were top of the field."

Designing a future

The Bunch Bar bingo game didn't stop at the Olympics. A quick glance at any top tier track meeting will reveal a pair here, there and everywhere from the UCI Track Champions League to the Ghent 6. Not that Catchpole is resting on his laurels. Having left his job to concentrate full time on his business, his focus now is on continual improvement of the existing products while, as a natural designer, he's always dreaming up a few new concepts too.

"I've been working with retailers, learning what is required to best present the products on the shop floor, moving away from the box-and-a-couple-of-stickers method to focus more on the retail packaging, like hang tags, for example."

"In terms of product development, I've also been working with New Motion Labs, a British start-up that have revolutionized the sprocket and chainring tooth profiles. I'm working on a sprint bar now too, using a similar process to the Bunch Bar."

"It's going back to the ladder system. This was always the goal, to work on the components, like the chainrings, sprockets, handlebars and various bits and pieces, and then up to a frameset. The frameset is the heart of a bike, so the goal is to have a Velobike bike, and to be one of the leaders within the track cycling industry. That's the goal."

"This frame will be modular, so it is adaptable to the various disciplines. Initially it was to be for Paris, working with Cycling New Zealand on the project, but the timeline is looking thin now considering the testing and production requirements. But there's going to be no holding back in the R&D with this. Think Hope/Lotus ingenuity."

"I haven't grown up as a cyclist so I'm not traditional, and I suppose that's one of the areas from an innovation perspective

that I have an upper edge on. I'm not blinded by what exists or what has existed in the past. I'm able to look at things from a fresh eye while asking 'Why have they done it like this?' It's hard to switch off as a designer, you are always thinking of things to solve or have ideas at the back of our head, but I love what I do and it definitely doesn't feel like a job for me."

Wall art

The significance of the Bunch Bars being used on the Hope/ Lotus bike were not lost. Glenn has a road bike but by his own admission "as a trackie," it doesn't get out much. Hung up and gathering dust behind him in his workshop garage was a Mike Burrows-designed Giant MCR.

"I suppose there's a few innovators that I idolize, John Britten [Kiwi engineer and motorcycle designer], Bruce McLaren [Kiwi race car designer and founder of McLaren Formula One Team] and Mike Burrows [British bicycle designer behind the Lotus 108], because they are all tinkerers. They are all people who did or do things in their garage and have gotten onto the world stage from being and doing the things that they enjoy. I see myself not quite at that point but those are the people that make me get up in the morning and inspire me."

THE KALAS STORY

Part One: Čestmír Kalaš

Trevor Gornall
Photography from the Kalas Archive

The remarkable tale of how a passion for cycling, and in particular grassroots racing, led to the formation of what would become Europe's leading custom cycle wear brand.

At Conquista we have been fortunate to benefit from a long-term partnership with Kalas Sportswear. We are one of the very few print publications the Czech cycle wear company advertise with and we are very grateful for their support, especially through our own recent difficult times. Many brands greatly reduced their marketing budget through the pandemic, but Kalas stuck with us, and that has made a big difference.

Having got to know their story well over the years we thought it deserved to be told to a broader audience. It's a story that has not widely been told before. The owners of this family-owned factory in the South Bohemia region of the Czech Republic have always been focussed on the basics of product and process rather than glossy marketing with fancy slogans and spurious claims about performance. Community minded, down-to-earth and small "c" conservative in their nature, their risk averse approach has seen them quietly build a multi-million-euro global business whilst remaining close to their roots. In the first part of the story we will introduce you to founder Čestmír Kalaš and reveal how the company came into being.

Our story with Kalas begins in the summer of 2015. Here we share a tale that perfectly sets the tone for all that follows, and informs why things developed along the lines they had until then. The occasion was the company's first ever Distributor Conference. A chance for all the various regional Kalas offices around the world to congregate in the brand's hometown of Tábor. It was a big moment for the proud owners and employees. Guests from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Germany, France and Spain, all descending on a hotel in the

It's such a lovely day I simply had to ride my bike this morning.

Čestmír Kalaš

mediaeval town square, coming together on a scale never done before.

The conference would last several days and include a range of activities including group presentations, individual country meetings, dinners, social activities and of course, a group bike ride, complete with winners' jerseys for the king of the mountains, best sprinter and overall winner. To kick off proceedings there would first be a fashion show, with models on a catwalk showing off the new planned 2016 cycling kit collections. Everyone gathered in the main hall and waited. And waited. And then waited some more. More coffees were taken. An extra croissant. Lots of chat about what was the cause of the delay.

Eventually Čestmír Kalaš walked in, seemingly oblivious to the sense of anticipation in the room. He sat quietly in the corner and the fashion show finally commenced. It was only later in the day that the reason for the delay became clear. Of course, at such a proud moment, the current owners (Čestmír's grandson Jakub, and Josef - the son of the other founder, Mrs Filipova) wanted their guest of honour present at the start. He was unaware of the concern he caused when he arrived late. "Where have you been Grandpa? We've been waiting for you!" said Jakub.

"It is such a lovely day I simply had to ride my bike this morning," came Čestmír's straightforward response.

And that in a nutshell neatly summarises the man who built Kalas Sportswear out of a pure passion for cycling. What could possibly be more important than riding your bike on a sunny summer morning?

Racer

Čestmír Kalaš was born in České Budějovice, Czechoslovakia in 1943. The regional capital of South Bohemia, the city lies 150km south of Prague and about 40km north of the Austrian border. Then, the country was part of the Eastern Bloc and, for much of Čestmír's early life, ruled by a socialist government. The Velvet Revolution of 1989 saw the non-violent transition of power away from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the creation of a parliamentary republic – the Czech Republic. These changes would also eventually lead to the formation of Slovakia.

A 15-year-old Čestmír joined the Slavoj České Budějovice club and immediately fell in love with racing bikes. After graduating from high school, instead of going to college he devoted himself to cycling. Back then, in the communist era, it was not possible to become a professional bike racer. He trained as an auto electrician before doing military service, where he then represented the army club Dukla Český Krumlov.


29
29

It was at this time Čestmír was first selected for his national team and raced at the elite level in Montenegro. After completing his military service, Čestmír found his second love and soon married, prompting his move to Tábor. At that time, he was still employed as an auto electrician in České Budějovice and for a while he commuted the daily 120km round trip by bicycle, all year round, until he found a new job closer to home in Tábor.

Coach

During this era there were two strong cycling clubs in Tábor, with several promising young talents in their ranks. Kalaš noticed this and began to offer training advice to encourage and nurture these young athletes. At the age of 29 his active racing career at the elite level was drawing to a close as he switched his main focus to coaching. Taking this responsibility seriously, he enrolled in coaching courses in Prague and quickly gained official qualifications. Despite the commitment of studying and coaching he refused to hang up his racing wheels and remained active as a veteran racer, regularly participating on the Masters circuit.

"When I started racing at the Masters World Cups, I was only finishing around the top ten. But even for that I had to be pretty damn pumped up!"

Throughout his years as a racer and a coach, Kalaš remained an employee of the transport company ČSAD Tábor, who were an active supporter of the local cycling club. The company donated a decommissioned bus to enable the team to travel to races and the club adopted the company's name as their own. Ambitious and capable, Kalaš worked his way up from auto electrician to a role in the finance department. Finding time for the job, racing and coaching was a huge commitment and meant years of working long days with late finishes.

"At work during the day, training in the afternoon, shower, dinner and then straight back to work. I had to work hard to get everything done."

The hard work eventually paid off. Kalaš's bunch of rookies from Tábor started to get noticed with a series of wins on the international stage. Recognising his talents as a coach, the management of the ČSAD Tábor transport company decided to appoint Kalaš as the team's first full-time coach. However the team was short on the finances required to pay for their burgeoning race programme. Ever resourceful, and never shy of hard work himself, Kalaš suggested all the riders get themselves part-time jobs and use the funds they earned to contribute to the upkeep of the team. The work they found was mostly manual labour and the

We picked up tools and went to work to earn money for rims, tyres and other parts. The guys appreciated the components a lot more after they earned them themselves.

Čestmír Kalaš

riders of the team could often be seen wielding pickaxes and sledgehammers around the streets of Tábor as they engaged in local demolition jobs.

"We picked up tools and went to work to earn money for rims, tyres and other parts. The guys appreciated the components a lot more after they earned them themselves."

Eventually the demolition work dried up and by 1989 the Tábor team once again found itself lacking the necessary support and seeking a new source of finance to keep the team racing.

By now Kalaš' value as an experienced coach had been recognized at national level and he was invited to coach the elite cyclo-cross squad. Naturally, this involved travelling abroad to accompany his young charges as they raced internationally. In autumn of 1990 one such trip to Switzerland would set Čestmír Kalaš on an entirely new trajectory.

The Proposition

The Czechoslovak team, led by Kalaš, were preparing for their Swiss races when they were approached by Toni Maier. Many will be familiar with Maier as the founder of Swiss cycle clothing company Assos. Toni's father was a prominent promoter of Swiss cyclo-cross and as such was already well known to Kalaš. Toni invited Čestmír to lunch, and it was during that meal he made an unexpected suggestion. Labour costs in Switzerland were comparatively high, and Toni wondered if Čestmír could help him source less expensive workers in a post-communist Central Europe.

Spotting the opportunity to help his hometown cycling club and despite having zero previous textile or manufacturing experience, Kalaš agreed without hesitation to organise the production of cycle clothing for the Assos brand. Now 47 years old and chairman of the Tábor club as well as coach of the race squad, Kalaš took this leap into the unknown focussing purely on the opportunity to secure the future of his club and secure the further development of young Czech talent.

"Without knowing what it all meant and how much work it would entail, I told Toni: *kein Problem!*"

The Apprenticeship

Kalaš returned to Tábor full of enthusiasm for this lucky break that had fallen in his lap. He immediately set about the creation of a business plan and started to work out how he could start producing kit, determined not to let the opportunity pass him by.

First he hired seamstresses and began to learn the process of


B-7


CSAD

stitching garments. The early days were a steep learning curve and every month he made the 1,600km round trip from Tábor to the headquarters of the Swiss brand in Lugano. He would stay for several days each visit, learning the trade and becoming thoroughly educated in the practice of cycle wear production. With a van loaded with fabric and a head full of new knowledge, Čestmír would return to Tábor ready to hand-sublimate the different fabric parts of kit by screen printing, before stitching them together and delivering them back to Switzerland.

The first few shipments that landed back in Lugano were of great quality, and with confidence assured, bigger orders started to roll in from the Swiss company. Some orders were sub-contracted to Otavan, a local clothing company in Tábor under the strict supervision of Kalaš. As the size and frequency of orders increased, so too did the need for bigger premises and more resources.

The Otavan company hit financial difficulties and were forced to let many of their staff go. Kalaš immediately offered them employment in his new workshop in a building he had sourced on the outskirts of Tábor. The new facility and employees enabled the capacity to grow and yet more orders flowed from Switzerland. Kalaš fondly recalls one occasion when the wife of Toni Maier visited the factory to help train the seamstresses in the complicated art of stitching cycle clothing.

"She was a lovely lady of Greek origin who spoke several languages. When she came to the production, she took off her mink coat, sat down at the sewing machine and showed us how it is done. We all looked at each other approvingly and marvelled at her skills."

Tooling Up

Textile manufacturing requires a lot of machines. Kalaš managed to acquire a few sewing machines, but to expand production further he would need a lot more, and not only sewing machines – all kinds of different technical kit was needed. Such machines were typically not so easy to come by.

But the political and economic upheaval of the early 1990s was to Kalaš's advantage. The new freedoms of the region led to a number of textile factories springing up in South Bohemia. The competition was too intense for several factories based in nearby Upper Austria, and these quickly went out of business. A speculative Yugoslav businessman bought up all the machines from the bankrupt factories and offered them for sale at discount prices (for cash). Maier and Kalaš learnt of this firesale and so went to inspect. Maier was able to identify the basic kit Kalaš would need for

Without knowing what it all meant and how much work it would entail, I told Toni: kein Problem!"

Čestmír Kalaš

his own workshop and Kalaš was quickly parted from his life savings of 70,000 CZK (approximately £3,200).

These basic second-hand machines were great to get things moving but would not be enough to establish the business on a firm footing for the long-term. The business plan drawn-up by Kalaš identified that he would need to raise a further CZK 400,000 (approximately £13,300). He promptly arranged a bank loan for the full amount, neglecting to mention to his wife the small matter that their family home had been used as security.

"I took out a loan for CZK 400,000 and had to guarantee it with our family house. My wife, of course, went crazy. She told me that I had no experience, that I would go bankrupt and that we would become homeless. It was a big commitment and I had to give my best."

With the significant cash injection, business really took off. But with a lot riding on the success of the business Kalaš struggled to combine the demanding roles of managing an entrepreneurial start-up custom cycle wear business, national team coach, and chairman and trainer of the Tábor club. Something had to give, and reluctantly Kalaš resigned as national team coach so he could devote more attention to activities closer to home.

"Of course, I couldn't be in so many positions. I remember one weekend we were at races in the Netherlands. I was running around the track all Sunday, then we drove all night to Czechoslovakia and were home by 03:00. I slept for a few hours and went straight to the production. It was all too much, so I gave up the position of national coach."

Soon, the orders again began to exceed capacity and Kalaš was forced to think creatively to meet demand. In the next part of the Kalas Story we will cover the pivotal role of the other founding partner in the company – Mrs Filipova, the break from Assos and the creation of the Kalas brand, right up to the modern era of Kalas Sportswear and the kit we see today worn by world class athletes at the Olympic Games and Tour de France.

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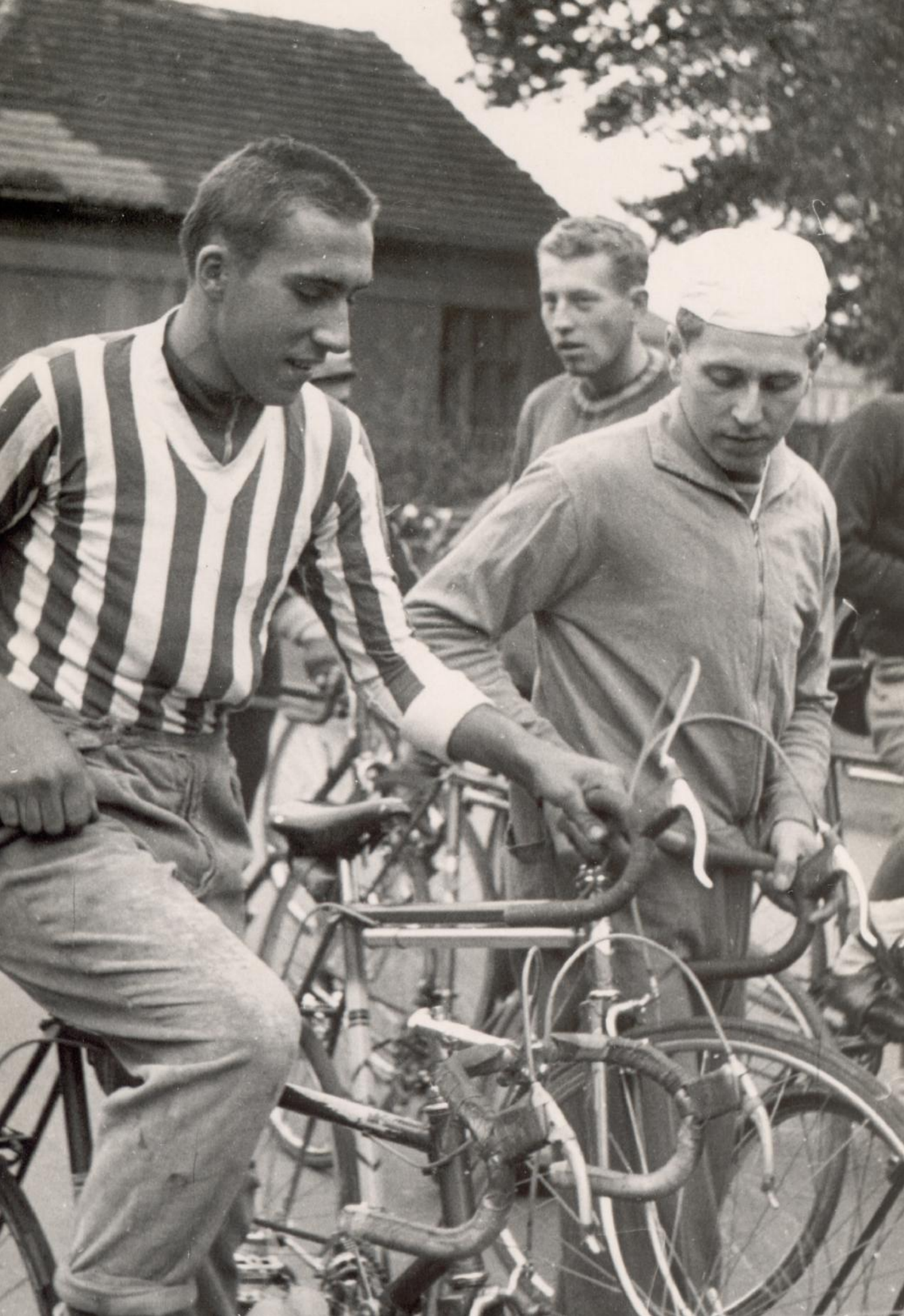
Čestmír Kalaš


assos
CSA
assos
IMPROMAT




Schartner
Bombe


Lebensmitt


RUDÉ PRÁVO


KOVO
Silon
Silon
Silon


Diamant


START


2
1
3

FROM PARIS TO THE BLUE WAVES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN, FROM MARSEILLE TO BORDEAUX, PASSING ALONG THE ROSEATE AND DREAMING ROADS SLEEPING UNDER THE SUN, ACROSS THE CALM OF THE FIELDS OF THE VENDÉE, FOLLOWING THE LOIRE, WHICH FLOWS ON STILL AND SILENT, OUR MEN ARE GOING TO RACE MADLY, UNFLAGGINGLY.

SEX, CULTURE WARS & TOXIC MASCULINITIES

How Henri Desgrange created modern bicycle racing – in his own words

Suze Clemitson

It's 1903, and Hausmann's elegant Parisian boulevards are buzzing. We're at the height of the Belle Époque, an era that shatters in 1914 with the onset of war. But for now, Maupassant's 'unsightly skeleton', the imposing and newly completed Eiffel Tower, attracts the crowds. The Metro, with its Art Nouveau edicules, trundles busily beneath the pavements. Marie and Pierre Curie are sharing the third Nobel Prize for Physics with Professor Henri Becquerel for their work on radiation. And 224 cars and motorcycles line up in Paris for the start of the Paris-Madrid race that will end in chaos in Bordeaux.

Science, technology, sport and art erupting into a new century.

There's a confident spring in the step of every Parisian. After all, they're living in a city that's at the heart of the modern moment, a sizzling plasticity of music and visuals and literature. They're on the fast track to the Modern Age, fizzing with the energy released when Impressionism, Fauvism and the 22-year-old Picasso meet and explode. They're just a few years away from being at the white-hot epicentre of Modern Art, when Picasso unleashes Les Demoiselles d'Avignon in 1907.

Chanel and Diaghilev, readymades and Surrealism, fashion and art and dance integrate with the latest technology, showcased at the glorious 1900 Universal Exposition, which brings thousands flocking to the City of Lights. Cinema is almost old hat, the Lumière brothers having unveiled their invention in Paris in 1895 with a short, simple film of workers leaving the Lumière factory. The Butte Montmartre is the bastion of pleasure and innovation, home of the Moulin Rouge and the Bateau-Lavoir studios where Picasso discovers

> ***The origin myth of the Tour de France is well-trodden. How Géo Lefèvre and Henri Desgrange went out for morning coffee and started a bike race.***

the delights of blue and rose.

But Paris is not all about the life of the mind, or the pleasures of the flesh. The Olympics of 1900, staged in the city over five months as part of the Exposition Universelle, are the first to be organised by the IOC under the leadership of Baron Pierre de Coubertin.

997 competitors from 28 countries take part, including 22 women, who make their debut at the croquet tournament in the Bois de Boulogne. Charlotte 'Chattie' Cooper takes the first-ever women's gold medal on the tennis courts, powering her serve from overhead and rushing the net at any opportunity despite her ankle-hobbling skirts. Margaret Ives Abbot is the first American woman to win gold in the 9-hole golf tournament and remains champion for 116 years. The host nation wins 6 of the 9 available cycling medals. And the Australians cause a stir as they front-crawl effortlessly up and down the Seine.

But for the *flâneurs* and the *boulevardiers* the shade of the Franco-Prussian war still lingers in the peripheral vision. Memories of the hunger and the rats hang heavy. The slaughter of Castor and Pollux, the magnificent elephants of the Paris Zoo, to satisfy starving bellies is a memory not yet forgotten. And the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, the top right-hand corner of the *Hexagone* savagely snapped off, still stings.

And hot on its heels comes another conflict, France's first modern culture war, *l'affaire Dreyfus*. Antisemitism and the bicycle boom prove an unlikely but combustible mix. And it becomes the provocation behind a fight to the death between two huge personalities and the newspapers created in their image.

The origin myth of the Tour de France is well-trodden. How Géo Lefèvre and Henri Desgrange went out for morning coffee and started a bike race. But without Pierre Giffard – the great populariser of bicycle tech, creator of *la petite reine*, journalist and passionate Dreyfusard – there would be no race.

Persuaded by Zola's famous polemic *J'Accuse . . . !*, Giffard uses the pages of *Le Vélo* to denounce the antisemitic stitch-up of the Jewish army captain. He's on the right side of history but the wrong side of the culture war and his paper starts haemorrhaging advertisers, led by the wealthy industrialist and right-winger Comte de Dion. The automotive pioneer objects

Giffard's real coup is to turn the spotlight as much onto the equipment as the man, cleverly exploiting the fierce rivalry between manufacturers like Michelin and Dunlop. And in the process, he created the blueprint for modern bicycle racing and the lucrative advertising that went with it.

to being criticized in the pages of Giffard's paper for fetching the French president a blow over the head with a walking stick.

But when it comes to promoting his business, de Dion is no fool. He knows the modern world is speeding onward on four wheels, and that to sell cars he needs advertising. So, he pulls together a gang of anti-Dreyfusards with deep pockets and sets up *l'Auto-Vélo* – and then just *l'Auto* when Giffard objects to the name and wins in court. At the helm, he places Henri Desgrange, lawyer, journalist, record holder, founder of the Vél d'Hiv and director of the Parc des Princes. He's discreet on the Dreyfus affair, but he's known to be close to ultra-nationalist Maurice Barrès, head of the Revanchistes and leading anti-Dreyfusard. Barrès becomes a regular contributor to *l'Auto* in its early years.

And now it's full-on gladiatorial combat, with Giffard the first to draw blood. In 1891 *le vert* launches Paris-Brest-Paris, a behemoth of a race covering 1200 kilometres. 207 riders face the challenge of a parcours demanding willpower and self-sufficiency, with Charles Terront pedalling through the third night to pass a sleeping Joseph Jiel-Laval and be declared the first winner in 71h 22m.

But Giffard's real coup is to turn the spotlight as much onto the equipment as the man, cleverly exploiting the fierce rivalry between manufacturers like Michelin and Dunlop. And in the process, he created the blueprint for modern bicycle racing and the lucrative advertising that went with it.

Bordeaux-Paris, Paris-Lyon-Paris and Paris-Saint-Malo soon followed, with varying degrees of success. Inspired by the British cult of 24-hour racing Giffard starts the Bol d'Or in 1894. In the greatest of ironies, he also seals his own death warrant. In 1901 *le jaune* seizes the right to organize Paris-Brest-Paris and in 1903 comes the unstoppable juggernaut that is the Tour de France. How different might cycling have been if Giffard had got there first?

Outclassed and outdistanced, *Le Vélo* is destroyed by the success of that first race. *Le jaune* surges in circulation and popularity, killing the green'un stone dead. Desgrange, triumphant, will rule the new sport of bicycle stage racing unopposed for the next thirty-three years, leaving an extraordinary and toxic legacy that still holds the heart of the race in its grip over a hundred years later.

Rude in his behaviour, rude in his speech, ruder to himself than to his collaborators, Henri Desgrange saw life as a permanent fight.

Jacques Goddet

Henri Desgrange, cycling's greatest culture warrior?

Rude dans son comportement, rude dans ses expressions, rude envers lui-même plus encore qu'envers ses collaborateurs, Henri Desgrange a considéré la vie comme un combat permanent. Rude in his behaviour, rude in his speech, ruder to himself than to his collaborators, Henri Desgrange saw life as a permanent fight.

Jacques Goddet

As battle-hardened warriors of the 21st-century culture wars, where every aspect of our lives becomes a politicised struggle between competing values and beliefs, it's hard to see Henri Desgrange as anything but a quaint historical figure with some antiquated views about women and a few common-sense ideas about riding your bike.

But Desgrange's position as a journalist and father of the Tour gives him a contemporary resonance that directly foreshadows all our shouty, sweary debates on Twitter. How he would have loved to provoke and block, brooking no argument or contrary position, imposing his ideas on hypermasculinity and the threat of feminisation with a vigour that would have won him followers from Jordan Peterson to Donald Trump.

H.D. The abstract loops and whorls of those initials have adorned one of the greatest prizes in sport, the *maillot jaune*, on and off since 1919. Black against yellow for maximum contrast and visibility. You can imagine the hand that wrote them, strong and sure, yet impatient and ready to fight. Autocratic, and hardened by years of gripping his handlebars in pursuit of excellence.

The father of the Tour, *le patron*, Henri Antoine Desgrange was born in Paris, on the 31st January, 1865. Henri and his twin Georges-Leon were born into a comfortably middle-class home in the 10th arrondissement, where his father Jacques practiced as an architect and his mother Marie-Hortense arranged flowers and kept house – we imagine. Graduating with his bac a year early, Henri earned the right to practice law at the age of 20.

But Henri, with his dashing moustache and slender build, wasn't meant for the stuffy office of an avocat, with a stiff white jabot at his throat and a bespoke black robe draped across his shoulders. And he's no *juge* Roban. In fact, rumour

> ***The velodrome opened with a bang as Desgrange pedalled to a new hour record of 35.325km.***

has it that he was asked to leave the chambers of Maitre Depaux-Dumesnil for showing off a well-turned calf in a tight sock. Because Henri has fallen in love – not with the scandalous and desirable Olympia, Manet's outrageous canvas painted in the year of Henri's birth, but with *la petite reine*, the two wheels of destiny.

Soon Henri is spending every waking hour in the newly opened Vélodrome Buffalo out at the Porte Maillot, handily placed for the burgeoning bicycle manufacturing industry in the *quartier général de l'Automobile et du Cycle*. Taking its name from the flamboyant Buffalo Bill, whose Wild West shows had wowed the Parisian crowds in 1889, the velodrome opened with a bang as Desgrange pedalled to a new hour record (without a trainer) of 35.325km.

The Buffalo was a magnet for the demi-monde. Chippy Warburton ran his gang of cyclists, including Arthur Zimmerman, the first-ever world champion in 1893, out of the Buffalo track, while Toulouse-Lautrec stood on the infield at his easel and captured the show. The banking was so steep it earned the nickname the 'Cliffs of Neuilly' and quickly garnered a reputation for feats of daring, the looping circle of death attracting motorcycle sprint races with speeds of over 90kmh.

Desgrange knew his mark was on the modest side – it was beaten a year later by Jules Dubois who went over 3km further, the biggest single improvement in the history of the Hour – but it was the apotheosis of his relentless quest for records. On two wheels or three, the future journalist went hunting over 100m, 200m, 333m (or a lap of the velodrome), quarter mile, 500m, half mile, 1000 metres and further and further, gobbling up the metres and kilometres like a Pac-Man of the Third Republic, all the way to a 100km record of 3h 4m 7s. But it was that day in the velodrome that marked him, the man in black against the white cement track. "When I got off my bike," he recalled, "I was dirty, oily, snotty, dusty. In short, you wouldn't touch me with a bargepole. But my God, I was happy!"

It didn't get any better than that for the twenty-eight-year-old, and he retired two years later, in Bordeaux, after setting a 100km tricycle record (with trainer) of 2h 41m 58s. Just eight years later he'd stand outside the Réveil-Matin in Montgeron, a suburb to the southeast of Paris, and at 15h16 fire the shot that

A woman is about as much use to a male cyclist as a pair of dirty socks or a woodburning stove in summer.

was heard around the cycling world.

The head and the legs: the birth of the Desgrange mythology

Priced at 3 francs 50 centimes, Desgrange's seminal training manual appeared in 1894 and stayed in print until 1930. Pitched as the advice of an older Desgrange to a fifteen-year-old wannabe cyclist – a portrait of the artist as a young and hungry *pedaleur* – it distils all the misogyny and male-centred anthropolatry already at play in Desgrange's nascent mythology. So, we have the assertions that an intelligent man will always beat a brute, and that you should always choose a stupid woman to attend to your hygienic needs, and Lord knows there are plenty to choose from. After all, as he most famously asserts, a woman is about as much use to a male cyclist as a pair of dirty socks or a woodburning stove in summer.

The methods that Desgrange outlines – the rinsing of the mouth with vinegar to endure hours of thirst, holding the bladder to avoid the need to urinate, the exhortation that there be no weakness, no gifts in a rider's approach – seem at once outlandish and startlingly contemporary. With its emphasis on intelligence and strength, cunning and invincibility, the head and the legs in harmony, Desgrange lays out the blueprint for the Tour de France, years before Géo Lefèvre will sit down with him at Baudelaire's table in the Brasserie Zimmer on the day of Emile Zola's funeral and say, "What if . . . ?"

Written between the demise of his own cycling career and the advent of the Tour de France, *La Tête et les Jambes* belongs to an era when the bicycle is still the preserve of the modern bourgeois man, before it filters through to the working class and becomes a tool of mass transport rather than a pseudo-intellectual pursuit in the early 1900s. Christopher Thompson, the great social historian of the Tour, argues that Desgrange's writing was a way to elaborate his own social philosophy of sport, and then implement it through the race itself.

In a series of letters in his training manual-cum-epistolatory novel, Desgrange links the male body and ideas of masculinity, hygiene, modernisation and patriotism into a blueprint for becoming "a fighter and a great cyclist." Only by making manly resolutions might young Henri one day be capable of winning a race like, say, a tour of France.

The sport of cycling demands of those who want to engage in it two kinds of quality, of very different order, which complement each other: the head and the legs.

Any keen cyclist reading Desgrange's magnum opus today can glean plenty of decent training tips on developing not only the body, but sound judgement and plenty of sangfroid. The modern approach to cycling can trace its roots directly to Desgrange's assertion that *"le sport cycliste exige de la part de celui qui veut s'y adonner deux genres de qualité, d'ordre bien différent, qui se complètent l'un et l'autre: la tête et les jambes"* – The sport of cycling demands of those who want to engage in it two kinds of quality, of very different order, which complement each other: the head and the legs.

But this isn't just a training manual. Through his letters to H.D. – recalling those looping initials that many a Tour winner will carry on his breast, reinforcing his brand – Desgrange is making the man that will one day regenerate the nation. A nation that first comes to see the shape of itself through the maps printed on the front page of *l'Auto* promoting his Tour de France.

How to make a warrior

1914, and it's almost impossible to foresee the Tour taking place against the backdrop of the escalating political crisis. But as Archduke Franz-Ferdinand is assassinated in Sarajevo on 28th June, Philippe Thijs – nicknamed 'the Basset Hound' for his low-slung style on the bike – wins the monstrous 388km stage between Paris-Le Havre on his way to victory overall in Paris. Six days later, the world is at war.

Desgrange gathered all the patriotic militarism of a recently defeated nation into his editorial on the brink of war. *"Mes p'tits gars! Mes p'tits chéris! Mes p'tits gars francais! Ecoutez-moi!"* he implores the 197 riders of the 1914 race, before slinging insults at the Prussians and writing with impassioned violence of the need for riders to get stuck into the 'great match'.

"Make good use of all your repertoire. Tactics should hold no worries for you. Use your guile and you'll return . . . you know all that, my lads, better than me, who you've been teaching for nearly 15 years. But be careful! When your rifle is pointed at their chest, they'll ask your forgiveness. Don't give it to them. Crush them without pity."

He'd already used the race literally to push the boundaries, sending the Tour through the disputed territories of Alsace-Lorraine, urging the peloton to sing La Marseillaise as an

He'd already used the race literally to push the boundaries, sending the Tour through the disputed territories of Alsace-Lorraine, urging the peloton to sing La Marseillaise as an audible 'Fuck you'. In the fevered climate of the times, it was no surprise that he would urge fit young men to their deaths.

audible 'Fuck you'. In the fevered climate of the times, it was no surprise that he would urge fit young men to their deaths.

Grand champions like Octave Lapize, who had once raised his fist and screamed "Assassins!" at the impassive men who stood and watched as he trudged wearily up the unpaved roads of the Tourmalet en route to winning the 1910 Tour. 'Curly' was shot down over the battlefields of France. Lucien Petit-Breton, the first real stage racing star, who had helped mobilise the movement of French troops in the taxis of the Marne operation after winning back-to-back races in 1907 and 1908. The gentle 'Geant de Colombe', Francois Faber, the Tour's first foreign winner, who dominated the 1909 race and fell in the trenches fighting for the French foreign legion. Just a handful of the riders who went to fight for France and never returned from the Hell of the North.

The Belle Époque sits uneasily like a luscious cherry atop a queasy confection of nationalist niggles and territorial disputes that eventually foment into world war one. For France, the indecently embarrassing ease of the Prussian defeat just over forty years earlier had left the country searching for warriors.

By the 1870s the French Army was a truly professional unit of hardened military men, ideally suited to pursuing Napoleon III's forever wars and global ambitions. But while every Frenchman was under the duty to serve, a hangover from Napoleon Bonaparte's reign, few ever did. It was an army of the non-elite, the officer class choosing to send replacements if ever called to serve.

By contrast, the Prussians preferred to train up the entire male population and the French never stood a chance against a quickly mobilised, highly scalable and ferociously well-organised army of reservists. Overwhelmed by sheer numbers, the rout left an indelible stain on the French psyche and created far-reaching changes in French society. The passing of the Jules Ferry laws of the 1880s created a system of free, secular and mandatory education across France. Never again would the country be caught out by the intellectual inferiority of its soldiers. *La tête et les jambes* was what was required.

But if Jules Ferry had dealt with *la tête*, it was French sport that would provide the muscle power. Jean Jaures, the French socialist, encouraged the bourgeois pursuit of athletics to purify the lungs and

> ***Desgrange editorialises that Frenchmen are "tired, without muscle, without character and without willpower." The Tour would create the supermen who would restore a nation's virility.***

develop the muscles. *Scoutisme* became phenomenally popular, with scouts developing their mental and physical skills in a heady stew of patriotism, resourcefulness and honour. Far-right ideologues like Henry de Montherlant – much admired by Desgrange – celebrated an ideal of the virile male body, ready for the fight.

Looking back to the warlike aesthetic of the cult of health and physical beauty in Hellenic times, the physical culture movement preaches the regeneration of man through muscles. In the space where the obsession with the physical male body integrates with the body politic, perfection is drawn from classical statuary – from the Mars Borghese and Achilles and the Fighting Gladiator. Soon the halls of the Gymnase Trait were heaving with would-be Greek gods. But for all its homoerotic undertow, the purpose of the cult of male physical perfection was to foster healthy childbearing and regenerate the French race.

Desgrange cultivated a close friendship with another young cyclist, Dr James-Edward Ruffier, a keen proponent of *la culture physique* who regularly wrote for *l'Auto* on the need to create health and strength through movement. Géo Lefèvre was an early contributor to *l'Éducation physique* magazine. Still obsessed with France's loss to Prussia, Desgrange editorialises that Frenchmen are "tired, without muscle, without character and without willpower." The Tour would create the supermen who would restore a nation's virility.

Arguably one of sport's most influential media figures, Desgrange's opinions were taken absolutely seriously. And his fears that intelligence might trump physicality, that French manhood would fall prey to *surmenage* or intellectual burnout, were common at the time – by the 1880s Republicans were sponsoring *bataillons scolaires*, young schoolboys with rifles and uniforms. But it wasn't all sport that would create the French superman. *L'Auto* often derided the new American import basketball as girly or feminine, its no-contact nature the antithesis of the physical brutality and violence of long-distance bike racing.

To be fair, H.D. was as good as his word, volunteering to fight in 1917. Géo Lefèvre joined him, earning the Croix de Guerre for bravery and becoming an officer of the Légion d'honneur. Desgrange joined up alongside the *poilus* or hairy ones – common soldiers, like the British Tommy, but blessed with luxuriant facial hair and gallows

By the 1920s the poilus and the peloton were clean-shaven – gone were the extravagant handlebar of Garin and Joseph Fischer's befborstel, a Dutch speciality designed to tickle a woman's fancy.

humour, bleating like sheep as they headed for the slaughter of the battlefields. By the 1920s the *poilus* and the peloton were clean-shaven – gone were the extravagant handlebar of Garin and Joseph Fischer's *befborstel*, a Dutch speciality designed to tickle a woman's fancy. Desgrange signed his articles of the period Henri Desgrenier – Henri of the attic. He was 52 years old at the time.

Desgrange was back at the start line in 1919 for the rebirth of the Tour. Tracing a parcours that deliberately embraces the whole of France, H.D. takes the race into the heart of Strasbourg. It was an edition marked by the scars of the Great War, a race of which he said, "While there is a single rider left who finishes the Tour on my doorstep, the race will continue." The Belgian *flahutes* dominated, hardened by the Rape of Belgium, and Eugène Christophe pulled on the first *maillot jaune*, a prize he would never win in Paris. At the race finish in July, Desgrange was proud of his 'hairy rabbits': *"J'ai ramené mes onze 'poilus': je peux dire que ce sont de fiers lapins!"*

But let's not forget that, for all Desgrange's lofty pronouncements on the Tour being a great moral crusade, he was ultimately doing it all for clicks and likes. By breaking his own rule never to mix politics and sport, his inflammatory editorial made sure all eyes were on *l'Auto* at the outbreak of war. Whatever meaning we now pour into the mythologies of the Tour de France, Desgrange's true visionary genius was to recognise the value of polemics and culture wars in the promotion of a bicycle race that was designed, first and foremost, to sell his newspaper.

Opposites attract: *la femme et la bicyclette*

Tu prendras une femme a qui tu essaieras de faire des enfants et qui te tromperas avec tes amis. Tu as mieux a faire que cela. Reprends ta chère bicyclette, c'est le salut pour toi. You'll take a wife with whom you'll try to have children and who will cheat on you with your friends. You have better things to do than that. Get back on your beloved bicycle, it's your salvation.

Henri Desgrange: *La Tête et les Jambes*

The push and the pull, the fast and the slow, the sprint and the freewheel, *"La culotte courte laissant passer d'enormes mollets."* Desgrange's roman á clef, *Alphonse Marcaux*, is

You'll take a wife with whom you'll try to have children and who will cheat on you with your friends. You have better things to do than that. Get back on your beloved bicycle, it's your salvation.

set in the turbulent world of the velodrome where men are massively muscular and women are the trollops who just want to get inside their short shorts. Why, those minxes wanted nothing more than to destabilise the Third Republic itself!

Focusing on the central figure of Alphonse Marcaux, the director of a couple of velodromes on the outskirts of Paris, Desgrange exposes the dirty underbelly of the sport: *"Toutes les faiblesses, la promiscuité du quartier des coureurs, les compromissions commerciales, les petites canailleries des confreres se ruant a la curee des traites de publicites."* Having laid bare all the weaknesses and promiscuities, the commercial compromises and the petty scams of the cycling circuit like the ultimate Secret Pro, L'Aurore slyly commented: *"l'ecriture violents a dessein et mordante cruellement vaudra a son auteur augmenter le nombre respectable d'ennemis qu'il compte deja dans les milieux speciaux."* The intentionally violent and cruelly biting tone of the writing was sure, Marcel Viollette wrote, to increase the respectable number of enemies the author already has in this specialised environment.

A year later, in *L'Intransigeant*, cycling correspondent G. Vu said it was impossible to think of a book that was more topical than *Alphonse Marcaux*. It was, of course, on sale at the offices of *L'Auto* for the sum of one franc.

Desgrange first pitted woman against machine in *La Tête et les Jambes*, and the racing world of Alphonse Marcaux reeks of testosterone. But the most cursory glance at the Hour record or the archives reveals a richly competitive world of women awheel, racing against the clock and each other.

On Friday 7th July 1893, amongst a background of violent mobs and revolutionary upheaval, Mlle de Saint-Sauveur set the first-ever unpaced hour record on the cement track of the Buffalo. Criticised for her dapper white flannel suit and the monotony of her effort, Saint-Sauveur's record was beaten in August by her fierce rival Renée Debatz. Both women rode British bicycles, Saint-Sauveur the Surrey Invincible and Debatz a special Humber with Dunlop tyres. Marques that recognised the publicity potential of the French queens of the track. As Giffard presciently put it: *"Pendant que nous nous battions contre les Allemands, les Anglais, calmes dans leur île, s'empara du vélocipède parisien et le perfectionna avec le soin jaloux qui les caractérise."*

The next great star of women's cycling was La Flèche Humaine, the Girl Arrow, Helene Dutrieu. The slight, dark-haired teenager was a sensation on a bike.

While the French went to war, the English had seized the initiative and turned the French velocipede into the modern-day bicycle.

At the Royal Aquarium in London, the teen terrors of the track were tearing up the racing in their risqué sleeveless vests and knickerbockers, while the Buffalo was a mecca for world cycling – resembling, according to L*a Vie au Grand Air,* a modern-day Babel where the crack riders of many nations – including women – met to compete.

The next great star of women's cycling was La Flèche Humaine, the Girl Arrow, Helene Dutrieu. The slight, dark-haired teenager was a sensation on a bike, beating all-comers and setting six Hour records in quick succession, coached by her brother Eugène, who told her she had the right stuff to go further than Saint-Sauveur. In her post-cycling career, she made a speciality of the loop-the-loop, first on a motorbike, then in an automobile, earning the nickname 'La Moto Ailée' the Winged Moto. Dutrieu was one of the first women to gain her pilot's licence and she took to the skies to set yet more records, flying fearlessly to triumph in the Coupe Femina and rivalling France's great multisportive Marie Marvingt.

There's a potent crossover between the gestation of the aeroplane and the bicycle boom. The Wright brothers were both bicycle mechanics who used the basics of the pedal action to create the rudimentary steering apparatus for the Wright Flyer. Women awheel quickly transferred their skills to the freedom of the skies – Marvingt would even see action over the Western Front after her drag deception as a soldier was uncovered in the trenches in WWI.

Yet the female *poilu* did not win favour with M. Desgrange – or so it's alleged. The story of Marvingt asking to be allowed to ride the 1908 Tour is certainly apocryphal, as are tales of her riding each stage 15 minutes behind the peloton. But she almost certainly rode every kilometre of the 4,488km parcours at some point during the year on her trusty tourer Zephyrine - after she'd finished swimming the Bay of Naples in an apocalyptic thunderstorm and crossing Lake Garda by moonlight, serenaded by the local police captain and his band of course.

Breakneck Marie, Danger's Sweetheart. You can't help feeling that Desgrange would have secretly admired a woman who ranked in the top five worldwide as a mountaineer,

Desgranges misogyny is laughable, if still triggering, today. And he wasn't alone then or now. Who could forget Marc Madiot dismissing the winner of the first Tour de France Feminin by saying women on bikes looked ugly?

climbing in culottes of her own design because a heavy ankle-length skirt was too restrictive. A skilled exponent of alpine sports, swimming, boxing, running and martial arts. Who became the first woman to pilot a hot air balloon across the North Sea in Dantesque conditions and once used her ju-jitsu skills to see off an attacker in London. Who taught the Italian army to ski in world war one and set up the modern air ambulance service while finding time to patent metal skis for skiing on the dunes of the Sahara and to ride from Nancy to Naples just to watch Vesuvius erupt. Who at the age of 85 cycled from Nancy to Paris in freezing January weather, camping out to save money on hotels but always finding a decent meal along the way from a welcoming *maître d'*. A woman who administered her own injections and mixed her own cocktails. Tchin.

But then H.D.'s life was full of oppositions, right down to his relationship with party girl and avant-garde artist Jane Deley. Desgrange died in his sleep at his beloved Villa Mia in the south of France, surrounded by cycling memorabilia and beaten by the prostate operations that saw him hand over the reins of the Tour to Jacques Goddet in 1936. He was found dead in the bedroom of the villa he shared with Deley, sprawled on the floor that he had once paced relentlessly when ill-health forced him off the bike.

Unsurprisingly, little is known of the women in Desgrange's life. There was, at some point, a Mme Desgrange and a child – divorce papers were filed – and there was Deley, a gifted artist who was part of the French entry in the art competition at the 1928 Olympics. She was a frequent exhibitor at Paris salons, first showing her work at the Salon des Indépendants in 1924. Jane's bold and confident illustrations lit up the pages of *Colombe*, René Jouglet's novella about a Le Havre teenager working in a lingerie shop. With her shingled bob and pencil-thin eyebrows, her clear and level gaze looks out from contemporary images but mining for information about her is like mining for Tanzanite. We know her reactionary republican lover was 13 years her senior. And that he may well be buried beside her in Grimaud, not in the family vault in Père Lachaise as his sister claimed at the time.

Desgrange's misogyny is laughable, if still triggering, today. And he wasn't alone then or now. Who could forget Marc Madiot dismissing the winner of the first Tour de France Feminin by saying women on bikes looked ugly? Or Sagan's

When we think of cycling it's Eddy Merckx – the über-male – whose image that we see, fists clenched on the handlebars, delivering yet another superhuman performance.

infamous arse pinch? Or Iljo Kiese pulling a porn star pose on an unsuspecting fan? Like the goddesses of the track, once known only by their carefully posed portraits and their choices of outfit rather than the bravado of their exploits, Deley has been rendered all but invisible in Desgrange's mythology. As cycling journalist Alain Puiseux once said: *"Quand on dit vélo, l'image qui s'impose, c'est celle d'Eddy Merckx, d'un surmâle les mains crispées sur son guidon, tendu vers la performance."* When we think of cycling it's Eddy Merckx – the über-male – whose image that we see, fists clenched on the handlebars, delivering yet another superhuman performance.

The curse of toxic masculinity

Isn't it better to triumph by the strength of your muscles than by the artifice of the derailleur?

Henri Desgrange

The problem with creating false dichotomies - man/woman, woman/bicycle, weak/strong - is the unintended consequences. By forcing male identity into a straitjacket of physical toughness, it curdles and becomes toxic. And in a vicious circle, new definitions of masculinity are required to redress misogyny. And so it goes. It's why Desgrange shut the door to women in the sport and why he stands as one of the architects of the kind of toxic masculinity that finds its ultimate expression in the violence, racism and hypermasculinity of the modern peloton.

Desgrange's views on creating Frenchmen fit to fight may have been of a piece with his time, but in the Tour he had an ever-shifting laboratory with which to tinker, study and observe. There's a good reason why he called the race "The greatest scientific experiment that the sport of cycling has ever given us."

When the Tour returned in 1920 it did so with the first triple winner in its history. Philippe Thijs – already winner in 1913 and 1914 – was the epitome of the *flahute*, the hardmen forged in the battered fields of Flanders. It wasn't until 1955 that Louison Bobet would match his feat, and it was another eight years before Jacques Anquetil broke the record by winning four Tours. Thijs would have worn the brand-new yellow jersey from top to tail if he hadn't been denied on stage one by his compatriot Louis Mottiat, who promptly

There's a good reason why he called the race "The greatest scientific experiment that the sport of cycling has ever given us."

abandoned for doping and whose withdrawal from the race drew the sniffy headline "Pas de drogue SVP" from the gents at *l'Auto*.

Thijs was the kind of rider Desgrange deeply admired, calling him "the complete rider . . . with a clear head, huge experience of stage racing, superior class and a strength that enables him to work hard and overcome all difficulties." He stood in clear opposition to the French chouchou Henri Pelissier. When it came to describing the home-grown champion, Desgrange let him have it with both racist and misogynistic barrels.

"But it's all too much of an effort for him, he who calls himself a thoroughbred! Elsewhere he has a bellyful of morale but when he comes to the Tour he's like a skinny cat. And then he behaves like a pretty woman! At Morlaix he didn't want to, at Brest he did. Compare this capriciousness with the strength of will of Christophe! We'll all regret it but Henri Pelissier will never figure on the glorious list."

Henri did of course, in 1923, taking his revenge on Desgrange by crushing the race and winning ten stages on the way, but not before he and his brothers gave an explosive interview to Albert Londre's *Le Petit Parisien* and opened up the whole dirty sausage factory of the Tour for everyone to see.

The mythology of the *forçats de la route* addressed the literal toxicity of the race – the pills and potions, the cocaine eyedrops and chloroform for the gums and horse liniment for the knees, the lost toenails and the brutality. But for Pelissier it's deeper than that. He sees the race is driven by ideas of hypervirility that inevitably turn toxic. He says they wouldn't treat a mule the way the riders are treated, and if you looked at the rule books for the post-war Tours under Desgrange you wouldn't disagree.

Before the war, riders had been allowed to race in groups of ten with a trainer for support. But by 1920 it was every man for himself. Designed to limit the influence of manufacturers on his race, Desgrange imposed a strict set of rules.

"A participant in the Tour de France is placed in the situation of a rider who sets off to train alone without having prepared anything on his route for refreshments. This means: 1. He cannot assist his comrades or competitors in any way and they cannot accept anything from him. 2. On the road, the rider must be responsible for his own refreshments, without

Each rider must complete the Tour de France on the same machine, except in the case of serious accidents. In such a case, he may swap the machine with a cyclist encountered on his route, on the sole condition that the machine borrowed is a different brand to his own.

having ordered or requested the ordering of anything, and must not receive any help from whomsoever, to the extent to which he is obliged to collect water from the springs or fountains he may encounter by himself. With regard to the bicycle, each rider must complete the Tour de France on the same machine, except in the case of serious accidents. In such a case, he may swap the machine with a cyclist encountered on his route, on the sole condition that the machine borrowed is a different brand to his own."

Article 48 in that year's rule book stated that a rider must start and finish a stage with the same equipment – not only his bicycle but any items of clothing, inner tubes or repair kit. Pelissier abandoned the race in disgust at being made to wear a previously discarded jersey. Desgrange, obsessed with creating the ultimate trial, enforced his worldview through the little book of *reglements* – thou shalt respect other people's property, thou shalt not rely on others, though shalt have no other god but me. I wonder what the autocrat would have made of today's race with its flotilla of support vehicles and rubbish-free zones, although he'd have recognised and applauded across the years the various proscriptions on feeding during the greatest part of the effort.

And yet, and yet . . . in January 1904, Desgrange announces the creation of the Audax France on the lines of the Audax Italiano and gives birth to the sport of cyclotourism, long distance cycling with a humanitarian face.

The idea of Audax was based on the feat of a group of Italian cyclists who covered the 230km between Rome and Naples on a single glorious day in 1897. A ride so magnificent it was dubbed 'audacious', which morphed into the abbreviation audax. But while its name belies the nascent sport's Latin roots, it was Desgrange who first codified the rules.

The Audax Club Parisien became the first to issue the brevets or cards that each rider must have stamped at control points along their route – though, perhaps predictably, they had that right rescinded when they gave Victor Breyer a helping hand to organise his own event, the Polymultipliee. Even in the genteel world of *cyclotourisme* there was no love lost between the two men – it was Breyer who had witnessed Lapize calling race organisers criminals, who had first pushed the race through the impassable Pyrenees, who never missed an opportunity to face off with his

> ***In the 21st century, in the poisoned bubble of the professional peloton, less enlightened attitudes still prevail.***

old boss.

Ridden in the spirit of 'leaving together, arriving together', the Audax requires all the self-discipline of a Tour rider – participants must manage their pace and time to include refuelling and rest stops – with none of the cruelty. Success is ultimately measured by the completion of the distance, not the speed of the first rider to cross the finish line. The best known is Paris-Brest-Paris. The once monstrous professional bike race is now an event that gathers over 6,000 *randonneurs* from 60 nationalities every 4 years to the roads of Normandy and Brittany to ride together in a spirit of discovery and conviviality.

In the 21st century, in the poisoned bubble of the professional peloton, less enlightened attitudes still prevail. Professional cycling remains a breeding ground for gender strain – the unhealthy push and pull between the true emotional self and ideas of hypermasculinity handed down the generations from DS to soigneur to club coach, but all ultimately perceived through the filter of one man for whom surviving physical tests was a triumph of the will and the muscles. Audax may be a humanitarian legacy, but Desgrange is all about the fetishisation of male bodies and the kind of fascist-adjacent politics that lead inevitably to the 1936 Olympics.

The irony of whippet-thin men churning out insane watts and looking like they wouldn't pass a supermodel health test shouldn't be lost on us. In the peloton, misogyny, racism and hypermasculinity sit side by side with intense emotions and sexualities that cannot be expressed. When we look at the modern peloton, with its blinding whiteness and heteronormativity, we don't need to look far to see the dead hand of Henri Desgrange.

WAR ON WHEELS

Inside Keirin and Japan's Cycling Subculture

JUSTIN McCURRY

WAR ON WHEELS

Justin McCurry

Review by Matthew Bailey
Photography by Justin McCurry

Every single cycling magazine has done a feature on keirin. Go on, take a look on your favourite publication's website. It won't be obvious, or easy to find. It'll be tucked away down a virtual back alley somewhere, with no one paying any attention to it. The site might act embarrassed about it, or even deny that it exists, and try to draw your attention to other attractions, like a multitool group test or yet another article about the 1989 Tour. But keep looking. It will be there.

And it will feature all the same things as all the other keirin features in all the other magazines. It will tell you how the riders spend eleven austere months at keirin school learning the trade, and then, once qualified, all three days of each race meeting in quarantine, their phones and other devices confiscated so that contact with the outside world is impossible. It will marvel at the riders' dayglo jerseys, cut loosely to accommodate the body armour they wear, and titter at the markings on their shorts that reveal what category of rider they belong to. It will highlight the contrast between, on the one hand, the down-at-heel spectators and tatty velodromes and, on the other, the very substantial race winnings that are often on offer and the billions wagered on races every year. It will linger lovingly over the handsome track bikes, with their retro steel frames and componentry, which the riders themselves assemble and maintain. And it will sniff at the riders' beer bellies, cigarettes and above all their thighs – massive, often unshaven and slathered in baby oil, so that the riders skid when they hit the tarmac, as they frequently do, since aggressive riding is the norm and contact between competitors, including headbutting, is not forbidden.

I know that every article on the subject mentions all these things because I read every single one of them when I was researching Conquista's own keirin feature, published in issue 10. I spent hours on the internet looking for any information I could find (or at least, any in languages I could read). I ordered back issues of niche American hipster fixie magazines. I dug deep.

But eventually my spade hit bedrock and turned: I had read everything there was to read. I was rather proud of the final piece, which (thanks to our friend in Japan and keirin insider Ryu Yukawa) was accompanied by an interview with Yudai Nitta, one of the all-time greats, and photographs by the incomparable Brian Hodes.

Nonetheless, I was left frustrated. Despite all my efforts, there were questions that I just could not find answers to, among them:

Who came up with the keirin rules and race format, and why?

Why did women stop racing in 1964, then start again in 2012?

Why isn't anyone trying to sell me, or seemingly anyone else, a keirin bicycle?

Why does no one ever talk or write about South Korean keirin?

And most interestingly of all, what does the future hold?

As its audience ages and dwindles, can keirin be saved?

Can it be modernised, or internationalised? Should it be?

Not long after issue 10 was published I was contacted by James Spackman, creator of Pursuit Books, publishers of such diverse and wonderful cycling writers as Emily Chappell, Paul Fournel and Kenny Pryde. James had been debating the possibility of commissioning an English-language book on keirin, and – over a double espresso in the sort of stylish Peckham café in which the tall, immaculately turned-out and athletic James looks wholly at home, and in which I look and feel like a member of Dumpy's Rusty Nuts – he tentatively suggested that I might be the man for the job.

But by then I knew enough to admit with regret that I was not, and only partly because I had already completely exhausted my knowledge of the subject matter.

Some years before I had read Adharanand Finn's *The Way of the Runner*, a book about Japanese distance running and specifically the phenomenon of the *ekiden*, a form of relay race run in teams of six (or more, or fewer), usually (but not always)

over the marathon distance, sometimes on the roads and sometimes cross-country, comprising legs of different lengths to suit different runners. Team members pass between them not a baton, but rather a sash called the *tasuki*, with the goal not only of covering the distance in the shortest time but also of achieving *wa* or "group harmony". The most significant event on the calendar is the 217km, 10-leg Hakone Ekiden, which – despite featuring teams from universities in just one region of Japan and involving eleven hours of action broadcast over two days – attracts TV audiences of around 50 million people, brings tens of thousands more out onto the streets to spectate, and turns its most successful competitors into huge stars. In other words, it was about as different as possible from my previous understanding of what distance running was while still being recognisably the same sport. And until Adharanand Finn published his excellent book almost no one outside Japan had ever heard of it.

To be clear, however, neither this nor anything else in this review is intended to imply that the Japanese are any more or less odd than we in the west. After all, our version of distance running typically finds room within the same event for both world-class athletes and someone's dad shuffling round dressed as a comedy scrotum.

But what is true is that if you want to learn anything about Japan you need to find a guide who knows their way around the country, the language and the culture. In this case it would have to be someone who understood the sport too. I advised James accordingly.

I am a middle-aged man with a family, so I am unused to having my opinion sought on any subject and certainly have no experience of having my advice followed. So, I was rather concerned when James listened to what I said and went off to look for someone meeting this description.

I need not have worried. In Justin McCurry, James hit the bullseye. McCurry is (among other things) the Guardian's correspondent in Japan and South Korea. He has a master's degree in Japanese Studies from SOAS and has lived in Tokyo since 1991. He's a committed keirin enthusiast. And now, thanks to Pursuit Books (and, arguably, me), his excellent new book *War on Wheels* headbutts its way into the gap James had identified, and sprints confidently away from all previous English-language accounts of keirin (including

mine), leaving behind a sprawling mass of bent frames, baby oil and exploded clichés.

Bicycle racing is always a balance between competition and collaboration. The main reason for this, of course, is aerodynamics. We all know it's easier to ride behind than in front, and in a group rather than on your own. But professional bicycle racing adds many new dimensions. In the pro peloton there are teammates and rivals, personal grudges and grievances, favours owed and granted, national and regional rivalries and loyalties, and of course loyalties to the peloton itself (not always in a healthy way).

A Japanese keirin race features only 9 riders rather than the hundred-plus of a full peloton and lasts only a few laps (usually 4 or 6 depending on the size of the velodrome), most of them ridden behind a pacer. But the tactics involved once the racing begins nonetheless make the head spin. One of the best parts of McCurry's book is his unravelling of the complexities of these tactics. He explains how the riders form three lines of three racers, each with a defined role, so that for most of the race proper it is the lines that are racing rather than the individuals (though eventually the members of the winning line start to race each other); how the riders get to know each other over a career, starting at the famously austere keirin school and developing deep personal and professional relationships as they train together over many years in their local velodromes; how riders from the same region consequently tend to form something akin to informal teams, becoming intimately familiar with each other's strengths and weaknesses; how older riders tend to be given slightly less demanding roles within the line, perhaps explaining, at least in part, how keirin riders are often able to compete until into their 40s and 50s.

An even more impressive accomplishment is McCurry's extended exploration of the true significance to keirin racing of gambling – which, it turns out, is the answer to most of my lingering questions, because it is gambling that explains much of keirin's nature, culture, rules, format, history, place in Japanese society and indeed its very existence. It is by far the single most important element of the whole undertaking. Here are a few examples.

Where did the rules of keirin come from? If the punters are to stay interested in a sporting

event it needs to offer plenty of variables to ponder, plus a healthy dose of unpredictability. (To put it another way, there's a reason why Paddy Power doesn't frame a market on the individual pursuit.) Keirin's unique rules are designed to deliver the optimum balance of order, chaos, tactics, skill and dumb luck.

It is slightly less clear exactly who hit upon the magic formula. Official histories, with which McCurry seems to agree, suggest that it was Teisuke Kurashige – imperial soldier, philanthropist and (with Kiyoshi Ebisawa) one of the two fathers of keirin, who together developed the sport after world war two to provide employment, entertainment and public revenue. Others are not so sure. An exhibit at the keirin museum in South Korea, whose authorities are apparently always keen to troll their counterparts across the Sea of Japan, insist that it was born in, of all places, Denmark. And there are indeed records of bets being taken on velodrome races in Denmark as long ago as 1888, in a format which appears to have been a sort of Battle Royale on wheels. But it wasn't keirin – that Danish form of racing did not involve a pacer, and it appears that this all-important inclusion was Kurashige's idea. On the other hand, pacers had long been common in other forms of European racing. Maybe we will never know for sure.

Why isn't there any marketing of keirin equipment? To protect the interests of punters, who are supposed to be betting on the performance of the rider alone, every part of every bicycle used in keirin racing has to bear a stamp confirming that it meets strict regulations. This prevents any rider gaining a performance advantage from his or her equipment. So, as a matter of logical necessity, manufacturers are unable to take out advertisements to explain why, or even claim that their bikes are better than the competition. What is more, the only money riders are allowed to earn is their race winnings: endorsements and sponsorship are forbidden. (The importance of this point can hardly be overstated: think of the importance of brands, their marketing departments and their money to cycling culture and media, and therefore to the profile of the sport, everywhere else in the world.)

Why did women stop racing, and why did they start again? Many very talented female athletes are unable to pursue a professional sporting career. Women have simply faced (and continue to face) cultural, financial, social and other


Odds Park
wattbike
GIRL'S KEIRIN

barriers that men have not. This is bad for any sport, because small pools of talent tend to be shallow, and a shortage of genuinely competitive participants tends to produce predictable and so unexciting outcomes. But for a sport that exists to generate not just sporting but also gambling action it is a disaster. In early keirin racing a small handful of women dominated, and the gamblers lost interest.

The resurrection of women's keirin appears to be an attempt to drag the sport into the modern (and wider) world. The women are allowed to use carbon frames and wheels, for a start, rather than something Reg Harris might have regarded as rather old hat. The races stick to the Olympic rules, rather than the traditional Japanese format, meaning much less tolerance for aggression and collisions, and making it much easier – at least in theory – to involve international riders.

But if the resurrected women's keirin is a shot at internationalisation and modernisation it leaves a lot to be desired. It is officially called – I can hardly bring myself to write it – "Girl's Keirin" (that abysmal apostrophe is only about the third-worst thing about the phrase). The authorities may allow new and different frames and wheels but continue to insist that the women use approved saddles designed for the men, resulting in what McCurry calls "an epidemic of genital chafing". Women's racing is marketed with the slogan "It's not about pretty faces, it's about big thighs!" There are no women in senior administrative positions in keirin's regulatory authorities. Overall, the attitude of the sport to women is perhaps best illustrated by two rules of keirin school: firstly, the young female athletes who attend must take classes in applying make-up; and secondly, they are not allowed to wear make-up while at the school.

Gambling explains many other features of keirin, not only the ones that I had noticed and puzzled over. This gives McCurry the opportunity to cast light on themes that go beyond the merely sporting. If you have read as many keirin articles as me – or, given that they are all the same, if you have read at least one – you will know that it is the corrupting influence of Japan's gangs, the infamous *yakuza*, which explains the decision to quarantine riders during events.

Much more surprising is the discovery that the *yakuza* are not illegal. In fact, they have business cards, corporate logos and smart offices, whose

addresses you can find on the website of the National Police Agency. Of course, most of what they do is illegal, and the Japanese authorities are increasingly hostile to them. But the complex historical poacher-and-gamekeeper relationship between government and gangs is nicely illustrated by McCurry's fascinating stories of the police asking for *yakuza* assistance in quelling crowd trouble at early keirin meetings – crowd trouble caused by spectators' suspicions that races had been fixed by the very same *yakuza*.

The riots and gangsters in the early days of keirin racing almost resulted in a permanent ban. The question was discussed in parliament. But the authorities took extensive measures to avoid oblivion, bringing in standardised rules and equipment, and keeping riders away from malign influences during race meetings. This history is also the explanation for the existence of the keirin school. Riders in the early years had a reputation not only for consorting with criminals but for hard living and misbehaviour more generally. The school was intended to ensure they set a better example to spectators and that the sport presented a more civilised face to the world.

These measures kept the sport alive but did little to remove keirin's sheen of seediness and controversy, which keeps it operating in the shadows of Japanese society. Almost all forms of gambling have always been and remain illegal in Japan, with only a handful of exceptions (apart from keirin, bets can be placed on horseracing and (uniquely Japanese) forms of speedway and powerboat racing: there is also a sort of vertical-pinball-cum-slots game called pachinko, McCurry's discussion of which is fascinating). It is generally accepted that the authorities have eliminated gang involvement in all these exceptions. But the stains of the past appear to be indelible.

McCurry tackles one other sensitive large subject with admirable and unusual directness, namely, that of the attitudes of keirin, and of Japan, to foreigners. Foreign riders in Japan for a short visit are only required to attend keirin school for a couple of weeks and are treated like royalty when off the track. Once they hit the velodrome, however, the baby oil flows freely, and, as McCurry puts it, the locals invariably "unite behind a single cause: to stop the *gaijin* (foreigner) at all costs."

In all fairness, the Japanese do have historical reason to be wary about western blow-

ins, who tried so hard for so long to cheat the locals out of their natural resources and convert them to Catholicism that they were eventually emphatically kicked out in 1639, after which all contact with the rest of the world was banned on pain of execution. Relations were not fully re-established until America's Commodore Perry took his friendly gunboats to Tokyo in 1853, following which events Japan went from completely ignoring the west to furiously developing in order to compete with it and prove itself superior. This involved the adoption of many ideas from western politics, business, economics, education and culture, triggering extensive national soul-searching. Unfortunately, the copying extended to the same sort of un-neighbourly behaviour – warmongering, imperial expansionism and even the massacre of innocent foreign civilians – that the western powers had been guilty of for so long. Matters culminated in the second world war, when the Japanese sided with the Germans, reasoning that, following the inevitable conquering of Europe by the Nazis, the USA would agree a global settlement that would leave Japan in charge of all of Asia. This did not end well.

So, after two centuries of refusing to have anything to do with the west, then a century of competing with it, copying it and ultimately suffering total national humiliation at its hands, it is hardly surprising that the Japanese have rather mixed feelings about outsiders. Much less excusable is an undeniable and persistent racism in certain quarters, which, like most examples of the same phenomenon globally, seems to be fed by a peculiar mixture of arrogance (foreigners are inferior) and insecurity (foreigners will take over if we let them), often culminating in a notorious refusal adequately to acknowledge historic wrongdoings. McCurry's treatment of this difficult subject and how it manifests itself in the 21st century, especially in sports from rugby and tennis to sumo, is deft and enlightening.

Once again, though, it must be stressed that none of this makes the Japanese unique, even if their specific way of doing things is *sui generis*. There is another island nation prone to arrogantly believing in its own superiority, both dismissive and fearful of foreigners, and which is willing to incinerate its long-standing relationships with the rest of the world in a tantrum of mindless jingoism, regardless of the consequences for its own welfare. And, like the Japanese, we also drink a lot of tea.


고객들은 행복경륜
KSPO
경륜경정사업본부

This discussion of Japan's treatment of foreigners brings us to another subject I was keen to learn more about, namely, South Korean keirin. McCurry's telling of its story is revealing.

For years, even Koreans born and raised in Japan – and there were lots of them, thanks in part to Korea's history as a colonial possession – were officially excluded from keirin racing and were not allowed to attend the keirin school. Japanese attitudes were such that referring to a rider as "Korean" simply meant he was a cheat. Despite this, when Korea set up its own version of keirin in 1994, the Korean Sports Promotion Organisation borrowed as much as it could from the Japanese model, attempting to copy every detail both in sporting and administrative terms. But when Korean riders were invited to race against their Japanese counterparts for the first time in 2012's Nikkan Series the results were decidedly mixed. Fears that the foreign riders would be met with a torrent of racial abuse proved unfounded. But two other factors have served to undermine this attempt at internationalisation. Firstly, the punters stayed away because they knew too little about Korean riders to make an informed bet. And secondly, the visitors struggled badly to compete, unused to either the tactical (regional, personal) subtleties of the line or the sheer aggression and physicality of Japanese riders, none of which features in Korean racing. The last Nikkan series was held in 2017 and there are no signs it will be resurrected.

It is curious, though not unusual, that extremely similar sports should evolve separately and irreconcilably in countries and cultures that otherwise seem to have so much in common. Canadian football continues to exist in total isolation despite sharing – at least to the present reviewer's eye – over 99% of its DNA with the NFL's version. Australia and Ireland had to concoct a grotesque hybrid of Gaelic and Australian rules football called the "International Rules Series" just so that they could play against each other. However, the history of international rules football may bring a small element of hope for the future of the Nikkan Series. Irish lack of familiarity with the techniques and etiquette of the physical side of the game (Gaelic football does not allow tackling of other players, only "tackling the ball") may have contributed to a tendency for international rules contests of the mid-2000s to descend into a spectacular orgy of ultraviolence, resulting in the cancellation of the 2007 series. But the contest has survived


N 8
N 9
N 10

and prospered, with another series scheduled for 2022 (Covid permitting). So maybe a way can be found for keirin's two countries and cultures to compete.

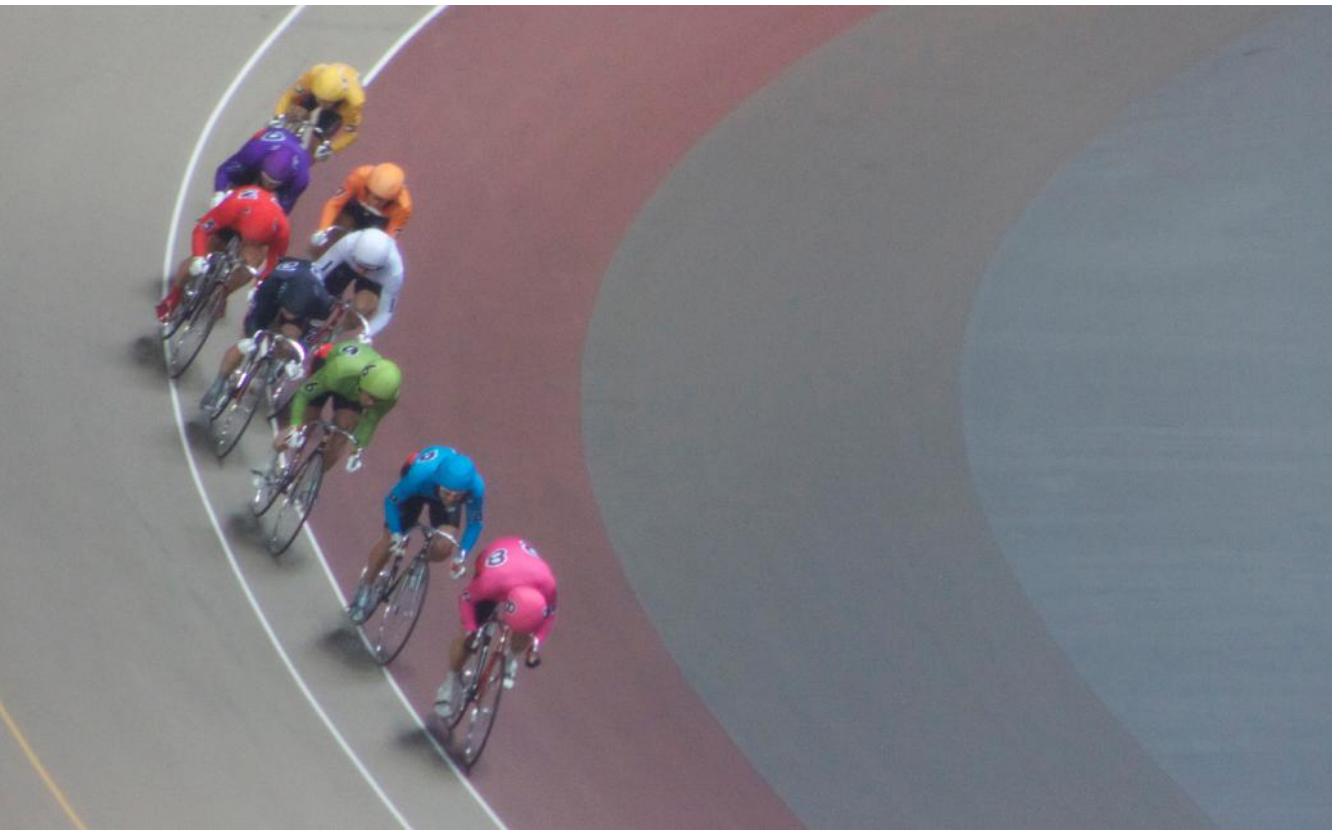
If, of course, that is what keirin – its administrators, participants, fans and spectators – really want. And that is not clear at all.

McCurry writes "Almost everyone I spoke to, from journalists, riders, officials and fans, were united in the belief that keirin will only survive . . . if it submits itself to wholesale modernisation. That means more foreign riders, better publicity for the men's and women's circuits, and a push for Olympic success."

It is no criticism of *War on Wheels* to admit that having read it I was left with a sense of confusion and dissatisfaction. The book brings out, in a way I had not previously grasped, just how much ambivalence there is about and within keirin. Do they want women to race, or not? Do they want foreigners to race, or not? Do they want people to gamble, or not? Do they want to attract a younger and more diverse audience, or not? Do they want to change at all, even at the risk of extinction?

The keirin authorities are obviously aware that the sport is in decline. Its audience is ageing, and therefore dying. Various measures have been taken to try and change this, but they all seem decidedly half-hearted. Japan fought successfully to have keirin included in the Olympics, where it has become very popular. But Olympic keirin is effectively a wholly different discipline, with motorised pacers in tight, indoor velodromes and much less tolerance of physical riding: no notable Japanese riders have made the transition to the highest level, and only a handful have tried (after all, why give up a lucrative day job?). We have already seen how "Girl's Keirin" is at best a partial form of modernisation. The Nikkan Series does not bode especially well for further internationalisation.

One of the oldest clichés about Japan is that it is alien and bizarre, incomprehensible to outsiders. There is, of course, some truth in this. Some things are very different. And often it feels like the Japanese are being wilfully different, both to make themselves less like the rest of the world and to make themselves more like each other. We have already seen that the urges to be separate, to be different from everyone else and to be similar to one another represent a sentiment with a long history. In fact, as we learn in *War on Wheels*,



according to traditional thought, since time immemorial the Japanese people have been "bound not only by ethnic ties but by an indefinable spiritual connection: an unspoken mutual understanding the Japanese call *ishindenshin* – what the mind thinks, the heart transmits . . . Homogeneity, so the theory goes, is the glue that binds an entire people." If you believe this, you might think that change, and outside influence in particular, is an existential threat: pull too hard on one thread and the whole tapestry might unravel.

But when someone as expert as Justin McCurry, writing with such patience, directness and honesty, helps you to understand something as distinctively Japanese as keirin, it makes the whole country seem a lot less inscrutable and, as a result, a lot less immutable. There was indeed a time, after world war two, when Japan's fragile new social contract looked genuinely vulnerable to organised crime and popular unrest. The history of keirin shows us precisely that. But those days are long behind us. It is very hard to sustain an argument that tinkering with the rules, format and culture of a form of bicycle racing will bring them back. Keirin has changed before in order to survive, and there is nothing to stop it making the further changes everyone agrees it needs if it is to prosper. And with nine billion dollars a year flowing through its betting offices, there is no shortage of resources to make it happen.

Keirin may disappoint and frustrate. *War on Wheels* assuredly does not. It is packed with fascinating things, too many to mention here: did you know that it was the British that introduced curry to Japan? Or that two Japanese towns compete each year to see how much they can spend on dumplings? More importantly, there are endless insights into the sport and the country of a kind only available to someone who speaks the language, lives on the spot and has access to the riders, frame builders, administrators and others who fill these pages with history, personality and excitement. It comes recommended without reservation.

See James? I told you so.

War on Wheels is available from bookshop.org and all good retailers.


新田祐大選手
赤　競
5
TAIRA

THE PEACE RACE

Legends beyond Fraternity

Marcos Pereda
translated by Matthew Bailey

Zygmunt Eugeniusz Weiss lived many lives in one lifetime. At first, like anyone else, he was just a kid. Warsaw, the first years of a new century. There, Zygmunt studies, does some sport, excels in a few things. They say he can ride, but he can also write. So, take advantage. Travel, see the world, maybe bring home some glory.

Weiss competes in two editions of the Olympic Games, in Paris and Amsterdam, 1924 and 1928. They were not performances of note. Later, he travels all over Europe. Covering this and that. Football games, athletics meetings. Also, of course, cycling. He visit France, attends the Tour. We could do this, he thinks, where I live. It would be a nice place for it. Yes, maybe . . .

But the time is not right. September 1939, memories of hatred and fire. Five years of tragedy arrive. But the time will come. Weiss works at *Trybuna Ludu*, a sports newspaper. He remembers the Tour, the Giro, Yes, it could be good now. Right here. Look around. We don't have much to celebrate. Let's do it, just to have something to celebrate.

So, our Weiss gets in touch with a colleague over the border. Czechoslovakia. Karel Tocl, another journalist. Because it is always the job of reporters to raise dreams from ashes. It's 1947 and they have both been thinking. It would be a good thing, yes, a very good thing. After all, we're brothers now. Practically. Let's hug. Let's bond. Two countries that get along well together. OK, fine. We can't agree where the race should finish. In Warsaw, says Weiss. Prague is better, says Tocl. Look, it's the first year, let's experiment. Instead of one race, let's have two. One from Warsaw to Prague, and one from Prague to Warsaw. We'll start on May 1, because we are children of the proletariat, because this is to the greater glory of all the outsiders of the world.

XII. MEZINÁRODNÍ ZÁVOD MÍRU BERLÍN - PRAHA - WARSZAWA

ZÁVOD MÍRU

2.–16. KVĚTNA 1959

RUDÉ PRÁVO

Trybuna Ludu

NEUES DEUTSCHLAND

Five days later Aleksandr Zorić wins in Warsaw. Two days after that August Prosinek does the same in Prague. Two Yugoslavs. One Serb, one Slovenian. By today's borders, that is. Prosinek, in fact, was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. So many things to explain.

Let's all say "Welcome" to the Peace Race. Or *Závod miru*, in Czech. Or *Wyścig Pokoju*, in Polish.

The name came the following year. That was the first true edition, the one that united two capitals of the east. Later, as we will see, it becomes three. In 1949 it went from Prague to Warsaw. The jerseys make their debut. Yellow for the leader. Blue for the team classification (though it will be white with a red stripe from 1948-1950, and completely white the year after that). We are Marx's children, Engels's friends. In other words, it is important to see which collective wins. And by the way, remember that here we are competing in national teams, not those grotesque commercial outfits that exist in the capitalist west. No, that's professional sports. Our sport is an integrated education for all citizens. It is team spirit that is important, not individual victory. The taking part, not the winning. Many times, we will give priority to the blue jersey over the yellow one. Oh, and they were all finished off with Pablo Picasso's dove. The symbol of peace, no less. Jan Veselý, a Czech building his *palmarès*, carried that unmistakeable icon of fraternity and concord through a Central Europe that was still in ruins. Scattered rubble. So many wounds. There in the middle, a guy pedalling. Wearing a jersey the colour of the sun. And the dove.

There, in the middle, is hope.

The first page of the rules is clear. "The Peace Race expresses the will of all participants to defend lasting peace, security and cooperation between the peoples of all continents of our planet . . . It deepens international solidarity among athletes while popularizing amateur cycling." Let's say the timing was good: pacifist rhetoric was on the march throughout Europe (quite rightly – we know where that came from). As late as 1950 the so-called Congress of Peace Advocates was held in Stockholm. There, during its third session, the famous Stockholm Appeal was issued. In essence . . . no nuclear weapons. Throughout the Eastern Bloc, half a billion signatures were collected in support of a nuclear ban.

In 1950 the Germans joined the Peace Race. This was controversial: the Germans were still regarded with hatred in those places. But while, yes, these were Germans, they were good Germans. It's better to call them comrades. Yes, perfect, comrades. Welcome.

XVI MIĘDZYNARODOWY KOLARSKI WYSCIG POKOJU

PRAHA*WARSZAWA*BERLIN

RUDÉ PRÁVO • TRYBUNA LUDU • NEUES DEUTSCHLAND

9·25
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1963

Six riders from the German Democratic Republic. Otto Busse, Horst Gaede, Lothar Meister, Werner Gräbner, Karl-Heinz Hey and Kurt Plitt. Meister, a young man from Chemnitz, was the best of the lot, and finished 14th. Almost an hour behind Denmark's Willi Emborg in yellow, but . . . who cares. We came here for the symbolism, comrades.

And two years later . . symbolism cubed. The Wyścig Pokoju becomes the Friedensfahrt. It goes all the way to East Germany. Milko Dimow, a Bulgarian, wins the stage between Wroclaw and Görlitz. On German soil. There will also be stage finishes in Berlin, Leipzig, Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz) and Bad Schandau. Transport yourself back to that time. Seven years since the end of world war two, less than thirteen since its beginning. And there they were, the Germans. On bikes. Riding a thing called the Peace Race. It's mind-blowing. It's magical.

Along with others. Any nation can take part in the Peace Race. East and West, guys who know all about cycling and others who can barely stay upright. Teams from all over the Soviet bloc will be there, of course, but so were many others, such as Great Britain, Holland, Finland, Denmark, Spain, France, Italy and Portugal. Also, surprisingly, the German Federal Republic and even the United States send teams. And other, more exotic cycling countries. Mongolia, for example. Or India (one rider competed in a turban). Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, Mexico, Cuba. As many as you can think of. With no time cuts. The brotherhood among the participants is the main thing.

Legends? As many as you want. One for each of the host countries, if you like. Jan Veselý. Täve Schur. Ryszard Jan Szurkowski. Them.

Jan Veselý. Veteran of the Peace Race, we could call him, because he was around from the very beginning. He will forever be the first leader, having won the first-ever stage in Łódź. A second ahead of Josip Šolman and August Prosenik, who in turn were a second ahead of Cibula and Kudert. How capricious history is sometimes. Prosenik takes overall victory with Veselý only managing fifth place, eleven minutes back, but he also wins the fourth and fifth stages, in Liberec and Prague. Three out of five. A success, no?

But there is room for improvement. The following year . . . overall victory. Ahead of the French, who were making their debut. Admittedly, not Robic and Bobet, but . . . Maurice Herbulot and Charles Riegert complete the podium. Then second place in 1952 and 1955 (behind Ian Steel and Täve Schur respectively) and the blue jersey, complete with dove, with his Czechoslovak team mates in 1950 and 1951. Stage wins here and there. And then there's the other thing. The charisma. The iconic face, the receding hairline,


VII WYŚCIG POKOJU
Warszawa-Berlin-Praha
1954
2-17 V
TRYBUNA LUDU NEUES DEUTSCHLAND RUDÉ PRÁVO

the long nose, the fresh smile. A symbol of a country that few other images of the time could offer.

So much so that, like all great heroes, Veselý was greater in defeat than in all his victories. Tenth anniversary of the Friedensfahrt, 1957. A Bulgarian wins, a novelty that was never repeated. His name was Nentcho Christov, and he looked like he could pull trucks with his legs. Veselý . . . not that year. He hasn't trained properly for a long time, he feels old, tired. He's almost thirty-four years old, man, what do you expect? But everyone believes in him. The spectators shout, "Long live Veselý, long live Veselý." He salutes shyly, almost unwillingly. His country's federation ends up sanctioning him. He retired from the race, despite being uninjured. He gave them so much, and that's what he got in return.

Gustav 'Täve' Schur, for his part, was the perfect man for his time. Easily marketable, perfect for the export market. A socialist *Übermensch*. He was perfect – so handsome, so strong, so dignified. Put him in a Gorky novel and I'd say, no he's not credible, he's too much of a cliché. Nonetheless . . .

As a young man he becomes a metal worker. A mechanic and welder. Until he discovers the bicycle. Late in life, in his early twenties. He joins the Aufbau Börde Club in Magdeburg, which is rather humble (in his heyday he would join the Sportclub Deutsche Hochschule für Körperkultur in Lepizig, which was the best of the best). No matter: almost from the start, he sweeps all before him. Victories here and there. Small town races, then bigger ones. Rund um Berlin. The national championships of his country, six times. The Tour of the GDR four times. Then came the leap to bigger and better things. The Peace Race, of course. He was there at three essential moments. 1953 was the first time the East Germans won the best team jersey. He was on the podium in his own right too. Two years later came the pioneering victory for his country. He repeated the feat in 1959. Others would follow (Hagen, Ampler, Peschel, Hartnick, Ludwig), but the first is always special.

But there's more. Victories, and defeats that are victories, because this blessed sport is made of more than numbers and *palmarès*. Among the successes were two world championships – amateur, of course: he wasn't allowed to ride the other one. Reims and Zandvoort, in 1958 and 1959 respectively. (The pro races of those years were won by Baldini and Darrigade, for anyone interested.) He never won gold at the Olympics. Bronze in Helsinki and silver in Rome. The 100km individual time trial. Bearing the flag of a unified Germany at the request of the International Olympic Committee. And then there was his third Worlds – the one he lost, and which became an even greater victory.


VII.
INTERNATIONALE
RADFERNFAHRT
FÜR DEN FRIEDEN
WARSCHAU-BERLIN-PRAG
2.-17.5.1954
Trybuna Ludu · NEUES DEUTSCHLAND · RUDÉ PRÁVO

The fame, the legend. The year was 1960. At Sachsenring. Yes, in the German Democratic Republic, two hundred kilometres south of where Täve was born. As the double-reigning amateur world champion, something that no one had ever done before and would never do again. The temptation of the treble. In the final kilometres Schur has everything under control. He escapes with Bernhard Eckstein and Willy Vanden Berghen. One teammate, one Belgian. Shortly before the finish Eckstein attacks, because that's what you do in that situation. The leader, the powerful one, is protected, and the lesser rider goes to the front. And the Belgian starts trying to convince Täve. He is Flemish, after all. Don't let the opportunity go. If we work together, we'll catch him, and then sprint for the title. But Täve . . . nothing. The team comes before the individual. Germany before the citizen. Socialism before any bourgeois temptation. What is a *palmarès* when I can bring glory to the people? Täve outsprints the Flemish rider and finishes behind Eckstein. Everyone cheers. He is more popular than ever. Precisely now, when he isn't even trying to win.

An icon for a nation. He is the GDR's sportsperson of the year nine times in a row. He is voted the most important athlete in the country's history. He goes all the way to the Volkskammer, the parliament of the GDR. He was a member of the SED, the ruling Socialist Unity Party. For thirty-one years, no less. For the whole period 1959 to 1990, when reunification came. Then, as he was a man of very definite ideas, he moved to the PDS. He was elected again, this time to the Bundestag, between 1998 and 2002. His popularity, prestige and even his looks remained intact.

Go and look for photos. Or postage stamps with his image on. Or any of the dozens of books written about him. Look for interviews, radio programmes, videos. Look at his bearing, his gaze, his power. Täve Schur had something, friends, something you're either born with or you're not, something you can't train. Täve Schur is charisma.

That leaves the Poles. Ryszard Jan Szurkowski. The image, always the image first. The determined gaze, the penetrating eyes. The fierce gesture, as if he wanted to tame his opponents rather than defeat them. The black hair in curls, the long sideburns, because Szurkowski is a man of the seventies. Look at photos of Ocaña, or Merckx. The dark eyebrows, the square chin. He has the look of a movie star, a look that will make you sigh on a Saturday night. A great mass of muscles brought into harmony by pedalling. And his heart wholly at the service of his country.

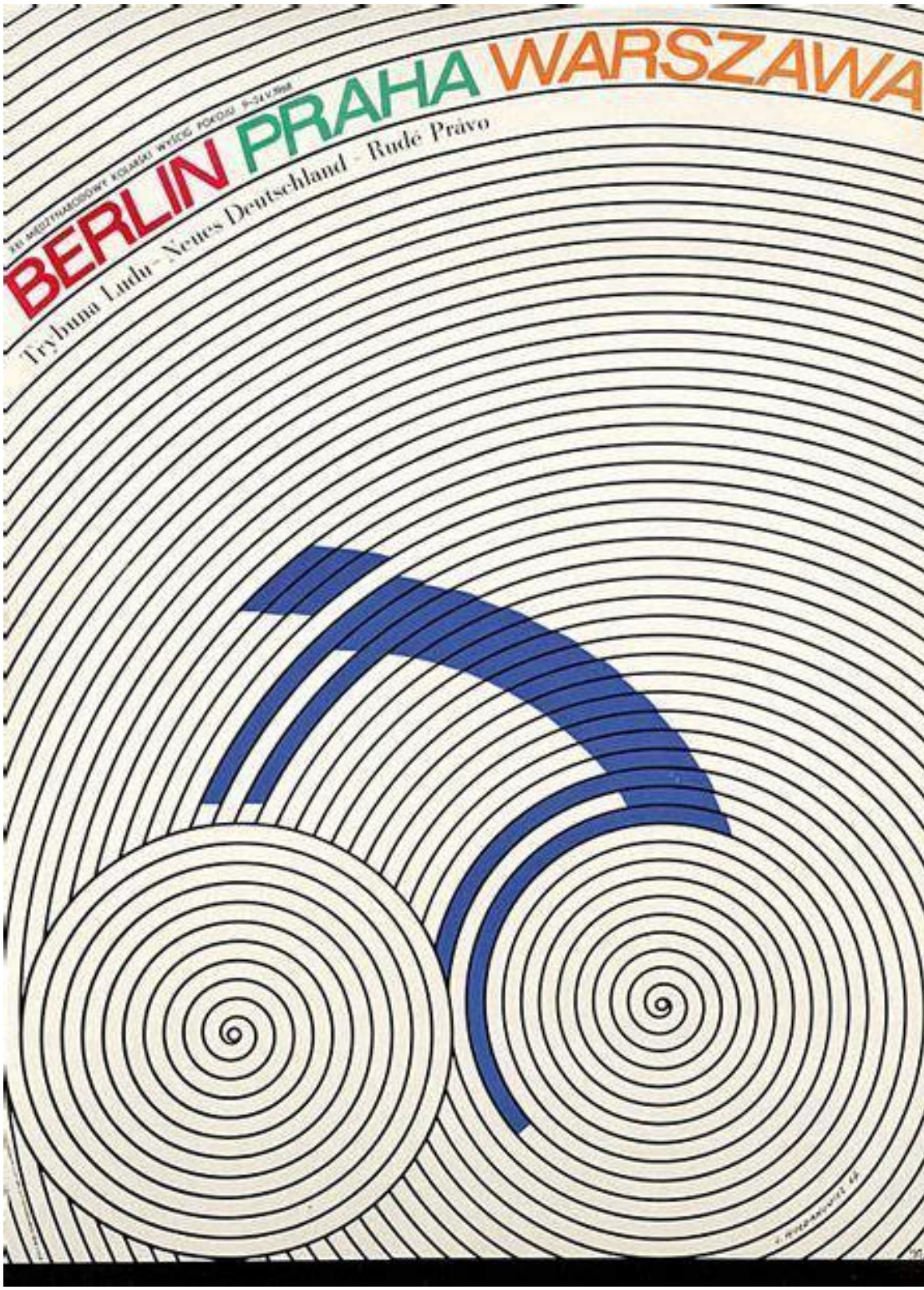
Because Ryszard would do anything for anyone. He was inspiration, he smiled when no one was smiling, he was moments of happiness. He was also a splash

XIV MIĘDZYNARODOWY KOLARSKI WYŚCIG POKOJU
Warszawa - Berlin - Praha - "Trybuny Ludu" -
"Neues Deutschland" - "Rudeho Prava" 2-16.V.1961

of colour when everything else seemed grey. His ears poking out from under his helmet, the broad back. On the bike he looked even bigger. On the bike he was almost perfect.
With his national team he won a short but select list of honours. Two Olympic medals, at the Montreal and Munich games. Team time trial. Both of them silver, both times behind the Soviet Union. More. Three gold medals at the Worlds, one of them for the main event. 1973, the historic Barcelona circuit. Yes, the year of Gimondi, and Maertens, and Ocaña, and Merckx, because Merckx is always there. A double for the Poles. First Ryszard, second Stanisław Szozda. Partners and friends. There were other victories too. National champion many times. Dominance behind the Iron Curtain. Bulgaria, Turkey, Algeria, Egypt. The Dookoła Mazowsza back home. National champion in cyclo-cross, which is all the rage. He even stuck his nose into the western bloc. Circuit de la Sarthe, Grand Prix William Tell, Tour of Britain, Scottish Milk Race, the Vuelta al Táchira, Tour del Porvenir. Stages, general classifications. In those days, in the seventies, years of fights on the bike and men at the limits of human endurance, Ryszard Szurkowski was one of the best cyclists in the world.

And, of course, he is an icon of the Wyścig Pokoju. Four victories (1970, 1971, 1973 and 1975) and one other podium. Until then no one had won the race as many times. In fact, we can say it's still a record – at least in the classic Peace Race. Uwe Ampler also won four times, but his last victory was in 1998, when the race was not even a shadow of its former self. And Steffen Wesemann, five-time winner, took all his victories immediately after the collapse of the USSR. So, quite a different thing. At any rate, Ryszard's *palmarès* is extraordinary.

And they say the professionals came knocking at his door. Molteni, no less. Yes, to race with Eddy. To race for Eddy, because Eddy never left even a crumb for others, but still . . . He proved he would have been equal to the task. In 1974 the Polish team rode Paris-Nice and Szurkowski made the podium on three stages, taking two second places and a third. On the first stage, in Orléans, he was beaten only by Eddy Merckx (which happened to everyone). On the fourth he was behind Eric Leman and Rik van Linden. On the seventh he finished behind only the latter. On his wheel that day were Jean-Paul Richard, Miguel Mari Lasa and a certain Eddy. He was also fifth in Saint-Étienne (Guimard, Planckaert, van Linden and Thévenet . . . what names) and eighth in Draguignan. Ten classifications, counting the sectors, and the Pole was in the top ten in half of them. He finished twenty-eighth overall, of course, because the climbs were not meant for someone of his size. It was worth it. But he was never going to be a pioneer – it was impossible. So, he was left with accumulating laurels for


BERLIN PRAHA WARSZAWA
Trybuna Ludu - Neues Deutschland - Rudé Právo

his country.

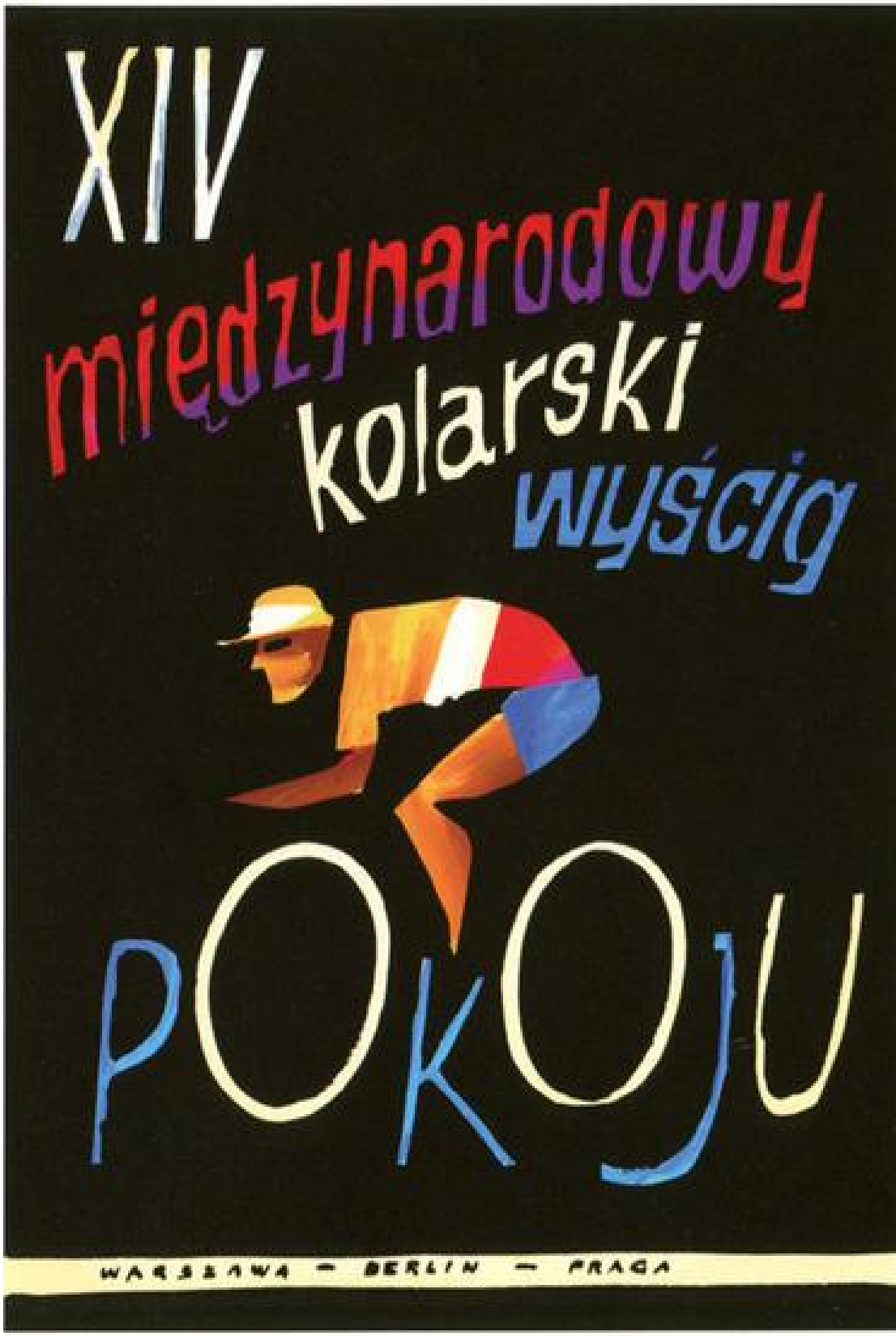
(There is a historic photograph. It shows the finish in Órleans at the moment when the riders cross the line. It looks like a freezing cold day, because everyone is wrapped up warm. Merckx is on the right of the image, with his arm raised. He is wearing the snow-coloured leader's jersey with the word 'Molteni' printed on his chest. To his left, one wheel behind, we see Ryszard Szurkowski. He is wearing a world champion's jersey. His eyes are closed, his mouth open. Perhaps he understands the opportunity that has just slipped through his fingers. In the background, far in the background, a teammate of Merckx's celebrates the victory as if he had won himself. It was then that Eddy said if he had been able to sign as a professional he would have been buying a one-way ticket out of Poland.)

After he retired times and fashions changed. Then he was able to innovate. He was national coach for four years, between Los Angeles and Seoul, where Poland took silver in the team time trial. He coached Lech Piasecki to the double in 1985 – the Peace Race and the world championships. Piasecki was finally able to compete with the professionals, and he scored some remarkable results. Stage wins in the Giro, time trials here and there, a few days in yellow at the Tour. One imagines Szurkowski reading the news smiling, with a touch of pride and a hint of resignation. I could have done that. I was better than him. Still . . .

Of course, he was in a different position. He was a legend. Legends don't get paid much, but they stay in the memory. It's not clear which is better, in the long run.

The Peace Race survived as long as the communist regimes. At least the classic version, the one that made everyone dream. It languished in the 1980s, unable to generate new myths, to produce historic moments like those of decades before. All the paraphernalia of propaganda, all those beautiful images in posters and photographs . . . so distant now. Now we are older. More cynical, less innocent. We know that Poles and Russians sometimes attacked each other in the peloton, that Czechs were looked down on. The magic was lost on the road to dialectical materialism.

It was a Czechoslovakian who won the first Peace Race after the fall of the Wall. The classic capital cities were left out of this edition, and the race took a picturesque route between Berlin, Slušovice, Bielsko and Biała. The event lived on until 2006. Gaimpalo Cheula, an Italian, won on the Linz-Karlovy Vary-Hanover route. But nothing was the same. There were professional teams, brands showing off, sometimes in obscene ways, there were kids who had no idea of the sacred significance of the race they were riding. But yes,


XIV
międzynarodowy
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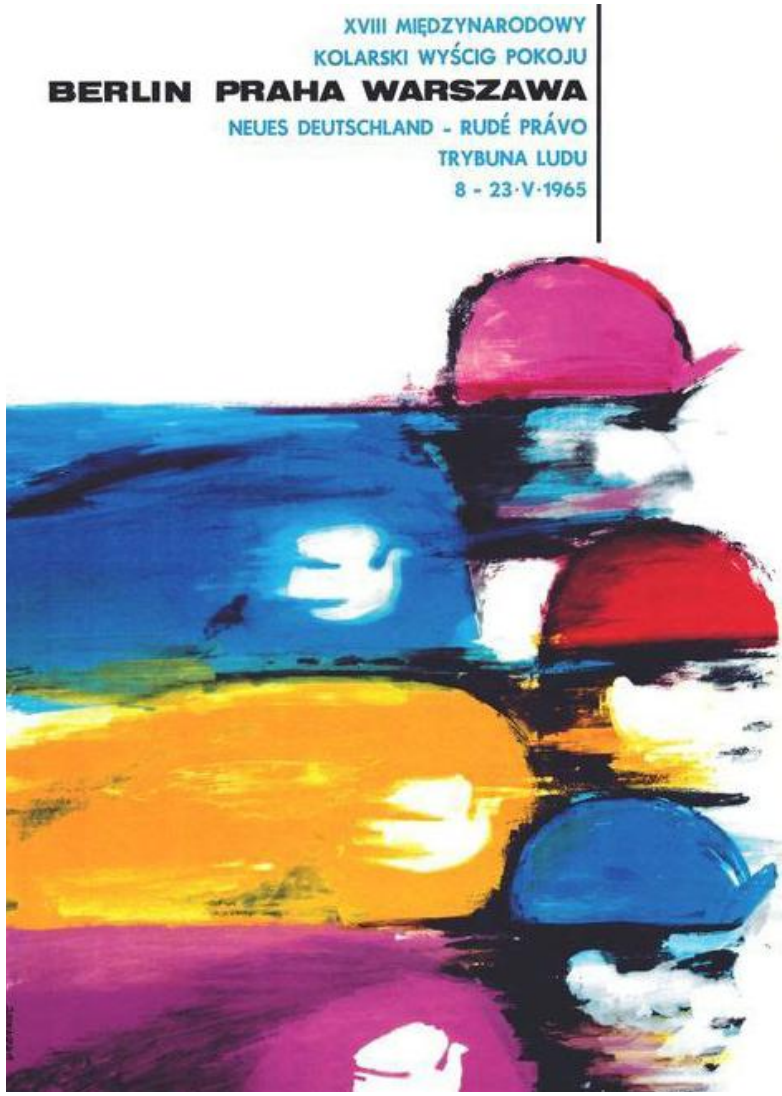
WARSZAWA — BERLIN — PRAGA

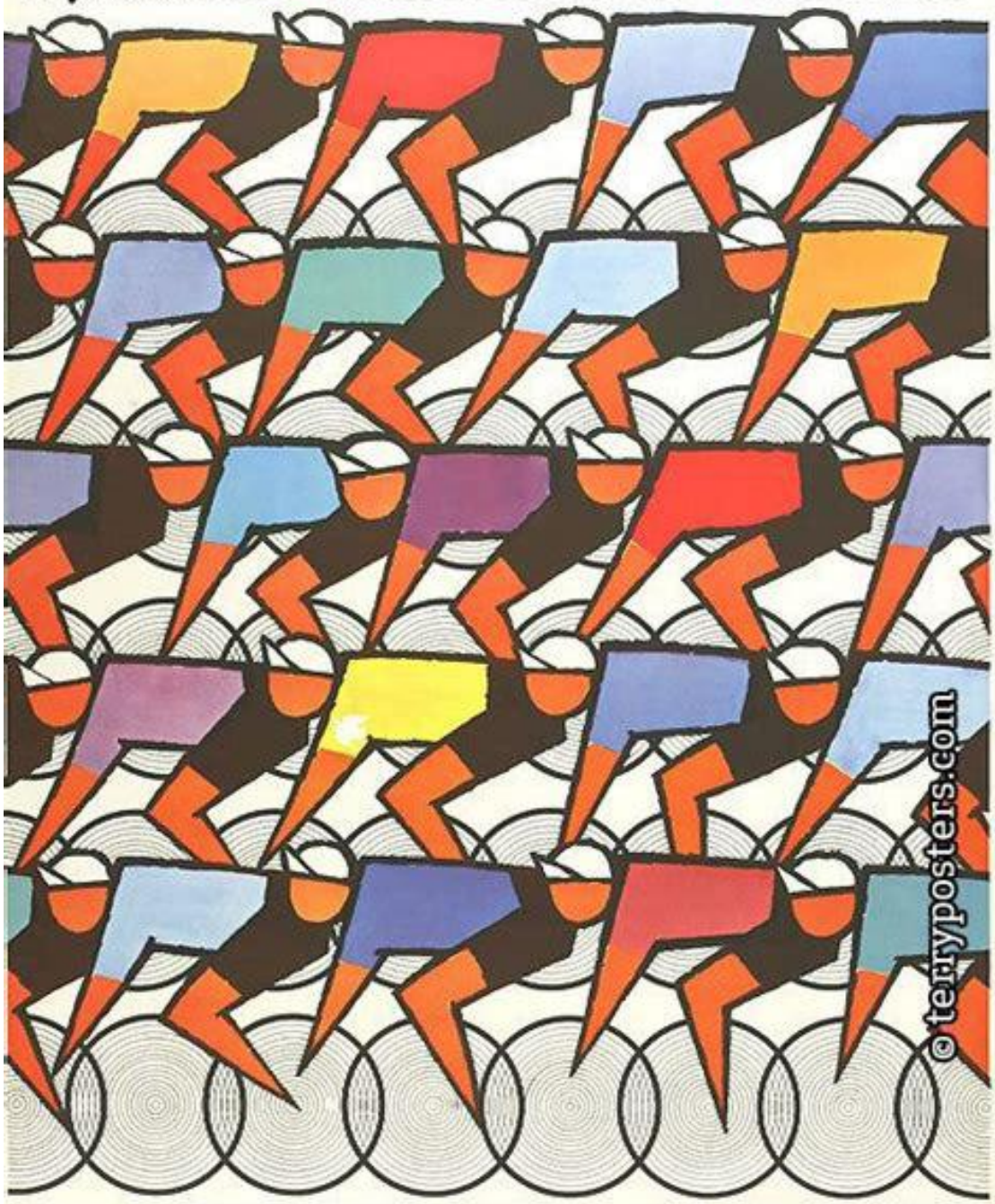
the history remained.

The history of a bike race. A special one. One that sought to embody only positive philosophies, benign intentions. Men dressed in cycling gear, pedalling to spread peace across a continent that seemed to have forgotten about it.

That was the Peace Race.



Trybuna Ludu • Neues Deutschland • *RUDÉ PRÁVO*



WARSZAWA - BERLIN - PRAHA

30. MEZINÁRODNÍ ZÁVOD MÍRU

8.–21. KVĚTNA 1977

PRAHA • WARSZAWA • BERLIN
32. MEZINÁRODNÍ ZÁVOD MÍRU

9.-24. KVĚTNA 1979

RUDÉ PRÁVO – Trybuna Ludu – NEUES DEUTSCHLAND


Bristol
SOUTH
100

WINNATS PASS

The National Hill Climb Championship

Paul Jones
Photography by James Lucas & Paul Jones

Some years ago I wrote a book about hill climbs and the brilliant Adrian Bell at Mousehold Press was kind (or mad) enough to publish it. I liked the demented obscurity of the event and the crazed crowd. It is a gladiatorial, synaesthetic event, a compressed Alpe d'Huez, transplanted to a hillside in the UK in late October. I remember competing in the national championships on the Rake in 2012. My memories of the event are ambivalent. I recall climbing upwards into a gallery of intense sound and colour, when an air horn went off inches from my face and someone shouted at me so loudly that I felt startled and afraid.

The community around hill climbs has grown, harnessing the power of the internet to find a safe space to talk about obscure bike mods and horrid training regimes, normally when everyone else is clocking off for the drinking season. Hill climbs are also in the vanguard of the fight for parity, with equal prize funds and reserved places. The number of juniors is on an upwards curve. After all, a closed road on a brutal ascent is infinitely preferable to a flat 10 miles on a terrifying trunk road. There are other reasons behind the upsurge in popularity – it's exceptionally photogenic, the most Instagram-friendly of races. Time trials feature a string of super-expensive bikes on a bypass near Bicester, riders encased in aero-helmet and visor. Road races are over in a few short seconds of fizzing freewheels. In contrast, the hill climb is four hours of riders passing by very slowly. It is authenticity, that rarest of things, in a world of advertorial representation featuring hyperreal images of expensive people on expensive bikes in expensive places.

The classic climbs – Winnats, the Rake, the Nick, Dovers, Jackson Bridge, Holme Moss – have a strange primitivism. They are serpentine, sinuous lanes creeping upwards. Winnats is the great 'lost' course, and it hasn't been used since 1977. The geological description of the area is saucy, speaking of 'basal shear', 'transition zones' and 'plastic deformable mass'. The


BS CC
Bristol
SOUTH


Bristol
SOUTH

main road to Mam Nick fell away down the hillside on a shifting bed of Bowland shale and dark grey mudstone. It tolled the bell for the climb as a viable racing venue, moving it into the pictorial archive.

Which makes it all the more miraculous that somehow the National Hill Climb Championship have returned to Winnats, and that once again a bike race has happened on this short but luridly violent and beautiful climb. It's down to the efforts and vision of Chris Myhill and Nick Latimer, who led the organising team for the district and decided that if they dared to do it, then it might just happen. The word 'vision' is bandied around all the time. I have to do a 'vision statement' at work, and you can probably guess my views on the topic. For once, the abstract noun fits the endeavour. Returning to Winnats after 44 years is the hill climbing equivalent of betting the farm because you heard ghostly voices from long-dead baseball players telling you to build it.

All of which is preamble and a detailed explanation as to why I ended up sat in a Travelodge off the M6, eating a strange salad and some Percy Pigs I bought from Tibshelf services, waiting for the clocks to change and trying to grab some stuttered sleep before getting up at 5am to ride for just shy of 5 minutes in very wet rain. In short, the lure of Winnats tempted me into trying to qualify. I dusted off my hill climbing kit because I had a romantic, foolish idea that I could ride it, and then write about it in a vaguely participatory way and maybe that might make an interesting coda to the book I wrote a few years ago. In reality, outside of my literary dreams, I did a series of qualifying events painfully, embarrassingly slowly. I got quicker, but very slowly. Somehow, I scraped in, and my name appeared on the start sheet. Tomorrow, we ride.

* * * *

I have been taking repeated lateral flow tests all week in the hope that I might be quarantined out of the commitment, but to no avail. I park my car on the shivering mountain and hide from the slabs of shale-coloured rain slanting against the screen. I put off going out. I have never ridden the climb before. I have written about it, not ridden it. People think I have ridden it because people think I'm the font of all knowledge about this stuff, in the same way people ask me about the End-to-End record and expect an immediate recall of a time or mileage or a stretch of road. Writing is collation, rather than remembering. It is assembly, audio bricolage. Either way, I feel like a charlatan. Maybe because of that I have opted for a fixed wheel with a fairly hard gear: 42 teeth on the front and 22 on the back, or 50". I will create authenticity.

Through the dense droplets I can see riders warming up. They have enormous dinner plates on the back, tiny sprockets on the

People said I would explode, my knees would shatter into shards of bone and matted sinew, something inside would prolapse and end up outside, my arms would snap from rotational torque, I would die – or worse – I would walk.

front. I was mocked mercilessly on the internet last week when I mentioned my gear choice. People said I would explode, my knees would shatter into shards of bone and matted sinew, something inside would prolapse and end up outside, my arms would snap from rotational torque, I would die – or worse – I would walk. In my stubborn, ridiculous way, I stuck with it and now ignore everyone, because that is what riders used to use back then. It's the 'Winnats gear'. If my head explodes like a character in Scanners then so be it. That is the price of future shock. It will make a good photograph for someone's feed.

The gear feels alright at 7.28am, riding up the hill for the first time. I turn the pedals carefully and it seems steep but presents no obstacle. I see Tom Bell riding up, determined, smooth, immaculate. I go back to the car and do my customary warm-up – on this occasion, sitting with the heating on and a thick jacket, prolonging the going outside bit for as long as possible, before emerging, already damp, into the wet and windy landscape.

There is something eerie and overwhelming about the start line for a hill climb. It's the calm combined with a formless tension at what comes next. Hill climbs are horrid, painful affairs, featuring an explosive ramp up to maximum heart rate, a pitiful attempt at pacing, a wall of crowd noise juxtaposed with a gradual depletion of oxygen and strength. All of this awaits the rider. My monologue is mostly justification. "There won't be anyone here, it's wet and early . . . just ride up, you know you can do that." I am shivering uncontrollably, a rotational landslide of cold rippling down through my torso. I remember that being cold at the start of a five-minute race is not a good look or good strategy. I remember that I don't really want to be here, or perhaps I really do, but I don't want to do what is coming next.

But then I remember that Chris and Nick had been working towards this point for three years. That the local council had given them a unanimous 'no' when they first requested a road closure. That they went away and answered every single concern and went back again, that they compromised, did the work, amassed the support, and then went back again, and that the result was this moment in time. And I feel a vague sense of obligation to complete the event. There is a countdown from ten. I can see a river of brown flood water rippling through the gazebo. I resist the urge to chat to the marshal.

Then the clamour is gone, and only the bike and forward motion remain. I hear snippets of noise, people saying things. Someone asks, "Is that fixed?" and I say "Yes", and it is the last thing I say that makes any sense for about 15 minutes. I ride up and feel OK and there are lots more people than I want there to be and they are making much more noise than I want there to


mgs

be and it increases with each increment of height gain. I am baffled by it. It is 8.31am on a Sunday, the clocks have changed for Christ's sake. Why aren't they in bed? Instead, they have come here to shout at people mad enough to do this thing and watch and get utterly soaked and they will have to empty their shoes of water when this is done.

The first two minutes seem OK. The gear is good – I chose wisely. But then it starts to unravel. The gradient lifts up, notch by notch, a thumb screw, a steady trepanning. It isn't binary, it just starts to really hurt, and the periphery gets wobbly. It gets so hard I want to stop, genuinely, to climb off, anything but carry on. I hate the people shouting and want to be anywhere but here, where I know I cannot stop until this is finished, because of some unseen commitment, some force of something that tells you that you cannot stop. My arms and legs are working independently, ignoring the messages in my brain, and I can't see.

I've done lots of hill climbs and at every single one I have been entirely aware of everything and everyone, the people at the side of the road, someone I know with a cowbell, a strange jacket, a tree, a sheep with a scrawled farmer's tag, a whiff of strong perfume, someone looking angry, or exhilarated. Here, not so, it's just a blur. I think I see Mum – she is there somewhere. I am vaguely aware that I think that it might be Mum and Ian, her partner, with his camera, maybe, but I can't be sure because her voice isn't right, it is an octave lower, or higher at the same time. And I am making strange noises, strange reedy noises, pain noises, because I am not doing OK and I can't look up because it would give it away and I can't look at the people looking at me because I don't want to because I can't see them and I am embarrassed at how hard this is, how ragged I look. There is no transcendence, only a man wielding a giant kebab in the rain as solid water slides down with no gap between the droplets. I glimpse, through delirium, the finish line and know that it is about to end, this privation.

They have catchers. This is a hill climb thing. They are there for people who have gone a bit far and can't walk afterwards and they stop you from falling off the bike. I used to think they were there for the people who like drama, people who like the feeling of being helped, even though they don't really need it. I used to ride through, carry on for a bit, cool down. I once felt a bit sick, but no more than that. Today is very much more than that.

I prepare to ride through but instead lean against the catchers, slump down on the bars and any vestige of energy disappears in a moment. I try to move but it is not possible. I think of all those dilettantes at previous races, people I'd seen doing this thing, and realise this is me. My legs

But then I get very wet and very cold. I have to hide in the car and try and get changed in the front seat and not scare the juniors and women walking past outside as I peel my skinsuit away from my cold limbs and rain-shrunken penis, which has somehow almost disappeared inside my groin.

give way, and I am helped to the grass, laid out like a corpse. My bike stands silently some distance away, embarrassed. I can hear the commentator and he's talking about my book. That's nice. Later, at the HQ, others recount similar experiences – "Oh yes, I definitely lost my sense of where I was. I didn't realise hill climbs actually went up to 11 until today" – and I feel a little bit relieved. Mum appears after a few minutes. She has a giant cowbell she found on the internet. I realise mums never stop being proud of their children, even when their children are 45 years old and should know better.

I walk back down, pushing my bike, because my legs appear to have been glued on upside down. And because I have no braking surface. I get very, very cold and everyone wants to speak to me because I am the idiot who did it on a Bob Jackson Vigorelli and it somehow speaks about how cycling should be and this feels warm and comforting, to them and to me. And suddenly I must speak to absolutely everyone because now the blood has rushed back into my brain and the endorphin spike brings out a crazed, full gas gibbering. But then I get very wet and very cold. I have to hide in the car and try and get changed in the front seat and not scare the juniors and women walking past outside as I peel my skinsuit away from my cold limbs and rain-shrunken penis, which has somehow almost disappeared inside my groin.

My fragmented mess of a ride, ascending Winnats but descending into the depths of oxygen debt, is immediately put into relief by the artisans. Andrew Feather and Andy Nichols hurtle uphill, faces fixed, the narrow tunnel a hindrance and a help. Tom Bell floats like a dandelion seed on a thermal uplift, efficient, fast, incredible. Mary Wilkinson on her gorgeous Cannondale threads a yellow stitch through time. Bithja Jones turns the pedals in a visibly different cadence, somehow outside of time and physics, balancing on a gossamer thread of total commitment and total failure, accompanied by a rippling noise rolling up the mountain, of cowbells and shouting and rain. Sodden dogs look away unimpressed, horrified to be here. This isn't the walk they were promised. This is noise and madness and wet rain. This is no place for dogs.

Bithja finishes and we know immediately that she has won because it flashes up on the screen and we can see the split timing. I think of Mary Wilkinson, and how she has now come second many times and how amazing she is, and I know it will hurt. I know that each of them will come back and do this thing again because they are impelled to do it. The race is over, and spectators begin streaming down the pass, pushed along by the filthy torrent at the side of the road. Shoes are emptied of water, car heaters set on full. In time they will talk about this day in hushed tones. Right now, they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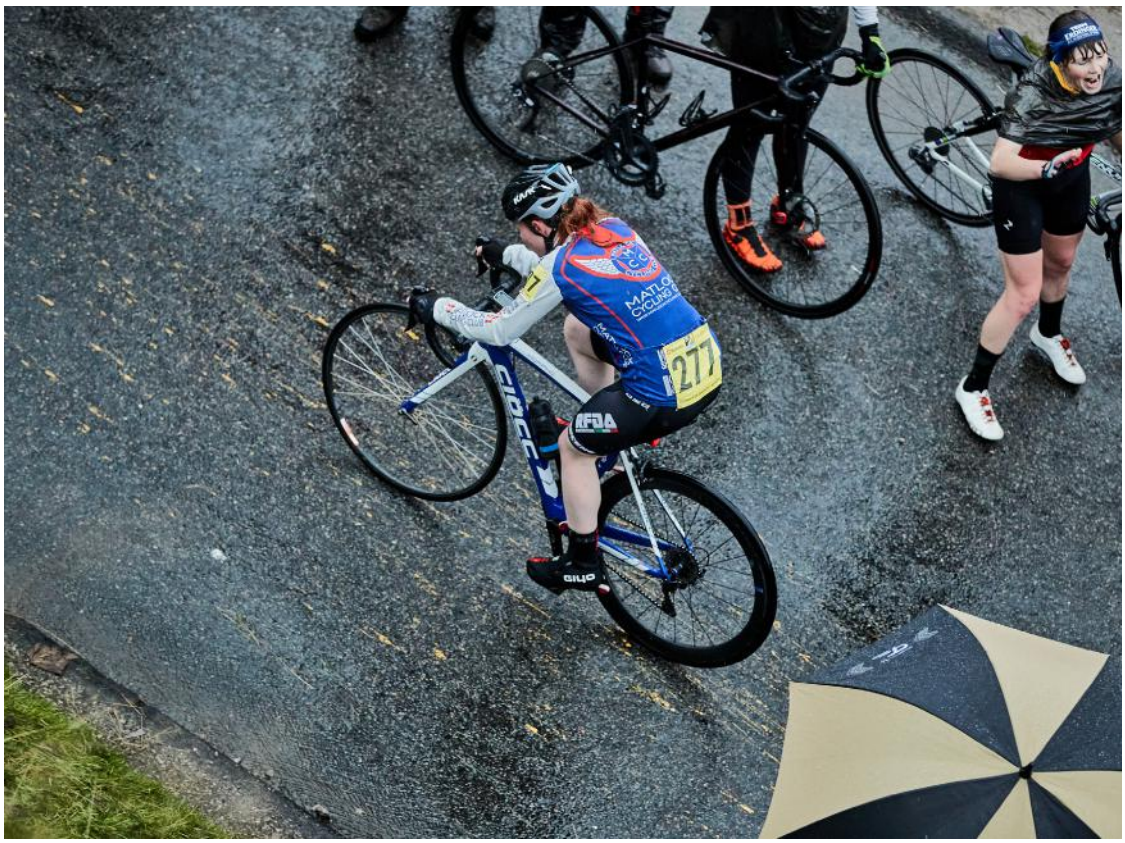
BICESTER HERITAGE
SO FURTHER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just shiver.

The hall is full of endorphin-struck people and traumatised friends and family. The sun comes out, glorious and unabated. The prizes are dished out and Bristol South CC win the women's team award, a first national title in 60 years, and I feel properly tearful. I'm a long-standing member of the club and Bristol South is a part of the cultural, social and cycling heritage of the city I love, the one I live and work in. It is an amateur institution which is keyed into the history of cycling, but also the narrative of our lives. It has meaning and depth.

I also know that our club has sought to widen participation at every step, to support women riding and racing, to be inclusive and diverse. We have had equal prize money for many years. It's written into our constitution. We have a women's chain gang, a women's road race and lots of formal and informal rides. We are aware of semantics and the power of language, and we want our club to be unambiguous about parity. Clubs are important. But club teams don't win the nationals these days. The model has changed, and now it is always composite outfits, with sponsors and jazzy jerseys. For this reason, it feels extra special. It seems evident in that moment – to me at least – that having vision and perspicacity leads to a better world for everyone. It seems apt that it is a vision of Chris Myhill's and Nick Latimer's that led to us being here in the first place. In my head I win multiple awards: for the most spokes, the oldest and nicest bike, the stupidest gear and the worst braking surface.

* * * *

At work on Monday someone asks me how my weekend was. This is standard school photocopier bike chat. I think of small talk, the standard answer, the normal weekend. "I drank a bottle of wine by 7pm on Friday, went to bed, got up, took my kids to things, drank more wine, went to bed, got up, took my kids to more things, drank more wine, watched Succession, went to bed, woke up and came to work." I tell them instead that I went to the Peak District and did a five-minute bike race on a very steep hill, and as the words tumble out, I realise that the conversation might require more context than there is time available. Hill climbs are popular, but people at work don't know this. I have a mission to tell them. This is my niche mission in life, my obsession cubed, telling people about the things that they didn't know mattered to them. My colleague glazes over and we both silently wish I'd told them about the wine and not the rain. I show them a picture.

I realise I haven't yet come down from the hill and it might take some time. This is because I have been living somewhere between the places we normally live, and I have been changed by the process. I feel a complete and transcendent joy. Ordinary

life is better when we do extraordinary things. I realise one of the pictures of me has the youngest competitor watching on from the side lines after his effort. I send him a book and note because I feel moved by the congruence of it. A few days later a handwritten letter appears, and it is the best letter I have ever read.

I wonder how Bithja feels, so I send her a message. She replies immediately, with pure feeling.

“My heart is still on that hill”.


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Long-distance transport without batteries, particulates or CO_2 emissions. What if the LAVO bike could actually make that possible?

THE LAVO BIKE

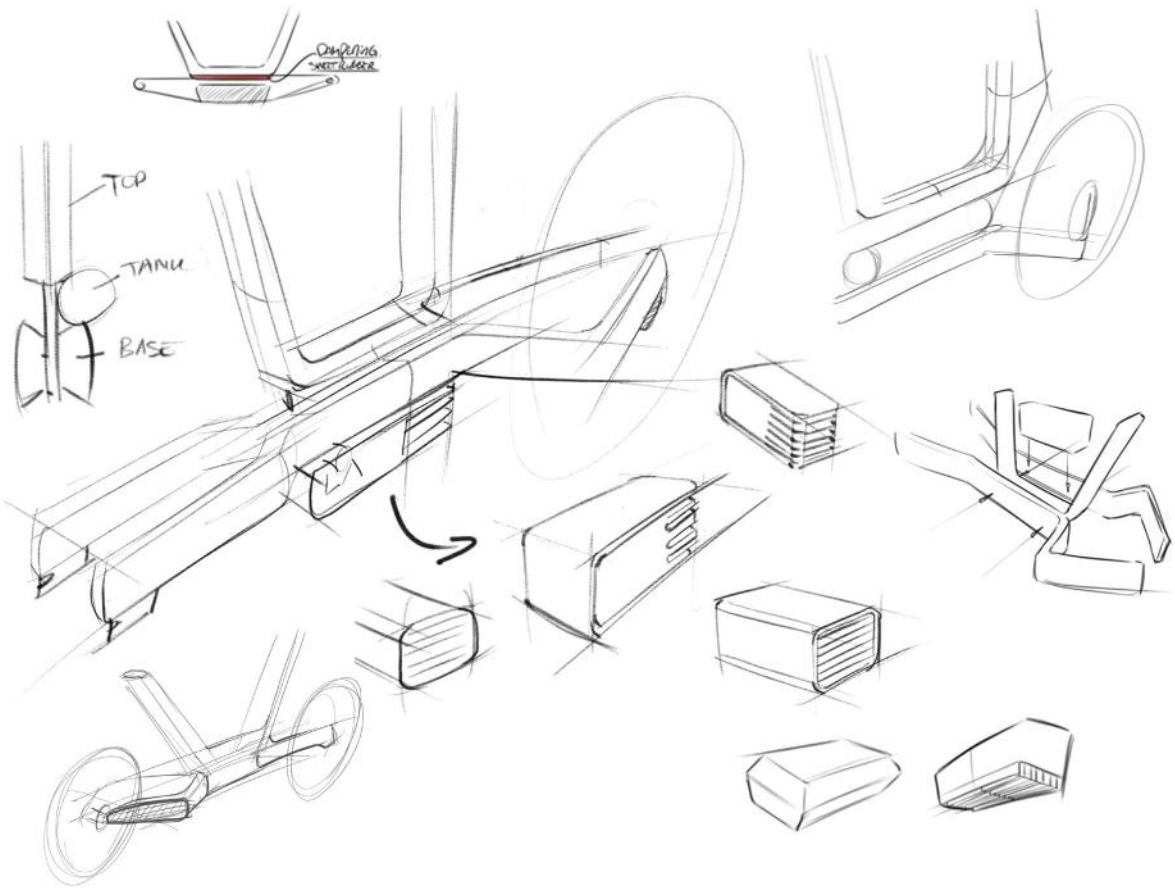
A Toolkit for a New Emission Free Mode of Transport

Trevor Gornall
Photography by Maarten van der Wolf

Many reading this might agree that bikes are a great transport option offering multiple benefits to individuals and society alike. Affordable and accessible, convenient, environmentally friendly and offering a source of regular, low impact exercise whilst reducing traffic congestion. What's not to love? Electric bikes have made cycling even more accessible and attractive to a wider audience, enabling more people than ever to experience the benefits, freedom and convenience of two-wheeled travel. However, there remain some concerns about exactly how environmentally friendly the production and disposal of e-bike batteries are. And they are heavy, adding considerable weight to the bike. But are there any viable alternatives? Is it time to have a complete re-think about how we power our e-bikes and other vehicles? The guys at LAVO think so, and they have come up with a thought-provoking concept that could challenge the assumption that the switch from fossil fuels will automatically mean a move to electrically powered vehicles.

Anyone old enough to recall the Betamax brand name and the 'videotape format war' of the mid-to-late seventies may remain similarly cautious about the early adoption of new tech. Back then a cloud was but a mere cumulonimbus and watching a movie of your own choice in your own home required considerably more effort than scrolling through the 'Marvel Cinematic Universe', whatever that is.

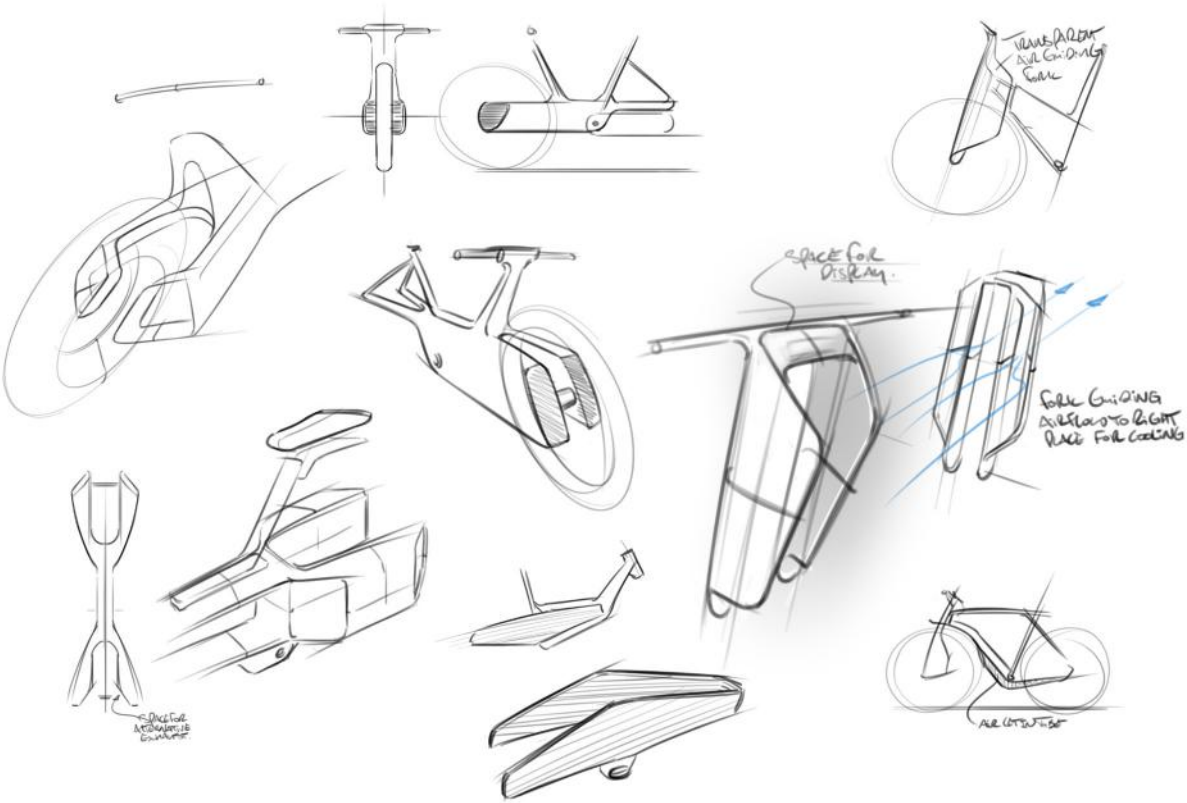
Oh no, the simple act of watching a movie often required a good half day to be allocated to the endeavour. It involved a journey to a local rental store (big shoutout to the Blockbuster massive) and, in my case, several hours of staring at the covers of empty


TOP
TANK
BASE

book-sized cassette cases, all laid facing outwards on skinny little shelves. Forlornly poring over the sleeve notes of endless B-movies you've never heard of and had no real interest in watching, but determined not to return home empty-handed just because all six copies of Battlestar Galactica had already been rented out and were not due back until Monday.

You'd select your movie by picking the giant cassette box off the shelf and taking it to the counter where you would present it, along with your membership card, to a man (it was always a man) who, after an unfeasibly long search in numerous oversized drawers, located the right tape, popped it in the case – pausing only to record your rental on the 'computer' – and handed it over for to you to carry home. Upon getting home you inserted the tape into a massive box-shaped contraption (a video cassette recorder or 'VCR') that was almost as big as the television itself. You would hit the play button, and before retreating to sit down (no remote control) you'd await the start of the film, though not before spending several minutes twiddling with the tracking knobs to try and remove squiggly lines from the screen. If you were unlucky the tape might get chewed up inside the player, making it impossible to watch parts of the movie without reeling past, or worse still, the tape would snap, causing you an awkward conversation the next day with the store staff and an extended negotiation to avoid a £2 fine.

Renting movies was not that expensive, but the purchase of the consumer device to play the movie at home was a considerable investment. The main conundrum of the day was not so much which make of player to invest in, but rather which format. Alongside Sony's Betamax format, JVC launched their Video Home System or 'VHS'. Amongst others, Philips also introduced a home video cassette format, but VHS and Betamax would go on to slug it out for the then-lucrative home video market. By today's standards, there was not a great deal to choose from in terms of the performance and cost of these incompatible formats, but in the end the consumer made their choice and the slightly less expensive VHS format triumphed over Betamax's higher picture quality. Despite its technical superiority, Betamax became a byword for failure and owners of the format were ridiculed by smug VHS-ers for wasting money by backing the wrong horse. They also had to fork out for a second machine if they wanted to continue to watch movies at home. Leading-


SPACE FOR DISPLAY
FORK GUIDING AIRFLOW TO RIGHT PLACE FOR COOLING

edge can often mean 'bleeding edge' – a motto I would later learn from an early mentor of sports business consulting, John Dix of Deloitte.

But what, you may understandably ask, does this lesson in defunct consumer electronic formats have to do with bikes? We shall return to this, but before we launch ourselves headfirst into examining the credentials of the undoubtedly strikingly designed LAVO bike, let's first find out a little more about LAVO, the Australian company that lends its name to the concept.

LAVO is a green energy technology and lifestyle company that see hydrogen as the fuel of the future. Their brand honours Antoine Lavoisier – the scientist who named hydrogen 'H1' – and their noble aim is to "challenge convention, spark a global conversation and enable a meaningful change in attitudes and behaviours around sustainability, the environment and responsible consumerism."

The company claims to have developed the world's first commercial home hydrogen system. Their proprietary energy storage system works by taking electricity from solar panels and converting it using an electrolyser. This breaks down water into its component hydrogen and oxygen parts and diverts it to a storage system where the hydrogen can then be used to fill and refill small tanks or 'cells'.

StudioMOM is a design studio based in Arnhem, Netherlands. Together with their clients, they develop products and strategies that aim to have a positive impact on the world of tomorrow. In their own words, they "strive for circular solutions that leave a minimal footprint."

Sharing their desire to shape a new reality, LAVO asked StudioMOM to design a super-lightweight e-bike that would be powered by their hydrogen cell system. However, given the low weight of the cell system and the large energy requirements of long-range cargo solutions, StudioMOM believed it made more sense to design a cargo bike. A hydrogen tank of 1.2kg is clearly preferable to a battery that weighs 6kg.

So, StudioMOM developed the LAVO bike – or as they prefer to call it, "a compact modular transport concept powered by green hydrogen." They see this simple modular concept offering great adaptability. Each technical element of the bike is considered almost like Lego blocks, meaning different models can be easily constructed from a selection of


LAVO

alternative core components. This offers distinct options for a range of different purposes, such as a cargo bike or city bike – just swap out a few key modules to adapt the model. As StudioMOM told us, "It's a toolkit for a new emission-free mode of transport."

Other aspects of the design that we noted include the clever, if not entirely unique, incorporation of technology into the frame, such as the lighting units. Also, the frame is designed to be ergonomically adjustable to fit people of different sizes.

At the time of going to press, the LAVO bike is not available to purchase, although the helpful guys over at StudioMOM suggest we might not have too much longer to wait. They told us this is more than just a concept bike and believe that, in principle, we could all be riding around on our own LAVO bikes before the end of 2022. The LAVO bike has been designed in the main using existing components, such as the Elian steering hub, which needs no further development. A functioning hydrogen cell-driven prototype does exist, but more work is needed to scale up this aspect for mass production.

Assuming the boffins at LAVO can resolve the outstanding production challenges, what would it cost to own a hydrogen-powered bike? Current estimates lie in the region of 1.5-2 times that of a comparable electric bike. So, not particularly cheap, and likely beyond the immediate means of a large proportion of the population who might otherwise be attracted by the green credentials. But at the same time, this is not entirely unaffordable for someone who would benefit from daily commuting or use the bike for business. Of course, the costs are predicted to fall over time, as more are produced and economies of scale kick in.

The main issue however is not so much the cost of the bike itself as the cost and availability of the hydrogen fuel cells. The designers of the LAVO bike suggest costs will come down considerably once the hydrogen cell technology is embraced more widely. If, for example, fleets of the bikes were adopted by courier companies, this might fast-track the wider implementation of the hydrogen fuel cell technology. Similarly, if the hydrogen cell was adopted across more modes of transport the technology would become much more accessible and affordable.

Clearly, developing the infrastructure required to

deliver an entirely new consumer fuel is a considerable hurdle, overcoming which will require coordinated effort. With the range of the cells limited to approximately 150km, there is a real need to recharge or exchange them regularly. Recharging a cell only takes about ten minutes, but there is no existing convenient network of recharge stations. The vision of us each commuting on our LAVO bike, then swapping the empty fuel cell for one we prepared earlier from our own hydrogen storage tank, with fuel we have created using electricity generated by our own solar panels, shows how far the bike is from general availability. The capital cost of all the hardware required to produce the hydrogen makes the cost and obtainability of the bike alone largely irrelevant at present.

But the fact that this LAVO bike and this hydrogen cell technology do exist prompts us to have a conversation about what kind of world we all want to live in and what part we can all play in achieving it. These may well offer us one viable option which, with the support of businesses and governments, could see meaningful change in how we lower emissions and reduce our carbon footprint.

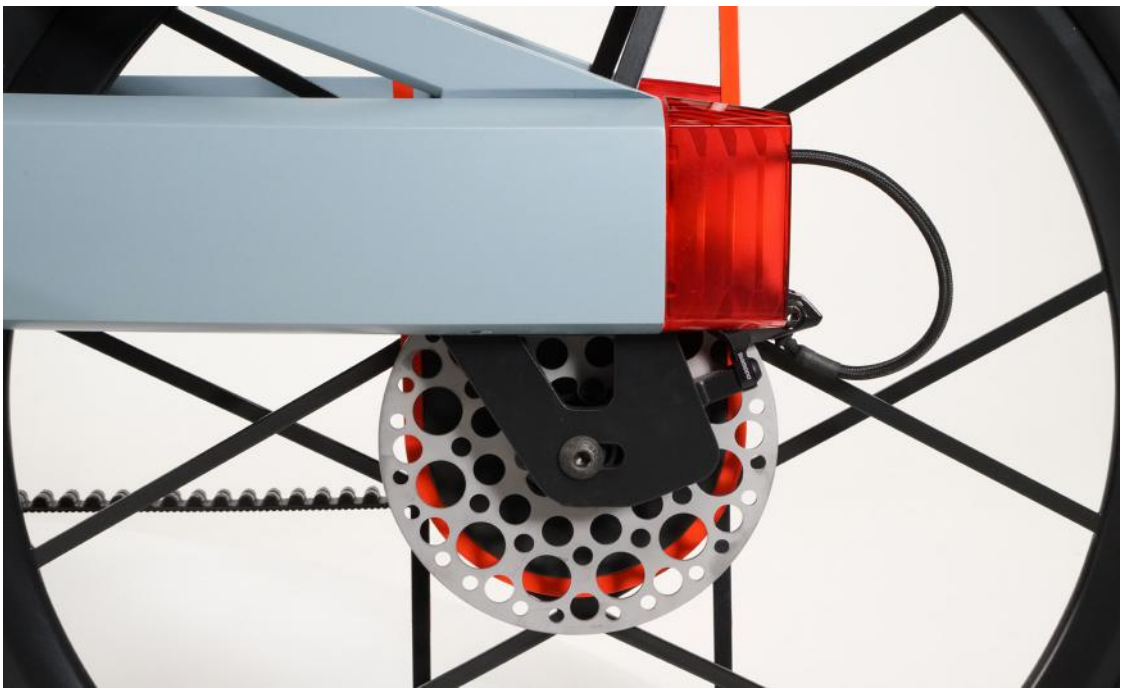
The Betamax tale might warn that important technological advances should not always be left in the hands of us mere consumers. Henry Ford is said once to have proclaimed, "If I'd asked them what they wanted they would have told me faster horses" – although the irony that Ford is probably responsible for kicking off this whole global car obsession is not lost on me.

Over the past couple of Covid-impacted years, we have seen many interventions around the globe where governments and local authorities took radical decisions to reduce or remove city centre access to motorized vehicles. Seeing for the first time the positive impact of reduced emissions, many now do not want a return to how things used to be. Indeed, it can be argued that authorities need to act to prevent future lawsuits being brought by families of people whose health is severely impacted by pollution from cars.

Sooner or later every city in every nation is going to have to tackle the issue of switching to more environmentally friendly transport options. It remains to be seen if the green hydrogen cell format will win through eventually and become adopted by every home as standard. Currently, that feels a long way off. What we do know already is that the first hydrogen bike in


LAVIC

the world makes transport over long distances possible, without heavy batteries, particulates or CO2 emissions. In this way, the LAVO bike brings us one small step closer to an emission-free society.

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