

Tacoma Wheelmen's Bicycle Club

Newsletter

June 1999

Founded 1888

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Phil Blenkush rides into his 80th with an 80K

Phil Blenkush appropriately celebrated his 80th birthday by leading an 80K ride on a sunny April 24, when more than 30 club members joined him at the Black Diamond Bakery for pieces of banana cream pie.

Phil started riding bicycles at 72 because his heavy walking regimen was damaging his knees. He used to hike Mount Rainier three times a week and once walked 2,800 miles across country.

His son, Nick, lent him a bike until Phil bought a mountain bike. Another son, Tim, is a bike racer. He shifted to road bikes and now mounts a Cannondale touring model, fitted with mountain bike handlebars.

He rides about 50 miles a week and leads about 20 rides a year. His favorite route is to the Black Diamond Bakery.

His ambition is to “get the word out to older folks that they don’t have to stop.” He would like to see more tours offered for seniors.

He enjoys riding with club members because they are “supportive, congenial and friendly.” The club has honored him for riding 2,000 miles in 1998 and 1997 and riding 1,500 miles in 1996. He also has been awarded five “over-the-bar pins” for accidents. He attributes his mishaps to inexperience. At most he has missed two weeks of riding.

He says he doesn’t feel well, when rain and inclement weather keeps him indoors.

“I have a more optimistic outlook when I bike.”

And now the Peninsula Metric Century!

Carol Davis

Lights! Cameras! Action!! The PMC is ready to roll! Everything is set: portapotties, rest stops, sag vehicles, plenty of food, souvenirs, T-shirts. Volunteers remember to come, please, and don't forget the potluck at Mat and Connie Reitzug's at 6 p.m., Friday, June 4. June 6 will be a beautiful day, and afterwards, the Gig Harbor Round Table will serve up many pizzas to our hungry group. If you didn't get to volunteer, you'll have just as much fun just riding the ride.

Beginning at 7 a.m. on June 6 the PMC will offer four routes — from 20 K to 100 miles — in the Gig Harbor area.

Registration fees are \$15 for individuals, \$35 for families and \$18 for attractive polo shirts. Check out the website at twbc.org/pmc.htm.

Daffodil profits hit \$10,000

Janice Jensen

April 18, 1999 was the only rainy day that week, but it didn't discourage the 1,200 riders that arrived for the Daffodil Classic. The start was in a new location and once the early morning confusion was over, things went pretty smoothly.

Daffodil brought in \$10,000 in profits and no mishaps, a success in itself. Don Partington went above and beyond when he helped move two sani-cans to their proper location. Although the riders were not aware of their original location, one mile from the rest stop, the Buckley folks made sure all went well. Thanks Don!

It would take all night and the next day to list and thank all the volunteers who have helped year after year with no complaints. The people who order the food or T-shirts or souvenirs. People who handle equipment, publicity, insurance and permits. People who cut and serve food with a smile. From marking the course to putting up signs to sagging to registration, every job important, every volunteer needed.

Thank you all for your precious time and for making Daffodil a great success. We could never do it without YOU!

From the president's handlebars

Ernie Stephenson

So I'm sitting at the Board meeting the other evening and the subject of officer elections comes up. Gee, has a year come and gone already?

It just doesn't seem that long ago I was looking at the upcoming year with no small amount of apprehension. There would be the budget, STP and all the other events through the winter and then the spring rides that hallmark the Wheelman.

Would I be up to presiding over these events? (Actually, I'm still not sure I ever was....) It was such an honor to stand in front of the first general meeting and every one since then. It might seem a bit silly, after all, we're just a bike club, right?

Why is it then that whenever two or more Wheelman come together, it will be almost no time before they are laughing and swapping highlights of great rides in the past or special and wonderful things that have happened in our club? Every organization should be as close knit as we are.

And if you are sitting out there on the fringes and have only come to one or two meetings, I cannot tell you of the wonderful companionship you are missing. Get out to a meeting. Come up and say "Hi."

I'll be around one more year as Immediate Past President. It would be an honor to shake the hand of all 400-plus riders in this wonderful group. Have a safe and happy cycling season.

Newsletter goals: William's standards

Dorian Smith

As a member of the Tacoma Wheelmen, it's likely you'd rather not spend too much time reading this newsletter. Probably you'd rather be hunched over the handlebars of a lightweight bike on a tree-lined road on a sunny day in the 70s with a full-service bakery about 30 miles ahead.

So, this will be short.

A few months ago, this newsletter changed hands. For eight years it was edited with tireless efficiency by William Hoehne. He nursed, coaxed and cajoled contributors and passed on sage advice and comfort to those who experienced severe difficulty mustering up a few paragraphs.

He also brought consistency and credibility to the newsletter. The major virtue and most difficult task of any publication is to come out every month. And the Wheelmen were blessed with that reliability. Some club members maybe took it for granted, until the bulk mail delivery slipped a few days. But it became the main source for information about club rides, activity reports and thought-provoking commentary about bicycling and, specifically, bicycling in Tacoma.

A good editor creates a publication that encourages contributions. And William was proud that he rarely wrote his own articles.

The newsletter was offered not only as a source of information but as an outlet for club members to relate their experiences or express their ideas. The goals for these qualities will not change.

With the advantage of computer software and devices, readers will notice some design changes in page layout, artwork, etc.

But the important things will not change. Members will continue to be encouraged to submit their articles, anecdotes and notices about rides. They are also encouraged to submit photograph prints.

And the newsletter's standards will remain William's standards.

TWBC Board highlights

Here are a few issues and topics that were discussed at the Tacoma Wheelmen's May 4 board meeting.

Volunteer coordinator needed for summer picnic: A volunteer is still needed to coordinate the club's summer picnic which is still planned for July 18. Anyone interested can contact Steve Brown at 253-752-4038. Manitou Park has already been reserved. The picnic will coordinate well with the Summit to Sound Relay, which several members of the club are participating in.

Several board members said they prefer a mid-summer date over September when the weather can be risky. Possibly next year the club picnic will renew a tradition of 10 years ago and hold the picnic in Flaming Geyser Park.

Daffodil Classic Revenue: After paying expenses, the club earned about \$10,000 this year from the Daffodil Classic Ride. This amount is what was planned in the 1999 budget. The Daffodil Classic has the largest attendance of any ride in Washington with only volunteer labor.

Transit and bicycles: Accommodating bicycles on transit systems is becoming a big issue, reported Bob Myrick who attended the recent American Planning Association's conference in Seattle.

Bob said many transit systems do not provide racks nor allow bikes on the buses. Pierce Transit is regionally noted for accommodating bicycles, allowing bikes inside buses that have also been fitted with bike racks. Amtrak National Rail Passenger Service allows up to six bikes per train, a feature that is heavily used in San Francisco.

Bob said bicycle groups, including The Bicycle Alliance are lobbying for more accommodations on the regional Sound Transit system.

TWBC jerseys: The new club jerseys have arrived and are available for \$53. The club will not profit from the sale of the jerseys. Call the Rideline at 253-759-2800

Ride Codes: Ride speeds indicated on the ride codes was discussed and it was decided to modify them. The Ride Codes will be labeled 1, 2, 3, 4 but the average

speed will be reduced. Ride Leader Connie Reitzug also said that the slower rides will emphasize the frequency of stopping to regroup. The labeling for terrain — A, B, C, D — will not change.

Welcoming members: The club will renew its efforts to help new members participate in rides and volunteer for events. Among the plans considered are:

- A meeting “greeter” (John Campbell) who will identify new members and ask for their bicycling preferences and introduce them to the club’s activities and benefits.
- “Getting to Know You Rides” will continue to be scheduled. These rides will be slower and the leaders will offer basic tips on riding, equipment, safety, etc.
- Welcome kits will be prepared with information about the club and bicycling.

Special Events: There are still volunteer spots available for the STP Spanaway checkpoint on July 10-11.

Bike pathway along SR-16?

According to early plans for the second Narrows Bridge, a six-mile bicycle/pedestrian path will be constructed along State Route 16.

TWBC member Scott Pierson displayed a map of the proposed bicycle route at a recent membership meeting.

The path will be 10-feet wide and connect Cushman Trail on the north side of the bridge, run through Cheney Stadium and end at the Target shopping center at S 23rd and Union.

He added that the portion of the trail which bisects Snake Lake Nature Center and may require negotiations with Metro Park officials.

The bicycle trail became possible when the City of Tacoma received a TEA-21 grant, which is federal funding to construct bicycle commuting.

Like the second Narrows Bridge, the bicycle pathway is still several years in the future.

Paramedics on bikes at next club meeting

Steve Brown

Pat Donovan, a captain and paramedic with the Puyallup Fire Department, will present an informative lecture on bicycle-mounted paramedics at the club meeting June 15.

These folks could be seen at last year's Puyallup Fair. An article about the program appeared in the January edition of the TWBC newsletter.

The monthly meeting starts at 7 p.m. and is held at the South Park Community Center, 4851 S. Tacoma Way. The meetings feature fun, food, door prizes and more. For more information on this club meeting or future meetings call Steve Brown at (253) 752-4038.

During the summer the club traditionally does not hold general meetings so members can concentrate on more important things like bicycling and summer vacation.

The next meeting will be held in Sept. 21. And don't forget the club picnic on July 18.

For sale

FOR SALE: Alley Cat II ("ride along" that attaches to an adult bike), \$100. Schwinn Lil Stardust 16" girl's bike w/training wheels, \$65. Call Mike or Debbie Romaine, 253/537-2330.

Biker Babes training log: flu, broken axles, hypothermia

Carla Gramlich

I was slowly building up my mileage and had planned to do a century on April 11. The day before I rested. Instead of riding I spent the afternoon on the couch. I was not feeling well. On Sunday morning, I took off to lead the 100-mile ride feeling lousy and not able to eat anything. I thought that I would start to feel better after a few miles. I kept a decent pace for the first 20 miles into Orting. But after Orting my legs felt like cement and I still was not able to eat but I sipped some Gatorade. I decided in Kapowsin to bag it and handed my leadership over to Toni Matson. I ended up home sick for three days with some kind of flu.

The following week I was scheduled for a 50-mile loop. I felt a little unsure of myself because of the week before. I friend said it was "performance anxiety" and he could relate. We started at a fast pace and I was in the pack. The pace intimidated a couple of riders who only did the 20-mile loop instead of the full 50. The day was sunny and we rode 50 miles in a respectable time.

The next weekend Steve and I traveled to Spokane on Saturday to do the Lilac Century. We took off that Sunday morning at a quick pace of 18 - 20 miles per hour and felt that we could finish the century by 2 or 3 in the afternoon to start driving home. At mile 35 there was a rest stop and we were informed that we would climb the next 14 miles. I can normally deal with some climbing but the wind was brutal.

Steve took off and I finally saw him again at the rest stop. We checked my back wheel and found that it was not spinning smoothly. I adjusted a brake that might be causing some drag and still the wheel did not spin well. The culprit was a broken axle. We decided to take a short cut back to the start because of my mechanical problems, wind and the impending rain. I did 73 miles that day. While driving home

we continued fighting headwinds. The other side of the mountains may have more sun but those headwinds are horrendous.

I finally did a century in Vancouver (WA). I now know why STP skips Clark County. There are some killer hills in that part of the state. The route for "Ride Around Clark County"(RACC) was marvelous. We did the whole century including all the hills with weather that included rain, hail and sunshine.

The Lewis County Century is reputed to be an easier century but the cold and rain left us numb. Toni Matson started to experience hypothermia. We finally found a place to get some hot drinks and then headed back to the start after only 62 miles.

Janice Jenson made it to the second checkpoint but would not leave the heated bathroom until she was promised a ride back to the start. Steve Brown did the whole 70-mile course by himself and was wondering what happened to the rest of us. Bob Myrick was the only one from our group to brave the weather and complete the entire 100 miles.

New wheels, new bikes; no excuses

Carla Gramlich

During May the Biker Babes showed off their new wheels. I ordered a Mondocino in November during the builder Antonio Mondocino's Tacoma visit from Italy. When it finally arrived in April, I spent time at the shop building up the bicycle. It's purple with a chrome fork and lugs. (The following description is for techie types.)

I built the wheels from '99 Record hubs and Torelli rims. The other components include Campy Chorus Ergo shifters and brakes. I chose the Torelli headset with straight bearings and a Campy Racing Triple because I am a wimp. I installed a 9-

speed cassette in the back, complete with Vredestein tires because they are purple and matched the bike. I christened the bike during RACC.

Toni Matson found the bike of her dreams within 10 minutes after walking into the Portland Bike Expo. It is called a Seven, because the other numbers were being used. The frame is titanium and carbon. To compliment this combination frame, her components are a mix of Campagnolo and Shimano.

Janice Jensen went with a local builder — Stevenson of Olympia. Her bike will be more of a touring type frame. She is siding with Chorus components.

We can no longer use the excuse that the bicycle is the problem.

Mileage will continue to increase with a century or more each weekend. I signed up for the "Ride the Rockies" that will include some 10,000-foot mountain passes for seven days in June. After that ride, it will be almost time for STP and then RAMROD.

Biker Babes and Biker Babe-Wannabes will meet June 11 since there is a conflict with the Peninsula Metric Century potluck. We plan to visit Emerald Downs. If interested please call Carla Gramlich at (253) 752-4038

Commuters' quest: the ideal bike

Scott Pierson

Bike to Work month was May for some, June for others. No matter when you decide to ride to work or carry groceries, you will be in for a puzzle as I was. I haven't found a bike sold in the U.S. that is store-ready to carry three bags of groceries and most will eat your slacks. The puzzle gets more complicated, too, as I discovered.

My wife, Bev, has been looking for a bike to ride to her job at the University of Puget Sound and to the Proctor Street business district. She often wears good clothes and doesn't want her skirt ruined by a greasy chain or spokes.

When we looked for desirable features, we became discouraged that there actually are no commuter bikes available.

If you want to do jumps, tear through the hills or join a swift paceline, the bike shops are ready for you. If you are older than 50 and only want a sedate pedal to the store or work, forget it.

The only commercial bikes for this type of riding are available in Europe and Asia, such as the Pashley Princess, imported from England for \$1,000. But try finding one in the U.S. The custom-fit Bike Friday has nice features but the company won't budge on removing the derailleur and the chain is ready to attack your good slacks.

Europe is crawling with bikes Bev would like so I downloaded a couple of pictures from the Amsterdam website (www.zenzero.com/amsMertje08.html) and made a list of features I think would be welcomed by the older generation who would like to ride for daily routines.

The first thing we look for is a step-through frame. It is nearly impossible for a woman to swing her leg over a bike seat while wearing a skirt. Some U.S.-made bikes have what looks like a step-through frame but unless you like to ballet and wear size 1 shoes, forget it.

I've used a real step-through frame and they are great when your bike carries a load. The chain enclosure means doesn't need a front derailleur and internal rear gears (in the rear hub) are available with 3 to 7 speeds.

I hate changing a tire on my way to work in my good clothes, so I would opt for solid tires. They weigh about the same as pneumatic tires, pump and patch kit and ride just fine (You can find them on the Internet at www.greentyre.com).

Lighting systems that do a great job are available. But where should the rear light be mounted? Check out the light illustrated here which is mounted on the fender.

I would think that a bike with these features could be made for under \$1,000, would weigh less than 30 pounds and sell very well.

So if you want to ride to work or just do some shopping, you'll have to improvise by adding bags or boxes, lights, fenders, and other things to your bike and carry spare leg clip to secure your slacks. In the meantime, write a letter to Bicycling Magazine, talk to your local shop and if you ever get to Europe, check out one of their many commuting bikes.

Ride notes

Okanogan Tour: There's still time to sign up for Wayne and Sue's tour June 12 to 19. Cost is only \$125 for campsites, sag wagon and a few other amenities, such as a surprising number of forests. Call Bob Myrick at 473-7455 or Wayne and Sue at (509) 682-3568 or www.waynesue.com or e-mail at waynesue85@yahoo.com. Possible carpooling to Lake Chelan.

Southern Oregon: Two-week trip June 18-July 4 led by Roz and Carol Davis and Ralph and Dena Wessels. Filled.

North Cascades Highway: Led by Carla Gramlich. Camping trip Aug. 7-15. Limited to 10. \$25 deposit requested. Campgrounds include Lake Chelan, Lake Wenatchee State Park. 35-65 miles per day. Two mountain passes. Call 253-752-4038.

Ride with Louie: STOKR 99 (Scenic Tour of the Kootenai River) out of Libby, MT., May 8-9. Golden Triangle out of Banff National Park in Alberta May 22-24. Hosted by Louie Boitano, 253-922-1168.

TourBC: Tour, along historic Gold Rush Trail in Cariboo-Thompson area July 18-24. Supported Steve and Phyllis Lay 253-759-1816, or 1-800-330-9926 or www.tour-bc.net.

Courage Classic: Are you riding the Courage Classic this year and would like to be on the Tacoma Wheelman's Bicycle Club team, call Robert Deehan at 253-272-9682. You will get a T-shirt and be in a group picture on the third day of the ride.

Cycle Vermont: 400-miles (advanced-intermediate) in Vermont's Green Mountains Aug. 21-27. Catered. \$550 includes support. 1-800-755-2453 or Connie and Mat Reitzug at 253-460-1533

Last minute rides: If you would like to add a last-minute ride for a weekday, contact Connie Reitzug at 460-1533 by Sunday afternoon. For a weekend call Thursday afternoon. Also e-mail twbc@exite.com so the web page can be updated. The web page and rideline are updated late Sunday and Thursday evenings.

Riders' essentials: All bicycle riders are urged to wear a helmet, carry repair items -- such as spare inner tubes -- and first aid supplies on every ride.

Ride leaders: Cue sheets or maps are recommended for rides longer than 35 miles. Also turn in your ride sheets if you are a ride leader. Or else the club won't know how many rides you led through the year by the annual banquet in January.

New TWBC jerseys: In small, medium, large and extra large. 2XL and 3XL. Some sizes are limited so get yours before they are gone. Price is \$53 and still a bargain when you compare to similar quality from retail outlets. Features 15-inch zipper with reflective strip on back pocket and arm bands. Highly visible colors.

Bike-bus commuting: the pure agony and courtesy

Mary Neukom

Have you ever thought you had better get back into biking to work? Well, I finally followed Karen Forbush's Nike's "just do it" and "dood" it.

The only way this was gonna happen — since I live 22 miles one way from work — was to ride northeast, even though my job is south, to catch the bus. The great news is that every single Pierce or Intercity Transit person I've encountered has been extremely helpful and courteous to folks who haven't tried bike/bus commuting.

So far, among my interesting experiences have been forgetting to put the bike rack back up, which prompted the driver to get off the bus and do it himself. In another incident I discovered there was no bike rack. It was difficult lifting the bike on the bus. To top it off, we encountered a 3-hour Friday night freeway backup.

As I sat on the bus floor to keep the bike from slipping and falling in the aisle, I wondered if I could get off and ride home. The driver wouldn't let me off on the freeway, but courteously let me off just a mile from home as he drove through town meandering the long way back to the 512 Park and Ride. I was only about 10 minutes late getting home while other commuters were 1-3 hours late. What a way to go!

Next, I decided to become adventurous to avoid flats or spoke/paint/fender damage when sharing the bike rack. I prepared my old red commuter bike. This is the second bike that I rode all the way from Tacoma to San Francisco and my entire first 200-mile STP. It has thorn resistant tires — never has a flat! Great idea!

IT WAS PURE AGONY!

Oh my gosh, how did I ever ride this thing even 20 miles? The brakes are way in front — out of reach. The seat's hard as a rock — leather. I rode one day to and from the bus stop, 17 miles, with sore knees and butt. Am I really gonna be able to handle this again?

Guess I'll switch back to my pink bike that "fits like a glove," me not anyone else. The commute's worth the small anxiety in getting to the bus on time, but not worth riding a bike in pain and nearly unreachable brakes.

See you on the road or bus!

Government report
bob myrick

Last month, the TWBC Government Affairs Committee meeting included Ernie Stephenson, Ralph Wessels, Steve Brown, Carla Gramlich and myself. Scott Pierson represented the City of Tacoma and Bob Vogel represented Pierce County.

WSDOT Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC): Scott reported on his attendance at the State's Dept. of Transportation BAC meeting. There is a new state staff member assigned to bicycle matters for our region.

Larry L. Anderson can be reached at (360) 357-2710. He has been with the DOT for many years, but he seems to need some exposure to our unique needs. In the past, I have had success with minor problems, like shoulder cleaning, by calling the appropriate maintenance district.

Scott presented the city's I-5 trail proposals to the BAC. He also presented the need for a state wide bike route system and appropriate signage. The BAC and its staff didn't seem to want to take on this matter as part of its mission. They understood that the idea is at the concept stage and liked the vision as a long range goal. They made a number of suggestions for the concept, including taking it to local groups for support.

We still need a "signage" law that relieves local government from liability if someone is injured on a "signed" route. We may also need a law or clarification regarding liability for improved bike lanes since the county is fearful of liability if they create bike lanes. It will now be necessary to take these matters to the Bicycle Alliance of Washington (BAW) not BAC for support. Hopefully, the BAC will support new laws and seek funds for signage, bike routes and bike lanes.

Road Rage: Carla has arranged a short meeting with Pierce County's Prosecuting Attorney, John Ladenburg, on May 19 to discuss road rage, bike route signage, bike lanes and other matters like lack of enforcement in car versus bike incidents. This meeting is on behalf of the BAC and BAW not BAC and TWBC.

Sound Transit Matters: It has been noted that Sound Transit may not be properly designing its facilities to easily accommodate bikes on buses, light rails and trains.

A meeting was held in Seattle with BAW, Cascade and bike officials from King County, Seattle, Tacoma and Pierce County. BAW promised to request a meeting with Sound Transit's top officials to resolve this matter.

Sound Transit has apparently become aware of our concerns and is already meeting with the local bike officials. I learned about Transit Oriented Development (TOD) after I was sent by Tacoma to the American Planning Association's national conference in Seattle.

I fear that officials in Auburn, Sumner, Puyallup, Tacoma, and Lakewood are not taking the proper steps to encourage high density housing within a quarter mile of their rail stations and transit centers. Such housing is critical to allow people to walk or bike to these centers. Tacoma should be encouraging such housing all along its new Light Link system in downtown Tacoma.

Bike Stations: King County METRO has received a TEA-21 (which funds bicycle projects) grant to develop bike stations. One will be located at the Tacoma transit

center. It will have all types of convenient parking, an attendant, repair facility and the like. Of course, for this to be successful, there must be customers. There are no customers or bike locker usage at the transit center now. Housing must be created near the centers for this to work in the foreseeable future.

City Water Ditch Trail: Scott reported he will have to contact Tacoma Water again regarding our request to adopt this trail as a "Tacoma Cares" project. The city will seek funds to pursue this trail. At the next meeting, we will ask Scott to report on the status of different bike-related project requests in the neighborhoods of Tacoma.

Safety Grant

Applications: Ralph had the forms to apply for state monies, but the deadline was close. We considered buying helmets for poor people, funding Sprocketman and producing safety brochures.

CarLess Commute in June: CarLess Commute will be celebrated June 14 to June 26. Look for registration materials in this newsletter, in the Tribune or at your work site. Join the TWBC team or the team where you work.

Sprocketman Vacancy: The job is still open. Call Cara at 253-798-4739, if you would like to help kids protect their heads and bodies.

The next meeting of the TWBC Government Affairs Committee will be held at 7 pm, June 8 at Planet Burrito on Sixth Avenue. There will be good food and fellowship as we try to help our government do the right thing.

Juan Duran's Ride for Hope

On May 15, Tacoman Juan Duran began a solo cross-country bicycle trip in memory of his wife who recently passed away and to raise awareness and donations for the Franciscan Home Care-Hospice in Tacoma.

Juan's "Ride for Hope" is courageous for two reasons: he is riding alone for 3,500 miles — from Miami to Tacoma — and he is undertaking the adventure as a novice rider.

Juan's wife, Renate, died last October after a two-year struggle with bone cancer. The May-September ride is intended to raise the awareness of the benefits of hospice care.

By May 1 his campaign had already collected \$5,000. One Gig Harbor donor had contributed \$3,500. Other donors are asked to contribute \$35 which equals one penny per mile.

Contributions can be made at 253-591-6890 (fax: 253-591-6781). There is an active website at <http://www.rideforhope.com>.

New and renewing members

New Members: Bruce Pyrah, North Pyrah, Evonne Howard, John Atkinson, Kevin L. Daniel, Jacqueline Lee, Michael J. Campagna, Steven P. Ludowese, Marlaina M. Wall, Pam Marzano, John Suvel

Renewing members: Mona and Rick Hahn, Lori Lastufka, Noreen Light, Carolyn L. Nelson, Kenneth D. Blaha, Greg Grenier and Family, John and Shirley Morgan, Hand and Hazel Giddings

Past pedaling

anne heller

Historical highlights of TWBC's 110 years

By the 1890s the bicycle was well established both as a means of transportation and a form of recreation. The "safety" bike had overtaken the high-wheeler in popularity in the 1890s. In 1892 people began singing about Daisy on her bicycle built for two. Thoughts also turned to making the bicycle a military vehicle. In today's world of Humvees and B-2 Stealth bombers, it is not easy picturing the bicycle as an instrument of war. But many countries gave the idea serious consideration.

In 1895 the War Department decided to test the practicality of using bicyclists as a component of the Signal Corps by sending a soldier bicyclist on a circuit of Washington State. Private Frank Anderson of the 4th United States Cavalry left Fort Walla Walla on August 22 for a 270-mile trip to Vancouver that took 102 hours. His wheel was loaded with 60 pounds of equipment including tent, carbine, powder and 25 rounds of ammunition. After arriving in Vancouver he rested for five days before heading to Tacoma. After leaving Tacoma, he crossed the Cascades, following the Northern Pacific line to Spokane before returning to Walla Walla.

While a month on the road to carry messages across the state and back seems like a failure today, in the 1890s people were positive that a military use could be found for this popular technology. An 1896 article in Harper's Weekly was devoted to the use of the bicycle in the armies of Europe and America.

While the experiment in Washington State dealt with the bicycle as a means of sending messages, the Harper's article envisioned the bicycle as a component of the infantry.

Major Howard Giddings, the author of the Harper's article, believed that "in rapidly moving considerable bodies of infantry the bicycle will find its highest function in time of war. Fancy a force of infantry, independent of boats and railroads, moving in any direction 40 or 50 miles in one morning, and appearing on a field not weary and exhausted as after a two days' hard march, but fresh and prepared to fight."

Perhaps Major Giddings could leap into battle after a 50 mile ride, personally, I would prefer a nice rest under a tree with a smoothie. Major Giddings also believed that an advantage of the bicycle in battle was that it could be used to transport the wounded from the battlefield. As he said, "a wounded man can be placed on the bicycle by one man, unassisted, who can then mount and carry both without serious inconvenience, the wounded resting in an easy position."

European countries had more interest than the United States in establishing a bicycle corps. Italy began using bicycles in its army in 1870, France in 1887. To qualify for the French military unit the elite cyclists had to cover 90 kilometers in six hours.

The French also experimented with a folding bicycle, much like today's Bike Friday. The soldier folded it in half and slung it over his shoulder.

The Harper's article includes photographs of a bicycle with a Colt automatic attached to the handle bar, a tandem with both rifle and revolver attached and duplexes with mounted Gatling guns and mountain cannon. The duplex was a strange contraption with two rear wheels, two side-by-side seats, two handle bars and one front wheel with armament mounted between the seats.

Major Giddings dreams never materialized. Advances in other technologies made the bicycle impractical for the military, which is just as well for those of us who relish its commuting and recreational advantages.

Volunteer opportunities

Greater Tacoma Senior Games

Bicycling volunteers are needed for the Greater Tacoma Senior Games which will be held Aug. 26-29 at various venues in the Tacoma area.

The games are for seniors 50 years and older. Sports include aquatics, badminton, bowling, lawn bowling, horseshoes, golf, bocce, disc golf, tennis and board games (bridge, cribbage). The event coordinators this year are determined to include bicycling.

The games' purpose is to help encourage and educate seniors to promote fitness, competition and sociability.

The Greater Tacoma Senior Games, affiliated with the National Senior Games, is a newly formed non-profit corporation. Its formation is especially timely because the United Nations has proclaimed 1999 as the "International Year of Older Persons" and the World Health Organization has designated 1999 as the "International Year of Healthy Aging."

For more information contact Ruth Offutt at (253) 756-7945 or 4702 South 19th St, Tacoma, WA 98405.

Feed your STP friends

If you have decided NOT to ride the STP we need you at the Tacoma Wheelmen-sponsored lunch stop! It takes quite a crew to feed the 10,000 that will be coming through Tacoma on July 10 and we want to treat them well! The food will be prepared Friday night and laid out early Saturday.

To volunteer Call 253-759-2393 and leave name, phone number and T-shirt size.

RAMROD volunteers needed

Redmond Cycling Club needs volunteers for RAMROD (Ride Around Mount Rainier in One Day) on July 29. Positions are worth "points" to secure preferred status for RAMROD registration this year or next; to "buy" a free RAMROD entry or to participate in WIMPROD All volunteers receive a T-shirt.

For information call Peggy Fjetland at 253-841-4458 or Allen McBride at 206-937-6920.