

# Bike like hell

Writer tells tale of mediocre cycling performance through a rainstorm

by R. M. Prindle  
*The Collegian*

Riding bikes is out. Cycling is in. So, there I was, lost in the middle of the state of New York, shivering and wet, grasping my handlebars to maintain control while shooting down a two-mile hill at thirty miles an hour in a monsoon with no brakes and mud covering my sunglasses.

What led up to that vaguely interesting, yet life-threatening moment?

The surging popularity of cycling can be attributed to three things. First, the success of the 1984 Olympic Cycling Team in L.A. Second, the success of Greg LeMond in the last several Tour De France races, and lastly, the serious, debilitating, lifetime injuries that runners usually sustain which end their urge and ability to run.

I no longer have to worry so much about slowly acquired problems like shin splints, hip pointers and tendon stress. Cyclists need only worry about quick death via the front end of a Peterbilt or maybe brain damage from a blow to the head that lies at the end of catapulting off the rim of a pothole.

I am relatively new to the sport. I adopted my new pastime grudgingly after several trips to Hamot Sports Medicine. On my last visit the doctor basically told me that he had seen worse damage to tendons, but never in such a mediocre runner. I thanked him for his insight, promised I would switch to cycling, and told him I had gotten worse treatment before, but never from someone with such a mediocre intellect.

SO, I BOUGHT A BIKE, which was fairly cheap compared to the several hundred dollars worth of color-coordinated accessories that a cyclist needs unless he wants to be outcast by the biking snob-czars. I started to ride with a friend who was also fairly new to the sport. We rode throughout the summer, doing harder and longer rides.

We felt cocky and confident about going the distance in the 100 mile Tour of Chautauqua a few weeks ago. It was a brisk morning and we arrived early to make last minute adjustments. We tightened here, loosened there, and adjusted everything. Then, it started to rain.

Now, the prospect of riding a bicycle for six hours is scary even on a good day. But the thought of riding that long in freezing rain sucks like a jet engine. My friend and I slapped on our helmets and got ready to ride anyway.

Five minutes before the tour began, my friend had to use the facilities. Ten minutes later he came back. It took us a while, but we finally caught up to the pack of 120 other riders. First we reached the children, then the old people, then finally the pack we felt most at home in: the guys who bike three hours a week, but talk about it for ten.

Things started to look up as we neared the cutoff point. If we turned right we would do the 25 mile course with the women and children and wimps. If we decided to be men and keep heading straight we would have to do the whole thing. But like I said, things were looking up. Passing all those children and old people gave us a rush, and it had stopped raining and even looked as if the sun might break out.

We went straight.

A mile down the road the real rain started. I mean torrential, Gilligan's Island type typhoon rain with wind. I should explain that racing tires are about as wide as nickels and not half as sturdy. And they aren't all that fond of gripping wet road. I struggled for control against the wind and tightened my helmet strap. I knew we were all in for an interesting Saturday in the country.

THINGS STARTED TO GET WEIRD as we completed the first leg. A section of my friend's chain started to make hideous clanking noises as it shot through his derailleur, my helmet was playing Japanese water torture on my head, and every time I took a drink from my water bottle I got a healthy dose of road muck that had settled on it. The rain turned from torrent to omnipresent mist and we could see our breath as we strained against the cold and drear. That may sound almost poetic --you know, man against nature and all that crap -- but if I had to choose either reliving that moment or having my wisdom teeth removed again, I would have a very difficult time deciding.

Eventually my friend's chain got so bad, he could barely pedal and we fell miles away from anything resembling a pack. This led to a new problem. We had no idea where we were and we had nothing but what can best be described as a child's crayon drawing of Chautauqua County (provided by the tour organizers) to guide us. We were lost.

IT WAS RIGHT ABOUT WHEN WE HIT THE HILL that the wind and rain hit full force. By then we were on the brink of tears. We were also dirty, cold, and two hours behind schedule. I should explain that wet brakes are useless on a steep hill, so it was basically a matter of holding on and thinking of who my survivors might be able to sue if I thought it.

We survived the hill and eventually found the right road, a backwoods tar and chip, full of rabid dogs and rednecks. We could tell the rednecks because they were the ones in rusty 4x4s shouting obscenities.

I am recovering now. I haven't had the nerve to get back on my bike yet, but yesterday I found the courage to clean my water bottles. In a few days I'll probably start missing the excitement of the sport, but if it's raining when that happens I suppose I could always console myself by making a dentist appointment or two.

## This week's sports schedule

<b>Today</b>			
Tennis	A	Thiel College	3 pm
Volleyball	H	SUNY-Fredonia	7 pm
<b>Saturday</b>			
Soccer	H	Mercyhurst	1 pm
Tennis	H	Allegheny	1 pm
Volleyball	A	Alfred*	10 am
<b>Tuesday</b>			
Tennis	A	Mercyhurst	3 pm
Volleyball	A	Thiel College	6 pm
<b>Wednesday</b>			
Men's Golf	A	ECAC qualiafier	11 am
Soccer	A	Pitt-Bradford	3 pm
<b>Thursday</b>			
Men's Golf	A	ECAC qualiafier	11 am
*Tournament			

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