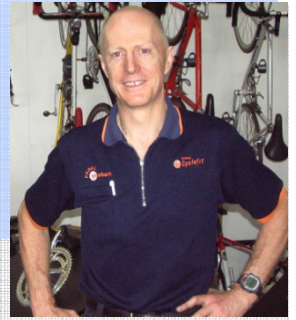


G'day I hope that Santa Claus was kind, that some of your New Years' resolutions weren't total BS and that the waist line didn't take too great a hit. By now you should be back in harness and doing a few kms.

Margaret and I wish everyone a happy, healthy and above all, safe cycling New Year.



Extraordinary Customer no.1

For the last 10 years or so I have enjoyed positioning **John Cogill** on several bikes as well as maintaining his fleet of cycles. John is a special kind of guy. My feeling is that 100% of the enjoyment of cycling occurs in the first 5 hours and better than 90% of that is in the first 3 hours. As you will read below, my Alpine Classic adventures only confirm that view.

John isn't like that. He loves distance and has ridden right around Australia as well as many shorter 2 - 3000 km trips. During each, he camped by the side of the road and lived as basically as possible. John came in last week with his mountain bike and asked me to "Make it work like new. No expense to be spared". I asked whether he was off on another adventure and he said yes, that he was going to cross the continent from Byron Bay in New South Wales to Esperance in Western Australia. I asked which way he would go; north over the Top End of south across the Nullarbor Plain and his reply was that he was going straight across. Realising that this is over 4000 kms, mainly desert and almost all off road, I asked what backup did he plan to have. He said that he had mapped out the waterholes and had a plan. Now this is during the worst drought in 100 years and with no Sat Nav and no mobile phone; just a compass and tenacity. A serious challenge, you may think?

The punch line is that John will celebrate his 84th birthday somewhere in the desert during this trip.

Cleat Wedges

I've been using these almost since they came on the market but still get a kick out of their simplicity and the results that can flow from using them.

Your body delivers something like 4 billion proprioceptive signals to the brain each second, but the brain can only process 2000 of these signals in that time. Something like 0.0000005 of the total.

On a bike, every watt of power you produce has to be transmitted to the bike via your feet. You absolutely want the proprioceptive feedback from your feet to be getting through loudly and clearly rather than as background noise if you want to perform optimally. This is analogous to being in the centre of a football stadium trying to hear a single voice over the noise of a shouting crowd of 2 million. ***Peripherally, the only way the feedback from the feet can be 'heard' clearly is if the alignment of foot and ankle is correct.***

The best way to do this is by using BFS Cleat Wedges to allow optimal foot cant on the pedal.

Next page are photos of the shoes of Brad S-----. Brad has been a serious level Judo competitor for many years and in that time has had 3 knee reconstructions and 5 arthroscopes. Now he rides a bike for fitness but knee pain has been a constant issue. No longer. The solution in Brad's case was a change in bike position in conjunction with 7 wedges under the left foot and 6 under the right. That's a lot, but Steve Vesel still holds the record with 15 under one foot and 13 under the other. No one else has come close to that! Below is what Brad's shoes now look like.



I'm finding time and again that long term knee 'horror' stories almost always need far more wedging on a bike than is generally realised and Brad is yet another example.

Bike Handling

I've known a few riders who I think can really handle a bike. One of them, a German ex pro, amuses himself by keeping his front wheel overlapping and hard against the rear wheel of the rider in front on the twisting descent of the steep side of Akuna Bay. Without exception the handling hot shots I'm personally aware of are all males. I've now seen the world's best bike handler. Watch her to the end.

<http://video.google.co.uk/videoplay?docid=-8867862777896510907>

Passoni

I've seen some impressive titanium frames over the years from Baum, Seven, Serotta, IF et al but I saw my first Passoni the other day. A Euro that I talk to regularly has always raved about Passoni but I thought "How neat can a titanium weld bead get?" The brands listed above have weld beads that are remarkably tidy.

Well, now I know the answer. Passoni, who builds 400 frames a year only, all custom, hand files the welds back to the point where the frame looks like it came from a mold. It is a seamless one piece look that is extraordinary. Before you get too excited they are megabucks and I'm not selling them. They have an agent here, an Italian gent named Davide and he sells them. My involvement is if someone wants a Passoni, they will be directed here for me to work out a position for that customer and then provide custom frame dimensions based around that position.

We'll have one in the shop for a week from the time you read this if you want to see a masterpiece as I have to build it up for a magazine test.

See <http://www.passoni.com/default.asp?lingua=ENG> for more details.



Extraordinary customer no.2

I first met **Harley Johnson** at a seminar I gave in Adelaide some years ago. I remember him because he was just so keen. Every time I asked for volunteers to illustrate a point, Harley was on his feet before anyone else had finished raising a hand. He later rode the 1500 kms to Sydney to be fitted and once the repositioning was complete, rode the 1500kms back again. Harley spends most of his time working on organic fruit farms around the world and doing health consults. He is a raw vegan which means he eats nothing other than uncooked plants and fruit. No nuts, seeds, grains, animal products etc. An extreme diet perhaps, but it works for him. I've listed some of the things I know Harley has done on a bike without support.

- Perth to Cairns via Byron Bay (I would guess nearly 7000kms) in 29 days. Wasn't setting records; he just needed to get from Perth to Cairns.
- Fastest unsupported finisher at the 2003 1200 km PBP in France
- South Australian solo 24 hour mtb champ in '02 and '08. In '04 he got second but made up for that by running the Adelaide Marathon the next morning
- Ridden out of Bangkok in the evening in Teva sandals and platform pedals and found the mosquitoes so bad that the only solution was to keep riding. By dawn he had covered 235 kms in sandals on a utility bike.
- Cycled over large parts of the U.S. South East Asia and Central America eating from fruit shops and picking edible greens from the side of the road for what he calls 'road salad'.
- Off the bike, I've known him to eat up to 60 bananas in a day and he was World Durian Eating Champion (durian is the national fruit of Thailand) in '05 and '07.
- One thing I most remember Harley for but don't thank him is for taking me and 35 others up a 3 km hill with a vertical gain of 640 metres. The average was just over 20% and the steepest section was 25%. There is no feeling like riding at sub 35 rpm in a 39 x 23 just to stop the bike from falling over as you crest the top.

At Tour Down Under time, the pro teams are on the lookout for local Adelaide riders who can show them where to train, but of course the locals need to be able to keep up. So Harley has been in demand recently. Here's a clip of Harley with the Caisse d'Epargne boys. Check out his bamboo bike frame.

http://au.youtube.com/watch?v=X5HjL7yMc_U



Alpine Classic

As some of you know, I spent most of '08 off the bike recovering from a nasty crash in late '07. In early November '08 I was back on the bike and looking for the motivation to get back into some kind of shape. As a cyclist, my limited talents have always been at the shorter, speedier end of things so I thought I would do what doesn't come naturally and train up for the late January, 200 kms, Alpine Classic that starts and finishes in Bright, a picturesque town nestled in a valley in the Victorian Alps.

The Alpine is not a race, though you could be forgiven for thinking so, but an Audax trial. 2,500 riders take part over various distances from 75 kms to the full 200kms. There are 4 major climbs: Tawonga Gap 10 kms, Falls Creek 33 kms, reverse Tawonga Gap 7 kms and Mt Buffalo 31 kms. I went down with S.C.C club mate Steve Berveling and Hiddo Lambers Heerspink who is visiting from Holland.

Pics of the accomplices below. Hiddo is the curly haired one and Steve is the one with 3 smiling faces of which only one is his. I'm the hairless one.



We started just before dawn and rode the 25 kms out to bottom of Tawonga Gap in a bunch about 400 strong which is kind of addictive. To maintain your position in the bunch, you need to constantly be moving forward and shoving your front wheel into any gap that it will fit into. Sort of like a giant, attacking crit but not as fast. Hiddo is a 184cm, 65 kg climbing freak and exactly half my age, so when I went over the summit of Tawonga in the front group just behind Hiddo, I was pretty happy. Hiddo punctured early in the descent and then found that his pump was dead. Steve B arrived to help and his pump wasn't much better. Steve was surprised that he could stay with Hiddo up Falls Creek, but as it turned out, Hiddo rode the entire climb with less than 50 psi in his rear tyre. He was able to get a working track pump at the check point at the top.

Meanwhile I was getting shelled from the front group during the middle of the Falls Creek climb. I followed every wheel and pulled every trick but no amount of 'racecraft' can make up for old age and lack of talent. Falls Creek is a beautiful climb in the sense that it is cool rainforest. The first 10 kms is undulating, the next 10 kms is solid climbing and the last 10 kms to the top is a slog.

I didn't see Steve or Hiddo on the descent and found out first hand about the dreaded undulations in the few kms between the bottom of the Falls Creek descent and the start of the return over Tawonga Gap. The problem is that you spend 30 minutes descending with barely any pressure on the pedals and then hit short, sharp undulations on the 'flat' between the 2 climbs. What can you do?

Just ignore how powerless your legs feel and keep pedaling seems to be the only answer.

It took a few kms to get the legs going again; just in time to hit Tawonga. This is the steep side and I lost more ground going up. At the top I got together with a monster South African rugby forward and we did enough shouting to get a bunch going on the descent. That was the good part; overtaking cars and plenty of riders on the twisting descent. At the bottom, about half of our bunch remained and we steamed back to Bright into a slight headwind at 45 km/h. The monster and I were doing something like half the work and he wouldn't stop whingeing about how hard done by he was to be following the wheel of "Such a skinny, undernourished excuse for a bike rider who isn't big enough to provide me with any protection"

My replies were along the lines of "If you shut up and keep pedaling Fat Boy, you'll do it easily" That's the polite version anyway. He was NOT fat at all and told me as we entered Bright that if I was big enough to represent any kind of a challenge, he would invite me off the bike to sort out our differences.

Conveniently, I had to pull off at that time to refill bidons in the accommodation we were staying in, which was located on the course. I was leaving several minutes later when who should arrive but Hiddo, full of fire and brimstone because of his 'mechanical' and wanting to ride like a madman to salvage his hill climbing reputation. He told me that Steve was several minutes back. I left him and headed for Mt Buffalo expecting Hiddo to pass me somewhere on the climb.

This is where it got 'interesting' for me. I have had no functioning posterior cruciate or medial ligaments in my left knee since 1973. I've got very large VMO's and the left one more or less holds my left knee together. This is the injury that got me into cycling 36 years ago and I can only remember having a problem with it on the bike twice in that time. The third time was as I hit the start of the Buffalo ascent.

I thought about turning around and going back to Bright because it bloody well hurt, but didn't feel like explaining fifty times to fifty people why I didn't finish and so just rode on, slowly, using more or less one leg. That's a pain in the backside way to ride up a 31km climb in 36C degree heat and not one I want to repeat. BUT I caught my South African friend who was doubly peeved to be caught by an aging, undernourished something or other (he slipped into Afrikaans when he was swearing) riding and we rode a lot of the way together. My 5' 11", 70 kilo, one legged speed, was the approximate equivalent of his 6'5", 115 kg, no fat, 2 legged speed while carting all that muscle up the grade. By the time we reached the top, we were friends and his name is Jannie. He was suffering terribly in the heat. By the checkpoint at the top, my right leg was visibly 10% larger than the left leg; full of blood and feeling swollen from being overworked up the climb. But I felt alive. Jannie looked like death.

But where was Hiddo?.

He'd punctured again and rode Buffalo with a semi deflated rear tyre just as he had Falls Creek!

My South African friend dropped me on the descent as I couldn't pedal fast enough to make up for his 45kg weight advantage. I got into a small bunch at the bottom and we picked him up but he was totally 'gone' and couldn't hold a wheel anymore. A very big boy for a ride like the Alpine.

I was damned glad to see the finish and enjoy a couple of Belgian Dubbels from the Bright Brewery, conveniently located at the finish line.

And Steve?

The quiet achiever! He finished just behind Hiddo after a drama free day and a good time was had by all. None of us suffered any lasting psychological or physical damage and will probably saddle up for it again at some stage. If you want an alternative to the Tour Down Under or the Jindabyne training camps next January, enter the Alpine. It is a beautiful but challenging ride and well worth the trip.

A few statistics – Distance: 202 kms; Riding Time 7 hours 19 minutes (plus pit stops, bidon refills and handing in cards at checkpoints) Vertical gain: 4035 metres; Average gradient 4%; Distance uphill: 98 kilometers; Water drunk: 8 x 600 ml bidons for 4.8 litres; Food consumed on bike: 2400 calories; Water poured over head: 3 litres – most of it when riding up Buffalo.