

NAKED ROAD RASH

by
Rich Dixon

Some stories simply shouldn't make us laugh. We know it's socially incorrect to chuckle at another's misfortune, but we do it anyway. This is such a tale, and it's not my fault if you find humor in accidental adversity.

Most of what follows it true—as far as I know.

Horsetooth Reservoir overlooks the Colorado Front Range city of Fort Collins. The switchback route leading to the reservoir offers access to the foothills, so it's a popular tourist destination and a heavily used bicycle route. Ignoring a variety of pleasant, safe, easy trails within the city, any cyclist worth the title



Steep and sharp curves--FUN!

routinely climbs this narrow road. Despite a minimal bike lane and virtually non-existent shoulder, it's the gateway to picturesque destinations in Buckhorn Canyon, Masonville, Big Thompson Canyon, Lory State Park, and Rist Canyon.

Hand cyclists aren't immune from this local version of insanity. Fort Collins is home to several accomplished wheelchair athletes, most notably world-class wheeler Steve Ackerman. These amazing athletes frequent the steep, arm-numbing ascents and thrilling, brake-burning descents above our fair city. Our current saga centers on an unfortunate episode during one of those high-speed plunges.



It's a LONG way down

And remember that it's ESPECIALLY inappropriate to chuckle at the misfortune of a dedicated athlete on a hand cycle.

Personally, I've accomplished only the initial ascent to the reservoir. The one-mile, six per cent grade provides plenty of challenge for a C-7 quad, especially an old

bald guy with enough sense to recognize that steep, uncontrolled, curving descents are a potential cause of C-7 quads in the first place. I'm content simply to complete the climb to the dam, absorb the panoramic view of the city and the mountains from Wyoming to Pike's Peak, and watch sailboats skim across icy water while I enjoy a snack. I'm even happier to arrive safely at the bottom and return home with no additional disabilities.

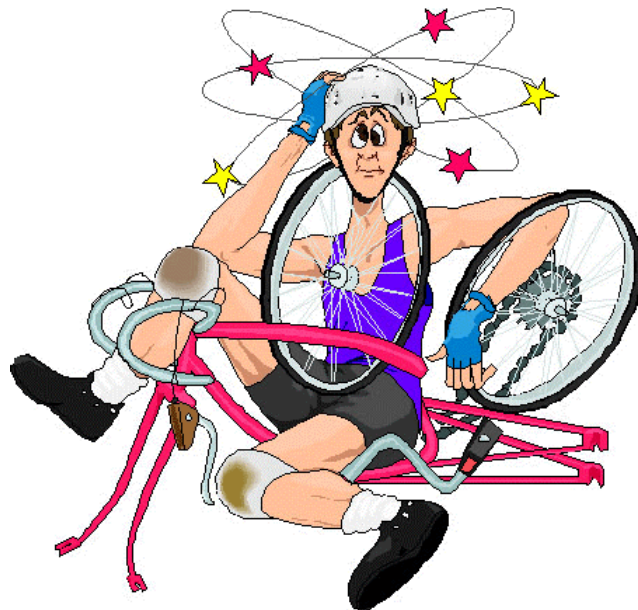


A great view at the top

A friend (we'll call him "Mike") sat atop this hill a few years back. "Mike" climbs hills like this fairly easily, and on this particular occasion he neared the end of a routine foothills excursion. Like every regular rider, he looked forward to the sharp final descent, particularly the switchback that provides an especially exciting twist when you refuse to touch the brakes to diminish precious momentum.

There's an especially keen sense of speed in a low-slung hand cycle that suspends your backside mere inches above the pavement. Literally being able to touch the road as it roars past at more than forty miles per hour creates an enhanced adrenaline rush, and it's tempting to relish the excitement and forget the danger posed by a small pothole or some other unexpected obstacle. How is it that wheelchair athletes seem oblivious to the fact that excess speed might not be advisable for folks who are ALREADY using wheelchairs?

So Mike surveyed the scenic overlook one last time, then pushed forward and felt cool air begin to rush past his face. He of course wore a helmet along with a tee shirt and shorts. And everything would have been fine, except that at the most inopportune moment he experienced what cyclists euphemistically call a "mechanical incident." That harmless-sounding description doesn't quite capture the instant desperate sense of panic associated with unforeseen high-speed equipment failure.



So one moment Mike savored the exhilarating ride and then, without warning, the thrill vanished. Instead of roaring along the road with wind whistling in his ears, he suddenly rolled, bounced, and skidded ON the road. First blacktop, then gravel, and finally scrub brush peeled skin and clothing from his body until he ultimately slid to a stop in a pile of thorny weeds—clothed in nothing but socks and cycle helmet.

Here's the part where we aren't supposed to laugh, because what's funny about a crash at that sort of speed? But it's

okay—nobody’s watching as you read, and you know I wouldn’t be telling a story that entailed long-term serious injury.

A quick inventory revealed no apparent critical damage to anything other than bike and pride, but he now faced a “thorny” dilemma. He needed to crawl several yards to his mangled cycle to retrieve his cell phone. Concern wavered between bleeding road rash and the prospect of crawling buck-naked through thistles, sharp rocks, and assorted bugs and small animals. Neither helmet nor socks seemed to offer much useful protection for this unappealing trek.

Particulars of that prickly excursion are probably best left to the imagination. Frankly, I don’t even want to visualize the details, though he did encounter one lucky break. Along the way he managed to retrieve a significant remnant of his shirt, allowing him to retain some small degree of dignity when passing motorists stopped to offer assistance.

That scene creates its own amusing mental image. I’m actually amazed that someone stopped. Would you pause next to a guy crawling along in the weeds wearing only a cycle helmet and socks?

All’s well that ends well. The road rash healed, and as far as I know the thorns, thistles, and wildlife left no lingering after-effects.

As I said at the beginning, some stories just should not evoke laughter. We really ought to be more sensitive.

I won’t tell if you don’t.

Rich Dixon is a motivational speaker and author of *RELENTLESS GRACE: God's Invitation To Give Hope Another Chance*.

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