
SEVENTY-FOUR

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USA! USA!

OF MICE AND MOUNTAIN MEN

HUNTER AND THE LEVO

THIS IS JUST A TASTE—A SMALL, SATISFYING SPOONFUL OF WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO FOR THE PAST SIX MONTHS. IT DOES NOT AIM TO OVERWHELM OR OVERSTUFF, BUT RATHER GET THE JUICES FLOWING FOR MORE...OF EVERYTHING. MORE ADVENTURES, MORE TIME IN THE WOODS, MORE STORIES SHARED WITH FRIENDS, AND ABOVE ALL, MORE FUN WITH BIKES. WE NOW INVITE YOU TO SIT BACK AND ENJOY THE FLAVORS THAT HAVE INSPIRED US.



IN 1974, OUR STORY BEGAN. EVERY TIME YOU RIDE, YOU KEEP IT GOING.

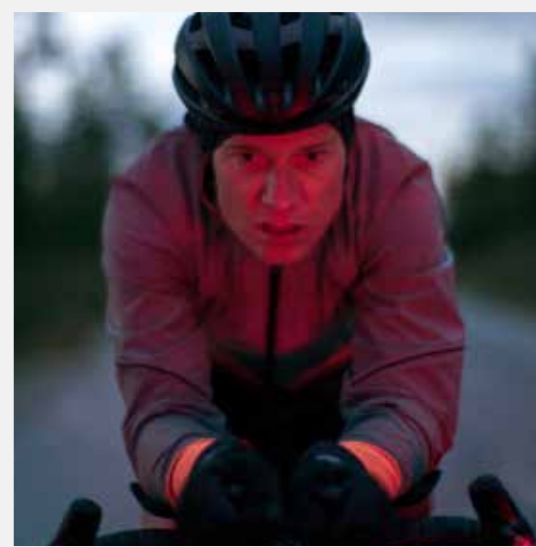


NO SLEEP 'TIL SMYGEHAMN

The Sverigetempot. At ten-years-old, this 2,100-kilometer brevet is an absolute beast of a ride. While simple enough in concept—go to the top of Sweden and ride to the bottom as fast as you can to make the time cutoff—it's completely unforgiving in its execution. This is an event where bodies rebel against the relentless pace; daylight seems to stretch well past midnight (because it does); and sleep becomes a stranger barely seen. And it all adds up to a simple truth: if you plan on lining up at the start, you'd better choose a bike that you love to ride, because you're going to be spending a lot of time with it.

Riding the Sverigetempot was always Erik Nohlin's dream, and as the designer of the Sequoia he jumped at the opportunity to finally turn this dream to reality. With co-worker Rita Jett and childhood friend Kristian Hallberg by his side, the team rolled out from the start (Riksgränsen), and arrived at the southern-most point of Sweden (Smygehamn), 156 hours after they began. This time was well under the 177-hour cutoff. Challenge accepted, challenge crushed.





SEQUOIA

1,000 DECISIONS. PROPERLY MADE



USA! USA!

American crowds are ignited, the cheer cries out. Megan Guarnier is again the National Champion and with it, she instantly qualifies for the Olympic team. Stars and Stripes. The chance to line up for the once-every-four-years opportunity. This is what it's all about. The pride is there for everyone to see. This is a woman chasing her dreams with every ounce of courage and conviction she can muster. It's more than skill. It's determination. It's support. It's living your day-by-day with discipline and grace. And a whole lot of bike time. Boy, you sure do become really good friends with your bicycle when you're a pro.

When she stands on the podium, all you see is the joy. The victory. Sometimes it's easy to forget that this woman is just like us. She lives in the real world. She has a family, a house. There are dishes in the sink, and smells of pancakes and coffee in the morning. And just like us, she dons her kit, clips into the pedals of her race-winning Amira and heads out for a ride. But there's a subtle difference. Her jersey is that of a National Champion. And she seeks more than the solitude and joy of simply riding a bike—though she gets that, too—she is riding with the hope of hearing that chant for many more years to come. USA! USA! This is her American Dream.





AMIRA

THE UNDISPUTED LEADER OF THE ROAD



OF MICE AND MOUNTAIN MEN

The engine of our rental car objects ever so slightly as we begin the initial climb through the lower neighborhoods of Gibraltar Road. Thick with driveways and houses, we poke our way through this narrow, populated corridor on the outskirts of Santa Barbara, CA, before the houses begin to thin out and we arrive at the recently repaved portion of the climb. The road is smooth and knows only one direction—up.

As we begin our slow, skyward crawl in earnest, it's as though all three of us collectively lean forward in the car to crane our necks upward and to the right. Our eyes trace the line of the road up at a nasty angle, and follow it to where it disappears around a stark, far-up corner. A silence cocoons the car.

“Holy shit,” someone says, finally. “This is a beast.”



It's not that we've never climbed steep things on bicycles, it's more that the higher we go—the farther we grind up and see what's ahead on this mountaintop finish of Stage Three of the Amgen Tour of California—the more we can't help but think: They're going to race up this? This is going to hurt.

CRAZY WITH A SIDE OF CRAZY “How you feeling?” I ask, peering out the window of the mini-van as our rider, Andrew Firestone, rolls to a halt. He's about to ride this short section of Gibraltar again, for the third time this afternoon. He shrugs. Chuckles.

“Actually, I'm feeling pretty good,” he says, and I sense a little surprise in his voice. He'd told me earlier that he'd been worried about his knee—that the small, healing tears in his meniscus might flare up and kill this day. “But there's no pain at all,” he says.

You may recognize the name. Andrew Firestone's great-grandfather founded Firestone Tires, and his family has a long history in winemaking—an industry Andrew was “born and raised in” until launching his own hospitality enterprise in 2014. But maybe it's the face you recognize as The Bachelor from way back in Season Three? Today, though, he's just a cyclist like the rest of us, staring at the ominous face of Gibraltar and getting ready to punch it. As it happens, Gibraltar is practically in his backyard—it's only fair he should ride it.

It should be noted that in getting Andrew to climb this mountain, we're not sacrificing a total cycling beginner to the climbing gods. And while he describes himself as a mediocre cyclist, the facts don't really back that up—he's competed in several triathlons and finished his first half-Ironman just last year. But Gibraltar? On a phone call earlier in the week, he'd confessed he'd never actually climbed to the top of it. “I'll do pieces of it [but] to really go out and ride it takes a certain degree of crazy.”

“It's a narrow, nasty little road,” he says, walking us through his history with it and how he usually warms up a bit on Tucker's Grove first. “You get on the 192, and then onto Gibraltar, and it just kind of depends on what kind of mood you're in. If you're really full of piss and vinegar, you try and go up and do a couple of miles up there, but it's brutal. It doesn't let up.”

No. It most certainly does not let up.

“How are you feeling?” A grin, a shrug, and we continue on. Welcome to Crazy Town.



PURE, NATURAL, RAW INGREDIENTS Some climbs are internationally known—ones for the bucket list, with dossiers and fact sheets. But after seeing Gibraltar during the Queen Stage of the 2016 Amgen Tour of California, this climb may just get penciled in on some of those lists. It's a raw and naked climb, relentlessly carving its way through canyons, slicing back and forth with hooks and squiggles.

We'd scouted it around lunchtime. Everyone mentioned the sunset and the views, but right now, there's only fog.

"SOMETIMES YOU GET THIS EPIC-LOOKING FOG IN THE MORNING BEFORE NOON. IT USUALLY BURNS OFF BY THE AFTERNOON, BUT THAT KIND OF MAKES IT MYSTERIOUS. THERE'VE BEEN TIMES WHEN WE'VE CLIMBED IT AND YOU CAN'T SEE MORE THAN A CAR LENGTH IN FRONT OF YOU." - Ryan Ung, route scout for the Tour of California

Earlier in the week, I'd spoken to Ryan Ung, a real route scout for the Tour of California. Having never seen the road, we needed to get some intel on what to expect.

"It starts in the center of town. You go by the iconic mission, and from there on, it's only uphill for the next 12 km" he says, talking us through the finale of this 167.5-kilometer stage. "There's only one spot where it really lets up, and it's about 8% average the whole way. You might get spots of 6%, and then the rest is 10%, and that's what averages it out to eight. You're never on a straight road, you're always kind of winding and you'll get a view on [both] your right and your left. So if there's wind, it's not really helping you at any point." There's a slight pause before he adds: "There's nowhere to hide."

Climbing is the pursuit of craft. There are those who are naturally gifted at it, yet seek to apply it with surgical precision, and those who yearn to learn its mysterious secrets and perfect their own style. It's that perfect blend of cadence and rhythm. It can be scientific and precise—measured, methodical. Tweaking the ingredients for the perfect recipe to win the day.

Sounds a lot like the beer making process...

BEER BEFORE GLORY Gibraltar Road sits comfortably in Santa Barbara's 805 area code. It would be an easy enough leap to say, "Hey, 805 is a beloved local beer. Let's talk about

how cyclist's love beer" and be done with it. But in exploring the subject of beers and Firestone Walker Brewery (Andrew's brother Adam is one of the founders) a second connection emerged—that of obsession. Obsession with craft. Obsession with details. Obsession with the relentless pursuit of perfection.

Firestone Walker Brewery, with its flagship location in Paso Robles, has a pretty simple ethos: Beer before glory. And while that may seem to be the reverse for cyclists when it comes to thinking of the amber liquid, it's an ethos that rings true for riders and bicycle builders alike. Or to put it another way—you really don't want to take the risk of a wild yeast monster getting in and wrecking all your flagship beers. You want to keep them separated, so it's only natural that these beers should end up in the warehouse equivalent of the state's largest naughty chair.

Beer geeks are much like bike geeks, and when the tasting begins, the sheer obsession these guys have for beer really hits you. It's easy to get swept up in their love for beer. Flavor has never sounded so rich. Stories come one after another, and are only halted to go sample some beer straight from the barrel in the taproom. Process becomes sexy and unpredictability, electric.





And then it's back to the tasting room to sample some of the rowdy wild beers. Some of these experimental beers are a twist on the Belgian "sour beer" tradition. Others are just twisted. One thing is clear—they're all pretty delicious.

It's such a free-form interpretive dance of beer making—the total flipside to the main brewery—yet somehow, there's a perfect balance to it. From Sour Jim and Jeffers point-of-view, you just have to be prepared to gamble everything and see why you get. You have to be prepared to get wild.

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE The fog is back on Gibraltar, albeit much higher up than before. We're rewarded with a clear view, right up until the rocky section of the climb, where an eerie mist rolls over the lip of the road to make its way up. Andrew is also making his way up, and I hear him breathing as he methodically taps out a steady cadence behind us. It's not long before Andrew has to stand to dispatch the pain of the grade and muscle on up.

"Ooowheel!" says Erick, driving slowly behind, "He's really working now!" We all kind of snicker a bit at that. Watching someone else suffer on a climb where you know it has to be hurting is a little funny, right? Ok, it's cruel.

"NO. NOBODY DOES. I MEAN, LITTLE SPANISH MEN DO, BUT NOT 185 LB., 6FT TALL FATHERS OF THREE. THEY DON'T." - Andrew Firestone, on if he likes climbing

Climbing is awful. Climbing is wonderful. To be good at it, you either have to be genetically blessed with a supreme mix of ideal physical characteristics that help you fly effortlessly up mountains; or have that unpredictable wild-card element that allows you to roll the dice, ignore your limitations, and just go all-in for the win. A victory on Stage Three of the Tour of California is probably going to take a little bit of both—the scientist and the wildling.

Andrew Firestone's victory comes as he makes the final push to where Gibraltar meets with a E. Camino Cielo Road. For a brief moment, the sun parts the fog cloud to shine a beam of light down on his moment of glory, and he throws his hands in the air. His ascent of Gibraltar is complete—the victory salute seals it.

"That last part," he says, getting off the bike and breathing deeply, "seemed way steeper."

Earlier, as Andrew had been turning around to make another pass of a highly photogenic corner, I'd poked my head out the window and softly planted this seed in his ear: "You should make this your goal."

"To climb this?" he'd said, and made a quiet, scoffing sound. But I saw it. As he leaned over to rest on the bars, an idea match struck toward a Future Goals fire. I swore I heard the "maybe I should?" cogs turning in his head. Because that's what a taste of something like this does. It gives us that sliver of faith in ourselves. Faith that we can get the formula right. That we can crush mountains with the right mix of brute strength, daring swagger, and gentle subtlety that won't crush the tiny mouse of confidence in our hand. Faith that one day, we can concoct that perfect climbing brew. Now let's go get that beer.

TARMAC PRO RACE DISC

THE COMPLETE RACE BIKE



HUNTER AND THE LEVO

MATT HUNTER IS THE RIDER WE ALL WANT TO BE. A TRAILBLAZER IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE, HE'S ALL FLAWLESS RIDE STYLE AND RUGGED CHARM. HE'S ALSO THE LAST PERSON WHO NEEDS HELP GETTING UP A TRAIL. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE POWER TO RIDE MORE TRAILS? SURELY HE'D BE DOWN WITH THAT? TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION, AND TO GAUGE HOW TRAIL RIDERS WOULD REACT TO THE NEW TURBO LEVO FSR, WE SENT HIM TO FINALE LIGURE, ITALY, TO FIND OUT.





MATT HUNTER | AMBUSH HELMET | SOSPEL, FRANCE

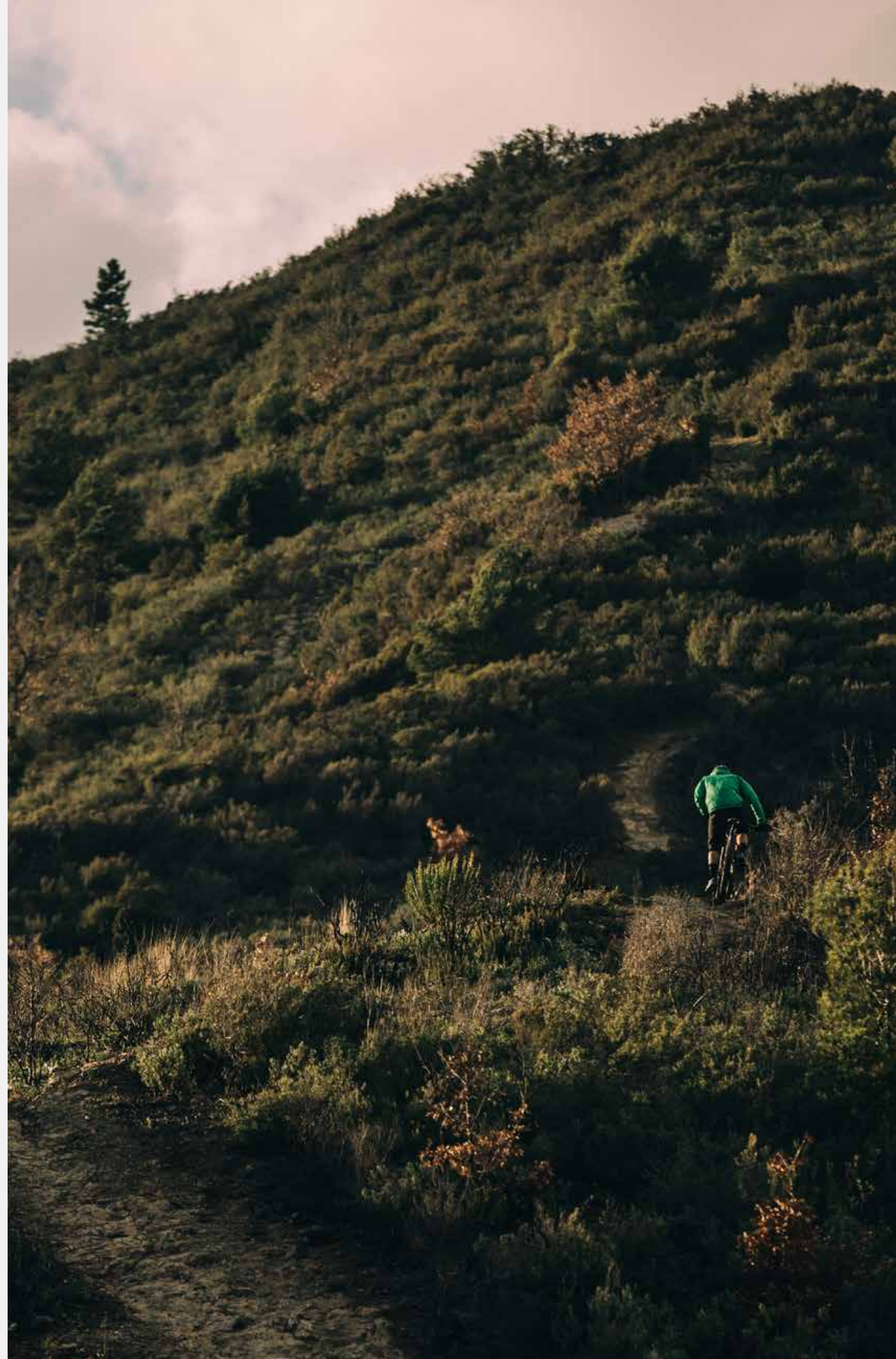
“TO BE HONEST, I KIND OF WANTED TO HATE IT.”

Matt Hunter has never been one for pulling punches. He speaks like he rides—with integrity and whole lot of laid-back attitude. So while his initial reaction may have been to dismiss the Turbo Levo without a second thought, he instead chose another path. Matt Hunter chose to indulge his curiosity and base his final Turbo Levo verdict on the only thing he has ever known and trusted: The ride.

The days progressed on the trails in Italy, and Matt found the stigma of “e-bikes” washing away. “In the mountain bike world, they’re looked down upon as [sic] cheating,” he said, “and that may be true depending on how you choose to look at it. But with a different perspective, it’s also a really fun bike to ride and you can go farther than you could before.”

As mountain bikers, we see it much the same—there are preconceived notions, sure, but then we designed the Turbo Levo to surpass them. And what you’re left with is simple and to the point—the Turbo Levo gives you the power to ride more trails.

After the trip, we asked him for some parting words on his experience. “You have to try it. I mean, you can feel however you like to feel about it, but it’s really fun to ride. I’m often told by people ‘I’d love to ride trails like you, but it’s just too flat where I live’ and my answer was always ‘Well, I guess you have to move.’ But I guess, now, you can get a Levo and shred the prairies like it’s a big hill!”



S-WORKS TURBO LEVO

THE POWER TO RIDE MORE TRAILS





TIME TO RIDE

