
SEVENTY-FOUR

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SIMPLE PLEASURES

When it comes to the subcultures of cycling, there's always the temptation to judge. Large men in skin-tight suits; full-grown adults grabbing bikes and roughing it in the open air despite having perfectly good beds just a few miles away; and mud-soaked souls suffering in what look like the wastelands—what's not to judge? Fortunately, when it comes to bikes, there's more that unites us than divides us. There will always be that simple connection between the earth, the bike, and us. It is pure, uncomplicated, and holy.

In this issue, witness the simple joy of this connection writ large on the face of Matt Hunter's son as they explore the trails together. Revel in the bare-bones ritual of bikepacking on a work night—an act that's as much about recharging as it is about riding—and perhaps get inspired to plan a campout of your own? Fixed-gear fans will salivate over the creative love and care bestowed upon four one-of-a-kind Red Hook Crit bikes, while tread-junkies get a behind-the-scenes glimpse of our new mountain tire factory. Heard the story about Fausto Coppi stopping for coffee during Milan-San Remo? We'll explore the connection between this legendary tale, cycling, and pastry, and round out the issue with a look at the passion behind cyclocross.

Yay, bikes!

'74

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RED HOOK CRIT

It's a race beloved by many, where skinsuits reign and sheer leg strength is used for both going fast and slowing down. No brakes, no problems.

To celebrate the joy that is the Red Hook Crit, four of our designers were given the task of personalizing a bike and gear for each city of the Red Hook Crit—Brooklyn, Barcelona, London, and Milano.

BROOKLYN NO.9

The first Red Hook Crit—held in Red Hook, Brooklyn in 2008 to celebrate a birthday—was a humble affair, with just a handful of riders and spectators. Today, it's morphed into a true institution, with qualifying times and a field capped at 250. It's an unsanctioned event that focuses on pure speed rather than endurance, and attracts riders who like their road races "alley cat" flavored, with hairpin bends and true technical skill needed for a chance to win. Loved by spectators and riders alike, the energy is pure street—the perfect environment for an artist to play.

McKenzie Sampson, Apparel and Technical Graphics Designer at Specialized, has always gravitated towards the street-art vibe of Brooklyn. When approaching this project, he took his personal style and love of graffiti, and mixed it with the emotions cyclists often feel when racing bikes: the sense of "fight or flight," of the mind fighting with the body to get through.

The frames, shoes, helmets, and skinsuits—one set white with black graphics, the other reversed—feature a collage of icons and drawings that appear to be pulled straight from Sampson's sketchbook. The bikes and helmets had their designs applied directly by hand, and are true one-offs.



"WE DEFINITELY HAVE TO TRY EXTREMELY HARD TO MAKE STUFF THAT'S COOL AND RELEVANT TO THE EVERYDAY PERSON. IT TAKES A LOT OF RESEARCH AND A LOT OF TIME BUILDING GRAPHICS AND INSPIRATIONS AND THINGS THAT REPRESENT THAT. IT'S LIKE A LITTLE PIECE OF ME, I GUESS." – McKenzie Sampson

BARCELONA NO.4

"IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS, THERE IS ALSO OPPORTUNITY."

While it's doubtful Sun Tzu ever raced a fixed-gear bicycle, this well-known line from "The Art of War" could easily have been written about the chaotic experience of finding yourself in the middle of the pack at a Red Hook Crit (RHC). There's a frenzy of activity, colors flashing by, and the confusion of every rider wanting to make that break and steal the race. There is opportunity here—you just need to know when to strike.

"I call it Crit Camo," says Specialized Industrial Designer Brian "Swiz" Szykowny, describing the theme of his RHC Barcelona designs—a colorful camouflage that's as chaotic as the race itself. "It's confusing and it blends in with everyone else's crazy kits,

but it also doesn't. So you're floating in the pack [but] if your teammate needs to know where you're at, they can spot you from a mile away."

When it comes to crit racing, you must always be able to see your allies in the field.

"I dug around for some 'Art of War' quotes to put on there, because crit racing is a lot like a battle," he says, describing why he chose the particular quote that appears on the inside collar of the kit riders Colin Strickland and Aldo Ilesic (Allez-Allez Specialized) will be wearing. "In the midst of chaos there is also opportunity, and that's also a little bit of like our company."



The RHC Barcelona bikes, kits, helmets, and shoes seek to create the effect of hiding in plain sight” during the race, but “Crit Camo” isn’t just a random collection of shapes. In finalizing his design, Szykowny combined three different military camouflage patterns: two German—Rain Pattern and Plane Tree—and a third splinter camo called M90. With a nod to the Spanish artist, Gaudi, and his mosaic style, Brian proceeded to blend all three together to create a kind of wild and outrageous color explosion. It is, to put it bluntly, loud.

“It actually started out a little bit more complicated and it got toned down as it developed,” says Brian, explaining how the



“THE RED HOOK BIKES WERE THE MOST CHALLENGING MASKING PROJECT I’VE DONE ON A BIKE. THIS WAS 16 LAYERS OF PAINT WITH 6 DIFFERENT MASKS OVER ALL THAT, SO IT TURNED INTO A HUGE MASKING ORDEAL.” –Brian Szykowny,

Industrial Designer, Specialized

color palette was chosen. “There is a little bit of color theory going on. Some triadic colors, so they complement each other on the color wheel, and at the end, I did a kind of Hail Mary pass added the blue, which is a complementary color to the orange.”

The problem with the colors—or challenge, really—was always going to be in the sheer level of work required to get them all on the bikes. “The painting is extensive for something like this, but I just honestly wanted a challenge in the paint booth.”

Looking at the behind the scenes photos in the booth, it seems he got his wish.

LONDON NO.2

What do you get when you take the U.K’s Royal family, Buckingham Palace, and the Crown Jewels, and mix them with Alice in Wonderland and a deck of cards? A collection (bike, kit, helmet, and shoes) that’s ready to deliver the royal treatment at RHC London No.2.

When Specialized Footwear Designer, Jon Takao, started thinking of the concept for his London-themed Red Hook Crit project, he focused first on the city itself and the icons people would recognize. Through this process, he arrived quite naturally at the front gates of Buckingham Palace and the Royal family. Elements from the Crown Jewels Collection, plus the actual black and gold of the gates to the palace, worked their way into the design of the bike and shoes. The final jewel in the project’s crown came once Takao began considering what it means to race in RCH’s wild and cutthroat format.

“I started thinking about the race and that half the time, it’s such a gamble. Racing in general is a lot of luck, positioning, and then fake-it-till-you-make it,” says Takao. With the idea of “the great gamble”

“I PULLED THE DETAILING OUT OF THE GATES [OF BUCKINGHAM PALACE] AND PUT THAT ON THE BIKE IN A REFLECTIVE PIECE, AND I FOUND A SWORD IN THE CROWN JEWELS COLLECTION, AND THAT’S WHERE THAT DETAILING AROUND ALL THE LUGS CAME FROM.” –Jon Takao, Industrial Designer, Specialized



MILANO NO.7

Milan is more than just the location for Red Hook Crit: Milano No.7, it’s an inspirational place for designers of all walks of life. Fashion, architecture, art—you name it, it’s there. But as far as designer Erik Nohlin’s concerned, the best thing to come out of that fair city is not Prada, Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, or Kartell, it’s Ettore Sottsass, “the only real punk rocker the field of design has ever had.” Never heard of Sottsass? Prepare to take your lesson, because to get to the soul of Nohlin’s Red Hook Crit Team Allez-Allez collection, you must first meet the man who stoked that fire.

Ettore Sottsass, an Italian architect and designer, founded the post modernistic artist collective called the Memphis Group in Milano in 1981. In the coming decades, this group reshaped the field of design by breaking all the rules, questioning everything, and basically turning the whole scene upside down. Their particular style of design elicited the same kind of reaction that most punk music does—it thrilled some people and created an intense sense of loathing in others. An article in the SF Chronicle once summed up Memphis as “a school of design that was a riot of color and materials that often overwhelmed a piece’s original intent, a shotgun wedding between Bauhaus and Fisher-Price.”

“ANY BREAKER OF RULES IS MY FRIEND.”
–Erik Nohlin, Industrial Designer, Specialized

in his head, Takao took the next logical step and arrived at a Royal Flush to tie it back to the original idea. After choosing the King as the featured player, he began to research detailing for design elements, and in the process, he found a way to create the final piece in the collection—one that would round out the theme.

“The Queen’s guards in Alice in Wonderland are playing cards, so that become the inspiration for the kit.”

With the black and gold of the bike (with reflective details that will come to vibrant life when hit by the flash of cameras), the intensity of the kit, and the regal audaciousness of the shoes, Takao has created a collection fit for Kings.



Whether or not you agree with that assessment is a moot point, because from Nohlin's POV, "Any breaker of rules is my friend, and Ettore has always been there as an inspiration for me in my work, not so much his physical work in the past, more his philosophy, method, and curiosity." This was the starting point for the RHC Milano collection of bike, helmet, kit, and shoes.

"In the early stages of the Red Hook Crit: Milano design process," explains Nohlin, "I studied the massive amount of work Ettore contributed to the world and decided that my concept would be a tribute to him and his brilliant legacy. A big 'thank you' for all the inspiration and for making product design less boring for us all." Ettore is, as Nohlin puts it, "one of the most important and influential designers, architects, and artists the world has ever seen."

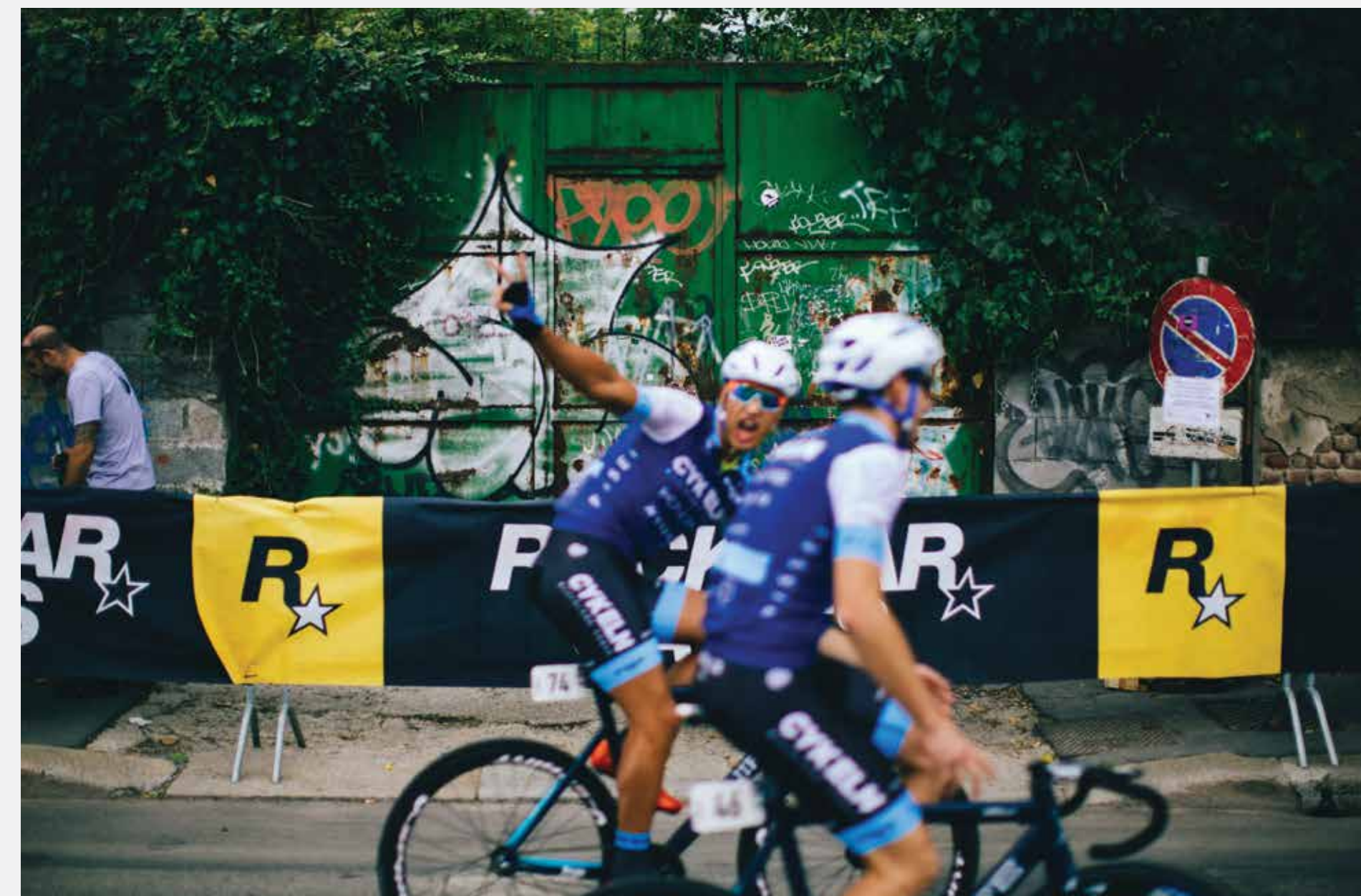
"The way Memphis gave the middle finger to the establishment has been a great inspiration to me as a designer," he continues. "By simply having more fun while tearing down walls, Sottsass was able to create so much confusion that people simply had no choice but to like him, mostly because he made people insecure and confused."

"I naturally have a more Scandinavian approach to design. Toned down, natural, form follows function, and all that. Pretty much the opposite perspective from what Sottsass later work is known for." As for Nohlin himself: "I certainly have a lot of Sottsass-type fun on the inside and to let some of it out during this design process has been refreshing. A tribute to Ettore is a playful and weird concept I hope is true to his legacy of breaking the rules while having all the fun, and in the end, creating a lot of confusion."

Team Allez-Allez's Colin Strickland and Aldo Ilesic will ride Nohlin's collection at RHC Milano No.7 and are ready to channel a little punk attitude of their own, confuse the competition, and turn the race on its head—just as the late, great Sottsass would have wanted it.

"I WANT THE PUBLIC TO LOOK AT THIS BIKE AND THINK 'WTF IS THAT THING?' JUST THE WAY I REACTED

WHEN I FIRST SAW A SOTTASS PIECE IN ART SCHOOL. –Erik Nohlin, Scandinavian Rule Breaker





ROUTE SCOUT: MILAN-SAN REMO

WHEN COPPI STOPPED

Somewhere in the world, at this exact moment, this scene is playing out. A cyclist has entered a café and is fishing money from a plastic baggie while awkwardly tap dancing in the direction of a barista. And just as they're about to order their coffee, their eyes inevitably slide across the contents of a glass display case, right there in front of them. Flaky pastries glisten appealingly under a warm light, muffins the size of toddlers' fists make their presence known, and cookies wait patiently in regimented rows beside them. At this point, calorie consequences will be calculated. Perhaps even gleefully ignored.

"Pastry watts!" they'll say by way of justification, and their ride companions will laugh, teasing: "Is it offseason already?" For the next 15 minutes or so they'll trade ride stories, sip espresso, and relax

at that café until one of them stands and complains about stiff legs. The group will spring into action, donning helmets, gloves, and glasses before rolling away to continue on.

You recognize this scene because the mid- or post-ride café stop is very much a part of cycling culture. But I'll wager not one of you has stopped for a quick espresso during a professional bike race. And certainly not while in the lead of La Primavera—the Milano-San Remo.

According to legend, in 1946, Fausto Coppi stopped and drank a coffee before continuing on to win the longest one-day race on the calendar by a solid 14 minutes. His café of choice that day was Caffè Liguri Pasticceria (now Caffè Pasticceria Piccardo), in Imperia, and it's still giving cyclists their fix to this day.



"I'M SICILIAN AND I LOVE ALL THE PASTRIES COMING FROM MY NATIVE LAND, BUT THE BEST IS FRESH CANNOLI FROM MESSINA. WHEN I GO OUT, I ALWAYS STOP FOR A COFFEE WITH A NICE RUSK COVERED WITH JAM. IN COMO, THERE IS A SICILIAN PASTRY SHOP, BUT IT'S BETTER I DON'T GO TOO OFTEN." –Vincenzo Nibali, Astana

THE LABORATORY The first thing you notice is the smell. It's the kind of aroma the kicks a stomach into an agitated, roiling chorus of "give me that now!" The pastry laboratory (named "laboratory" to differentiate it from the kitchen where meals are prepared), sits directly above the Café Pasticceria Piccardo. It is the birthplace of all the delicious treats customers will enjoy downstairs, and after a few minutes of observing the pastry chefs in action—the weighing of dough, the piping of pastry cream into golden vessels—you can't help agree with the name. There is definitely science going on here.

In the early morning hours, William and Luca, cousins from Naples, work quietly in that harmonious way that only people who know each other well can do. We watch as they calmly remove trays of brioche and focaccia from the oven; put the finishing touches on croissants; and perform the methodical clearing of space after each task is complete. It is a constant and calm flow of movement and activity. They speak their Italian softly, and nod understandingly to each other. Working alongside

them are several assistants, some from culinary schools here to learn the craft from William, the master chef.

Later, Luca prepares the Krapen, a donut destined to be injected with yellow Italian pastry cream, chocolate, or jam, and lovingly sprinkled with sugar. He carries the tray of raw dough into the kitchen to fry in oil, tending to them carefully. The expanding balls are turned gently before Luca visually confirms their readiness and removes them from the oil. The next batch he brings in have some krapen with holes cut in the center. My friend Marco turns to me, laughing as he explains why I've just heard the word "Seeemp-sons" in the middle of an Italian sentence about this ciambella.

"This donut with the hole," he says, pointing to it, "is not so typical here. But after The Simpsons came to Italian TV, people started to come in and ask for a donut like on the show. So, they started to produce these with the hole because of that."

"Ciao Bambini!"

When Maria Teresa Piccardo, arrives upstairs and passes by those toiling away in the laboratory, it's as though a cloud of wise energy has entered the room. Born in 1945, the year before Coppi stopped for that famous coffee, she walks with that quick step chefs often have, born of the constant need for movement in a kitchen. Of checking this and stirring that. In the past year, Maria Teresa has transferred her attentions more to the kitchen and lunch preparations, and less to the pastry side of the business. But her history with Caffè Pasticceria Piccardo—and of that of her sister, Carla who also works downstairs—is long. For generations, it has been in their family. It has been in their blood.

We stand with her in the passageway between the laboratory and the kitchen and chat about the life of the café, mixed with stories of Milan-San Remo gone by.

"She can remember very well," says Marco, translating for me, "the Milano-San Remo in the '50s when she was just a child. This was after the war and there was not a lot of wealth, so the race was a big event for the city of Imperia. She remembers the trucks with all the advertising that came through before the peloton, and of one especially that had free toothpaste samples. At the time, a free sample was not so easy to get, so she remembers very well this day. She says the children went crazy for it."

At the sound of the camera shutters, Maria Teresa smiles and waves it off. There is no translation needed when she says "Photoshop." or the laugh that comes after it. Her energy is infectious, and she becomes all hand gestures and vibrant voice as she continues her stories.

There's a long string of an Italian sentence that never seems to stop, but I recognize a name. Coppi. Now, she is talking of Fausto.

He didn't just come in that one day, she explains. He often stopped in for coffee. And then Maria Teresa asks us a question of her own.

"She is asking," says Marco, "what the link is between cyclists and pastry?"

It's a good question. We'll come back to that.

"EVERY TRAINING RIDE, I HAVE TO STOP FOR COFFEE AND SOME CAKE. IN TRAINING IT'S POSSIBLE, BUT DURING THE RACE IT'S IMPOSSIBLE NOW. FOR ME, THE BEST THING TO EAT IS WITH CHOCOLATE.

CHOCOLATE CAKE IS GOOD." –Peter Sagan, Tinkoff



RELEASE THE KRAPEN The morning crowd is shuffling in and out of Café Pasticceria Piccardo, carefully selecting brioche and focaccia from the display before standing at the counter to eat. People sip cappuccino and kick start their day in that moment, while at the rear of the café, a trio of elderly men sit near a window swapping stories. They have the gentle air of old and familiar friends talking of life, oblivious to the constant flow of people as the morning rush passes through.

Aurora Alku, a server at the pasticceria, endearingly takes us on a tour of the sweet treats in the glass case. She is precise and patient as she describes the ingredients of each, points out the ones most popular with customers and those she, herself, loves, and translating some of the names for me as I taste them. The case is enormous and filled to the brim with rows and rows of bite-sized temptations. This whole area, including the pastry case behind me with the brioche and focaccia, is a danger zone for diets. And we're not even going to mention the ice cream (though I confess Aurora let me taste those, too). But this is why we ride bikes, right? Calorie in, calorie out.

It is time to taste some of the wares from the laboratory. Time for some coffee and conversation of our own. As we sit to drink our cappuccinos and try a selection of pastries, Maria Teresa removes a collection of historical photographs from a worn and much handled paper bag. The early black and white

photographs from Coppi's era elicit smiles—a glimpse of days gone by and a reminder of the pasticceria's past. The Piccardo family legacy.

In Coppi's day, the café was actually in a different location, a mere sprint away on the corner of Piazza Dante. For a century that's where it stayed before moving in 2002 to a bigger, combined space with the Piccadilly restaurant and forming Café Pasticceria Piccardo. Even after moving that short distance along the block, the café retains much of its old charm, thanks to the presence of the original mahogany paneling that lines the long bar, and the lettering on the facades—the Liquoreria, Confetteria, and Pasticceria.

Maria Teresa carefully pulls photographs out one-by-one, describing points of interest as she does. We see photographs of the original location, and images of her mother at the cash register in the '70s ringing up customers, just as Carla and Maria Teresa do today (albeit with a smaller cash register). I bite into the krapen as Marco translates and I'm startled by the softness and sweetness of this treat. It is a pure, sugar-dusted taste bomb. The yellow cream explodes from inside, spurring a frantic motion from me so I don't end up wearing it. This is the kind of taste that makes you say "oh, to hell with how I look eating this, I'm just going to enjoy it." A sugary treat and a cappuccino in an Italian café. Does life get any better than this?

"I AM SUPER IN FAVOR OF A COFFEE BREAK DURING TRAINING—EVEN BETTER IF IT'S WITH A NICE BRIOCHE. IF I'M RIDING A LONG DISTANCE, OR I'M UNDECIDED ON THE RIDE ROUTE, I'LL STOP MORE THAN ONCE FOR A COFFEE. I REALLY LOVE THE PASTRIES, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH FRUITS, BUT IF I HAVE TO CHOOSE ONE, IT'S FOR SURE MASCARPONE, ALSO BECAUSE IT RHYMES WITH MY LAST NAME." —Michele Scarponi, Astana



THE MORE THINGS CHANGE That Fausto Coppi is a legend is not in doubt, and the story of him stopping for coffee—exaggerated or not—only adds another mythical branch to his legend tree. Any search for the details of his stop leads to multiple versions of it. Some accounts have Coppi casually rolling up, resting his bike against a wall, and then heading inside the café to order and drink his coffee at the counter. Others say he slowed and was handed the coffee before he continued on. Regardless of which version you believe, what is generally agreed upon is that it happened.

Next out is a book covering the history of the Milano-San Remo from the year it began until 1949. The photographs showcase a truly romantic period in cycling—the hard and testing conditions from a time when the Turchino was still a gravel road, and there were cycling superheroes such as Alfredo Binda, Gino Bartali, and of course, Fausto Coppi. Just looking at the elegance of their styles, the dirt and grime and toughness evident in the action shots, and even the official poses they made in their photographs—these riders are of a different time and a different place. It pins us to our chairs.

"What's the thing that has changed most for you in these years?"

Maria Teresa smiles and replies simply.

"The world."

"I didn't see it myself," says a Piccardo regular, Umberto Borelli, "but I was watching the race and know people who did. They told me it was so."

Umberto—part of the trio of gentlemen we saw earlier—meets with his friends at the café almost every day, choosing a prime, sun-soaked location near the back of the café to talk, read the news of the day, and drink good coffee. As he comes to join our table to talk of Coppi and days gone by, he removes his hat and runs a hand over his hair for the camera. With an infectious and cheerful grin, he proudly boasts that he has watched every edition of the Milano-San Remo since 1935 (although later confesses he actually missed one in the '90s because he was playing in a bocce competition), and watches from his terrace every year. It has a perfect view as the peloton streams through the Piazza Dante in Imperia.

"IN MY MIND, COPPI MADE THE RIGHT CHOICE GIVEN THE INCREDIBLE ADVANTAGE OVER THE OTHER

RIDERS. IT WOULDN'T BE POSSIBLE TO DO THAT TODAY IN MILAN-SAN REMO." –Michele Scarponi, Astana

The conversation is long and he is not one for allowing Marco to complete translations before he begins speaking again, but the highlights of his story are coming through. He describes the excitement of that time in cycling, the toughness of the riders, and the difference between then and now. Gesturing in the direction of the piazza outside, he describes how back then there was a large bidon in the corner for riders to clean themselves. That sometimes, riders were so dirty from the roads that you couldn't recognize them. And then, of course, there were the rivalries.

"Back then, you were either for Bartali or Coppi," Marco translates, before he turns to me and smiles.

"This guy," he says. "He was for Bartali."

The world has changed. Umberto echoes Maria Teresa's thoughts and describes the shifts he's seen since the days of Coppi and his hero, Bartali.

In the past, he felt the Milano-San Remo really brought people together. This was before TV when there were only radios. Radios were the link to cycling (and, of course, that other great Italian passion, football). Since many people didn't have radios in their homes, they'd gather in the café to listen to the race. Some would even telephone to get a progress report (and football scores). And then in the '50s, along came television. Roadside race attendance dwindled further. For Umberto, that's the biggest change. In pre-TV days, he recalls people being on the Capo Berta at 6am ready to watch a race that wouldn't come through for hours. At 6am, it was already lined with people who'd arrived on buses and had traveled from all over to watch the race live. And now? Now they roll up to watch at 10 o'clock. It's very different. Things have most definitely changed.

But while the way people watch the race may have changed—and television does have benefits beyond live race coverage, allowing people of all generations to tour Italy through their screens—there is one thing that has remained constant: The link between cafés and cyclists.

So finally, we are back to Maria Teresa's question—just what is the connection between cycling and cafés? To the outside observer, it may seem ludicrous. Why would you want to stop in the middle of a sweaty ride to strut around wearing Lycra and awkward shoes, handing a cashier soggy money because you forgot a plastic baggie? You can get coffee at any time. You can buy pastries anywhere.

But cafés are like catnip to cyclists. They're so ingrained into our cycling lives we sometimes alter routes in order to hit a particular café, simply because the beans are better or the croissants are more buttery. In some countries, the café ride is all about the coffee, while in others, there'll be cake or café rides that start and begin at a set coffee shop. There are even stories written for cyclists about café etiquette to ensure we, as a cycling tribe, play nicely in our communities.

Still, this doesn't answer Maria Teresa's question. And while I'm sure many people have their own theories as to the appeal, allow me to humbly offer mine.

Cafés are the great equalizers.

When you stop at a café during a ride, it doesn't matter how good you are or what you've done. It doesn't matter if you're a climbing god or a slug, a Cat 2 looking to upgrade, or a rookie. Man or woman, meanderer or sprinter? Totally irrelevant. Having a bad day or the good sensations? These are all states in the kingdom of cycling, but none of them matter when you have a hot pastry or coffee in your hand. In the kingdom of the café, milling about with our sweet treats and our espresso, sharing a laugh about the ride and every other subject under the sun, and catching joyous rays of sunlight in the spring and huddling together in the winter, we are all equals. No new riders or old, no amateurs or pros, and not even a man currently leading the Milan-San Remo. In that moment, we are just humans, enjoying our coffee before continuing on.

The real question is: Is it offseason yet?!



"I DID NOT KNOW THE STORY OF COPPI STOPPING. I PERSONALLY WOULDN'T HAVE STOPPED COMPLETELY, BUT IF I HAD BEEN OFFERED A COFFEE ALONG THE ROAD I WOULD HAVE SAID YES AS WELL."

–Vincenzo Nibali, Astana

"YOU DON'T NEED TO GO FAR TO CREATE A REAL ADVENTURE FOR A KID.

WE HAVE CAMPED OUT JUST A FEW HUNDRED METERS FROM HOME." –Matt Hunter

LITTLE TRAIL HUNTER

If you learn just one thing from these heartwarming photos it's this—things don't have to be complicated to be fulfilling. A father, a son, some bikes, and a trail are all it takes. Recently, Matt Hunter took his son, Robbie, for a small overnight trip on the outskirts of Kamloops, BC, near where they live. This meandering journey, with time to stop and explore along the way, proves that it's the small things—the simple act of being together and sharing the adventure—that bring us joy. Little Robbie may have it all in front of him as he grows, but you can bet Dad's going to be there to show him the way.

"We ride there because it's close to home and it has nice mellow hills for the Hotwalk," says Matt, explaining the route they chose. We watch as they noodle along mellow roads, Robbie dragging his feet to slow down when he gets a little too much speed, Matt carrying him when it gets a little hilly. It's a trip made of moments we recognize or longed for from our own childhoods, and it's as lovely as it is uncomplicated.

"He's always asking to go bike riding and camping and fishing," says Matt, "So that's what we did."





The Hotwalk, a gift from Specialized after Robbie was born, has already seen plenty of action. "He's been riding it since he was 13 months old [he's now two]. We took the seat off and built some custom padding so it was low enough. He started pushing it around on it as soon as he could walk."

We asked Matt if he had any advice for those who watch this and want to do a trip of their own. "Just do it!" he said. "The trailer is very helpful for carrying enough food and gear to be comfortable, and it leaves room on your back for carrying a two-year-old when the hills are too much."

Some bikes, a mellow trail, a sense of adventure, and hucking the occasional jump as your son cheers you on—it's a simple recipe for adventure anyone can follow.



"I LOVE THE WAY HE GETS EXCITED ABOUT THE LITTLEST THINGS.

"LOOK DAD, IT'S SOME POOP!" –Matt Hunter

FOR THE LOVE OF 'CROSS

NAMUR & HEUSDEN-ZOLDER, BELGIUM
UCI WORLD CUP #5 & #6

They come. Donning their rain boots, puffy jackets, and scarves they arrive in droves, seeking sanctuary in the Temple of Cyclocross. Faces bright against the grey day, they are momentarily subdued, saving their voices for approaching sermon. Scanning the assembled riders, they seek glimpses of their idols—riders they follow from weekend to weekend, race to race, result to result. The air is fat with anticipation. Soon. Soon they will release their urgent cries to the frigid sky, bleating the names of those they worship. They will be loud and boisterous in their revelry; a chanting, waffle-fueled choir rejoicing in the spectacle. They say Belgian cyclocross fans are crazy, but don't all religions look like that to outsiders? Hush. The service is about to begin.

The riders assemble, jostling at the start like loosely bridled horses. With professional road and mountain racing obligations met for the season, they're free to indulge their passion for 'cross and play in the mud, puddles, and snow. In this moment, they are focused and ready, thinking only of this first lap. Of surviving the start. Surviving that first corner. Surviving the chaos. Knowing that should they end up in front, called to the pulpit, they will let their quads do the talking.

The crowd tos-and-fros on course. Like flock of murmuring starlings, they are ensnared by the rhythm of the race and surging toward the action.

"THE FIRST LAP IS ALWAYS ABOUT FIGHTING, GETTING YOUR ELBOWS OUT AND TRYING TO JUST DEFEND YOUR POSITION OR TRYING TO MOVE UP AS FAST AS POSSIBLE. LIKE THE FIRST LAP—SOMETIMES IT'S A LITTLE BIT LIKE A WAR, BUT A NICE WAR." —Christine Majerus, Boels-Dolmans and 'cross addict

Riders pass and for a brief moment, hands are released from toasty jacket pockets to cheer. Mustached men, faces lined with decades of race memories, talk of form and chances. The party goes on. The congregation is united in their ecstasy—they know that soon, a hero will rise.

The collection plate is out and riders' offerings begin to clang into the bowl. Skill. Luck. Fun. Hunger. Contributions are made and a rider is blessed. Who will it be today? There's an overwhelming sense of togetherness in the sand and muck—after all, what is for one is the same for all in these conditions. Lap after lap, riders pull chutes to drift unceremoniously off the pace while others surge on. The herd thins, until finally, it is done and the victorious hands of this week's anointed one are raised. With a puff of relieved air and a cheer from the sidelines, the service is over.

The saying goes that if it's not fun, you're not doing it right, and with all the slow-motion video and epic photography often presented from cyclocross races, it's easy to forget that the primary reason everyone gives for loving it—at all levels—is precisely that. It's fun. Big, playful, competitive fun. It's fun for riders. It's fun for spectators. And who wouldn't love a religion based on that?

Let us pray.

"IF YOU DO AN INTERVIEW AFTER THE RACE, THEY [THE WINNER] ARE PROBABLY GOING TO SAY 'OH, I HAD A LOT OF FUN,' AND THE LAST ONE WILL ALSO SAY 'AH, THIS WAS AWESOME. I HAD A LOT OF FUN!' AND THAT'S NOT NECESSARILY SOMETHING YOU HAVE ON THE ROAD. I MEAN, DON'T ASK THE LAST ONE IN A ROAD RACE HOW THE RACE WAS. THEY'RE PROBABLY GONNA SAY, 'AH LET'S FORGET ABOUT IT.'"

—Christine Majerus



“IT’S ONLY AN HOUR LONG, MAYBE A LITTLE BIT LONGER, A LITTLE BIT LESS [...] AND IT’S A GOOD WAY TO KIND OF HAVE A CRACK AT THE SPORT [...] I THINK PEOPLE WHO ARE JUST STARTING OUT IN ‘CROSS CAN HAVE A PRETTY BASIC BIKE AND STILL HAVE A GO.”

—Rudy Melo

WEST SUSSEX, UK
ROUND 8, LONDON X LEAGUE

It’s cold outside, but you get out of bed anyway and shuffle about in your warm flat, collecting your kit while munching on warm toast. Later that morning, while loading your bike onto the roof of your car, you notice the sky looks mildly menacing—hmm, is rain in the forecast? You’re already thinking about tire pressure and post-race clean up. You head out of the city, winding through Sunday streets until houses begin to thin out and you find yourself in countryside. Rolling up with plenty of time to spare—your race isn’t until 2PM—you park. Like-minded souls have already gathered here, and as you sit in your car with the heater softly purring, you smile. “These are my people,” you think, watching familiar faces go through their pre-race routines. The parents, the kids, and the friends. This community—to you they are like a second family.

You switch the engine off and puff warm air into your hands. HTFU. Go time. You exit the car.

There is a kind of raw beauty to cyclocross leagues like the London X League. They embody the spirit of the ‘cross community in all its glory—supportive, competitive, and most of all, fun. There are the clubs, which every weekend, take turns to set the race table for that Sunday’s gathering, with volunteers laying down barriers and rolling out the race tape. There are the riders, who bring with them the desire to outdo themselves as much as their competition, and roll the dice whatever the conditions. And then there are the supportive families and friends who, week after week, turn up with carloads of enthusiasm to motivate all riders from 10 years old to 50+. Together, they make ‘cross happen.

“One of the main things that appeals to me in ‘cross is just the community behind it,” explains Rudy Melo, co-founder of the cycling collective, 5th Floor. “It’s very relaxed, but you can also take it really seriously if you want to.”

Seriously competitive or not, with multiple levels of experience in every race (there are no category rankings in this league, just age and gender groupings), there’s always someone to race against—even if it’s just your own inner demons.

“If you’re not doing as well as you wish, [then] you’re racing against yourself, or to do your best every lap, or you’re racing to do better than your previous race, or you’re racing to catch the guy in front or to stay away from the guy behind.” It seems no matter where you are in that precious 60 minutes of racing, the tussle is real.

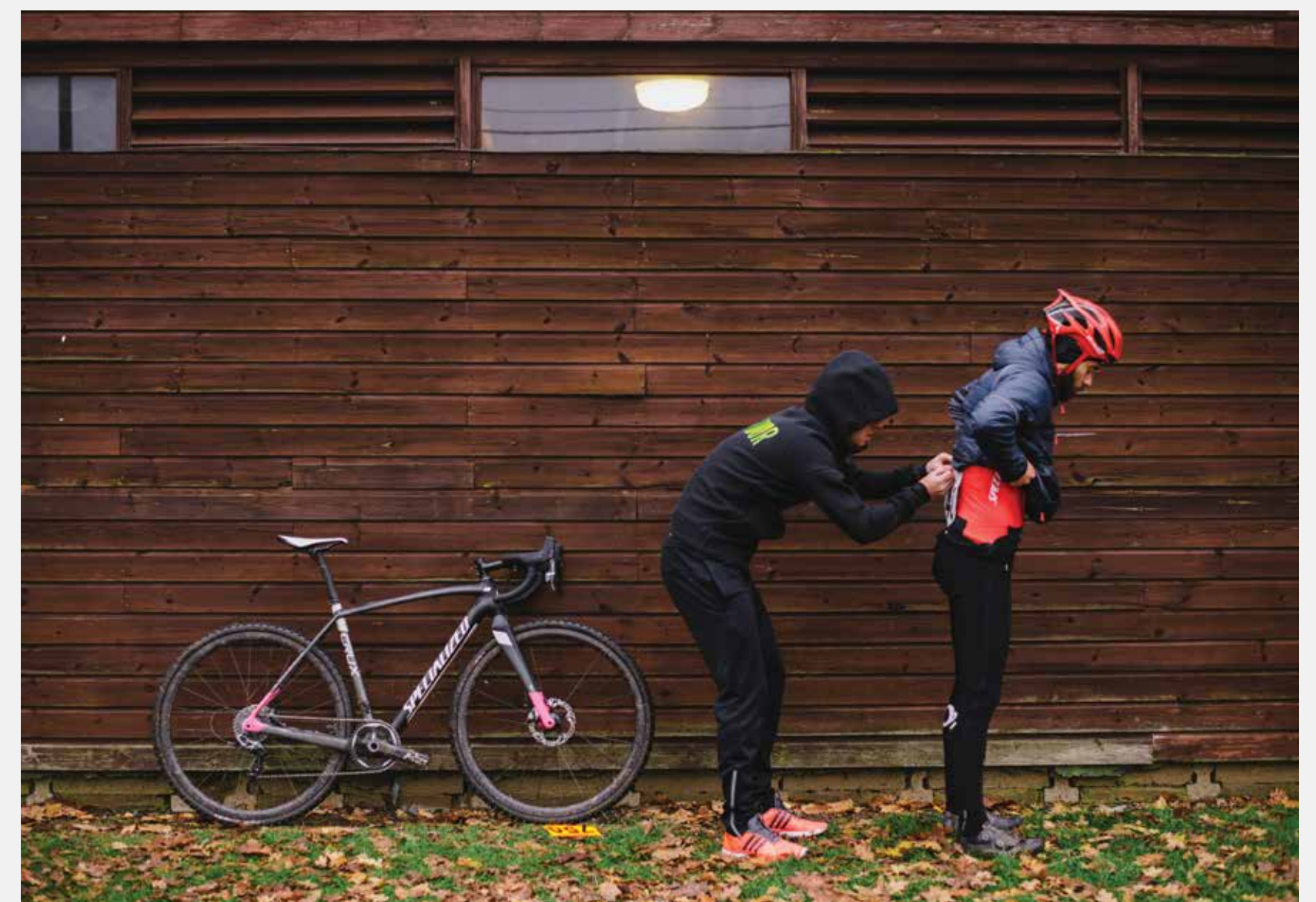
It’s winter. In a season of hearty soups and comfort food, ‘cross is like that go-to bowl of soul-restoring, chunky stew—familiar, tasty, and immensely satisfying. Every week, you find yourself lining up at the start line, joking around with the people you’re going to be battling against for the next hour—maybe more, maybe less. You will ride, and ride hard. You will ride until your lungs burst and your face is contorted with the effort. You will race against whomever is next to you, behind you, in front of you, and fight for the scraps of victory. And when the finish line comes, you will slump over the bars, breathing hard and sucking in oxygen in big, hearty gulps. Before going home, you will swap your war stories, complain about the cold, clean all your gear, and pack up. And come next week?

Come next week, you will come back for seconds.



“[SOMETIMES] I’LL BE RACING PEOPLE AROUND ME, I WON’T BE RACING FOR THE TOP 10. [...]

THERE’S ALWAYS SOMEONE TO RACE WITH, WHICH IS REALLY COOL.” —Rudy Melo, 5th Floor



LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
UCI CXLA

You'll find them in local parks on weeknights as dusk creeps in, practicing their moves on the soft grass. One, two, three, step, and one, two, three step. In this dance—the dance of 'cross—rehearsal is important. Repeated step-back dismounts followed by drills of the more advanced step-through dismount. There's the smooth "do-si-do your partner" as they swing bikes onto shoulders and charge up a hill. The weekend is coming and they're resolute in their practice. Unclip, step-off, hop, launch the legs and swing 'em high to land without damaging their delicate undercarriages. There are beginners, new to the moves, plus the old hands, working on refining the tempo of the dance. And then there are the lords of it.

Of course, Cody Kaiser would never describe himself as a lord of anything, but there's no denying there was a moment in time, U23 U.S. Cyclocross Nationals in 2014 to be precise, when fans saw him be a lord of a particular skill—riding up stairs. The video of him rounding a hairpin bend and bunny hopping up the stairs in a rhythmic pump track motion broke brains and melted the Internet for a hot minute. But don't kid yourself—to do that, Cody practiced the move over and over and over, just like those riders practicing in parks on weeknights.

To master the dance, you have to know the steps.

"It's all about rhythm and speed," he says, describing how to not end up on your ass. "[On that day] Everything just lined up. It was super rhythmic, and the pace of the race was right. [...]"

"[IN 'CROSS] YOU DON'T HAVE THAT ABILITY TO BE OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE AND JUST HAVE YOUR THOUGHTS TO YOURSELF. IT'S SORT OF LIKE A HEAVY METAL SHOW, ALL IN A BIKE RACE." —Cody Kaiser

You definitely have to be in a rhythm, and if you lose your focus for a split second, you're [running] into the next step."

Cyclocross is fast, short, and fun. And the more you ride and race, the stronger the muscle memory for skills required to succeed at it, becomes. The dance and its choreography become second nature as you learn how to plumb the mysterious depths of a sand pit without floundering, or negotiate sloppy mud fests. Carrying momentum into the mount and dismount becomes effortless, and slowly, those "Joey's OK" moments that once threatened your every race, fade. And then, one day maybe, just maybe, you do something so rad at a race that there's an expectation that you'll do it every time. Like Cody Kaiser and those stairs. There's no pressure but...

"People expect me to ride all the steps and hop all the barriers, and if there's gonna be a dismount, then they're expecting me to stay on my bike."

The weekend is coming. See you on the dance floor.



"I ALWAYS JOKE, 'YEAH, WE RACE FOR 45 MINUTES AND THEN SPEND FOUR HOURS CLEANING ALL OUR SHIT AFTERWARDS.'" —Cindy Lewellen, Poler CX team

'CROSS CRUSADE #1 | PORTLAND, OREGON

"Ride it!"

The bellowing taunt from the heckling hordes fills your ears as you approach the off-camber right-hander. This slope has a high probability of screw up—and that's exactly why the horde has gathered here. No pressure. You point your bike down and hoist your leg outrigger style to ensure you stay upright. The mud—a kind of sloppy, oatmeal'ish mess—has other ideas and you lose it, ass-tobogganing with your bike down the hill. The horde cheers enthusiastically at your misfortune. Laughing at the utter ridiculousness of the moment, you remount and slog on. This is Portland's 'Cross Crusade season opener and conditions are at once both awful and absolutely freakin' perfect.

A cyclocross race is the mullet hairdo of the cycling world—business at the front, party in the back—and it's joyously on display at Alpenrose. At the pointy end of the field, Crusaders charge hard and duke it out, while at the back, riders are pushing their limits

and having a blast. The whole thing is a gamble, and anyone could snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. It's obvious to all, however, that everyone is having the best time on a bike, like ever.

"We all race in the single speed category," says Poler CX team's Ryan Barrett, talking about the Portland scene, "and there really aren't any rules up here for the single speed class. So you'll find a mix of people who are dedicated racers and people that are off the back taking beer handoffs, people that are jumping, and you just see a lot of smiling and good vibes."

Purists will sometimes curl a lip and say: "Yes, but it's not Belgium" (although the conditions often do a pretty good impression), but no one racing here would claim that it is anyway. Cyclocross in the Pacific North West is its own thing, just as it is on the East Coast, just as it is in Australia, in the U.K. or... wherever. 'Cross? 'Cross is wherever you make it.



DREAM FACTORY

When we ride mountains, we dream. We dream of ripping down trails with ruthless precision, carving through corners, railing berms, flowing along endless ribbons of dirt with an air of supreme control. The keyword here is "control." For riders, skill is part of the control equation, and sure, the bike is, too. Tires, however—tires are what dreams are made of. And it should come as no surprise that ensuring those tires deliver on your dreams is important to us. In fact, it's a key reason that we severed ties with our previous tire production partner to invest in our own factory in Vietnam. With the previous partner serving multiple tire brands—and often less-than-willing to try new things—our dream of being more hands-on in mountain bike tire production became a reality. We sat down with two members of the tire team—Wolf VormWalde and Mike Taylor—to talk about how this new tire factory came to be.

'74: the Japanese partner we went with had a factory in Vietnam that handled the production of OE domestic scooter tires for large motorcycle brands. What's the advantage of them having no other bicycle brand's tires in their factory?

WOLF: "The biggest thing is control. Control doesn't mean you can just order something and it's always done the way you want it—it's still a discussion—but at least we're having the discussion [with the new factory]. If we go in with an idea, then they have to discuss it with us because we're their only customer. It's exclusive. That way, we can control what happens in the factory and [ensure] that the direction [we're both] taking is aligned.

'74: how involved were we in the switch to bicycle tires? How has the factory itself changed?

MIKE: "We got to be involved with what equipment to purchase, the layout of the facility, and of course looking long-term, [we want to] leave room to expand a little bit. We're already seeing that we're doing that after the first year of production."

WOLF: Before there was just an empty hall—I think it was a storage unit? Now they are [something like] 180 or 120 workers in three shifts, working seven days a week. It's buzzing. It started very small and slow, but now you come in and you're like...wow! [...]



'74: full production began feb. 1, 2016, but this process started two years ago. Was there a long ramp up to the first tire coming off the production line?

WOLF: We gave them two tires initially—a road tire and a mountain tire—to basically represent the whole breadth of tires we wanted to build there. We didn't change the tread or hot patch or anything, so we could just make this tire that we previously made at other factories and feed it into sales. [...]



MIKE: Yeah, we brought in that Espoir [road] and Purgatory [mountain], and eventually we brought our whole mountain program in, from Renegade to Hillbilly. We released the Renegade, Fast Trak, and Ground Control last year for this current model year, and then coming up in July, we'll be releasing the Butcher, Slaughter, and Hillbilly—so kind of the second half of the mountain program.



WOLF: And so now we have our whole mountain tire program [coming] out of this new factory. It means all the new tires have Gripton compound. It means formulations are from us—they're all different formulations, but they're all from us—and the factory is mixing them up per our recipes. For the start, we went with construction layups that we had already. But now we are developing new ones [...]. I think we've introduced 40 new/different tires there now? Forty different specs within half-a-year, it's just crazy. [...]. In its final state, the factory will be able to make a million tires a year. Right now, they are at almost 500,000 tires.




CAMP OUT WITH YOUR LAMP OUT

Sunrise and sunset—these are the bookends to our every day. And yet, so caught up are we in the scurry, the deadlines, and the meetings of our Mondays-to-Fridays, we rarely give them more than a cursory glance. But not the Camp Out with Your Lamp Out (COWYLO) kids. These adventurous souls are all about giving the sun its due. On a weeknight, they load up their bikes and climb a mountain, stopping once at “beer stop” to share suds and watch the sun go down before continuing on to the campsite. After a night under the stars, some will rise quietly to witness that same sun crack open the lid of darkness to begin the day anew. Packing their gear, they then descend 3,000 chilly feet, each at their own pace, to begin the workday refreshed, renewed, and reborn. It is a soul restoration.

But Camp Out with Your Lamp Out—a pilgrimage to the top of Henry Coe on a weeknight (most often Monday) to camp with work mates—is much more than the chance to attend a sun sermon. To those who tackle the 15ish-mile journey from the backdoor of Specialized HQ to a campground in the clouds, it’s about exploring the paradise in our own backyard and connecting with the tranquil world that rises above an overcrowded valley. It’s about bonding with your colleagues in a more personal way, sans emails, spreadsheets, and product timelines. It’s about the camaraderie of riding bikes together; of pitching a tent under the stars; of spinning stories in the darkness. Here, friendships are cemented, and in some cases, are born. Ideas spring forth—April fools jokes, big adventures, on-the-fly R&D tweaks, even food innovations such as the SmOreo (an Oreo on a stick, heated in the fire)—and spirits reignited. It is the secret sauce of the Camp Out.

“I ALWAYS APPRECIATE THE “INCONVENIENCE” OF BREAKING UP MY WEEK ONCE I’M OUT THERE. I’LL NEVER REGRET LAYING ON MY BACK IN THE DIRT WITH A BUNCH OF FOLKS WATCHING ONE OF THE BIG METEOR SHOWERS UP AT COE!” —John Kraft, HR, Specialized



A photograph taken from inside a tent, looking out through the opening. The tent's interior is visible on the left and right sides, with a zipper on the right. Outside, a vast field of tall, green grass stretches to the horizon. In the distance, a single tree stands against a bright, hazy sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

"Sleeping outside is always, always a plus," says Rita Jett, Demand Planner at Specialized and COWYLO regular. "[...] and it's on top of the hill where the sunrises and the sunsets are just...they're just magical."

"Every time I cross Highway 101[in the morning] and it's only like 3 minutes more to work," says Erik Nohlin, Industrial Designer and one of the founders of COWYLO "I see that line of cars and every time, I say: 'I feel like a winner today.' [...]" Getting into work, having a shower, having your oatmeal and you have this big smile—you're just glowing because you started the day in the best possible way. That's the magical thing about it."

Sixteen people—that's the attendance record so far. Sixteen bike campers who've swapped their beds and their televisions and after work commutes to instead go and commune with nature. And with two years under its belt, COWYLO has taken on a life and legend of its own outside of Specialized, inspiring others to try their own version of the weekday adventure.

"I heard about it before I even started here," says James Nixon, PR for Specialized. "I had a buddy who worked as an engineer, [...] and he would say, 'Yeah, we camp on a weeknight,' which was just foreign [to me]. I grew up camping, but the idea of camping between workdays was just...whaaat? It was almost mystical, like whoa."

"It's becoming an institution—you've gotta like that," says Erik. "And it's something we should encourage a lot more people to do. [It shows] people how easy it is, and that you don't need to plan for three weeks to do it."

"And it's only one night and it's a short ride," continues Rita. "So, if you want to carry your guitar, you're not going that far—you can take whatever you want with you. Like if you want to take a skillet and make some eggs in the morning, you can."

It's not just beneficial for riders, either. Specialized reaps the rewards of the COWYLO vibe, too. "I would say that it has the same effect on my work week as the lunch ride has on my workday," says Erik. "[With lunch ride] you ride your brains out and you get back and you're energized—you got your sun, you got the fresh air, and you can be productive for the second half of the day. I get the same by doing the campouts in the beginning of the week."

Weekdays may seem filled with stress and hassle, meetings and timelines, but for some, every day holds the potential of something special. Of freedom and escape. Of peace and tranquility. And so the sun sets and rises in a state of patient hope, winking seductively at the valley below. "Come and join me," it says. "I'll always be here for you." Will you answer the call?



LET'S RIDE

