

INTO THE RIDE #25

The Great Escape

by Randy Schlitter



Miles can demand respect, do the miles and you understand. The road can be an unforgiving place, much of it polluted with high-speed traffic that woefully outguns a cyclist. Yet they are out there, taking on the challenge, and experiencing that hard-to-explain joy of accomplishing the miles.

They often ride unannounced and unpromoted, riding to accomplish incredible feats. Some cross the nations, taking weeks, and even months. Time and distance change. The speed and pressure of former life suddenly falls into the background. Riding becomes the focus, and the destination. Getting somewhere is the sidebar, to experience the riding, the real goal.

It is rich in experiences. Just the view from the helm of your bike offers enhanced perception. You are in the place you ride, not a passing insulated cube of air. You're part of what you ride through, and sometimes involved. Cyclists have slowly cruised through areas striking up conversations with locals. Some have even dashed off their mounts to lend assistance to roadside struggles. It is with each mile you become tagged with experience, accumulating to a deep satisfaction by the ride's end.



Yet we can go almost unnoticed, blasting through quiet towns, parks, and neighborhoods almost as ghostly suggestions of man and machine. It is this range of experience that adds depth to cycling, making it almost infinite in mastery, and extraction of pleasure. Cycling itself endures even after falling behind as a serious attempt at transportation, and taking its place in many societies as the unpretentious purveyor. Cycling endures, placing it well woven into our world. Count the cars carrying bikes, take note of the cycles both parked and cruising the heart of any large inner city, in any country. Bicycles are the unpretentious transports thought long put in place by their rivals, cars, trains, and planes. So here we land in the new century with millions of bikes produced annually, consumed like steel and plastic candy by a world still in desperate need of what the bicycle offers: Escape.

In simple bare form it is just that - escape. Escape from the white noise, from the wearing pace, and unrelenting pressure of life. I will always remember the moment in my life this wonderful invention became so permanently entranced into my world. Oddly enough it was during a very static event; it happened at a movie actually called “The Great Escape” starring the very prolific Steve McQueen. The plot was simple; a group of WWII ally prisoners attempt to escape from a German war prison. After conjuring up many clever engineering solutions a tunnel was successfully complete, albeit a few feet short of the forest! (making the suspense even greater) A small group does manage to make an exit, after which all manner of transportation is used to “get away”. Planes, cars, motorcycles, trains, and even a bike, were used to scatter the group. All were rounded up, or met with their demise in attempts at further transit, all except one. The cyclist- he got away. I loved that! It chorded well with the newfound mobility, a bright red Western Flyer. For days after I pretended to ride through the Alps, an especially tough feat for a kid in the Kansas flatlands. But nonetheless somewhere deep in my subconscious I was building a bond with cycling that would last a lifetime, build a career, and to this day give that indescribable thrill that only cycling can give.

OK! I know this is sounding melodramatic, but cycling evokes passion. You know it from the fact that you probably have at least two if not three bikes. You know it from remembering a recent ride, the friends you met, and the thing you smelled, saw and touched. It is there because you too have been immersed to the point of “great escape” ending the day with the deep satisfaction only cycling can deliver. For you I truly am thankful to know and provide my wares. I respect this man-made world of machine that does somehow transport us, maybe not by so much speed, but by spirit, into that place which is always great to escape to.



Until next time stay safe, and stay into the ride! -RJS

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