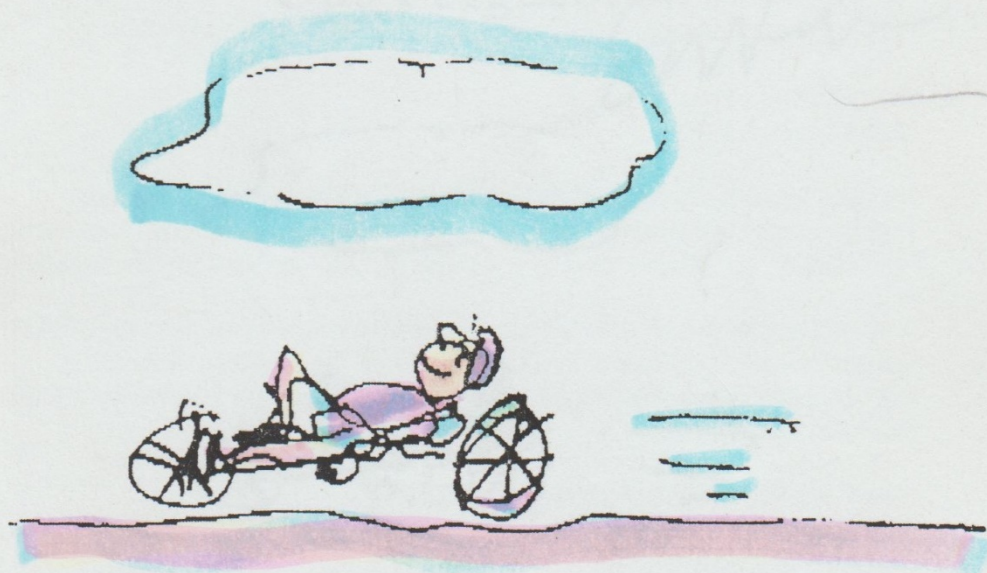


PAST APPLEGARTH IN RADIANCE

Gus Ferguson



A cycling miscellany

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My landmark is that cloud ...

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For all my cycling friends
but overridingly for
Lee Fox, role model, friend and mentor
and to Mary Jane Reynolds who as editor of
Velocipede first encouraged this nonsense

Past Applegarth In Radiance

My Sunday morning

Genuflections

Are made with bending knees

While sun spokes stroke

Across the road

And fire the fallen leaves.

My spinning chainwheel's

Starred reflections

Whin upward through the trees

And glinting from

My streaming cold:

The snailtrails on my sleeves.

The Bhakti Yogi Buys A Bike

Astride my dual prayerwheel
I meditate at speed
Devotion to my Dharma is
The only call I heed.

I never lust for victory
Nor crave frenetic motion
But gentle like the Ganges
Flow calmly to the Ocean.

To cycle through the Cosmos is
A karmic task and thrill,
I just adjust my cadence to
The rhythm of each hill.

I have a little mantra that
I murmur on my way
And if you pay attention
You are sure to hear me say:

‘Though heavy is the Samsara.
And hard to pedal solo;
I do believe Eternity
Is fully Campagnolo.’

Cyclops

The dusk like gauze is falling
The day is fading fast
And homeward I am crawling
In hope that light will last.

As remnant shots of daylight
Are shuttled through night's loom
I pedal apprehensive
Beneath the waxing gloom.

Myopic in the twilight
I peer from left to right
As cars from all directions
Scud blind towards the night.

Ecologists of the human race
List this amongst your theses:
That Cyclists of the Crepuscule
Are endangered as a species.

M'illumino d'immenso

near Llandudno

Alone, the swishing sound of spinning spokes
Disturbs the hush that marks the break of day.

In downhill speeding ecstasy we rush.
Below, the sea is opalescent grey.

Mysteriously, the low horizon drifts
And drops beyond the arc of human reach.

The ocean sighs and heaves in restive sleep
And snores incontinently on the beach.

A literary fugue begins to form:
The dreaming corpse in Finnegans Wake

That etherised upon the table lies:
But soft, what light through yonder window breaks

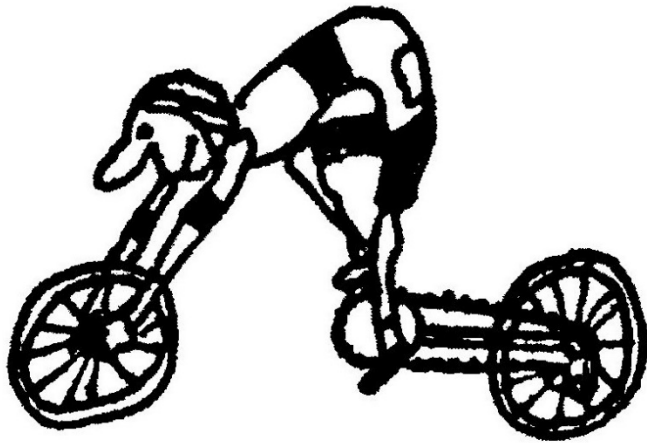
But then, the voice of Ungaretti wins.
His matinal verse our day begins.

How Did Emily Pankhurst Get To Parliament?

I've seen those London bicycles
Especially in the rain
Who're rnanacled to railings
By principle and chain.

Buckled, rusting and deflated,
Their spokes are all awry:
So utterly abandoned,
A tear comes to the eye.

How are the British mores
That make them pamper pets
And then, neglect completely
These sainted suffragettes?



Puncture Near Wittedrif

What bliss to be alive this morn,
With land and lake awake to raucous dawn

And every instant serendipitous
I praise, head bowed, the moment I was born

And each unconscious step that led to this
Epiphany of pantheistic bliss

But revelation's brief: a single thorn
Deflates it with a disillusioned hiss!



Illustrations: The Frameless Bicycle (pat pend) in action.
Note the 'tubby' in the back pocket which dates the idea

Yet In Arcadia Ego

I strain against the southeast gale
My futile shirt a flapping sail.

The vineyards and the waving grass
Applauding wildly as I pass.

Limerick

A molluscular cyclist called Mel
Wore a crash-helmet made from a shell
He said: 'It fits right,
Looks nice and is light
And protects me from starlings as well.'

Puritan Against The Wind

When every pedal stroke's a bore
When bum and back and neck are sore

And flesh is mortified for sure,
Then, I believe, my soul will soar.

Hinault's Not What He's Missing

I love to ride my bicycle.

I love to keep in shape.

I skim along the country roads

On all-fours like an ape.

Though clouds above are scudding

And the roadside hums with life,

To me it's just a canvas that

I cut through like a knife.

My posture's parabolic as

My feet pump up and clown

And all I see while training are

Bike tyres turning round.

An optional moral

I am, you'll note, in every way

A man like all the rest;

Oblivious to life itself -

Preparing for a test.

Death On The Road

It crept across the country road,
the snake that made us stop,
In threat it raised its spade-shaped head
and puffed its body up.

We all moved back in mild alarm,
an atavistic fear;
Deep down we knew what Adam felt,
when Satan sidled near.

But that was that. We checked no urge
to hurt or kill the beast
(This tale is not Lawrentian,
not moral in the least).

In fact , our one concern was that
the snake, now lying still,
Might soon be squashed by truck or car
(we wished this snake no ill).

We lamely tried to shoo it on
but still it doggo lay
And none of use would pick it up,
a fact we'd rue all day.

We cycled on, all hoping that
our friend would slither fast
Across warm tarmacadam to
the safety of the grass.

'I've heard,' said Nick, 'that snakes enjoy
relaxing in the street.

The tar retains the sunlight well
and reptiles need the heat.'

We pondered on this thought a bit,
imagined how it feels
When, hurtling through the morning air
came Death on sixteen wheels.

There was no chance it could escape
such synchronistic fate,
When we returned five minutes on
we were five minutes late.

Our erstwhile undulating friend
obliterated lay.
A tattered rag. The grassy verge
one million miles away.

And then we knew that our concern,
our gentle empathy,
Had slowed it down so it could keep
its date with destiny.

Cycling Senryu

1.

Hypoglycaemic
while pedalling by a bakery
Thoughts of Marcel Proust

2.

A cyclist's second
marriage — a new chain
on an old cluster.

3.

Cycling past
a kiewiet's nest, he stops
to check his chain.

4.

The hotter the clay
the worse for the tricycle
ice-lolly vendor

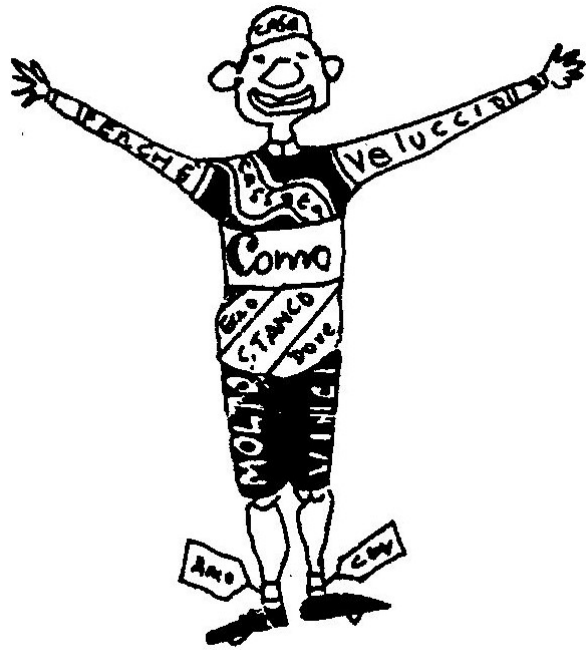
5.

Cycling to the shop
in his Campionati
Del Mondo jersey

Il Sponsoroso

Enrico Gelati of Johannesburg has such a wide variety of prestigious cycling clothes that the Dante Alghieri Society often use him as a crash-course in Italian for Beginners.

He carries the Society's emblem beneath his right shoulder.



La Gipiemme

After only two years of leisure cycling, a Pinelands father of three, Mr Henry Kantor, can carry on a twenty five minute monologue on the subject of Italian Bicycle Components.

Mr Kantor, a passionate Opera lover, is also working on a cycle of arias based on the Campagnolo Catalogue.

A Clever Ratiolist

The contention that strenuous cycling has a negative effect on human IQ was positively squashed by a Montevista time trialist, Peter 'Pedals' van Onsen.

Van Onsen managed, after grinding out 300 km in an amazing 9 hours 45 minutes*, an exhaustive series of complicated gear ratio sums with contemptuous ease

*An average speed of 41,8 kilometres per hour.

The Ultimate Replacement

In cycling circles much debate has swirled around the ideal form of liquid replacement. Fashions have included plain water, flat coke, hypo or isotonic electrolyte solutions, lemon tea with brandy, yakmilk and back again to water. But still the controversy rages.

In simple terms the body sweats and needs to replace the ingredients of that sweat. Biochemists, sports medics, Nobel prizewinners, midwives and charlatans have all had their say and, as yet, the ideal bottle has not been formulated. However, a new product manufactured in South Africa, called Dune, is about to hit the market with the motto — ‘There is no substitute for replacement’.

The manufacturing process is simple and non secret although highly secretory. A top cyclist, for instance an Argus Tour winner, puts on a specially adapted wetsuit which has internal channels and external tubes, designed to collect and transmit perspiration into pre-sterilised bottles. The athlete grinds away for the equivalent of 250 Ks on an ergometer which is programmed to stimulate the rigours of a Tour de France stage. The collected sweat is then pasteurised, spray dried, packaged and marketed.

The powder merely needs the addition of water and is ready for the bicycle race. Dune plan to launch this innovative aid to competition with their top-of-the-range ‘Lance Armstrong’ early next year. Prices will vary from R800 to a quite affordable R25 per packet. Cost will depend on the level of championship that the donor represents. A Tour de France winner would be the ultimate, and the minimum standard would be a Pedal Power approved fun ride winner.

Medical experts agree that in addition to the excreted electrolytes, endorphins, pheromones and partly metabolised vitamins, athletes will, as an additional bonus enjoy whatever forbidden substances that have filtered their way through the pores of the donor.

Setting Saddle Height: The New Age Method

According to yogic teaching there are eight nodules on the spinal cord from the base of the skull to the coccyx, called chakras. Each of these points, when stimulated by massage, brings about physical and spiritual relief.

Of interest to the chronic cyclist is the seventh chakra situated at the fifth lumbar vertebra about a hand's length from the base of the spine.

This point is often called the water chakra because of its influence over the emotions and on the balance of the body fluids.

A discreet massage of this area by the tip of the bicycle saddle can go a long way to preventing dehydration.

To set the saddle, stand over the crossbar with legs straight and feet flat on the ground so that the saddle tip nuzzles nicely against the fifth lumbar vertebra.

A few minutes before a race allow the saddle point to gently prod and knead the chakra.

Cycling Magnetism

Although already banned by the International Cycling Federation, a new product, from Assurdo Chemicals, called Magnum could make all the difference to your bunch riding.

Assurdo have isolated a polymer of ferrum silicate that is not only soluble in propylene glycol but can also be very efficiently magnetised. The solution is clear and can be sprayed onto the metal parts of any bicycle just prior to a race.

Unscrupulous cyclists who are not ashamed to wheel-sit will be effortlessly sucked along by the bunch.

The only effort required is to secure a good place in the pre-race line-up. Some insensitive loafing will ensure you a most impressive bunch position in the finish.

This product, available in an ozone friendly aerosol, is not for the highly competitive, as any attempt at break away will have you, literally, pulling the bunch along.

It is expensive and be warned that its application can be detected by a furry coating of fine metal debris that will cover the frame after a race of more than 10 kms.

Assurdo also do a neutralising and cleaning aerosol called Amag which demagnetises as it cleans.

Pedal Your Way To Perfect Health

Reflexology is a form of therapeutic foot massage and an ancient healing art. Terminals on the feet are connected through energy channels to specific zones of the body. Reflexologists claim that when these channels get blocked, minute lumps of crystalline deposits form under the skin. Massage breaks up the deposits which are then absorbed into the body's waste disposal system.

There are dozens of reflex points on the feet and adherents believe that all the organs of the body are mirrored in the foot. Massage clears toxic deposit, unblocks energy pathways, promotes the healing of diseased organs and stimulates general health.

Of interest to cyclists is a therapeutic pedal from Sanimoto. Named after its Japanese inventor, Shihatsu Makisaki, the Shihatsu pedal is designed to massage selected terminals while you cycle.

The balls of the feet have terminals connected to the shoulders, heart, stomach, spleen, liver, gall bladder, diaphragm and adrenal glands. The pedal platform is drilled to correspond to these terminals. After diagnosis by a trained reflexologist, aluminium massage nodules are screwed in at the appropriate spots.

Random foot massage could be the unsung source of many of the benefits of cycling. This would certainly not be the first time that sports physiologists have attributed effects to the wrong causes. Considering the ongoing accusations and denial of drug abuse in the sport, could it be that the strongly stroked adrenals account for some of the positive steroid tests that have made cycling so controversial?

A word of caution: care has to be taken in the alignment of the therapeutic cleats. Maladjustment can cause the massage of the wrong zones and you can end up curing diseases you don't have.

Finally, before fitting the Shihatsu, ask your therapist about the various erogenous zones on the foot. These zones vary from person to person. Unintended stimulation could be an embarrassment during the race. Which may explain why some people are so passionate about what is, after all, a demanding and often tedious form of exercise.

Paracadute — A Helmet Breakthrough

This is not a polemic against the crash helmet although I do want to moan about the hard shell version. It only minimises the risk of cranial damage and is not insurance against it. My hard shell has the following honest caveat: 'No helmet can protect the wearer against all foreseeable impacts.' It is cumbersome, hot and provokes unbelievable quantities of sweat. It restricts upper vision, (the glorious skyward glance much loved by poet and pedaller) and it can, we hear, cause neck dislocation. Enough said — this is a happy announcement of yet another

technical breakthrough by the Italian company, Assurdo Componenti. Assurdo worked from figures published in the Hind Donkel report which show that 85% of head injuries are anticipated by the bare-headed rider against 74% by the helmeted one. This difference is presumably due to the limiting of the full audio and visual range by the bulky helmet which restricts vision and adds to extraneous noise. Only 4% of cycle head injuries are caused by injuries to the top of the head. The Paracadute is a combination of crash helmet and sweatband. In essence it is a cotton sweatband with an outer layer which is a deflated inner tube. The tube is attached to a small canister of compressed air under a pressure of 12 MPa. The canister is triggered by a mercury tilt switch that clicks on when the bicycle reaches an angle of more than 45 degrees to the horizontal. As the rider tumbles, the canister instantly inflates the tube, forming a gentle pneumatic cushion protecting both head and collarbone from injury.

The advantages of the Paracadute are legion:

- It is cool and absorbs sweat.
- It does not have to be discarded after each fall as with polystyrene helmets. Repairs are done with a simple patch.
- It is purely functional — it is only a crash helmet when needed.
- It does not obscure the vision.
- It looks great.

One caution, however: the rider must take care to switch off the tilt switch when dismounting.

A Psychling Breakthrough

Dr Eustace Wheeler, the chief psychiatrist at the Turnhill Clinic, is recommending that his depressed and neurotic patients take up cycling.

Although the benefits of the sport are manifold he claims that the main advantage for the poorly breast-fed or inadequately potty trained patient is that it cures the need for instant gratification.

One of his patients, a melancholy 33 year old male had a history of deep depression caused primarily by an irrational need to have his desires met quickly. After a weekend in-depth encounter seminar on cycling the patient immediately bought a state-of-the-art racing bike. Now he can't wait to take his daily ride.

'We have discovered the bicyclic anti-depressant!' declared the eminent Freudian. 'Had Oedipus had access to a bicycle so much of the history of the human dilemma would have been altered. After all, spinning a 42/17 gear an averagely fit young man can travel from Delphi to Thebes in just over 3 hours. He would have missed the encounter at the crossroads by at least 2 hours and 10 minutes.'

Quo Vadis Argus Tour

My son's maths teacher, being a wizard at arithmetic, multiplied the length of an average bicycle by the 11 000 entries for the 1988 Argus Tour and came to the conclusion that if all the cyclists taking part had ridden as they are supposed to do in single file, they would have wrapped round the course twice.

The Argus Tour has seen a 100 per cent growth per annum over the last few years, hitting a new record in 1988 with 10 000 entries. Using a pocket calculator and a ballpoint, my calculations reveal that if the current trend continues, there will be a record entry in the year 2000 of 41 million cyclists.

Assuming the cyclists are set off in batches of 1 000 at 5 minute intervals, and that the officials and organisers are prepared to work 24 hours around the clock, the start will take 142 days to complete. By 2003, a year will not be long enough to contain one Argus Tour and Cape Town will have to break away from the rest of the country and declare an Expanding Year with the number of days escalating in proportion to the entries. Or maybe the earth will simply begin to orbit the sun slower and slower under pressure from the Claremont Rotary Club.

In any case, many of us thinking cyclists will be too old to take part. But what is certain is that in the 21st century there will be an ever growing number of full-time officials working on the Argus Tour. The possibility of the infrastructure of Claremont Rotary superseding that of the government must not be excluded, and judging by their superb organisation, they will probably do a better job in running the country.

Going For Baroque

One of the strangest human habits is the rewarding of success and the denigration of failure. Particularly when it is taken into account that failure of the grandest sort is the combination of the highest aspirations with the limits of human grace, whereas in success, human mettle is never fully tested.

One of the saddest and most spectacular failures in both the musical and the cycling worlds was revealed in 1986 and deserves the Nobel Prize for Ambition.

A Viennese wheelwright and chamber musician, Karl Heinz von Willig who was born in 1906 has been building the most beautiful wheels for a connoisseur clientele since the late 40's. Combining his talents as an engineer with his musicianship, von Willig developed a technique of spacing spokes in specially constructed rims and then shaving and tuning them so that when stroked in sequence they produce simple melodies.

The standard 36-spoke racing wheel covers enough notes for a wide variety of popular tunes. A tortoiseshell plectrum is attached by a specially designed bracket to the front fork and plucks the tune from the turning wheel. Much the same principle is employed as that of the musical box or harpsichord.

Importantly, the wheels are constructed with the correct tensile strength to make them racing-competitive. Von Willig's wheels never compromise either of their two components. They are perfect examples of aesthetic and mechanical synergism.

Over the years the international Who's Who of cycling and music have brought the von Willig bicycles. The wheels are set into the best quality frames which are also tuned to give off the correct harmonic vibrations. The frames are handled by Von Willig's friend and erstwhile cycling rival, the Italian hillclimber Ernesto Collo. Recently Lance Armstrong is reported to have ordered a gold alloy front wheel that plays the Star Spangled Banner.

Although von Willig's craft has always brought him an extremely good living, he, like all true artists, needed a challenge and for more than twenty years he has been obsessed with a magnificent ambition: to arrange a Baroque fugue for four well-tempered bicycles. Years ago the engineering was complete and the bicycles were built with extremely sensitive brakes to allow for delicate nuances in tempo and rhythm. As his opus magnum, Von Willig decided on 'The Cat's Fugue' by Domenico Scarlatti. It is poetic justice that Scarlatti was chosen from amongst the other great baroque composers such as Bach, Vivaldi or

Handel. This is because of the accepted criticism of Scarlatti's art, first made by Anthony Edwards of the London Sunday Times who commented that the 17th century master's sonatas for the harpsichord were 'merely mechanical exercises' - a description that is happily compatible with cycling.

The wheels of the four bicycles that would perform the piece while simultaneously taking part in a four-man team time trial were carefully tuned and constructed to perform the fugue over exactly 40 kilometres. The real problem was to find four cyclists who were capable of meeting the virtuoso musical standards of the ride, or conversely training up four musicians who were capable of meeting the rigorous athletic demands.

By April 1996 von Willig had put together his ideal team which included two riders who were initially musicians, and two musicians who were initially cyclists.

Secretly they trained and riding ordinary bicycles managed to qualify for the 1998 Italian Team Trial Championships in Milan. On the day they wore special catsuits with the inscription 'Il Gato di Scarlatti' sponsored by the Steinway Piano Company's harpsichord division.

Tragedy struck its dismal chord during the race rehearsal. Sergio Costa Divaris, the alto voice, trying to meet the rigorous demands of the crescendo at 37 km, fell, bringing the team down and breaking in total two collar bones, one leg and one finger. Von Willig was heartbroken and has retired to his Viennese estate to nurse the wounds of shattered ambition.

In an interview with Pedal magazine, which caters to the tastes of the musical and cycling cognoscenti, he confessed that the Scarlatti piece was intended merely as a prelude to a more heroic venture. His follow-up to be founded on the artistic and sporting success of the fugue was to have been the arrangement of the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto for a mass start road race. Bach's Concerto Grosso is coincidentally constructed similarly to a classic bicycle race, with its quick beginning, languid middle, and furious sprint which echoes precisely the allegro, andante, and allegro vivace movement of the concerto.

Ironically, as a further twist of fate, it has been pointed out by Professor Cecil Wheeler, who is the chief musicologist at the Constantia Cycling Academy, that in any case these days hardly any cyclists use spoked wheels in time trials. Modern technology has rendered von Willig's ambition obsolete. The modern disc wheels carry a stronger suggestion of the CD than that of a stringed instrument.