

2011-06 Focus on Members

This month's Focus is on Josiah Weiner, Ride Leader and rider of "that funny bike."

A common anecdote about residents of the more provincial neighborhoods of New York City is of someone who lived in the neighborhood without ever venturing out to visit Manhattan. However true the tales may be, they originate from the fact that, except in the most poverty stricken neighborhoods, all the necessities of life can be had within walking distance. If not locally available, things can be had by hopping on a bus or the subway, so while travelling may be necessary, personal transportation, such as cars and bicycles, is not needed.

My first encounter with cycling was the tricycle. As a wee lad, I would bump around on my tricycle in the third floor Manhattan loft where my artist parents and I lived. Occasionally I had the treat of taking my wheels out to Madison Square Park, where I would tear up the asphalt doing laps around the park. After outgrowing my tricycle, interest in bicycles laid dormant until about fifth grade. My neighborhood was in what was at that time the garment district, and there very few kids living in the vicinity, so it never occurred to me to want a bike. That is until I was old enough to walk down to the Village on my own to play in the school yard with my schoolmates. It then dawned on me that if I learned to ride a bike I could fly downtown, the half mile or so to the play yard. It just so happened that on the way downtown I would pass the window of a variety store near 14th Street on Avenue of the Americas which had on display a purple stingray bike with stick shift. This window display would tantalize me each day during my walk to school and back. I began campaigning for a bicycle.

My mom had other ideas. She did not like the idea of her son riding in



traffic, and not just in any traffic, but busy commercial Manhattan traffic. A year later a friend got me started two wheel riding on his old beaten up Rudge. The year after that my Dad bought me a green Dawes Galaxy. This bike was built like a tank, with Reynolds straight tubing, Nervex lugs and Stronglight steel cottered cranks. The following years saw replacement of many of the components, including Stronglight alloy cotterless cranks, Lyotard platform pedals, a tubular wheelset, and Suntour derailleurs.

In 1972 I followed a friend in joining the Century Road Club, a racing club which had club races in Central Park. We'd get up at 5 or 6 am and ride the 2 miles to Central Park where we'd do the lower loop of the park, known to us as the Criterium. It was about 1.7 miles, and we would try to do about six of those and get back home in time to be ready for school. Saturdays were the best, especially when our club was hosting an open race. Riders from clubs in New Jersey, Long Island and Westchester would show up for race day with the best road bikes from around the world. We would get to see bikes by makers such as Hetchins, Bob Jackson, Woodrup, Holdsworth, Carlton, Falcon, Benotto, Legnano, Frejus, Masi, Cinelli, Colnago, Le Jeune, Gitane, Peugeot, etc.. Race day meant helping Lou Maltese, the club president martial the riders for time trials, or placing riders at the finish. Maltese was a former professional bike racer "holding National and World records in 25 mile TT's, century rides and 3 mile races. In 1928 he turned pro, specializing in motopace racing which saw speeds up to 55 mph."

High School and College saw interest in cycling relegated to transportation. After graduating and landing my first job as an architect, I bought a Guerciotti road bike. Everything on that bike was made in Italy, and all the components were Campagnolo Super Record. That bike took me to work and back, from Carrol Gardens, over the Brooklyn Bridge to Union Square every day the weather permitted for a year.

Cycling took a back seat to the everyday mechanics of living for many years until not long ago when I looked up my local bike club and found it was the Princeton Free Wheelers. I paid my dues, and waited impatiently for my first copy of The Freewheel to arrive. Wow, so many rides were listed and most sounded very fast paced. I read the descriptions carefully, and chose a ride lead by one Kyle Nylander to be my introduction to riding with the club. I was not disappointed by Kyle. Here was someone who clearly loved cycling more than anyone I'd ever met. His enthusiasm and the encouragement offered during his rides got me on my bike again. My reintroduction to cycling sputtered at first, but really took off once I started attending Pat Van Hise's Saturday rides

from Sawmill. Her rides were within my capability, challenging but not life threatening, the scenery was great, and the company of her riders entertaining.

A testament to the character of the people whom I've met through the club is a not-for-profit business organized by Russ White of the Princeton Free Wheelers and staffed largely by Free Wheelers, which recycles used bikes back into the community while simultaneously raising funds for the Boys and Girls Club of Mercer County, enough so to keep over 100 kids in organized after-school programs during the last year.