

My First “Racing” Pedals

By Alan Medsker

After my [re]start of biking at the age of 50, I dutifully bought a new road bike to replace the antique that I had purchased from my brother in high school. I started riding to work most days (an 11 mile one-way distance) and got lots of miles in each week. Since this is America and we always look to the racing community for equipment inspiration, I decided to get some pedals and biking shoes that could attach (“clip”) together so I could be a more powerful cyclist and apply force to each side of the crank for the entire 360 degrees of its travel.

I did not figure out that this meant that *I* was the one applying that extra force and so I would wear out faster, until later.

I liked my new configuration and practiced getting in and out of them, enough so that I thought I would be able to safely commute to and from work using them. Didn’t seem that hard, just rotate your heel out a bit and your shoe comes right off the pedal. As it turns out, I could have used a bit more practice.

On one of my first commutes in using my new pedals and shoes, I was crossing a street to get to an island, which was bounded on two sides by a street and a third side by a right-turn lane for cars. I would stop on the island and then cross the other street, making an effective left turn at the intersection. While crossing the first street, though, I had to slow down and get up the curb of the island, and was passing in front of stopped cars (since I had the light). You might guess what happened next.

Going slow on a bike is harder than going fast. This is why bike rodeos have “ain’t-races” where the slowest person to get there wins. It’s *hard* to balance the bike when it’s going very slow. This is not usually a problem since you can just catch yourself with your feet if the bike starts to tip. However, you need your feet to be detached from the bicycle for that to work, and in this case, I neglected to rotate that left heel out, and my foot stayed attached, and over I went. Right in front of the minivan that was waiting for the light to change. I was unhurt, but when I looked up at the soccer mom driving the van, her look of concern prompted me to give her a quick thumbs-up and flash a sheepish smile, as in “yeah, I *meant* to do that”. I did not mean to do that!

So other than my wounded pride, I survived, and managed to make the rest of the way to work that day without further incident.

But I expect that soccer mom had some fun telling that story to her friends and family!