

The Adventures of a Cyclist Wannabe

By Pete Schmelzer

I learned to ride a bike...by jumping on my big brother's big bike and coasting down the hill. My legs were too short to pedal or apply the brakes, so I just jumped off at the bottom of the hill, tumbled into the grass, retrieved the bike wherever it stopped rolling, walked it back up the hill, and repeated the process all over again – so fun!

My first kid bike...was a purple 5-speed Schwinn with handbrakes – awesome! I had to wait a week for delivery and thought I would explode with anticipation. Finally, I was told it would be delivered to the house that afternoon so I went to the nearby park in the morning, and waited anxiously. When I saw the Marty's Bike Shop (Park Ridge) truck drive past the park at 10:00 am, I realized the delivery was early and sprinted home to what would be my primary mode of transportation for the next 10 years.

My worst bike ride ever...was when my cousin and I decided to ride from Park Ridge to his home in Skokie. He pedaled and I rode the entire trip on the handlebars with my feet resting on the front wheel lug nuts. I earned the fictitious "Iron Butt Award" – so not fun!

Why I'm a lousy bike mechanic...I took the front wheel off my bike and attached the fork to the back wheel of my friend's bike, so we could ride our own three-wheeled tandem together – it seemed like a good idea at the time. But like Howard Hughes' "Spruce Goose," it had one maiden voyage and then was put in dry dock...because it would not turn corners – so stupid!

My first hybrid bike...I played basketball in high school, in college, one season in Denmark, and then in adult park leagues into my late 20s, then lived a sedentary lifestyle for the next 20 years. Wanting to return to some level of fitness, I bought a hybrid bike that I enjoyed for a few years, but even though I was pedaling as hard as other bikers, I seem to be going so slow. A neighbor told me about getting clipped in on a road bike – sounds very dangerous, I'll try it!

My first road bike...my child-like anticipation of a speedy new bike was again realized when I brought home a Trek Pilot 1.2, clipped in and took off like a Ferrari – so fast!

Then I realized it was January, it was 25 degrees outside, windy and icy, so I should get back home. Everything was great until I slowly approached the back door of the house, forgot to clip out, and dumped myself into the bushes – so embarrassing!

When I turned 50...I decided to do something to demonstrate that I was still an athlete, so I bought a book on how to train for a Century Ride after age 50. From January thru May, I was on the trainer in the basement, spinning like a hamster on a wheel at 5:30 in the morning, following the five-month training schedule religiously – so boring!

But I did complete my first Century, and was hooked! On my second Century ride, I took a wrong turn and cut the ride short a few miles before I got back on the route. So when I crossed the finish line to the raucous congratulatory applause of the volunteers, I was only at 98 miles. I did not ride all that way to come up two miles short, so I decided to ride another loop around the parking lot, crossing the finishing line a second time...third time...fourth time...fifth time to the diminishing and insincere applause of the volunteers - until I finally saw 100 on the odometer – so embarrassing!

I rode four Centuries that summer – two were on back-to-back Saturday's, for which I earned a second fictitious "Iron Butt Award."

The next summer I tried another Century without much training and did OK. And then the following summer I thought I'd try another Century – again without training. I was the first one out in the morning...and the last one in at the end of the day. I knew I was done with Century's because when I crossed the finish line just before sunset, all the tables were picked up and there were no volunteers in sight to cheer me across the finish line – so totally gassed...

I told my wife, "if I ever tell you I want to ride another Century, slap me!"

Over the next 8 years...I was only able to ride sporadically. Daytime Bakery Rides were not an option and periodic work-related weekend travel kept me from being in any kind of riding condition. I would be multi-tasking at my desk when a personal email would pop up from the AHBC – "...there's a ride on Thursday for 20 miles...there's a ride on Saturday for 55 miles...with lunch." You guys are killin' me...so jealous!

For several reasons (including more time to ride my bike), I decided to retire in November 2018. During the 2019 riding season, I enjoyed the full fellowship of the AHBC on Bakery Rides, Weekend Rides and working the Arlington 500 – so fun!

Yet, my first road bike was approaching 15 years old and lacking the advantages of modern technology and geometry – especially for a guy who is 6' 6" – and that's when the new bike bug bit.

My second road bike...I found a bike shop in Boulder, Colorado that makes semi-custom bikes for "big & tall" guys – wider handle bars for wider shoulders, longer cranks for longer legs, overall frame geometry designed for a tall guy. I bought all the hype on how much more power I could generate, especially going uphill. So I bought a bike that cost more in 2020 than the new Chevy sedan my dad bought half a century ago.

In late February, I flew to Boulder for the bike fitting, marked all the specs, and had the bike shipped in several pieces to Arlington Heights. As delivery day approached in early March, I was once again experiencing the child-like excitement of a getting a new bike – looking out the window for the UPS delivery truck. But this time, I got a text message on my Apple Watch and an email on my iPhone detailing two-hour delivery window.

Once I got the handlebars facing the right direction...I was ready to ride! The early March weather was lousy, but I had two short "shake-out" rides when I did experience significant increase in power and speed. Can't wait for all the AHBC rides to start – I'm ready!

And then everything stopped...Coronavirus? Social distancing? Wear a mask? Ride solo or 10 feet behind another rider? No snot-rockets allowed? No Bakery Rides! No AHBC-sanctioned rides until further notice! Now wait just a minute here – I gotta new bike!! Not fair!! So frustrating...

(pssst...hey, when's the next Century Ride?)

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