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A Southern California Perspective:

Intro to Cycling in Oregon, 101

■ A course in the fundamentals of how not to make newcomers feel at home.

By Rob Templin

It's bad enough, you're probably muttering to yourself after reading the title, that Oregon is getting California's overflow, but now this: a transplanted Southern Californian professing to know something about cycling in Oregon.

Well, don't worry. I have a feeling you enjoy riding a bike as much as I do. Maybe more. Whatever the case, the sole intent of this occasional series of articles is to look at Northwest cycling from another perspective.

As you might have surmised, I'm new to the area. I didn't lug a lot of excess baggage — literally or figuratively — in my move from Orange County, California. Just the essentials that any good bikie accumulates over 20 years of riding and racing: piles of tee-shirts gathered from countless races and "fun" rides (more than I can possibly use in this lifetime), enough boxes of small parts to build up several bikes (anybody out there that can use some toe straps or non-aero brake levers?); and a collection of jerseys that, in its own unique way, has charted the course of cycling in the last two decades (if wool or trade teams like "Molteni" ever make a comeback, I'll be stylin').

But enough of the pleasantries. I have a bone to pick with you Oregonians. When I was growing up — which I've been informed on more than one occasion appears to be a slow and on-going process — I was taught the importance of making newcomers feel at home. Well Oregon, to put it diplomatically, you let me down.

When I first arrived in Eugene last Spring to begin a new job with Burley Design Cooperative, I couldn't help but notice what Jimmy Buffet has described in song as "changes in attitudes and latitudes." My first couple of weeks riding confirmed my initial observations. "Oregonians are a bit more laid back," I thought to myself. From a cycling perspective, however, there were just too many glaring examples of behavior that, well, didn't make me feel at home.

To start with Oregon, what's with the drivers here? I used to have more negative encounters in a single morning commute on Southern California's car-choked roadways than I've had in total since arriving here. My commutes to work were the pits. Training rides were even worse. After awhile you just get tired of the one-finger, peace sign salute.

For the most part, Oregon drivers don't appear to resent sharing the road with cyclists. Maybe there's a connection someplace with the incredible number of cars that I've seen with bike racks.

And what did Oregon do with all the broken glass that should be littering the road? What am I supposed to do with all the free time I have that used to be spent fixing glass tire cuts? Is this how you were taught to welcome new arrivals?

Oh yes, and the rain. If you figured this was one topic I wasn't going to let slide, you're right. I don't think I care much for those cutesy Oregon Chamber of Commerce phrases like "rain is liquid sunshine" or some such dribble.

Rain is rain. The only thing Oregon's rain and California's sunshine have in common is the quantity of each.

I had the good fortune to arrive in Oregon during an unusual (at least that's what I've been told), double-the-norm rain month. The "month" lingered from April to June. Cycling in the rain isn't much fun, but I'm trying to make the best of it. (This would probably be a good time to blatantly plug Burley's outstanding raingear, but I'll restrain myself).

Balancing the rain, of course, is Oregon's spectacular scenery and network of little-traveled roads. From my perspective, it's a novel concept: a cycling smorgasbord of deserted roads that offer everything from flat farmlands to mountainous, 39x23 climbs.

Now don't get me wrong. I don't want to give the appearance that I'm trashing a particular part of the country. No way. I'm just

making a few simple observations on changes in attitudes and latitudes. Besides, a few Oregonians *have* gone out of their way to make me feel a bit more at home.

Just the other day, for instance, some of the local farmers started burning their fields. The resulting air pollution brought tears to my eyes. Riding through the billowing smoke that contained God-knows-what, I couldn't help but think that this was air quality any true Southern Californian could relate to. Just like home! I later learned that field burning will soon be a thing of the past. Oh well. At least someone tried to make me feel welcome.

Like most major decisions we make in this world, there are trade-offs to be had. In my case, the move from Orange Country meant giving up sunshine, *real* Mexican food, and a "cutting edge" environment. In turn, it looks like I'll have an opportunity to experience some outstanding cycling (even if some of it will take place in the rain), and a positive community attitude. I think I got the better end of the deal, don't you agree?

As I was "bemoaning" Oregon's virtues on a recent club ride, Karl Maxon, who has done a bit of traveling himself with various pro/am racing teams, tapped me on the shoulder and commented, "but you better not tell anybody else from Southern California how 'bad' it is here, you know what I mean?"

I had to smile. Besides he was right. Did I want others to experience Oregon's unwillingness to make newcomers feel at home? I don't think so.

And by the way, Oregon, thanks. I think you know what for. ♦



DEAR DWAN & BUTCH: On an off-road ride recently, I crashed hard and bent the fork on my bike. It took two of us pushing and pulling, but we straightened the fork and I rode home. My question is whether the integrity of the chromoly fork is reduced by the bending and straightening. Should I be worried that my fork may snap on some future ride?

— T.M., Portland

DWAN: You haven't indicated whether it was the steerer tube or the fork blades that bent. I'll assume your blades bent, since you straightened them manually. Straightening all but the wimpiest steerer tubes by hand is nearly impossible (and not recommended).

The strength of your re-aligned fork depends on a few variables. Yes, bending things back after they've been violated in a crash will affect their virtue, but how much depends on the initial damage and how many times you reefer the blades back and forth before you got them into a rideable state.

Check for cracked paint or chrome, or ripples in the tubing from the stress of your efforts. Any of these unfortunate signs indicate the need for a new fork. Take your fork (or bike) to a good shop and ask them to check its alignment. Its unlikely that you and your buddy got it perfectly straight.

By the way, did you check the frame? Head-on collisions often result in rippled top and down tubes near the head tube, even when the fork absorbs most of the blow.

Should you worry? Only if there are cracks or ripples in the tubes, or if the steerer is bent. Otherwise, you'll have plenty of warning before anything life-threatening can happen.

DEAR DWAN & BUTCH: What are

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