

PRIVATEER

Mountain Bike Syndrome



THE
METAPHYSICAL
CRANK
AND
OTHER TRAILS

THE CROWING REGRETS, THE LONGING TO ESCAPE

THE
METAPHYSICAL
CRANK
— AND —
other trails

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I couldn't do it. Just bending over was an ordeal. Those feet seemed a million miles away. Never mind the socks in the drawer. They might as well have been in the shed. The air was cold and black. I headed downstairs and boiled burnt coffee and bolted a bowl of gruel sitting in front of the remainder of last night's heat from the burner. Pulled a balaclava on, fiddled with the track stand pump after fingering the half deflated tyre. Unlocked the back gate and pushed my feet down, wishing I had a spare inner tube. The roads were quiet and the birds hadn't quite woken up. The frost was holding on, spangling the privets. I pushed a bit harder and leaned into the corner as tight as I could, waiting for everything to disappear and gravity to take effect. It didn't. Dog walkers with little plastic bags of steaming shit huddled together in conference. While the dogs sniffed each others arses.

Arctic tundra and sand. Apparently that's what these bikes are for. Not for a 2 mile commute through some woods to work and back. Not for a sneaky "don't tell anyone I'm out training behind their backs, Our Kid" hill session up and down Rooley Moor Road in the dark. They were definitely never designed with 24 hour solo racing in mind.

A gentle incline rose up and the smell of a large invisible body of water filled my nose.

Barhead geese winked at me as I pictured them heading up K2 over frozen century old, woollen clad bodies. Talk to the animals. I winked back and rubbed my forehead to try and remove ice cream forehead syndrome. The head long wind disappeared as I took the junction. A bland 1 mile - ish. Nothingness. Always the same, just nothing, no redeeming features, no detail. The start of a thousand rides before deviation and change. Suburban dark in the morning light. A hundred lives waiting to retire, in a line, along a straight road to order their thoughts. I dropped down and the sunday morning polished cock extenders disappeared from my periphery. I could see the hum now. The constant rattling of molecules by the rubber wheels of commerce. Vibrating lines of concrete criss crossing the country, like a mutant sitar from The Dog Star. The expectation was building. The revulsion propelling me into the future. I hovered over the traffic, holding my breath, leaving the 21st century for the first time. 'Theres a grave somewhere, only partly filled, a sign in a graveyard on a hill reads...'

Somehow I've managed to fall in love with fat bikes despite only ever riding fat bikes up and down Rooley Moor Road, commuting through the woods and back and in a 24 hour race. I can't be bothered with artic tundra and sand would probably get into my chamois somehow so I might not go as far

as buying a fat bike just for the occasional attention-seeking ride but I'm happy blagging a go on one every so often.....

The once was greenbelt tightened and spat me off the tarmac. Potholes filled with splintered accrington bricks. A final reprise of a manufactured past composting back to dust. Miles of terraced homes dissolved by time. Built to service the boredom of the Victorians. It was the first conscious clue of the Industrial Fells.

My first fat encounter was a white On-One prototype. It rescued my weekend at an incredibly muddy Mountain Mayhem, that bike. While all around me were dropping out, getting angry and upset or just taking things seriously when the conditions warranted the deployment of an industrial-strength sense of humour, the bike made every lap a laugh. Grinning from ear to ear, head to toe in racy lycra and a tight-fitting, sponsor logo'd jersey, I'd left the proper race bikes in the van – the bikes that I'd brought with me to try to win this race and had been persuaded to sack all that misery off and splat around in the mud with 8psi in the tyres instead. And it only had one big gear as well. And the chain kept coming off. It was brilliant. I've not stopped going on about it.

Dogeared estates wander off into the distance behind under utilised council land. Carboot agogo and 12 a side aggro fight for attention. Maisonettes of retired security guards rub shoulders with the 'reality' graffiti interior astro-noughts. Graduating from Xbox to Liberty Cap one semester before the 51st States Prom night. 'We either make ourselves miserable, or we make ourselves strong. The amount of work is the same.' Don Juan, The Con-

tainer Driver Mystic strikes again.

The trees closed in, over and and above as I entered a north facing valley. Dank. Moss covered for sale signs. Rusty TR7's optimistically axle propped. Condensation dripping off fake bullseye glass. A trickling dribble of a stream keeps the mud just over a boot high. Dam both ends and build a bridge boys. Better for fish and frogs than humans. I climb up and out to clear sky and anally clipped hawthorn hedges backed alternatively by failed horticultural polytunnel skeletons and massive industrial complex processing and distribution centres. Commercial top secret recipes cooking up salt and sugar donkey burgers give way to methane landfill. The menu sir? Mini power stations sprinkled over a plastic sheet covered man made hill sucking up bacterial effluent and powering a thousand call centre CPU's.

A few months later and I'm chatting to a couple of friends, Shona and Rich (who run the Manchester city centre emporium of weird bikes Keep Pedalling) over a nice coffee. Can I have a go on that? A Surly Moonlander – one of the fattest bikes I've ever seen – had arrived recently and this one had purple rims and a sparkly paintjob officially called "space". Dripping in XTR. Pauls thumbshifters and some fast-looking tyres (yep, I said fast just then) it was as close to a dream fat build as you could probably imagine. The next thing I know it's in the house.

Rubber scarred two foot high kerbs and brand new tarmac delineate container driver territory. Massive walls of unstoppable diesel navigating lanes made for pre-burger donkey and traps. Cuckoo like parasites feeding landfill or dumping mechanically





the Disgust, the surrender.
the FATE
the powerless

ARE WE GOING TO ASDA?

imagine the
the longing
regret
the
to

escape

REPEL

2013

reclaimed meat to The Soylent Green Repository. Chain link fences knitted with dead grass frames car parks glittering with a million smashed windows. Bad typography singage (like an Altered Image cover, but its 2013) signs and seals its fate and I deposit the overwhelming machine in a closed box marked 'Fuck it'.

First job, drop the tyre pressure. Then drop the stem as low as it will go. The top tube isn't particularly long so I'm always going to be pretty upright but a low front end makes me feel better somehow.

Next, get some lights fitted and go and ride some roots. Then some cobbles. Concrete steps? I'll ride up them. Ludicrous amounts of traction from the tyres making me giggle as I stay off the brakes for much, much longer than I probably should be doing down that bit behind the garages, but that's not because it's someone else's bike ; far from it in fact - if I scratched this paint job Rich would set his dog on me - it's because the word 'invincible' doesn't really do the fat bike experience justice.

You can do anything on one of these bikes.

I do an Eddie Wearing to a Beeching redundant bridge now used by enthusiastic amateurs indulging in fantastic nostalgia. I enter my Monkeytown. Once a village, then a Cottonopolis satellite (where they fed extra milk rations to the kids who worked in the dying dept to counteract the ammonia poisoning by gallons of piss collected from the mills employees and now employed to change colours of the cotton.), now just somewhere to narrow the gene pool. The site of my primary education levelled. The old terraced corner shop bricked up. I don't know where they all went. Some fought, some chose peace, some profited, some lost everything, some went elsewhere, some went to dust before they had chance to grow. The barber who stood on an orange crate to reach your head in the leaning wooden shack with 50 layers of peeling paint. The towering, booming voices of headmasters and stinky bogs. The corner where she opened the door of a moving car and exited in front of me. Rolled into the kerb in a wet



duffle coat and white socks.

I climb through the tight paths of a 1960's bungalow estate. Whipped by nettles and dodging sunken flagstones. Like nothing had changed apart from my distance to the ground. Double glazing and carparks. Barking dogs and very long wheelies. Melting tarmac on long hot summer days. Down past the chippy was easy, freewheeling past new estates built on a old bus depot. Grass lawns growing on cracked, oiled concrete. Fast, like I was winning something. Like a memory repressed and dismissed. I was leaving something behind and moving on. I turned my head sideways to stop the whistling of the wind. I could hear the traffic now. Odds on I could keep my speed up to cross the road if nothing was approaching. It was a blind entrance onto the road but an excellent victory to escape being endoed by day-trippers en route to the Temple of Consumption. I survived the road and into the dire-metrically opposite ginnel which led down to the disused

sewage works over a series of rotten log steps. Nailed each one keeping the speed up and avoiding the dog shit. Just like an inverse Pacman. I was in 8 bit mode approaching the empty Mill where Sparky shat down the lift shaft just like on his big brothers David Bowie lp (?).

Empty spaces waiting. A central lodge, scene of childhood drowning stories. Discarded wire wrapped around ankles. Make believe boats made from old fridge doors. The old heat sink for the steam power was now looked after by the local anglers. A small hut housed their tools. Bin bags, flasks and rakes. An escape for sure. Fellow travellers on the road to nowhere. Too fat to go where I was going tho.

Mud singletrack through the reclaimed footings of a collapsed red brick mill lead me to a disused bridge where the wooden element has long since disappeared leaving a couple of steel beams just wide

I FOUND MYSELF BACK IN THE SEPULCHRAL CITY RESENTING
THE SIGHT OF PEOPLE HURRYING THROUGH THE STREETS
TO FILCH A LITTLE MONEY FROM EACH OTHER, TO DEVOUR
THEIR INFAMOUS COOKERY, TO GULP THEIR UNWHOLESOME BEER,
TO DREAM THEIR INSIGNIFICANT AND SILLY DREAMS.

They trespassed on my thoughts





enough to pedal across. Speed is my friend here and the penalty for failure is wet pain. I line up and close my eyes. I start spinning heading up to the entrance of the valley. To my right a mill still making paper for teabags and tampons. Housing a giant terrapin in its heated lodge. A true survivor.

I'm there now. Halfway up stream away from the noise. Trees, dirt and geology conspiring against 'development'. The valley sides are too steep I head to the top and follow the headland path. On and off to the tune of the farmers fields. I'm looking down on the tree canopy, waiting for a break in its defences. I'm in and fighting off camber exposed roots. Heading back down to the valley floor under cover of ancient oak and birch. It opens up and past camp fires. Special Brew cans and kingsize rizlas dot the space in memory of some late night reverie. A river elbows under a sandstone wedge. A rope swing mirrors into the ground and into the sky simultaneously. This is miles away from everything, clicking into place and pace. Everything else was a means to an end. Just a stoking of the fire. I've sucked it all in, consumed it and now it feeds me.

I wade across the shallowest part of the river and head towards an opening which turns out to be bog. This is the start of Deeply Vale, the scene of free festivals from the mid late 70's and another disused mill. Vini Reilly played here as The Durutti Column months before Factory Records released their debut vinyl 'A

Factory Sampler'. There's 'nothing' here, but I'm being dragged back. Ghosts reappearing. I'm off the bike and dragging it over the sinking, stinking bog. There's a sheep looking at me, bemused. Now I'm pushing buttons on an Oberheim DMX, a prototype drum box in Suit 16 formally Cargo Recording Studios. Its dark and raining outside as we wander down Drake St heading for the San Remo. I hit solid ground at last, kicking off as much clag as possible. Its all doable. Yeah, right.

I'm back in the saddle and moving past lakes along semi cobbled trails. Ducks firing off as I startle them. The tree line has faded and the moorland is looming. I can make out where I need to be. The roman road is straight up, cutting the moor in half. He said he'd be there at the Old Cock Inn. A no more public house that once serviced the quarry workers and sheep worriers of the moor.

Hill intervals aren't much good though – something to do with the tyres making the whole thing go 'boing' every time I try to sprint up something flat out – but a bike that dissuades hill intervals is probably a Very Good Bike anyway. The Husker Du tyres are bloody fast though. Even on tarmac.

But he had got there early and as I crested the last climb he had moved on. There was no sign. The conversation had moved on and his focus changed. He was deceased, he was no more. Like the parrot.