

Maddog Unleashed

From Earth Day to Xmas: Bike Shop Plays Santa For a Shiftless Journo'



"Aren't waiters great? You ask for things and they bring them to you. Same principle as Santa Claus." —Dudley Moore as Arthur in the movie of the same name

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

Seeing as it was Earth Day, I thought I'd ride on some. I poked a sharp stick at a few colleagues confined to various artificially lit cages and rolled away, snickering, for a little trail time.

The legs were not good for a variety of reasons so I thought I'd take a little light exercise in Palmer Park. Apparently everyone else in town had the same idea.

It was a pleasant outing, despite the crowds and my advanced decrepitude. Without exception, everyone I encountered was just happy to be there—a pair of women cyclists wrestling with a balky derailleur, a lone horseman, various dog-walkers, a couple of strolling teens, a mountain biker (not me) taking a wrong line into oncoming traffic (me).

For a change, I was riding a mountain bike, too. I prefer a 'cross bike, even on single-track, but as I say the legs felt and looked a little something like hairy tubes of traction sand, so I thought some fat rubber, a granny gear and a suspension fork might help smooth out the rough bits.

My lack of familiarity with this rarely ridden two-wheeler, a DBR Axis TT dating to the mid-1990s, was painfully obvious. Taking up cyclocross never made me a better mountain biker—it just gave me an excuse for getting off the bike when facing something scary. So I struggled with a variety of rudimentary obstacles. But at least I got one twisty, technical bit right while the girls were watching.

Twist And Shout. In fact, the whole fat-tire thing started getting good to me after a while, and I enjoyed something not unlike zazen on two wheels until the DBR's drivetrain started acting up after about 90 minutes. My right-hand eight-speed Sachs twist-shifter had finally gone to its reward after a dozen or so years, so I manhandled the chain into a cog I could live with and rolled it on home.

After a snack I chucked the bike in the truck and headed for Old Town Bike Shop, where a crowd of mechanics gathered around the ailing two-wheeler like surgeons in an operating theater. As they marveled at my geezer-mobile, discussing repairs, workarounds and replacements, I was reminded of a scene from "The Milagro Beanfield War" by John Nichols:

"But finally, at 76, there loomed on Amarante's horizon a Waterloo. Doc Gómez in the clinic at Doña Luz sent him to a doctor at the Chamisaville Holy Cross Hospital who did a physical, took X-rays, shook his head, and sent the old man to St. Claire's in the capital where a stomach specialist, after doing a number of tests and barium X-rays and so forth, came to the conclusion that just about everything below Amarante's neck had to go, and the various family members were notified."

Call The Doctor (And a Priest). I had been thinking in terms of a similarly radical intervention, a complicated organ donation involving a pair of eight-speed Shimano bar-end shifters stripped from my time-trial bike and mated to an as-yet-unused set of Paul's Thumbies. It was either that or (gasp) an upgrade to nine-speed. Having just had the taxman in my wallet pocket with both hands and one cloven hoof, I was certain this operation would be a tough sell to Herself.

Happily, neither extreme measures nor extreme unction was required. Like Amarante, the elderly DBR Axis TT has defied the Grim Reaper and rolls on, thanks to a quick and inexpensive Grip Shift transplant.

Aren't bike shops great? You ask for things and they bring them to you. And it wasn't even Christmas.