

Maddog Unleashed

'Tis a Privilege to Live In Colorado,' They Say, And By Fall, They're Right



All things on earth point home in old October: sailors to sea, travelers to walls and fences, hunters to field and hollow and the long voice of the hounds, the lover to the love he has forsaken. —Thomas Wolfe, *Of Time and the River*

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

October always catches me by surprise, like the bell lap in a cyclocross. With a quick look over one shoulder at a peloton of opportunities squandered, and a glance ahead at a lead group of goals unrealized, I find myself trying to calculate where I am right this instant and whether it's too late to improve my position before we hit the finish line on Dec. 31.

The real wake-up call is that initial dark, chilly morning, when a guy tugs on sweat pants instead of shorts for the first of many trips to the coffeemaker. Not many good riding days left, and today may not even be one of them. What the hell is the temperature, anyway? Cue the thermostat.

Suddenly those long rides I didn't make time for during summer because it was too hot, too busy, too whatever start queuing up in my skull, clamoring for attention. All too soon I will be taking my meager exercise afoot, squishing through icy puddles or squeaking across dirty snow. What was I thinking? Not much, as usual.

Happily, in Colorado autumn is the best of all seasons. Our spring has the lifespan of an intelligent thought on talk radio. Summer is for the tourists. And winter, well—it's winter. Or at least it was last year, which may explain the proliferation of "For Sale" signs in front of neighborhood houses.

But fall, now—I'm talking 70-degree days once the sun is high in the sky, with little to no precip', a riot of color and a whisper of wind shuffling fallen leaves on the trail. *The Denver Post* used to sport a motto on the front page: "'Tis a privilege to live in Colorado." *The Post* isn't what it used to be, but fall still is.

Downtime, Men. My favorite season includes fewer shifts in various barrels, and this proved especially welcome this year. The 24-hour news cycle had spent the summer eagerly gnawing its own tail, and chewing with its mouth full, too; an unsavory meal of bombast, buffoonery and bloodshed.

Pro athletes and their supporters sniveling about due process in drug testing had begun to remind me of drunken drivers whining about DUI checkpoints. Tell it to the poor sucker with the runny nose who gets the heave-ho from a janitorial job because a workplace drug test mistook his Sudafed for methamphetamine, I thought.

Still, there was something uncomfortably Orwellian about watching Oscar Pereiro swap his suit jacket for a yellow jersey in Spain, celebrating "victory" in the 2006 Tour de France, as the revisionists at Amaury Sport Organization got busy airbrushing unperson Floyd Landis out of the podium pix.

Ignorance Is Strength. As Winston Smith noted, a guy can't turn off the propaganda machine, especially when he works for the Ministry of Truth (Cycling Division). But he can safely turn his back on it for a while, and this I did come fall.

I tackled a number of unfamiliar recipes in the kitchen, sampled some foreign wines, and bought a few books that had nothing whatsoever to do with cycling. In preparation for winter, I ramped up my running, cautiously, walking any sketchy descents to spare my original-equipment 1954 knees and one trick ankle with a sense of humor that leans heavily toward the slapstick.

And I finally managed to shoehorn my birthday ride into the schedule, six months after the fact. Imitating *VeloNews*'s John Wilcockson, I rode my age—53 miles—but on a 'cross bike, from home to just past Palmer Lake and back on a trail that winds through the Air Force Academy.

It wasn't exactly a stage of the Tour. Hell, it wasn't even my birthday. But at least I didn't have to take any drugs to get there and back, or wait 14 months for some suit to tell me how well I'd done.