

Maddog Unleashed

'Viva Las Vegas?' No, Pull the Plug, Barks A Mad Dog Unleashed

"It is the most dispiriting, soul-deadening city on earth."—George Carlin, describing Las Vegas before opening at the Orleans Casino in mid-August

BY PATRICK O'GRADY



Some acts simply beg to be walked out on, and Bugsy Siegal's Fun House is several of them at once. When I last saw Las Vegas in my rear-view mirror on Sept. 30, 2006, I felt good, even righteous, as though I had just stalked out of a Clark County jail cell with all charges dropped.

Still, as I spend a sweltering August afternoon slouched in my office, typing away under a "Triplets of Belleville" poster augmented by a "Vegas Sucks! Move Interbike to Colorado!" sticker, I feel a twinge of regret—just a twinge—that I have sworn not to join the rest of you in prowling the concrete canyons of the Sands Expo & Convention Center this year.

I can't say I'll miss eyeballing all the new high-tech toys. My latest and greatest is a cheap steel cyclocross bike with bar-end shifters plus rack and fender mounts. Should I happen to develop a sudden craving for carbon, I'll sharpen a pencil and snort the shavings.

Catching a glimpse of pro cycling's stars doesn't make the nut anymore, either. Besides, aren't they all on suspension, fronting eponymous foundations or hunting honest work?

And let's not even talk about the pay. I can make more money trucking my empties to a recycling center. No, my sole regret is that I won't be participating in the vicious Scotch-battering the BRAIN editorial crew gives the company credit card nightly at Ruth's Chris Steak House on Paradise.

The Gathering of the Tribes. Thanks to the miracle of Al Gore's Internet, we BRAINIacs seldom see each other during the year. Much of the editorial staff has been consigned to Laguna Hell through a series of intricate corporate maneuvers, but Matt Wiebe and John Crenshaw remain in New Mexico, Doug McClellan hangs his hat in Florida, and I'm a teensy blue bedbug nibbling the vast red flanks of Colorado. The ad and circulation staffs are equally scattered, and not just in a geographical sense, either (between you and me, I believe some of the ad guys have actually voted Republican, and while sober, too).

Thus Interbike serves as a kind of family reunion, a chance to catch up on what everybody's been up to between deadlines, spend a few harried days cranking out the word count together, and hoist a rapid succession of pricey drams on the publisher's dime come quitting time.

But what sort of dysfunctional family holds its annual get-togethers in Las Vegas? Besides the Corleones, I mean. And it only worked for them because they were making tons of money and got to kill anybody who pissed them off. Free whisky will only take a guy so far.

Telecommute My Sentence, Please. So with all due respect to the hard-working people who make this annual powwow happen, I'm gonna be outside the big tipi this year.

It's not like I'm not the first person to hit the tent flap running. Plenty of my old pals have given Interbike and Vegas the slip over the years, and the wistful e-mails I get from some less-fortunate industry types who've heard I'm skipping the party this year tell me our expatriate community would be considerably larger if it weren't for the whole earning-a-living, feeding-the-kids thing.

I don't need the money that badly. It's the actual cycling itself that keeps me interested in our sport, not the glitzy ProTour exterior or its greasy industrial underpinnings. So until Interbike finds itself a new home in some place where a bicycle is more than a commodity, I'm going to spend the last week of September doing something I haven't done since 1993—riding my bike through the first few days of a crisp Colorado fall.

I'll miss those nightly decompression sessions with the gang at Ruth's Chris, but you know what? They sell Scotch here, too. I'll have to buy my own, of course, but at least I'll be spared that dispiriting, soul-deadening psychic tax they collect at checkout in Sin City.

And I can sweat out my hangovers on the bike instead of the Strip.