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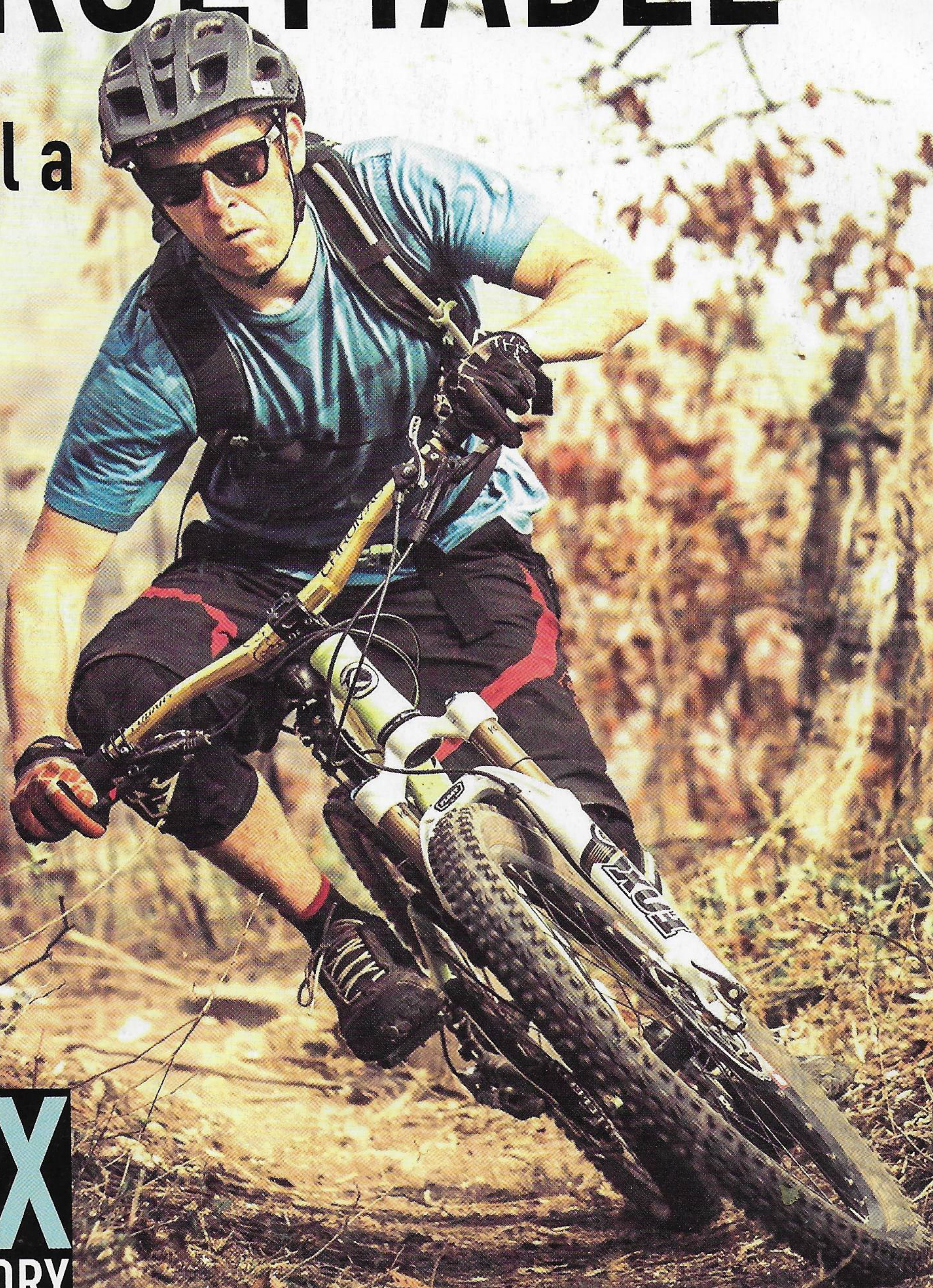
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MUDDY SINGLETRACK:
WHEN IS IT OK TO RIDE?

S P I D E Y



Charlie Kelly's Fat Tire Flyer began in 1980.

It is considered the first ever mountain bike publication and until 1987 it was the only one. Kelly wrote most of the copy himself using different names, took photos, did the layouts, edited submissions, handled publishing and took care of the mailing list. The magazine closed in 1987 but its influence remains. Dirt Rag publisher Maurice Tierney cited the Flyer as inspiration to begin this magazine. Kelly's new book, Fat Tire Flyer is a true, firsthand look at the wild beginnings of the sport of mountain biking with never before seen photos, artwork and memorabilia. In this chapter excerpt, Kelly, who co-founded the MountainBike company with Gary Fisher, recalls the first time they met.

Gary Fisher and I were destined to meet, because two guys with such similar interests could not operate for long in Marin County without eventually encountering each other. The catalyst was a girl I have never seen since. In 1971 I was seeing Rose, a Grateful Dead fan, and she told me that she knew a guy she described as being just like me. She knew him as "Spider," and she said he was a hippie bicycle fanatic with hair even longer than mine, and he hung around with the Dead. She said if we ever got together we would have a lot in common. That turned out to be something of an understatement.

One afternoon I was riding through San Anselmo, and I spotted someone who could only be Spider, riding with another fellow. He had long, skinny arms and legs and blond hair down to the middle of his back. He looked like the kind of person who would be called Spider. I rode up and asked him whether he was Spider.

He corrected me. "I'm 'Spidey,'" he said. It turned out that another member of the Dead "Party Krew" already went by the name of Spider. "But my name is really Gary."

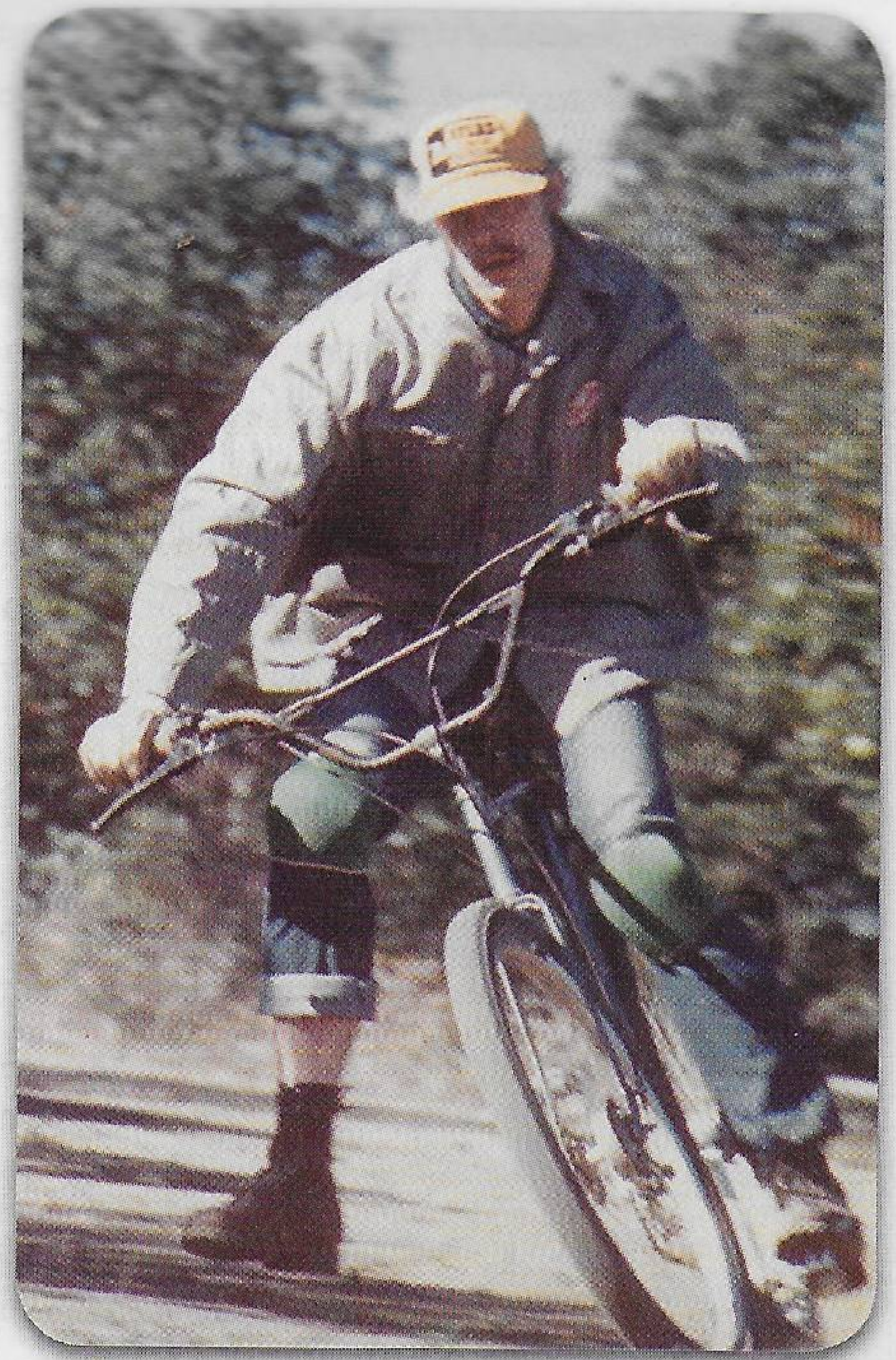
I told him about our mutual friend, Rose, who had suggested that we would hit it off, and Gary introduced his companion as Marmaduke. "But his real name is John Dawson." Apparently I was the only cyclist who used his given name.

Gary was riding a bike I had never heard of, with the label "Paragon" on the downtube, while his friend was on a Mondia like the one that had captured my attention a year earlier.

I asked where they were going, figuring that wherever it was, I would go with them. I had never been on a ride with two other guys on good bikes. I didn't even know two other guys with good bikes.

Gary said, "We're riding down to the Grateful Dead office in San Rafael. Marmaduke plays in a band with Jerry Garcia called the New Riders of the Purple Sage, and their first album is about to come out. We're going to look at the album cover art." I told them that I was the Sons of Champlin roadie and that I had worked on a lot of shows with the Dead. I don't remember whether I was invited or if I invited myself, but 15 minutes after I met these two guys, we were all sitting in the third-floor conference room at the Dead offices at Fifth and Lincoln in San Rafael, looking at dozens of drawings and photographs thrown across the big conference table. Marmaduke introduced the New Riders' bass player Dave Torbert to Gary and me, and the four of us listened to the acetate copy of their yet-unreleased album and pawed through all the graphic material. I had heard of this band, but I had never heard its music, and the album surprised me by how good it was. Within a couple of months it was more of a hit than anything the Grateful Dead had released to that point and remains a classic recording of Jerry at his peak on pedal steel guitar.

Dave and Marmaduke asked Gary and me what we thought of the various photographs and drawings. Gary and I were looking at each other, and I'm sure he was thinking what I was thinking, which was, "Why do you guys care what we think? You barely know us, and it's your album." In any event, we discussed some photographs taken in the house that Marmaduke and guitarist David Nelson shared in Kentfield. I had not yet seen the place but would later spend a lot of time there. There was a series of photographs, including one with Jerry flipping the bird, which was a joke since he was missing most of the middle finger of his right hand. Gary and I agreed that it was the best photo, and it became the back cover of the album.



Charlie Kelly

Gary was also intrigued by a drawing with a cactus and the letters "NRPS" in clouds, by Alton Kelley. We agreed that it was a catchy image. It became the front cover and the long-standing logo for the band, which Gary and I would not realize until the album was released. I was stunned when I saw the album on the shelves a few weeks later with the cover art that I had personally offered my opinion on. I have no doubt that the artwork decision took place in that room and at that very sitting because that was the way things worked in the Dead office. Even though Gary and I should have had nothing to say about it, we represented the critical votes. After about half an hour the meeting was adjourned, many compliments were given about the album, and it was time to go on a bike ride.

As the three of us left the office, Jerry showed up. He was

then about 30 years old and already putting on weight. Marmaduke, in contrast, was tiny, no taller than 5 feet 6 inches tall and about 120 pounds. Marmaduke chirped in his deep singer's voice that we were headed out to ride around China Camp, a loop of maybe 12 miles. Jerry made it clear that bicycle riding was not in his own future and that we wouldn't be running into him out there. Twenty years later I would be going for a bike ride with his fellow Grateful Dead guitarist, Bob Weir.

That ride around China Camp was the first time Gary and I rode together. I had been living on my new Peugeot for months, and Gary was the first good, experienced cyclist I had ever had the opportunity to ride with. Marmaduke had the nicest bike, a brand-new, full-Campy, Swiss Mondia with a rainbow paint job, but it was clear immediately that he was not in the same league with Gary and me.

It's the nature of the sport. In a crowd of riders new to each other, you have to find out who has what. I had never ridden with any other fast riders, but it was instinctive. Gary and I dropped Marmaduke easily and then for the last time in my life, I dropped Gary.

Gary was stunned because he was a real racer and I was just a geek with no experience and a marginal bike. The difference was that Gary had been out of organized racing for a couple of years and had been concentrating on his light show and the Dead Party Krew at the expense of bicycling. I had been doing little else than riding my bike.

Gary, like me, was then engaged in being a disappointment to his parents. He was not interested in academics, but now and then he reluctantly attended art classes to keep a little parental stipend coming in. He had been a bike racer as a kid, one of the youngest racers to be seen in the '60s in Northern California, but his long hair and rebellious nature had gotten him expelled from the Northern California Cycling Association by its legendary director, Bob Tetzlaff.



In those days there were strict international rules about what bicycle racers could look like. They had to wear black shorts and white socks, and hair down to here was not going to cut it.

In a way, bike racing was to blame for Gary's long hair. He had raced at the 1966 Tour del Mar, where promoter Tom Preuss had hired a couple of hippie bands, the Grateful Dead and the Quicksilver Messenger Service, to play the post-race party. Gary



had met the Dead there and had been accepted immediately as a Party Krew member, though he was still a teenager. From that point on he was immersed in the hip culture, and it would be years before he cut his hair. The staid world of bicycle racing would not tolerate his new image, and Gary could not tolerate the restrictions, so Gary gave up racing.

After graduating from Redwood High School, where he excelled in photography and shop classes, Gary used those skills to put together a light show called The Lightest Show on Earth and worked at a few concerts. He lived cheaply and simply and sometimes got money from his parents, who were not thrilled and implored him to get a life and go back to school. At that time, if you couldn't play music, a light show was an artistic vehicle that made you part of the show, and it must have looked like an interesting avenue of expression. As things turned out, light shows were not a good long-term career choice, and by the time I met Gary the writing was on the wall and the light show wasn't.

When we met in 1971, Gary was living in Mill Valley in a big redwood water tank that he had converted into housing. At least that is what I was told, because I never saw the place. Most of the time Gary was at Marmaduke's house, which was far more comfortable. Within a few weeks of our first meeting, the New Riders' album had come out and the band was hot, so it was touring, and Gary was house-sitting for Marmaduke and David Nelson in their big house on Kent Avenue. The house was conveniently located 15 feet from the main north-south bike route through Marin County, and I made a practice of stopping by every time I came past to pick up Gary for a ride. We were not yet good friends, but we had plenty in common, and he knew a lot more about bikes than I did, so it was instructive for me to ride with him and talk bikes.

Marmaduke had decided that his Mondia was not cool enough, so he put in an order for a custom bike with Albert Eisentraut, a Berkeley resident who at the time was the dean of American framebuilding. I was becoming all too aware of the shortcomings of my own bike; it was far too big for me and cheaply equipped in comparison to the Campagnolo-equipped bikes Gary and Marmaduke rode. Gary and Marmaduke constantly pointed out that I needed to upgrade to a bike worthy of my ability.

Marmaduke's family was wealthy and lived in an enormous mansion near Palo Alto. He made frequent trips down there to see his psychiatrist, and on several of those occasions I threw my bike into the trunk of his BMW and then rode home to get some miles in. On one of those trips I encountered another rider, and we started talking bikes. It turned out that he had a Colnago that he wanted to sell, and after some negotiation I returned a week later and bought it.

Colnago! Awesome! Next to a legendary and unobtainable Cinelli, this was the coolest bike on the planet. All Campagnolo and a much better fit than my Peugeot. Now I was a real cyclist. I had an Italian bike and the black, scratchy wool shorts with the chamois liner that turned into a plank every time you washed them, along with a growing collection of wool jerseys.

Sometime in 1972 I rode my bike to the Marin City Flea Market, looking for some furniture for the house I rented in San Anselmo. I found a table and chairs, but I had no way to get them to the house. I ran into Gary, and he had his van with him, so we put my furniture in it, and he said he would drop it off for me.

Several days went by. I was starting to think Gary had stolen my \$25 table, but he finally showed up and helped me carry it into the two-bedroom cottage at 21 Humbolt Street. I had just lost my last roommate, who had moved out to live with his girlfriend. Gary looked around and

observed that it was a pretty nice place. He asked who else lived there, and I told him I was fresh out of roommates. I invited him to share it with me, and in a few days he moved in. For the next decade we would be joined at the hip, first as roommates and later as business associates. ■

