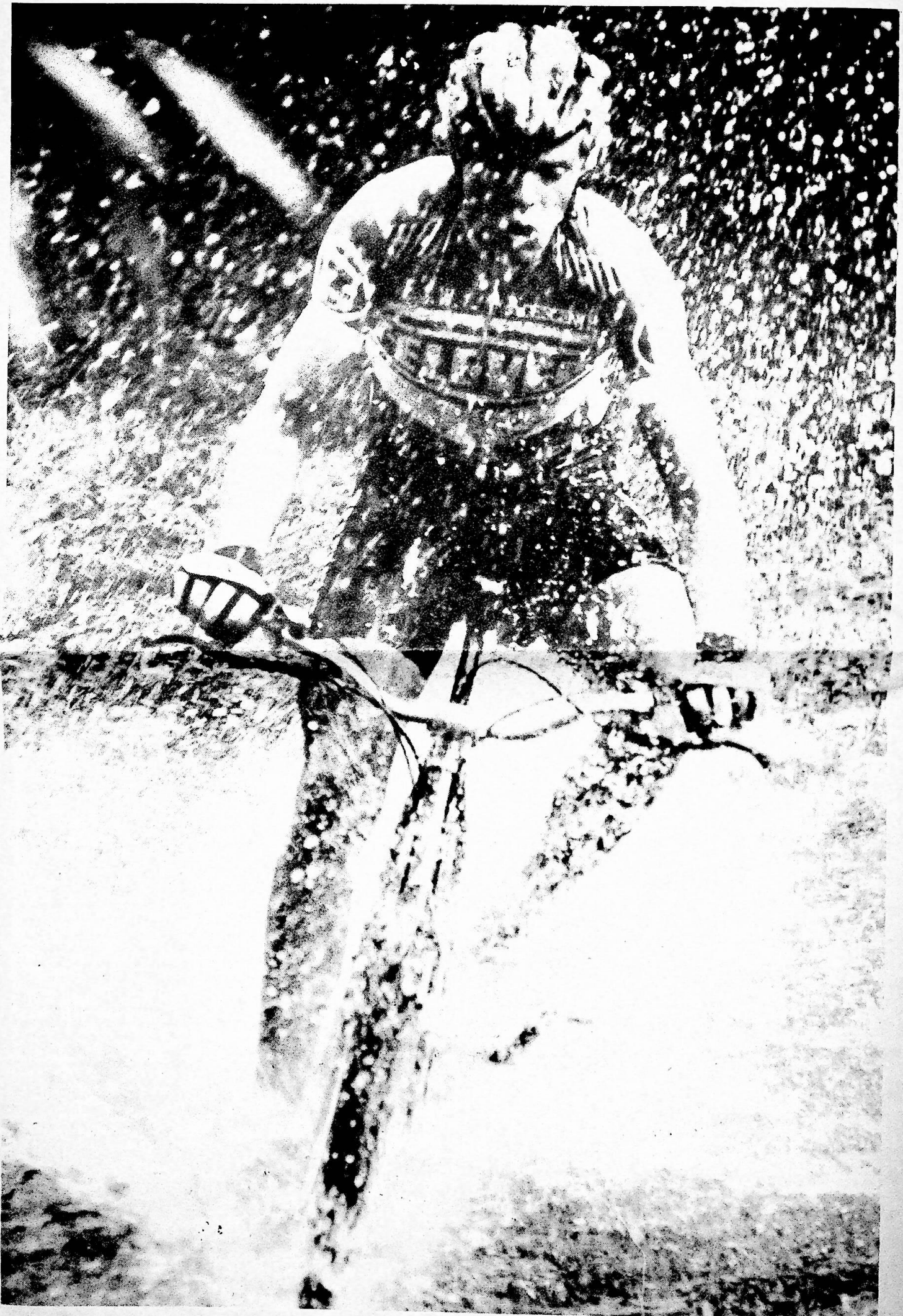


photograph by: Marianne Martin



Off Road Riding What's It All About?

written by: Marianne Martin

In the beginning, there were the 50 pound paper boy one speed bicycles; big strong, sturdy and stout. These bikes were of simple construction and served their purpose for inner city transportation of short distances and, preferably, flat terrain. With time, simplicity gave way to technology. Bikes were born with three, five and even ten different gear ratios. The market expanded and the technology moved on. Trends followed the European racing models with dropped handlebars, narrow tires, lighter weights and higher prices. Bicycles were designed for speed and long distance travel as cycling became sport. But for city riding, commuting and other daily use, the racing models were just not practical.

Hence the rebirth of the clunker; back to single speeds; back to simplicity. Cyclists could leave their good bikes at home. As the trend caught on, ingenuity created "beach-cruisers". These bikes were lightweight, sturdy and destruction proof, and therefore as good off the road as on. The rage swept California, but evolution did not stand still. It didn't take much time for some adventurous minds to combine the durability of the cruisers with the technology of the racing bikes. Beginning with five dollar clunkers and a few spare parts, experimentation gave way to a whole new breed.

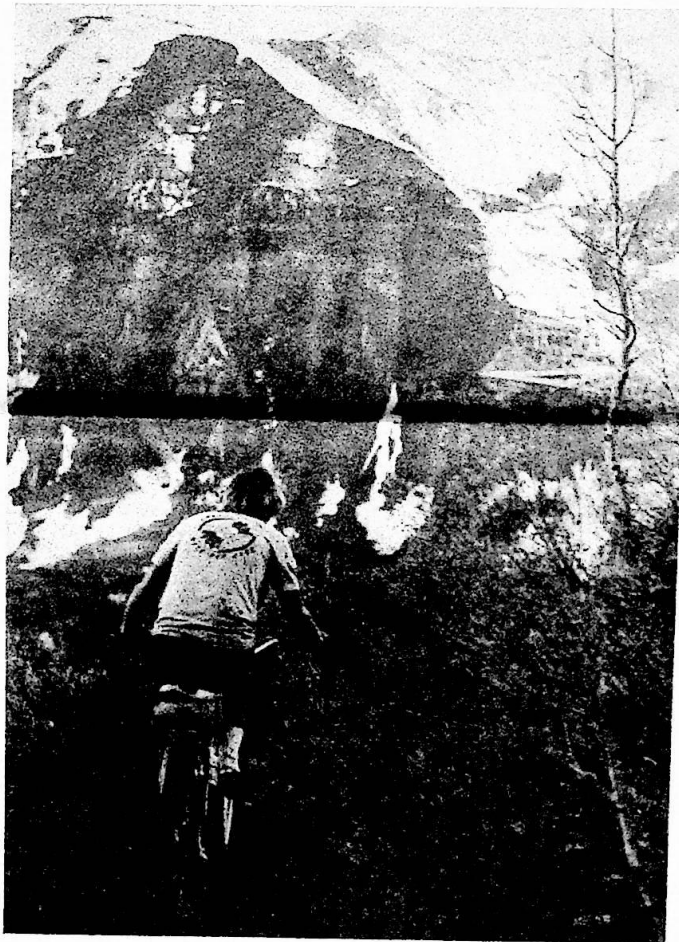
Today's off-road bikes, or mountain bikes, are distinguished by their wide knobby ballon tires, upright handlebars, motorcycle type brake-levers, heavy duty brakes, wide range of gears, thumb shift levers, and quick release seat post (for raising and lowering the seat to fit the needs of the terrain).

As additional features vary with the models, these bikes range in price from \$300 to \$1300. At the upper end of the spectrum are the custom framesets by such builders as J.P. Wiegler, Chris Chance, Tom Ritchey, and the like; which are made of strong light-

weight alloy and are put together with top quality components.

However, the "production" bikes of today are not far behind. A mid-priced model costing about \$700 can have many of the same features of necessity (sealed bearings, bottom bracket and

manufacturer puts it this way: "When you're skin diving sixty feet down or hang-gliding a thousand feet up, you don't want to be using cheap equipment; you want to be using the best. If your riding fifty miles from a paved road and a hundred miles from a bike



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weight alloy and are put together with top quality components. As prices drop further, so does durability.

For the average round-the-town-in-the-hills -sometimes rider, the less expensive models are fine. When weight and aggressiveness of the rider increases so do the needs. For a very adventuresome rider, one

shop, a breakdown is a lot more than an inconvenience. It's a disaster."

Uses for these types of bikes are endless and the buyers are from all walks of life. The long wheelbase, soft angles, and upright position make it great for commuters; while its strength, durability and gear ratios make it ideal for even the most adventurous riders.

"I got it for my head" said one off-season racer, "I was so burnt out from racing and training that I just wanted something to escape and go crazy with. It's been great!" Even when used mainly for commuting, the wide knobby tires give traction even in the snow so they're good for riding all year round. These bikes are legal for USCF cyclo-cross and also have some organized racing of their own. In California, races include down hill time trials and mass start events of up to thirty miles. No rules govern what may be ridden, one should practice experimentation and ingenuity.

The potential is endless. The many features provide benefits to a very broad range of users and make them adaptable to an enormous range of situations. The one benefit, however, that seems universal is the fact that above all, these bikes are fun!

This month, twenty courageous cyclists will head to Mongolia for a four week bike trek into the wilds of China; "we've seen other parts of China by bicycle," said Josh Lehman, one of the trip's leaders. "This time we'll see the real wilderness, the uninhabited edge." Mountain bikes were chosen for the trip because of their reliability and durability. All members of the trip will be using the same type of bicycle (the STUMPJUMPER by Specialized will be supplied for this trip) to simplify mechanical support.

Adventures such as these are becoming popular fast. It doesn't take long to fill this trip with twenty eager travelers, even at \$3000 per member. Such a vacation for most, is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Of course, a person need not necessarily travel so far for such adventure. Many exciting trips are available right here in the "states". Whether through an organized trip or one's own planning, many opportunities exist for this new breed of bicycle.