

# Mammoth Mountain Madness

*From serious roadracing to the Kamikazi Downhill, with a little BMX and Trials thrown in. If you couldn't find your kind of cycling here, you weren't looking.*

By Charles R. Kelly

**K**amikaze. Roughly translated from Japanese, it means "Divine Wind," and the phrase has religious overtones. But in the United States, the name conjures up visions of suicide pilots attempting to deep-six John Wayne. In Mammoth Lakes, California, the Kamikaze Mountain Bike Downhill held on July 19 did little to change the American impression of what the word means, as 150 suicide pilots took on four miles and 2000 vertical feet of ski-area access road.

But we're getting a little ahead of our story. The "Kamikaze" was only part of a celebration of cycling in the Mammoth Lakes area called the Sierra Cycling Se-

ries, with four days of competitive and non-competitive events featuring a stage race for road riders, a three-day rally for mountain bikers, and a BMX event. For several days, riders who ordinarily would have little to do with each other mingled and learned to appreciate each other's skills.

Typically, road riders regard mountain bikers as less than serious, mountain bikers consider roadies to be lycra wimps, and both groups put down BMX as child's play. For their part, the BMXers may admit a grudging respect for mountain bikers but think the bikes are too big and heavy. Road riders? Off the map.

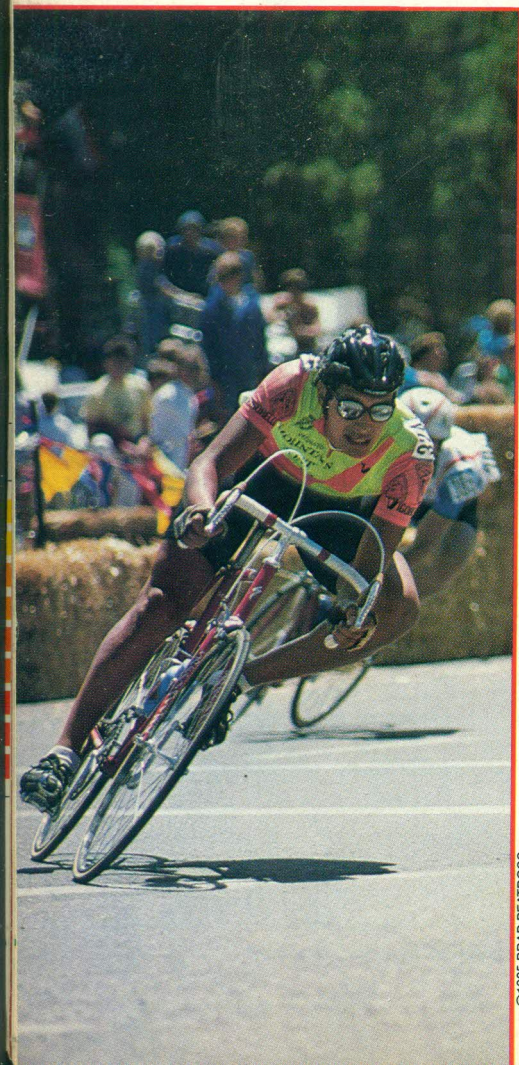
But while the road races and BMX competitions were interesting, they broke little new ground. The road racers were using the Mammoth races as a high-altitude tune-up for the upcoming Coors Classic, and for the BMX riders, Mammoth was just another stop on the circuit. The hottest growth curve belongs to mountain bike racing, and in its current state of flux it is expanding into every vacuum available.

Even more than road racing, classic mountain bike racing is a difficult item to

deliver to spectators. Riders would much rather race to the horizon than amuse a crowd by taking laps around a parking lot sprinkled with dirt for the occasion, but for the purposes of those who sponsor races spectators are the *raison d'être*. At Mammoth Lakes, the stage race format solved the problem nicely and at the same time illustrated the probable future of the fat-tire sport.

The Plumline Mountain Bike Rally consisted of three stages—an observed trials competition on day one followed the next day by the Kamikaze Downhill and on day three by the capper, a 50-mile race. Scoring such events will always be the subject of controversy, but in this case the competitors received points for their placings in each of the three events, with the individual stages weighted differently. The Downhill was worth twice the trials points, and the 50-miler three times the trials points. Overall winner Scot Nicol earned his title on the basis of consistency, taking second in the trials, third in the downhill, and fourth in the 50-mile race.

For the sponsor's standpoint, the observed trials are close to an ideal event.



©1985 BRAD PEATROSS



©1985 MEREDITH NELSON

All the action takes place within a small area, and riders break bikes and take spectacular falls at suitably low speeds. The course in Mammoth included a variety of obstacles so challenging that no one could get through all of them unscathed, and some of the better riders found their chances for an overall win altered by the trials. Ultra-skilled rider Jim Deaton lost his concentration on one of the easier obstacles, and swallowed maximum points when he was the first rider to fall completely off a log bridge. Arriving late, Scot Nicol practically charged out of his car into the trials event, and also fell off the log, but after the lapse he pulled himself together and showed his remarkable trials skill by finishing second.

The Kamikaze Downhill was the next day. With the legendary Repack course relegated to the history books because of permit problems, mountain bikers have been looking for another forum in which to showcase the aspects of their sport that deny sanity and the instinct for self-preservation. Yes, now it can be told: downhill mountain bike racing is not as safe as, say, tennis. In tennis you might get hit by a ball. In downhill racing you might get hit by a mountain. On dee-fense, Mother Nature.

In Mammoth, downhillers found a more than adequate replacement for the Repack course, and the answer to many hushed prayers in the form of a ski-lift ride to the top. Descending 2000 feet in four miles on a surface varying from loose sand to washboard, the Kamikaze course permitted riders to easily reach speeds of 40 mph while three feet away from the edge of a cliff.

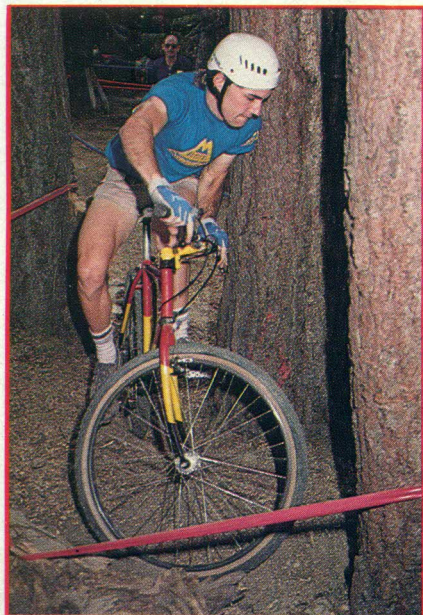
**T**he threat of physical annihilation is exhilarating to many, especially when experienced vicariously, and the Kamikaze Downhill got instant attention in the various print and video media. When the first rider pushed off at 2:00 that afternoon, a hundred hungry lenses looked for blood.

**Yes, now it can be told:  
downhill mountain bike  
racing is not as safe as,  
say, tennis.**

©1985 GARY NEWKIRK



# Mammoth



©1985 GORDON WILTSE

Downhill monster Jim Deaton, winner of every downhill race he's entered, showed why he is a master of this obscure science. Attacking every part of the course, he let his bike go on the long straights where vibration from the washboard surface numbs the arms from the elbows down. On the corners he rode in control, which is about twice as fast as most riders can corner, so he would not risk a crash, trusting his BMX acceleration to gain precious seconds as he straightened out. He passed his minute man, Todd DeAngelis, while thoroughly out of control and only halfway down.

## Mammoth Mountain results:

### OVERALL RESULTS:

Pro/Am:	Women:
1. Scott Nichol	1. Jacquie Phelan
2. John Loomis	
3. Jim Deaton	
Expert:	Veteran:
1. Greg Dres	1. Jim Herting

### Citizen:

1. Brad Peatross

### OBSERVED TRIALS:

#### Men:

Expert-Kevin Norton	9
Advanced-Gumby Collins	48
Intermediate-Peter Schoerner	12
Novice-Brad Peatross	20

#### Women:

Expert-Hannah North	61
Novice-Nina Baker	65

### FAT TIRE KAMIKAZE:

Pro/Am-Jim Deaton	8:42
Women-Jacquie Phelan	11:50
Expert-Dean Bradley	8:46
Citizen-Brad Peatross	8:42
veteran-Jim Herting	11:24

### SIERRA 7500:

1. Roy Rivers	4:12:1.0
2. Joe Murray	4:12:1.1
3. Todd DeAngelis	4:31:31

But then Deaton jammed his chain between the dropout and the cluster, forcing him to dismount, loosen the quick-release, free the chain, tighten things up and remount. An eighth mile to go, and Deaton drops his chain; no time to fix it, he coasts without pedaling. Thirty feet from the line his rear tire blows out. And after all that, he finishes in a dead heat for the fastest time.

The day after the Kamikaze, the action moved down to Bishop for the 50-miler. A rider's race, this had little spectator potential with a course that topped out at 11,000 feet. In the race brochure there was an ominous note saying that any riders who had lost more than five percent of body weight after 25 miles would be pulled. In this area summer temperatures of 100 degrees are the rule, and the start was scheduled for 6:00 a.m. to avoid the

worst of the heat. Fortunately for all concerned, rain fell all night, cooling the air and firming the road surface of loose sand.

But for all its toughness—50 miles, heat, rain, hail, and 7500 feet of climbing—the race was decided by a sprint across 50 feet of lawn. Joe Murray and Roy Rivers opened a chasm between themselves and the spread-out field, then put their heads down and sprinted against each other in what amounts to a photo finish in mountain bike racing. Rivers picked up his first race win by half a wheel.

As a first-time event, the Mammoth Sierra Cycle Series managed to find a few rough edges, but these will undoubtedly be under control for the second annual. Events like this have a way of becoming classics. ■



©1985 CHARLES KELLY