

The Mother's Day Tour

The Weaker Sex? Don't Believe It

By Jacquie Phelan

Mountain bikes are not for men only, as the growing numbers of adventurous women on the trails will attest. But the numbers aren't growing fast enough for Jacquie Phelan, the National Off-Road Bicycle Association's women's champion, and Casey Patterson, 1983 women's second-place finisher and proprietor of "Wilderness Bicycle Tours."

Hoping to attract more women to fat tires, they organized a mountain bike weekend for women only, "a girlcott where we ban the boys." What better occasion for it than Mother's Day?



Saturday, May 12, 1984

Dear Mom,

It's after midnight; do you know where your daughter is? She's sitting around a campfire in Sam Taylor State Park, surrounded on all sides by an unlikely crew of clunker converts. They are all women, ranging from my age up to yours. Until now, they never thought they'd see another girl on knobbies out in the wilderness. In fact, half of them have never imagined that *they'd* be capable of dirt riding—that's for boys, right?

Wrong. Ellen K. convinced her sister to try it. Lisa prodded her mother into taking the plunge. Terri says her old man considered coming in lipstick and a wig, just to be along on such an unusual ride. Dorrie came because she's literally the only klunkette in Bakersfield, and she could use the company for a change. They're all here to try something brand new, and must've overcome considerable misgivings. ("What if they ride me into the ground? What if they're all fat-farm dropouts? What if it's a gay singles group?") The funny thing is, none of us knows what the other "does," as in, "What do *you* do?" We're way too busy mastering palsied derailleurs to give a darn about how anyone spends her non-leisure time. Now is for problem-solving, so the fun can get underway!

We wobbled off this morning, after an excellent brunch of beer and quesadillas, through the filtered sun of the coastal redwoods. We had five flat miles to get to know the bikes (half had their own, half were riding Casey's steeds) before we hit the Olema Hill. Oddly appropriate, that name, because we all got the chance to feel like aging matriarchs as we climbed the 350 vertical feet in one short mile. The view of Tomales Bay and the cow-studded hills below us were all that would compensate for the climb; Ramona, the other "wranglette," and I had express



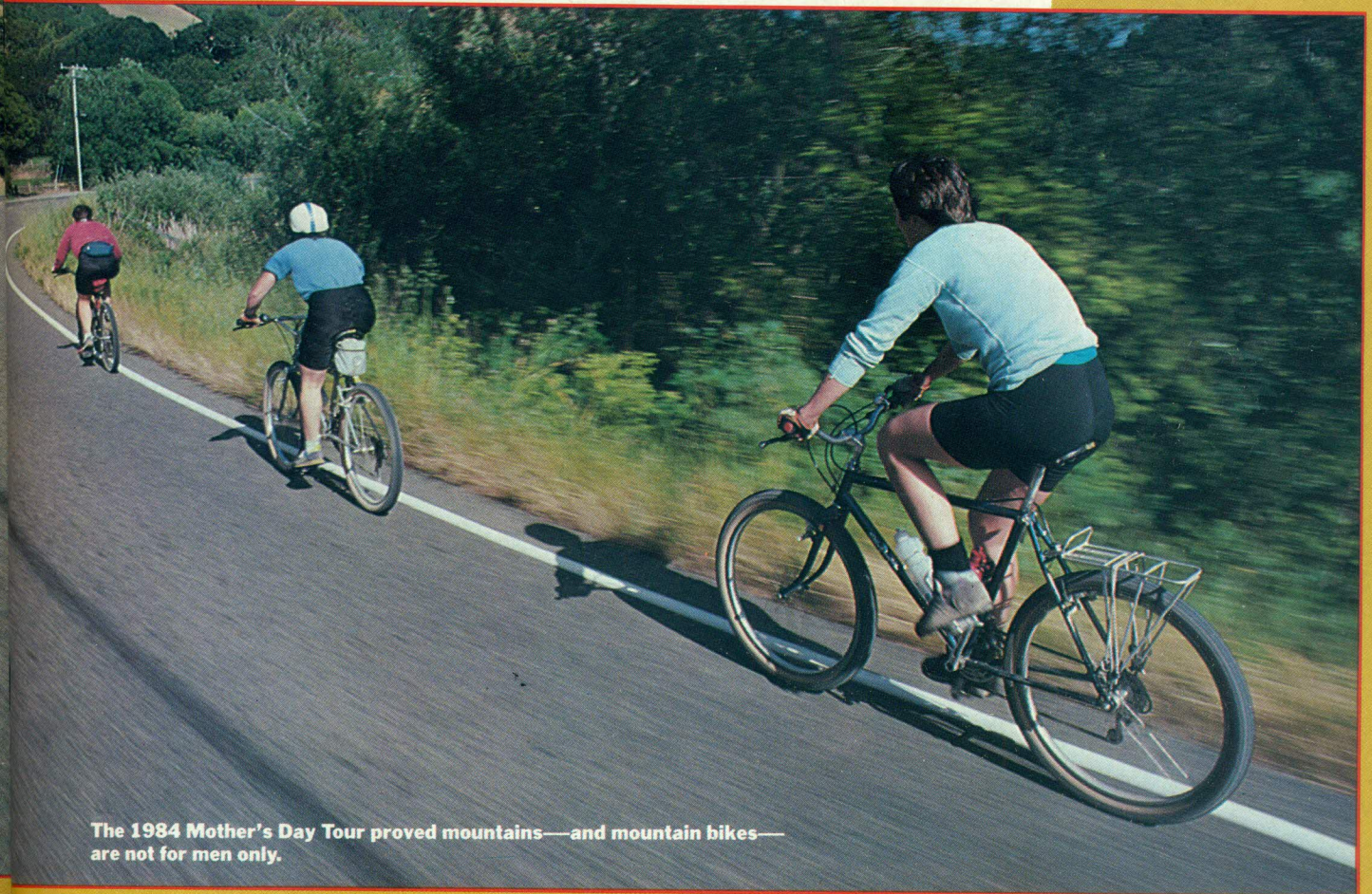
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instructions *not* to go ripping down the other side, lest anyone else should attempt the same. Inciting a high-speed crash would be indecorous, as Miss Manners would say. We complied.

The last few miles to Arch Rock we conducted at a pace halfway between a dawdle and a mosey. Overhead, the Red-Tailed hawks were doing pairs formation. Underfoot, Alba the Brazilian Bombshell was finding out about stinging nettles the hard way. The whole ride she'd been flinging herself down in front of the bikes for the low-angle photos. Just once, she plunked herself in the trailside weeds, and shot straight up into the air, as the fiery needles began to take effect. Boy, can that chick *dance*.

The Rock is a page ripped out of the Sierra Club Calender. It is almost too perfect: an immense, craggy finger pointing out to sea, topped with enough coastal wildflowers to keep a botanist busy for a week. Below and under it, a series of waterfalls and pools fed by Coast Creek. Watercress grows in the pools, so we collected enough for the evening salad, and noticed how pleasant the cool water felt after two hours on the bike at midday. What followed was a mad dash for the deepest spot, and our best impression of Renoir's "Les Grandes Baigneuses."

You may ask how complete strangers can get so comfortable around one another in the course of a few hours; I can only answer that, after all they went through figuring out the bikes, there wasn't anything left for holding up barriers. We became clunkin' cousins. You probably have no idea how vulnerable a novice rider feels, trying to retrieve a gear rattling like a spoon in a garbage disposal, while the rest of the gang sails past. Think of learning to tune the car radio while steering straight ahead, and you'll understand.



The 1984 Mother's Day Tour proved mountains—and mountain bikes—are not for men only.

We treated every bump like an exercise, every ditch like a problem with a solution.



On the return route, we turned loose the hotshots (Rude-Girl Ramona, Daring Dorrie and Margo the Masher) on the hilly trails, whilst Casey and I shepherded the rest back up the ever-so-slightly inclining Bear Valley Trail. True martyrs, we suffocated the urge to race from the meadow back to the truck. (We wouldn't want to teach any of our impressionable wards *bad manners*.)

Back at campsite #44, we got dinner underway. Casey brought news that ours wasn't the only "hen party" in the park; there were several women in the bathroom applying makeup for God knows what purpose. In camp, we were applying the beer. All the bread and salad disappeared as we waited for the *fettucine al fresco* ("glop," to you) to boil. Eventually, as the stove sputtered out its remaining BTU's, we settled for the pasta *al zanna* ("that's Italian for 'fangs': you'll need 'em'") rather than the usual *al dente*. Then we stood around the fire and told risqué stories . . . like the one where Casey got exactly what she wanted for her birthday: a handsome hitchhiker . . . whoops, wrong story.

Guess I'd better catch some z's myself. Wish you were here.

Sunday, May 13

Happy Mother's Day, Mom,

Casey and I just dropped off the 14 rank, but no longer beginner ladies at their cars. Terri's husband, who'd asked us to "bring 'er back alive," was waiting, the first reminder of "nor-





mal" life, with its schedules, responsibilities, duties. We'd said we'd be back on Sunday at 3:00; it was 5:00. We'd been having too much fun.

The second day of riding was even better than the first, owing to the wealth of experience gained from the previous day. We treated every bump like an exercise, every ditch like a problem with a solution. We coached each other like team members, hooting for the riders when they accomplished a move with finesse. Terri told me she dreamt half the night of lifting her front wheel over seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and gliding over impassable terrain. Betty began to stay on the bike, rather than walking it when the trail got rough. Carolyn now hits the turns like a pro, clipping the apex as neat as you please, leaving no dusty rooster tail behind. Not surprising, when you know that her motto is, "trails forever."

They're all dedicated outdoor nuts; only being out there on bikes is new. Casey and I are sure we're doing our bit for the fat-tire movement by adding a population of newly inducted fun-addicts to the trails. Helping dilute the effects of teenage gonzo diplomacy, whose salute is the extended middle finger, and whose greeting is, "Outta my way!" If you can't tell, I'm campaigning for the legitimacy of clunkers on trails, and the best way to do that is to impress other trail-users with . . . manners!

How Casey and I got such a diverse group of women together is still beyond us. All we know is, we did something that needed doing, and we know that the reverberations will echo on. Kids will say, "Yeah, that's a picture of my mom at Rockhopper IX," men will no longer complain about the absence of females in the sport, and we'll never despair over the lack of riding buddies.

Next year, it's *your* turn.

Jacquie

