

IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY...

BICYCLE ACTION
FAT TYRE FIVE
WENDOVER

For anyone curious about mountainbike events the goings - on in a green and leafy glen in the Chilterns on a high summer day provided the perfect answer. This was the Wendover Bash, the second event in the Bicycle Action Fat Tyre Five series and it had everything.

Inspired racing, an awesome descent down a sheer shale cliff to get the adrenalin pumping and a peaceful ambience in which to enjoy a picnic and watch others exert themselves.

The event proved exactly why mountainbikes are here to stay. They are great fun (if we had £1 for every person who's told us they've not had so much fun on a bike since they were a kid we wouldn't be writing this now).

You could see it on the faces of newcomers. Diffident and sceptical as they made their way into the middle of the chaotic gaggle of bikes and people. A tentative tryout on one of the machines on offer. A smile. Another convert.

The people from Channel Four's 'Wheels Wings and Water' were there. They'd seen it all before - evangelists for a new sport and all that. They trudged their way up to the top of Suicide Hill with cameras and equipment. Was it a bore? 'You've got to be kidding, this is a real gas!'

Problems with obtaining Forestry Commission approval meant a much shorter course than originally planned. In the event this proved to be a bonus. A tight course for the Muddy Fox Open meant some exciting racing and it allowed the picnicking spectators to enjoy the action without having to uproot their picnics.

The Open was a closely contested affair.

From the start there was a short straight before the track narrowed and entered the trees. A winding section through the beeches and into a sharp left hander, then the straight followed by a knotty up-and-down through a short sharp ravine and into the short finishing straight. Chris Simmonds from team



Picture: Richard Francis

Freewheeler showed superior skills and sprinting ability to beat the fast finishing Murray Tidmarsh and Rufus Albermarle.

The Gecko Hill Climb gave riders their first look at Suicide Hill even if it was the wrong way round. The task here looked simple. Get as far up the hill as possible without the feet touching the ground. There were a few things to contend with. The loose shale surface put a premium on handling skills on this ultra steep hill. Here, as in conventional cycle racing, power to weight ratio was the most critical factor as a few of the more muscle bound were to find out.

The pacemakers were feeling pretty secure as rider after rider found the slippery surface and the narrow track through the trees too much to handle. Then, young Yan Playe, who must

MURRAY TIDMARSH was one of the fastest down Suicide Hill. Going by the look on his face, it's one of those things you enjoy more once it's over.

weigh all of a few stone charged past their mark and gave the following riders something to really think about. Yan was eventually beaten into fourth place by some truly Herculean efforts. Jeremy Torr first of all strained every sinew and showed that his 'English' cycles really can climb. Craig Campbell though was to pip him on the line. He and his Freewheeler teammate, Chris Simmonds who finished third showed that BMX



Picture: Paul Willis.

ADRENALIN DOSE. Just making it down Suicide Hill was enough of an adrenalin surge for most people. This rider shuns the suicide antics of some of the Wenderover daredevils and does it the safe way - nice and slow, weight well back and the back brake locked on.

TACTICS played an important part in the days racing. Here two riders discuss theirs under the pretext of checking each others helmet.



Picture: Richard Francis



NEGOTIATING the short sharp ravine in the Muddy Fox Open was the trickiest part of the course - especially when the legs are a bit wobbly after a couple of laps of flat out racing. Inevitably there were a couple of spills and a mad scramble to regain lost ground.

PUSH START. A helping hand before heading through the trees for the Gecko Hill Climb.



skills come in handy - particularly when you have them in abundance.

The team relay was one of the most popular events at Wendover. It's a chance for chaos to reign supreme as riders battle to change bikes and keep the momentum going. Inevitably there are a few spills which keeps the spectators happy as well. Team Ridgeback handled the chaos better than the rest and beat the Muddy Fox and Covent Garden Cycles teams into second and third places respectively.

The last event was the one no one who took part would forget in a hurry. A 100 per cent blast of adrenalin scooting down Suicide Hill. You had to push your bike to the top. It just kept on getting steeper. At the summit you could see over the trees to Aylesbury in the distance. The way down was a narrow track through the trees.

The organisers from the Bicycle Co-operative were worried. 'Everyone must wear a crash helmet. Everyone should have knee and elbow protectors.



GREG 'CUDDLES' Oxenham decides the safest way down Suicide Hill is to leave the bike behind and run.

TEAM EFFORT: The tough course and hot weather took its toll in the team relay

This is not a race. Take it easy.' They had good reason to be concerned. A couple of people had given the Hill a go in the morning and ended up on their ears.

The first couple of people took it very easy indeed. Back brake locked on, bum hung way back over the rear wheel, desperately trying to control the bikes natural tendency to slide sideways.

Then Chris Simmonds hit the track. He looked suicidally fast as leapt the bike over the hump at the bottom. There wasn't much room to pull up at the end.

Chris managed it beautifully with a controlled slide. Not to be outdone, Brian Phillips of team Ridgeback also tore down the slope with a determination that looked to us like a death wish.

With blatant disregard for life and limb he flew past the people who had the brains to merely watch and took to the air at tracks end. He didn't pay as much attention to stopping though. Either that or he decided that he wanted the prize for Most Spectacular Spill. No one was going to deny him this for his effort was truly spectacular. Deciding he couldn't

pull up in time he launched himself over the handlebars in a somersault that would get him a spot in the Moscow Circus and tumbled down the small bank leaving his bike to find its own way of stopping.

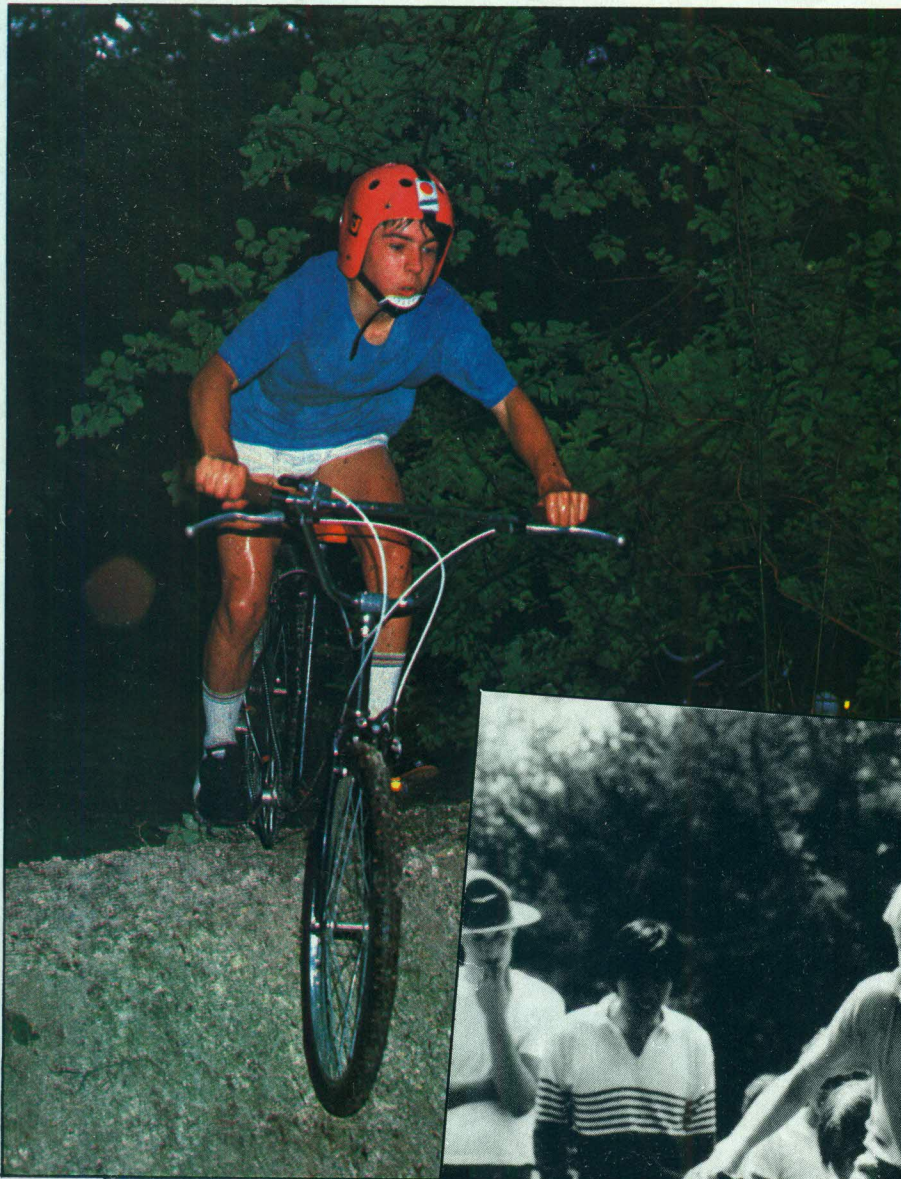
While no one matched Brian's style there were few other contenders who confined their efforts to the slope itself. Brian O'Brian of Muddy Fox had an argument with a tree that left him winded and the tree permanently damaged. And of course there was 'Cuddles' of Pamplona fame (see shorts) who decided to



MOUNTAINBIKE riders have their own form of limbering up exercises, or is this what the BMX crowd mean by 'getting air'?



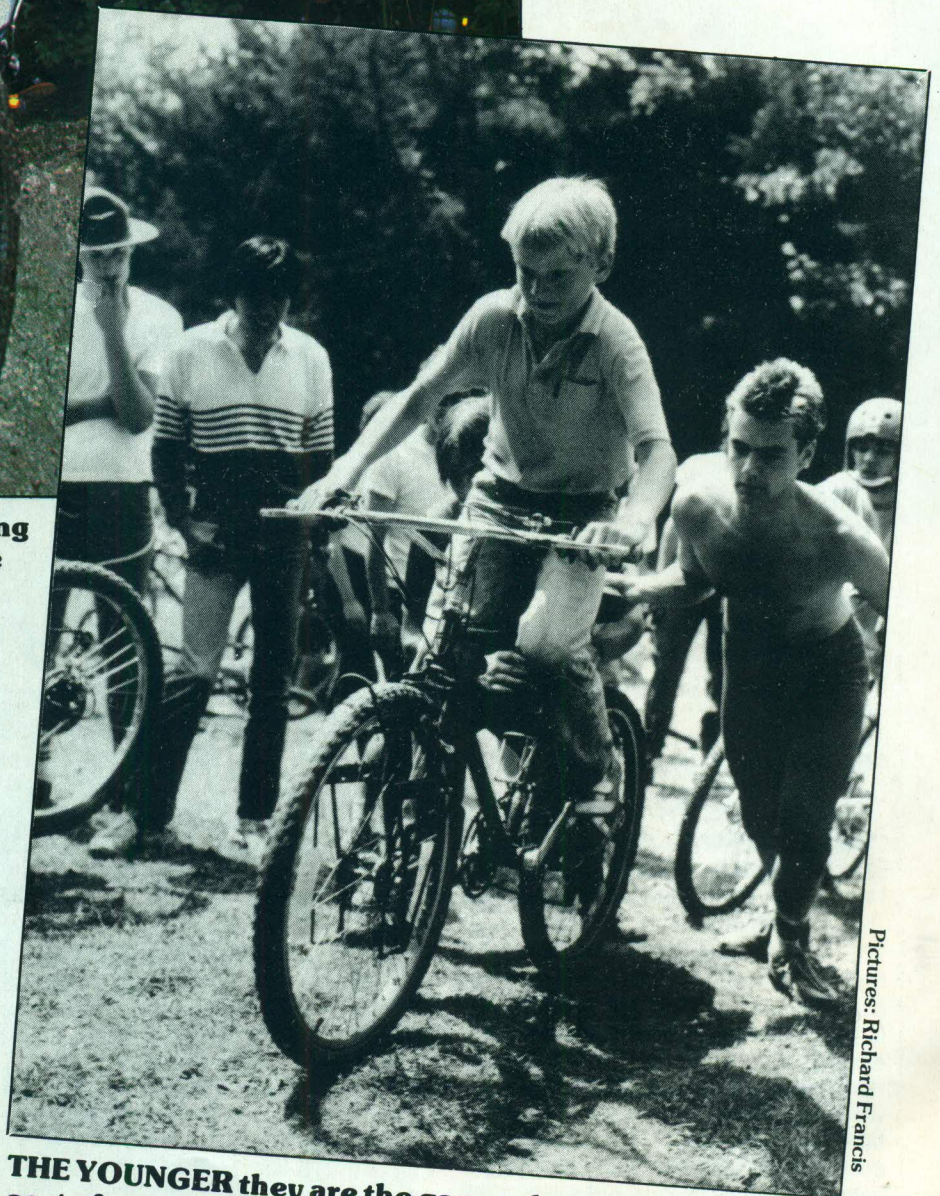
Pictures: Richard Francis



WORKING HARD. Charging through the trees, the face says it all. The racing was fast and furious and more than enough to exhaust most of the riders.

leave his bike behind and run the slope. Naturally, he 'walked away' with the Least Stylish Rider prize. His opposite number, the winner of the Most Stylish Rider award, was Andrew Entwhistle who introduced some elegance and grace to the proceedings with some stately riding on his Cleland.

But the prizes were secondary. Everyone had come to have a good time. They weren't disappointed. There were a few complaints. Like the bloke who came up and said: 'This is the second one of these my son's competed in. Now he wants me to buy a bike for the Brecon ride. I came out here for a nice day out in the countryside. Now I find it is going to cost me a few hundred quid.' By the way he enjoyed his test ride, he didn't seem like a man who minded exchanging his money for a mountainbike.



THE YOUNGER they are the gamer they come. This is the sort of competitor who has the 'newer' mountainbikers saying things like 'if only I were a few(?) years younger.'

Pictures: Richard Francis