

HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE

Mountain Bikes Aren't Made Just for America

BY CHARLES KELLY

It's been a hundred years since the first bike boom swept Europe and America, and since then the bicycle has been through several cycles of popularity. The last major pulse was when the 1973 gas shortage forced millions of Americans to consider for the first time the idea of traveling without a car. The resulting surge in bike sales accounts for many of the millions of cheap 10-speeds that now sit with tires flat, rusting in garages.

The introduction and widespread popularity of the mountain bike has created a cycling revolution more lasting than that of the '70s. It will rank as one of the most important in the history of the sport/recreation/transportation by the time we get far enough beyond it to have the advantage of hindsight. The revolution is far from complete, because the mountain bike has not yet conquered the world.

There may still be another decade of growth in sales before things level out.

Europe has gone wild over mountain biking in just the last year, especially the racing end of the sport. In fact, we'll wager that the undisputed world champion mountain biker will soon be a European. The fat-tire bike has invigorated famous old companies whose previous direction was the creation of lighter and more specialized components for elite

racers; now there's a reason for them to create high-quality components and bikes that have applications for riders who don't have trucks full of spares following them around.

Asia represents a major market for mountain bikes, and it seems only a matter of time until their advantages become obvious compared with the heavy-duty but slow, freight-oriented bikes that serve much of this continent. Most of the mountain bikes in use worldwide

are already made in Asia, and although the market for bicycles there is conservative, the influence of American innovation will eventually be felt. Millions of mountain bikes will introduce a means of communication more durable than newspapers or telephone lines. They will provide travel independent of public transportation, and they'll permanently change life on this continent.

With vast expanses poorly serviced by paved roads, Africa, South America, and Australia are natural breeding grounds for mountain bikes.

The irony of the mountain bike is that it will eventually affect the rest of the world more than it will the country of its origin. It will be a peaceful revolution and more enduring than any political upheaval. Governments will come and go, but the mountain bike is here (and everywhere) to stay. ■

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