

The bicycle jump ©kgl

There is an old "Fuji League" road bike in my garage. Nice silver-white in color, Fuji Val-Lite-Steel Quad-butted ("Lugged") frame with carefully pin-striped sculptured joints, old style down-mounted SunTour gears & deraileurs, quick-releases front, rear & seat. A very nice looking bike. In fact, the only other frames I've seen lately with sculptured pin-striped lugged joints are hand made jobs that you order a year ahead of when you actually want them and they usually cost as much as a small car.

This old roadie was at a yard sale over in Denver. It had been relegated to garage-abandoned-orphan status by the owner. I had left my MTB at home, believing the temporary job I came on would be a total time-hog. When I found the problems were reasonably solvable there suddenly loomed the prospect of a very boring five days after work with the hotel T.V. I picked up the

Sunday paper, circled several bike-for-sale ads and headed out.

Any of the half dozen MTB's for sale would have taken more than my week to fix. The rental fee at a nearby bike shop was more than I was willing to pay and the rentals didn't look much better than the basket-cases in the want-ads. Besides, the hotel had a good workout room that I could use, and get back to my own MTB when this week's job was done and I was home again. The last want-ad item I had circled said; "His & Hers road bikes for sale, good price". I found the address, the people were at home.

The owner of the men's-style Fuji, and his wife, had recently been car-clipped while riding on a local highway. They repented of road 'cycling, bought new double-suspension MTB's with all the goodies and advertised their roadies for sale. The lady showed me the free helmet that Bell had given her for her broken one. Her husband

hadn't taken as bad a fall, but they both decided to get off the highway. I really can't blame them. But that's a matter for another discussion.

Skinny tires had never interested me. Being close to 200 lbs I always figured fat tires were the only way to go. Probably a prejudiced holdover from my old paper boy days and my old single-speed heavyweight fat-tired Schwinn. Besides, if the truth was known, I probably thought all those tight bike clothes those skinny tire guys wore were just a tad funny. After weighing the options of spending the week in the gym or in trying out a skinny tire, the skinny tire won. After all, I just wanted to get in some pedaling and there were a lot of skinny tires in Denver. They're all over the place. For this yard sale price I could sell it to a co-worker at the end of the week, recover my few expenses and get back to my serious MTB'ing. I paid the lady, got a bill of sale and loaded the bike into the trunk of my rental car. On the way back to the hotel I

stopped at a bike shop, bought a tube of lube, two tires & tubes, a small pump, a pack of rags, a bottle of polish and a brush.

Back at the hotel I spread out the newspaper and tipped the bike upside-down on it so I could clean up the old Fuji. I polished off the road grime and dirt, lubed the bearings & gears and changed the tires. It looked really good. I changed into shorts & sneakers, whipped the bike up on it's rear wheel and walked it to the elevator and out of the hotel. Time to go see what all the attraction was for those funny skinny tire bikes.

I had always figured bikes were the same; if you rode one, you've rode 'em all. Climbing onto that skinny tire was a revelation; kind of like trading in an old faded green six-cylinder pickup truck for a brand new sports car. The miles melted away with very little effort on my part. Kind of like that old bike was saying; "Darn, it's good to be back on my tires,

don't you worry about pedaling, I can take care of this...". That week went fast, and the old Fuji and I formed a kind of friendship. I even bought some of those funny looking skinny clothes and a glitzy bike helmet. I melted right in with the other skinny tire riders and nobody knew I was a total rookie. When the week was over, Fuji took it's first airplane ride, all disassembled in an airline cardboard box. Air-freight cost nearly as much as the bike had. Couldn't help it, I was getting hooked on skinny tires.

Back home, at my normal workplace, at lunch hour I got used to riding up to the "East Side" then sizzling down a certain black top roadway. I noticed they were building some really big houses up there. By this time I had added a speedometer to the old Fuji, kept the old toe-cages on the pedals, and put on a pair of Michelin Kevlar tires. My daily speed down the deserted road was sometimes close to 40mph although 30mph felt better to me. I

kept alternately touching the front then rear brakes to hold it back to what I thought was safe. It was a sizzling "free ride" that slowed itself down at the bottom of the hill because of a long gentle upgrade.

Then one day, all of a sudden out of nowhere, there they were; a pair of black colored blacktop speed-bumps across the black colored asphalt roadway. I didn't get the brakes on until I was 35ft (measured the skid-marks later) from the first bump. I raised off the saddle, got my pedals at the horizontal, tried to get into as straight a line as I could, then let off the brakes and lifted the wheel just as my front tire was going to hit the first bump. My exact thoughts, I remember to this day, were "Ohhhh, S h * *, this is going to HURT!..."

The Fuji was airborne for about 38ft until the tires came back onto the blacktop and made wobbly squashy black marks, then the brakes skidded another 15 feet before I

let off again for the second speed-bump. Fuji only got about 18 feet of air that time before the Michelins came down again and made contact, leaving more wild squashy tire marks in the black top. My rear hit the saddle hard and I almost lost the pedals. The bike was wobbling and gyrating wildly. I thought the wheels were going to fold sideways and the frame was going to break, but old Fuji still managed to keep all it's parts hooked together and stay upright. I shakily coasted the brakes to a stop, got off the bike and lay down in the grass by the roadway for a few minutes to catch my breath.

The most amazing thing for me, when I could finally think again, was the way that old bike felt as it came back down both times: I swear the frame and wheels flexed 4 or 5 inches (yeah, I know, "impossible", but it still felt that way...) and those skinny little tires, on those delicate little rims, had not a bend, dent, cut, snakebite or broken spoke.

Fuji went with me on several business trips around the country in the next couple of years; Virginia, Montana, Colorado, D.C., Georgia, Alabama, Ohio, Wyoming and several other places. Those skinny tires surprised me by taking woodland trails in their stride as well as country roads. On one enjoyable business trip the old Fuji really showed it's class; six of us rode every evening and on the weekends. We'd have little friendly contests, like starting out at the top of a hill at the same speed and nobody pedal all the way down the hill. Fuji always started out with the others, but within just a few hundred feet none of those other fancy bikes could even start to stay close to us on a free-roll! Fuji just kept going faster and leaving the others farther behind for as long as the no-pedal hill lasted. I thought that was pretty cool, since I was the group's "Old Dude on The Old Bike".

After that unintended bike jump I've been much more conservative, even on familiar

roads. That old Fuji can get going a lot faster than I'm capable of safely riding. I added some new clip pedals and got some bike shoes to match, then quickly got another brand-new education within five minutes; stopped for a stop sign, couldn't get my clips undone, and tipped over sideways like the old guy on the tricycle in "Laugh In" used to do. Had to laugh, laying there on my side with both feet firmly hooked to the pedals, and still hanging onto the handlebars. I finally got that shoe clip trick almost figured out most days and have even almost learned how to pedal in a circle, like the big boys and girls do.

The last couple of years have been much too busy. Only got to ride a couple times last year. This year's resolution was to get back to some good recreational distractions in life, like good bicycle rides. With this in mind, today I serviced the old Fuji, replaced the speedometer battery and changed tires for a new season. Not that the old faithful Michelins were worn out, but their weather

checks seemed to speak a warning that they had done about all the duty they could safely handle. I told 'em thanks for all the good rides they gave me, then properly retired them.

Took Fuji for a 2001 maiden-voyage around town. It still runs like a lamborghini and flexes like a cheetah going over the bumps. It liked the new tires also.

I stopped by a couple of Fuji dealers over in Colorado. They can't even find a picture of a sculptured-lugged frame Fuji road 'cycle. Visited [Fuji Bicycles USA](#) and couldn't find a picture of it either, but they sure have some fine new models on the table. I wrote them a note, asking if they knew where my old Fuji League came from and they said it was an "Advanced Recreational Rider" from back in 1986. It was their bike for the "budget minded novice racer or advanced recreational rider." Man, if this baby was their entry level racing bike back in 1986, then those fine new models I saw on their

Web Site must really be something! Looks like the old Fuji and I are both well-preserved dinosaurs. Every time I get to lusting after one of those fine new Fuji bikes, though, my mind replays that wild jump, and I just can't imagine trading that old Fuji off. After all, it would have been much easier for it to give up and break under the stress, and roll me down the blacktop roadway for a hundred feet or so. You never can tell, it might even know I realize that. You just can't justify discarding an old friend, can you?

But then, on the other hand, if I was to loan that fine old Fuji League to my grandson for this year's Colorado Springs to Denver century, I'd just have to tighten my belt and justify ordering one of those shiny brand-new 2001 Fuji racers... After all, a guy should encourage his grand kids to get into skinny tires before they get to be old men like his grandpa did. And you sure wouldn't want your grand kids to be riding anything but the best...

Maybe we'll meet someday out there. I'm the old guy with the white beard, riding the old silver Fuji League. When you energetic youngsters pass me on by you'll know I'm keeping my eyes peeled for speed bumps. But if I ever figure out there aren't any more high-jump surprises up ahead... well, then all you gotta do is try to keep up. Until then, we'll see you somewhere on down the line.

Regards,

The Old Man.

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