

Dinosaurs on Bicycles

By Jerry Harpt

There is a seventy-nine year old cyclist, in Green Valley, Arizona, named Ted. He has been treated with Chemo due to a case of lung cancer. He is blind in his right eye. He rides a recumbent bike and is very careful when he gets in and out of it, maneuvering gingerly. The reason for that is, he is dealing with a past stroke. But, neither his stroke nor his lung cancer has kept him from biking upwards to 25 miles on Saturday mornings, with the Green Valley Biking Group. No one will ever take away his spirited heart. And, Ted has interesting company. One of the other riders deals with Neuropathy in his feet. Another has COPD. But why let something minor bother any of them, right?

Ted is just one of the spirited seniors who came to Green Valley from most of our states, including Alaska. He and fellow bikers, male and female, respond to updated emails and meet at the West Center tennis courts each Saturday. While assembling, they swap niceties, talk about the weather, pose for group photos, agree on a possible route, (often using wind as a factor,) and then are off in a long peloton line. Occasionally the line becomes two abreast so cyclists can ride side-by-side and chat. They can still talk because their peloton line is moving around twelve miles per hour, a bit slower than the younger die-hards who push their limits but see little more than the road they are peddling on. Who's counting anyway? Tongue-in-cheek, these riders are sometimes referred to as the, "Half-Fast-Group."

The group had its beginnings with a senior named, Basil Baker. He ignited interest in group biking about three decades back. At age 87, he now does his biking in British Columbia.

Basil might be surprised at the number of recumbent bikers that now ride with the group. Recumbent bikes allow the cyclists to sit in a laid-back position, much like the cyclist would when sitting in a recliner chair, with his or her legs straight out. In this manner, the rider's weight is distributed over a larger area, thereby creating added comfort.

Baker might also be surprised at the number of E Bikes, (electric bikes,) that help riders maintain group contact when more speed is needed or when they work their way up steep hills. Roughly speaking, an electric bike is a bike that comes with a motor that is accompanied by a battery which provides electricity to the motor. The motor, in turn assists the biker by adding encouragement to the crank shaft that moves the chair faster. The elongated battery is attached to the bike but can be removed if a recharge is needed. Some bikers get their bike battery recharged by parking their bike in their garage and hooking the battery up to an electrical outlet.

Close to half of the bikers in the group use recumbents. They joke that they are much closer to the ground if they have an accident. Flags stick up from the base of their bikes, and reach over their heads, to ensure that they are noticed by passing motorists. Little flashing reflector-lights, on the back of their machines, add to their chances of being noticed. One of the bikers has an additional scheme to keep motorists alert. He pulls a small cart that is hooked behind his back wheel. Inside the canvas-sided cart is his little dog.

The average age of club members hovers in the 70s. Although all are physically active, their age does influence the routes that bikers peddle on, ensuring that their resting breaks, (about every ten miles), include accessible bathrooms.

After some bantering, a few introductions, and maybe a photo opportunity or two, the group leader takes off and is followed by the rest, in a single line, not unlike ducklings following their mother upstream. The routes vary on any given day. One of the routes takes the peddlers across the main drag, known as La Canada, up a gentle

hill, and into a neighborhood of adobe laced houses that sport various species of cacti decorating their yards. Neighbors walking their dogs, get lots of waves and greeting from the bikers. While biking along, riders take the time to get acquainted, swapping information about their respective states, and naturally, swapping scores of lies about past accomplishments.

Eventually, the bikers swing back onto La Canada and head north, working their way toward Green Valley's sister community, Sahuarita. It is here, at the edge of man-made, "Lake Sahuarita," half of the bikers take advantage of the planned pit stop. While their comrades use the bathroom facilities, the others observe the spirits of the lake's fishermen, kayakers, and adults who are sending their remote-control sailboats across the lake.

The bikers then hop back on their machines to continue their 25-mile jaunt by heading back south on county roads that take them under the Interstate Highway, onto paved paths that sometimes steer them into the embrace of the desert, or along the edge of multi-acres of pecan orchards, a staple that Green Valley and Sahuarita are noted for.

Naturally, all good workouts should have a happy ending and the bikers applaud that idea. About three miles before the end of each morning's ride is an upscale coffee shop. It is found on the edge of one of the orchards. Pasada Java offers coffee, scones, sticky buns, muffins, and a ton of good will, on chairs and tables, both inside and outside the shop.

On one of the days when we landed at Pasada Java, a Country Music Band was entertaining, outdoors, on a cement patio. Approximately three hundred people were sitting on folding chairs, enjoying the early March event. Many of them were in a meadow that is adjacent to the coffee shop. Old pecan trees are found in the meadow, tempting many to pick up pecans that had fallen to the ground. A few spectators were line dancing to the music. The temperature was in the seventies, the lead singer had a golden voice, and the mood of the meadow kept one's mind off yesterday's difficulties. Many attendees were chatting among themselves, even during songs, just happy to be, "Southern Arizona Alive."

On another ride, the bikers follow their leader out to a road called, Camino Del Sol, (Walk of the Sun), and head south. On this ride, those without e-bike support recognize that they aren't quite as young as they used to be. The hills are a challenge to the best of the bikers. But, huffing and puffing or not, they are still youthful enough to accept the challenge.

Near the southern terminus of Camina Del Sol, and another pit stop, bikers get their pay back. They no longer need to peddle while gliding down a long hill, letting the wind cool them off, while celebrating their youth. Once at the bottom of the hill, they turn right and start peddling toward a tiny unincorporated hamlet referred to by many as, "Amado Territory." It is where the early stages of the movie, "Oklahoma," was filmed. An old water tower welcomes their arrival. Soon afterward, riders reach the crossroads where they are engulfed by the large horns of the Longhorn Saloon. The doorway to the saloon is found under the outstretched horns. A cup of coffee becomes a tempting morsel there.

Across the street is a mercantile store and another restaurant, "Cow Palace." The Palace is not currently operating thanks to a previous summer monsoon season that had chairs floating inside the building.

Memory makers are compounded every Saturday by a youthful group of Arizona Dinosaurs, some biking on a recumbent, some using electronic help, others huffing and puffing a bit, one hauling his dog in a cart, and all enjoying their rendition as to what it's like to be young at their age.



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