

# Ridiculous 2 Sublime

STORIES, PUNDITRY, MUSINGS, AND  
OBSERVATIONS OF  
CHUCK GOLDSTONE  
SPOKESPERSON FOR OUR SPECIES



## Expensive Bikes

I have a friend Lisa who is an avid bicyclist. She rides about 140 miles a week, far more than I drive in a like period, and she will base an entire vacation around the biking available at her destination. I have bicycled on vacation, but only when it provided the fastest means to get from wherever I happened to be to the Pina Coladas. I do in fact enjoy pedaling about on a two-wheeler and will spend an hour or two a night in the summer doing leisurely rides on bike trails. I am, however, considered by enthusiasts to be a kind of locomotive-second-class citizen, and they would no sooner associate me with them as would a chess master with someone who calls a knight that “horsey thing.” Serious bicyclists think nothing of spending a day doing a hundred mile excursion called a Century Ride. For me, a Century would literally be the amount of time it would take to bicycle 100 miles.

You would not confuse me with the die hard biker. If you drew a line on graph paper, which for the moment we will call the “*Continuum of Bicycling*,” putting an avid cyclist such as Lisa on one end and on the other, say, an elderly man who for the past four years has been in an irreversible coma, you would accurately plot me on the continuum much closer to the guy with the feeding tube.

I own a pretty serviceable bike. It has a whole bunch of gears, many more than I use, need, or actually understand. When I am faced with any kind of hill, which I consider to be any surface that will not permit water to pool, I slam the bike into the lowest gear. If on the off-chance I am moving along at healthy clip, I take advantage of Newtonian inertia and the user-friendly direction of the slope and grind all the gears to the opposite side to get as much of this cursed roadway past me as quickly as possible, and stay in that mode until I am rudely interrupted by anything I might consider a hill.

My bike frame, which I felt would move me into another class of cyclists since I did not buy it at Target, is moderately lightweight for a one in its price range, with an aluminum skeleton weighing in at about 25 pounds. I paid an extra \$100 to shave off 6 ounces, but before I left the store, I also bought a lock that attaches to the frame and weights 6 pounds. I am convinced that my bike looks marginally serious in that it does not have a wire basket on the handlebars. The leather-like seat is a little rigid and at my last physical, my doctor

confirmed that my prostate, the organ that least benefits from cycling, is tiny bit flatter on the bottom than it should be. While the agility of the derailleurs and tire-biting power of the caliper brakes was important, I ultimately chose my current model because it came in silver.

I figured if I do not do serious biking, I can still look a little like a savvy cyclist, so I invested in a pair of black bicycling shorts, made of stretchy Spandex and lined in the seat with chamois to cushion the alignment of ass-to-saddle. I do not to wear these tight-fitting shorts much, because they tend to show the outline of a guy's junk in more detail than necessary. Most days, I wear baggy cargo shorts, not only to keep my parts more of a "mystery," but so I can also carry my cell phone, iPod, my wallet, a tiny notebook, some pens, my compete ring of keys, sunglasses, and a cap, an inventory together adding another 5 pounds to the total curb weight of my bike.

Frankly, I do not worry about the weight issue. I personally weigh less than 150 pounds, so what is another five pounds either way? On the plus side, with a slightly more strenuous load, I am likely to lose a little weight biking, and if I can shed exactly 5 pounds, it will all but cancel out all the crap I am carting about.

Until I spoke with Lisa, I had no idea how much a really good bicycle costs. I thought the \$475 I spent on my hybrid was a reasonable investment, knowing that there are people on Craig's List buy used 1995 Toyota Corollas for not much more.

So imagine my shock to hear that Lisa spent \$3500 on a bike, and for an enthusiastic, that is a cheapee, compared to the elite bikes that sell for \$8,000-12,000 or more. I am hard pressed to figured out what on a bicycle could cost that much, unless the frame was constructed of a polymer made from carbon fibers and flecks of Beluga caviar.

I am not sure if I could tell the difference between a \$700 bike and a \$10,000 bike, especially if they both operate by me manually cranking the pedals in little circles, in much the same way as I am numb to the difference between a decent wine, and by decent I mean wine that was made from grapes, and a really great wine. So if you invite me to your house, just smack a price sticker that says anything more than \$20 on a bottle of generic Trader Joe's vino, and I'll be just fine, sniffing for bouquet and satisfied if there is any odor at all.

It's about the same for coffee. I drink a few mugs of it a day, but I would be hard-pressed to tell the difference between a \$35 a pound Special Reserve or a tepid cup of Folgers.

There is a very expensive coffee known as Sumatran Kopi Luwak, a café delicacy, made from coffee berries that achieve a unique flavor and piquant silkiness by passing intact through the digressive tract of the Asian Palm civet, a raccoon-like animal found in the Indonesian Archipelago, and deposited randomly about the jungle floor. Someone obviously discovered, and I am unclear exactly how this happened, that during the coffee's gastro-journey through the innards of this arboreal mammal, enzymes the beans meet along the way break down the proteins that make the beverage bitter, and the result is

a brew that its enthusiasts claim is extraordinarily smooth, arguable one of the most pleasant coffee experiences a drinker can have, so long as he or she doesn't spend much time thinking about the beverage's journey from tree to cup. The beans deposited by this coffee-processing omnivore—by a means that needs no detailed description—are carefully removed, washed (thankfully), then lighted roasted. At up to \$600 a pound and \$50 a cup, the coffee is the world's most expensive, not so much because there is a limited population of civets eating and defecating lattés, but because, I imagine, there aren't huge numbers of Indonesians willing to harvest the beans.

I personally figure it better be a really really good cup of coffee for me to even consider sipping anything brewed from the anus of a jungle-dwelling animal.

I am thankful that I cannot differentiate between the good and the great, and that I can merrily enjoy life's mediocre offerings with the same enthusiasm as those who must pay dearly for an experience, whether in coffee, wine, or cycles. I will stick with my \$475 hybrid bicycle. But should they ever come out with a touring bike that has passed through the digestive track of, say, a puma, I am certainly willing to give it a try.

*Author of:*

**THIS BOOK IS NOT A TOY! FRIENDLY ADVICE ON  
HOW TO AVOID DEATH AND OTHER  
INCONVENIENCES**

*(St. Martin's Press. New York)*

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