

Revisiting a classic (Breaking Away, now showing on the "Big Screen" in our Redwood City store)



That's me, er, Dave Stoller, working on his bike before the race

In 1979, someone decided to follow me around with a camera crew and film my life, and one of the greatest cycling movies of all time, *Breaking Away*, was the result. OK, not really, but watching that movie it sure seemed like it. I was Dave Stoller. Only I had a Cinelli, the greatest racing bike in the world back then (this, of course, was before Trek existed), while Dave Stoller had a Masi. And now, years later, it would be pretty dorky to say that I am Dave Stoller. Perhaps I've become his father, uttering the lines nearly every retailer knows by heart- "I dreamed all last night, that everyone I ever sold a car to came back for a refund. And there you were, handing out the checks! One for you, and one for you..." followed by the immortal "Refund? Refund? **Refund????!!**"



Dave Stoller was more emotionally-expressive than I; you never would have seen me give someone a hug when excited.

Unlike Dave Stoller, I didn't have a fantasy life as an Italian cyclist that turned into a romance based upon a fictitious suave character. I was 100% awkward around the opposite sex and what you saw was what you got. You can put lipstick on a pig, but it's still a pig (or geeky awkward 16-year-old whose life centered 100% around bicycles until he came across a young woman cyclist at a training camp and somehow something clicked for a few years... I still see her fairly often; we've both gotten married and raised the requisite boy/girl pair of kids and both still ride and neither of us have spouses that are at all into cycling like we are).

Â



We didn't have bike computers back then; we used our watches to time ourselves. Interesting little detail that I didn't pay attention to when I first saw this film.

And now, so many years later, that movie still resonates. "Maybe they are better than us." Are they, really? Or just more driven? When I look at my success and failures relative to others, it's invariably the case that a look in the mirror reveals the cause. They're only better than us if we let them be.

That scene in the photo at the top of this entry? That's me, rebuilding my first 10-speed, an Orly "Tour de France" purchased from Macy's for \$49. I didn't realize how nice a bike it was at the time, buying it because it was less-expensive than the Schwinn Varsity I

couldn't afford. A year later I had enough money from my paper route to buy that Schwinn Varsity, which I



Drafting to the max! Yes, we did, some still do, stuff like this. Not on a flat road at 61mph though.

rode everywhere. Skyline, Portola State Park, San Gregorio. On a 41 pound Schwinn Varsity. This was back in 6th grade; by the time I was a Freshman at San Carlos High (now a condo complex), I had learned how to do just about everything mechanical on that Varsity, and from reading books (no Internet back then!) like Tom Cuthbertson's "Anybody's Bike Book" I learned that the Orly rusting away below the house might have actually not been such a bad bike.



You can't watch Breaking Away and not want to get out and ride! And maybe wish you were 17 again.

What a revelation when, using a bathroom scale, I discovered it was 11 pounds lighter! Thus came my first real Dave Stoller moment, rebuilding that bike top-to-bottom, repainting it even, pretty much living the exact segment of the movie shown in that top photo. Watching that part of the movie brings back a mental picture of the page in Anybody's Bike Book showing how to extract a cotter pin from a crank. I did it exactly as the book said, and it worked! 40 years ago. I rode that bike in my first race, the Ilios Tour of San Carlos. That's not what it was actually called, probably just the Ilios Bike Race. But that's where it went.



1972, 2nd from the left, long-haired geeky kid, that's me. Jenny, my "biker girlfriend", is second from the right. She looks a lot better than me then, and still does now. I pick the right women. But why did they pick me?

Funny thing, my most-memorable victory in a bicycle race was on a course almost exactly like the track in the Little Indy 500. It was at a bike show at the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds, with races held on the motorcycle flat track. Just two laps if I recall correctly; I sat in the middle for the first lap, and started moving up the outside on the 2nd corner on the last lap. And just kept going. Probably my first race where I felt like I could sprint (I was pretty much a toothpick hill climber at the time), and just flew past a whole bunch of very surprised and stronger riders at the line. That, I guess, was my ultimate Dave Stoller moment. At least until one of my kids offers a "refund" to a customer in the shop. :-)