

## **1 Wheel, 100 Miles**

By Jim Moore

When that caveman genius invented the wheel, it didn't take long for folks to figure out that if one wheel was good, pairing up two of them promised a whole lot more possibilities. And so the evolutionary branch for one-wheeled vehicles ended up pretty short. Wheelbarrows... unicycles... that's about it.

But maybe it's that Darwinian dead-end that speaks to a certain group of people. Unicycles aren't really useful, and they're really hard to ride. And therein lies a twisted appeal.

The kind of appeal that attracts iconoclasts. Adventurers. Mavericks. Masochists. The kind of appeal that would lead to a local one-wheel club called the Unicycle Bastards. And, following that, the kind of peer pressure that resulted in four members riding their unis 100 miles as part of the Reach the Beach biking event.

That's right – 100 miles. On one wheel. With one gear.

“It takes a certain type of person to do this, no doubt about it,” said Jack Olsen, one of the Bastards. “It's not for everyone.”

He's actually talking about riding a unicycle in general, not riding a unicycle 100 miles. But once you've already gone past normal, why not see how far the road goes?

So Olsen, Chad Ramberg, Leif Rustvold and Bryce Jacobsen set out from Beaverton early in the morning May 16. Riding customized unicycles with outsized 36-inch wheels, they spun out 100 long miles as two-wheelers passed them in a steady stream.

With just the one gear and the extra responsibility of 360-degree balancing, these guys average 12-14 mph on flats. On this day, Olsen reached Pacific City in just under nine hours. (“Halfway through I made the mistake of checking my pace and realizing I could finish in nine; that may have been a bad decision.”) His compadres took between 10 and 11 hours.

And they all paid the price for their folly. Because there are several good reasons unicycles are not universally revered as long-distance machines.

One of those reasons involved Chehalem Mountain. Less than 10 miles into the ride, the Bastards had to ascend nearly 1,000 feet up this pastoral rise – a challenging climb for most multi-wheeled, multi-gear vehicles. But hard as it was, all four of them made it to the top – and without any UPDs (UnPlanned Dismounts).

Their efforts were aided by unique doohickeys that look like half a mountain-bike handlebar mounted perpendicular to the down tube, jutting out between their legs and

giving them an extra point of contact to help with balance. Christened the “Bastard Unibars” (among other, less savory names), these custom-built devices feature a brake lever and can even include aero bars for added comfort.

Not that anything is going to make a uni-century all that comfortable. Besides putting even more pressure on the, um, inner pelvic region than a bicycle, a unicycle takes other tolls on the body.

“My abs felt like I’d been repeatedly kicked in the stomach,” said Olsen. “Apparently all those little balance adjustments add up.”

“Unicycle seats are definitely not designed for long-distance riding,” said Rustvold. “We’re talking pain management.”

Ramberg sums up the overall unicycle challenge nicely: “Half the wheels. Twice the work.”

Yes, these are tough men. Doing an unusual thing. In public. And that leads to an endless stream of comments from their fellow riders – and few of them are original.

Case in point: As I pedaled my bike alongside Rustvold southwest of Newberg, a group of riders passed; one was whistling the circus-calliope song. Leif kept smiling.

“If you’ve got the personality to do this, you’re not bothered by that,” he said.