

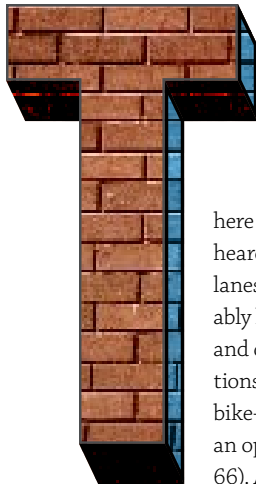
# AMERICA'S BEST *Bike Cities*

REMEMBER WHEN A STRIPED BIKE LANE WAS A BIG DEAL? WE'VE COME A LONG WAY. IN THESE PAGES, YOU'LL SEE HOW CITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE MAKING STUNNING BIKE-FRIENDLY CHANGES FAST, IMPROVING THE LIVES OF MORE RIDERS THAN EVER. THE BEST PART: IT'S ONLY GOING TO GET BETTER.



LETTERING BY JOHN KACHIK

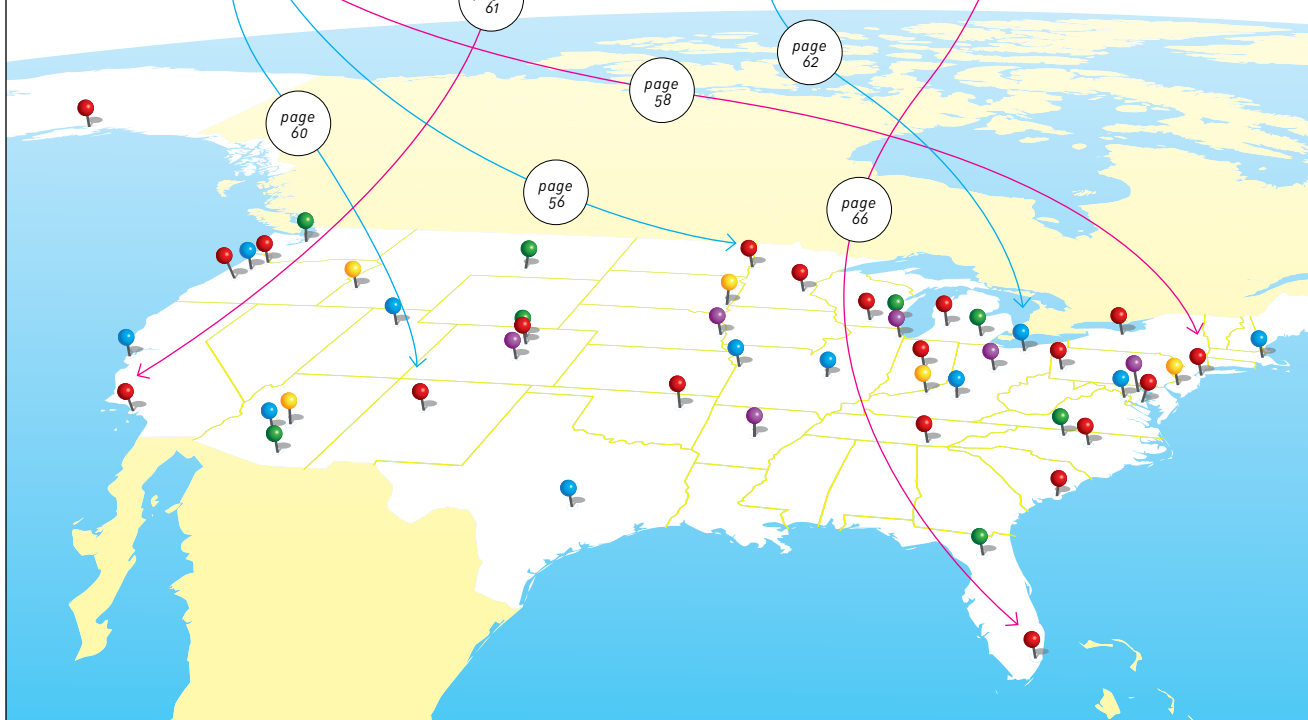




# The BICYCLING Top 50

here are many unspectacular but important things a city can do to gain our consideration for this list. Maybe you've heard of them, or maybe—given the pace of change these days—you've already begun to enjoy them: segregated bike lanes, municipal bike racks and bike boulevards, to name a few. If you have those things in your town, cyclists probably have the ear of the local government—another key factor. To make our Top 50, a city must also support a vibrant and diverse bike culture. It must have smart, savvy bike shops. **n** A few notes: We considered only cities with populations of 100,000 or more. We strove for geographical diversity, to avoid having a list dominated by California's many bike-oriented cities. If your town isn't named below—or if it falls on our worst-cities list (page 64)—then use this as an opportunity to do something about it, like cyclists in Miami did after their city earned a black mark in 2008 (page 66). And if your city is one of the 50 lauded below? Go out and enjoy a ride.—*Christine Mattheis*

- |                        |                                |                           |                            |                                 |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>1 Minneapolis</b>   | <b>11</b> Austin, TX           | <b>21</b> Louisville, KY  | <b>31</b> Sioux Falls, SD  | <b>41</b> Lexington-Fayette, KY |
| <b>2</b> Portland, OR  | <b>12</b> Denver               | <b>22</b> Chattanooga, TN | <b>32</b> Boise, ID        | <b>42</b> Omaha, NE             |
| <b>3</b> Boulder, CO   | <b>13</b> Washington, DC       | <b>23 Long Beach, CA</b>  | <b>33</b> Kansas City, MO  | <b>43</b> Salt Lake City        |
| <b>4</b> Seattle       | <b>14</b> Ann Arbor, MI        | <b>24</b> Cary, NC        | <b>34</b> Columbus, OH     | <b>44 Miami</b>                 |
| <b>5</b> Eugene, OR    | <b>15</b> Phoenix/Tempe, AZ    | <b>25</b> Milwaukee       | <b>35</b> Tulsa, OK        | <b>45</b> Indianapolis          |
| <b>6</b> San Francisco | <b>16</b> Gainesville, FL      | <b>26</b> Boston          | <b>36</b> Grand Rapids, MI | <b>46</b> Fargo, ND             |
| <b>7</b> Madison, WI   | <b>17 Albuquerque, NM</b>      | <b>27</b> Philadelphia    | <b>37</b> Billings, MT     | <b>47</b> Anchorage, AK         |
| <b>8 New York City</b> | <b>18</b> Colorado Springs, CO | <b>28</b> Pittsburgh      | <b>38</b> St. Louis        | <b>48</b> Baltimore             |
| <b>9</b> Tucson, AZ    | <b>19</b> Salem, OR            | <b>29</b> Charleston, SC  | <b>39 Cleveland</b>        | <b>49</b> Little Rock, AR       |
| <b>10</b> Chicago      | <b>20</b> Scottsdale, AZ       | <b>30</b> Arlington, VA   | <b>40</b> Greensboro, NC   | <b>50</b> Rochester, NY         |



To prepare this list, we referenced the *Bicycling and Walking in the United States 2010 Benchmarking Report*, prepared by the Alliance for Biking and Walking; the League of American Bicyclists' *Bicycle Friendly America* project; data from Mediamark Research, Inc., Dun & Bradstreet and The Nielsen Company; and interviews with national and local advocates, bike shops and other experts.



**FOR A SLIDE SHOW OF EACH OF THE TOP 50 CITIES, THE BEST SMALL AND FOREIGN CITIES AND GREAT IDEAS TO PUSH FOR IN YOUR TOWN, GO TO [BICYCLING.COM/TOPTBIKEFRIENDLYCITIES](http://BICYCLING.COM/TOPTBIKEFRIENDLYCITIES).**



The showroom  
at One on One  
Bicycle Studio.

# # one

## Minneapolis

*It's a cold, hard fact: The unforgiving and frigid city of Minneapolis is the country's top spot to be an urban cyclist. Now we just have to figure out why. by Steve Friedman*

*photographed by Jonathan Chapman*

THIS IS THE ADVICE I AM GIVEN BY A RESIDENT OF THE METROPOLIS that BICYCLING has proclaimed America's Best Bike City: If I happen to be riding and my freewheel freezes up, which it tends to do here on the grim and purgatorial north-central plains of Minnesota, "Don't just stand there and stick your thumb out. Flip your bike over. People will see that and feel sorry for you and help. People around here know that if you get stuck in the cold, you could die."

The man who divulges this gem is teaching a class on winter riding to me and seven other men and women ranging in age from 20 to 70. The mere need for such a class to exist should preclude Minneapolis, Minnesota, from attaining utopian status among cyclists. The subarctic climate here is so awful that it has spawned skyways because people generally don't even want to walk outside during the winter. Great bike cities are those like the sunny, progressive haven of Davis, California (or the more urban San Diego), or George Hincapie's lush and hilly bike-centric hometown of Greenville, South Carolina, or even a place like the legendarily bike-friendly Portland, Oregon, where riding without fenders qualifies you as a hard sort. Sure, we all might admire the cyclists of Minneapolis for their grit. But declaring that their home is the best city in America in which to be a cyclist?

The instructor moves on to a discussion of studded bicycle tires, explains that jumping snowbanks "is a great skill to develop," and that when we skid on ice and find ourselves out of control, we should lean into the skid and stay loose. He reminds us to oil the top and bottom of every spoke nipple, and that open tread patterns without tight parallel lines are best. Also, he adds that it's never a bad idea to carry an extra plastic bag for each foot while pedaling around this icy and godforsaken slab of frozen prairie, so that if we find ourselves losing feeling in our toes, we can take our shoes off, wrap a bag around each foot, then resume pedaling—"at least until your feet start sweating, which is when you'll really be in trouble."

Best city? Really?

\* \* \* \* \*

My first stop in my investigation of Minneapolis, which occurs during January 2010, is the One on One Bicycle Studio. I have heard, through people who claim to know the local scene, that this is the epicenter of all things two-wheeled. (Note to the other 50 bike shops in the Twin Cities, including Erik's Bike Shop, The Alternative Bike & Board and the recently opened Angry Catfish, as well as all the bike hangouts such as Grumpy's, and the bike-gang-run nonprofit repair joints such as The Grease Pit, and of course to the local bike lovers, bike messiahs and bike revolutionaries who all have their own hangout spots going: I didn't leave you out on purpose.)

At One on One, which also serves as a coffee shop/restaurant/occasional art gallery and party venue, there are signs announcing bike swaps and ice races and all-female alley cat races (the kind that use a manifest and checkpoints to approximate the bicycle messenger experience). You can bring your old junker in and have the mechanics convert it into a singlespeed, which is the winter bike of choice on these endless, flat, snowy paths and streets. You can, at 6 p.m. every day, see gaggles of bike messengers drinking beer and/or smoking cigarettes in the front of the store, and in the back. And you can meet Gene Oberpriller, aka "the godfather of the Minneapolis bike scene." Or, "Geno."



A former BMX rider, Geno lived on the second floor of what is now his shop when it was still a massage parlor. The owner allowed him to use the basement for storage. He and a friend (“the Satanic Mechanic”) liked to go Dumpster diving from coast to coast, and by the time Geno decided to open One on One in 2003, the basement had become popular among cyclists and junk lovers alike. In 2006, he made \$60,000 from sales out of what is known as The Bicycle Junkyard alone.

On the cold winter morning I meet him, Geno talks about the 27 raids in 12 years that led the massage-parlor owner (“a nice lady, she used to make me soup”) to sell the shop and get out, and how “a used bike that costs \$400 in Portland costs \$200 here,” and about a lake race coming up Saturday on Lake Minnetonka, and how even last week, when temperatures were below zero every day, cyclists were still stopping by, which is something that’s changed in the past 10 years. He says that now, when he rides his bike round-trip from home to work every day, he always sees tracks in the snow. He says he’s accidentally left bikes outside overnight, and they’re almost always there in the morning. He says that while he’s started to sell some bikes to Mexican immigrants in town, he thinks the Hmong and Somali are markets waiting to be tapped. He suggests that a person wanting to understand the bike culture in the city visit [MplsBikeLove.com](http://MplsBikeLove.com). And he does something strange and unexpected, something I will discover is not so strange and unexpected here, but that in fact is part of the very thing that makes Minneapolis such a great city to be a bicyclist: He suggests I visit a competitor.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tommy “Hurl” Everstone got his nickname when he was working at a bike shop in Oregon. He was already being called Earl, after a Tom Petty song, and....well, Hurl

got a degree in literature from Minnesota and he publishes (though on a very unpredictable schedule) a zine that shares the name of his shop, Cars-R-Coffins, so let him tell the story.

“I was working at Second Nature bikes in 1991 and there was a drug dealer who would always come around and ask us to fix flats and stuff and throw doobies our way and one of the guys in the shop said, ‘Hey, your name should be Hurl, with a silent H, like Herb, with a silent H.’ But now it’s Hurl.”

Hurl commutes 4 miles to work each day, and he says he thinks so many people ride bikes here—even in winter—because “it’s always been an outdoorsy, Nordic, get-out-and-do-it kind of town. And there’s that Scandinavian mentality, that ‘What doesn’t freeze us makes us stronger’ thing.”

Wanting to present all sides of the Minneapolis scene, Hurl admits to me that while the Midtown Greenway—a 5.5-mile former railroad corridor in south Minneapolis that now serves as an east-west bicycle superhighway—is great, at night there have been some assaults, which makes sense, as it goes through some rough neighborhoods. He suggests I consider joining one of the volunteer vigilante night bicycle rides that patrol the Greenway. He also tells me, as do about 10

# #8

## New York City

**Typical Big Apple: It wants to be the best—now. In terms of bikeability, it’s succeeding.**

How do you ensure safe bike travel on streets where drivers run more than one million red lights a day, pedestrians jaywalk like ants on a trampled hill, and cyclists—yes, we’re at fault too—take signals, lane markings and one-way signs as mere suggestions?

You start over. “We are reengineering the streets,” says Janette Sadik-Khan, commissioner of the department of transportation. The city is working on “perhaps the most ambitious scope and timeline ever” for creating bike-friendly streets, she says. Since 2006, the city has added more than 200 miles of bike lanes, nearly doubling what was there (“Portland has 200 miles total,” Sadik-Khan notes); New York City also put in 6,100 racks and 20 bike shelters and distributed more than 23,000 free helmets. In 2007, Sadik-Khan’s team set a goal of doubling the number of daily cyclists by 2015, but the rise has been so dramatic—up 45 percent in just two years—that it has moved the goal to 2012. “There are more bike commuters in Brooklyn alone than there are in the city of San Francisco,” says Sadik-Khan, citing figures from



the U.S. Census’s 2008 American Community Survey.

Most significantly, the city added more than 4 miles of Copenhagen, Denmark-style protected bike lanes—where a curb on one side separates you from pedestrians and a curb or row of parked cars on the other protects you from traffic. “We saw a 50 percent reduction in bike and pedestrian accidents and injuries within a year of installing them,” says Sadik-Khan. The lanes also prevent illegal parking and discourage jaywalkers.

Last fall, the city council passed a law requiring freight-elevator-equipped buildings to allow bike access, easing theft concerns. Next up: another 12-plus miles of protected lanes on the East Side, possibly by October. At this rate it won’t be long before riding in New York City is, dare we say, easy.—Loren Mooney

**About 185,000 New Yorkers ride a bike each day—some of them via the dedicated bike lane on the iconic Brooklyn Bridge.**





other Minneapolisites I meet, that the city always plows the Greenway before it plows the streets.

I'm impressed by all the bike information and all the bike enthusiasm, but I still don't really understand why so many people ride bikes here. What makes this such a great bike town?

What makes Minneapolis a great bike town, Hurl answers, are the bike couriers and road racers; the BMX racers; the velodrome in nearby Blaine; the small but growing bike-polo community; the Stupor Bowl (the largest alley cat race in the country and, presumably, the free world, says Hurl, held every winter on Super Bowl weekend); and even the local branch of the Black Flag bike gang—its members fuse kids' bikes together, one on top of another, then ride toward one another and smash each other with two by fours.

"The cool thing about our community of cycling is everything helps each other out," he says.

Like Geno, Hurl talks about how lately more people ride more often, even when, like now, the subzero

temperatures leave "a gnarly layer of ice on the side streets. We call it boiler-plate ice." Then he suggests I visit one of his competitors.

Chuck Cowan, owner of Behind Bars Bike Shop, is as laconic as Hurl and Geno are talkative. "I went down on some brown sugar today," he says, perhaps by way of explanation. I say "huh," then realize he means he fell skidding on yet another type of Minneapolis snow—different than boiler plate, but apparently every bit as treacherous. When he mentions the location, a visitor in the store in the best bike city in America says, "Oh, yeah, we call those 'the lanes of death,'" and both men laugh.

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According to the U.S. Census's 2005 American Community Survey, 2.4 percent of the working population of Minneapolis rode their bikes to work. By 2008 (the latest figures available), the number had risen to 4.3 percent. That might not sound like a lot, but it's the second-highest percentage in the country for a major city, behind Portland's 5.9 percent. That's 8,200 people living in Minneapolis who ride to work—except in winter, when by anyone's best estimate the number dips to about 4,000.

The city government is hoping to get those numbers even higher. Minneapolis is one of four population centers (along with Marin County, California; Sheboygan, Wisconsin; and Columbia, Missouri) that recently was promised \$25 million apiece in federal funds over the next 10 years to get more people onto bicycles.

Already, the Twin Cities have impressive bike infrastructure: Between them, Minneapolis and St. Paul have 84 miles of dedicated bike paths and 44 miles of designated bike lanes on streets. The city has plans to

**Hurl says subzero temperatures leave "a gnarly layer of ice on the side streets. We call it boiler-plate ice."**

**Some of the best of cycling's best city (clockwise from top left): Geno, One on One Bicycle Studio, Hurl, outside Cars-R-Coffins.**



install another 40 miles of designated bike lanes. Every city bus and train has bicycle-carrying capability. Every office building in Minneapolis is required by law to provide bicycle storage, and the city funds half the price of every bike rack any business installs. Although a study by the Alliance for Biking and Walking said that Minneapolis had more bicycle park-

ing than any city in the country, transportation planners want to install \$250,000 worth of new racks. In the spring, Minneapolis will try its version of a city-bike program: One thousand bicycles, complete with headlights and taillights, will be set up at 75 locations throughout the city. They'll be accessible with the swipe of a credit card at solar-powered kiosks, returnable at any location, and the cost will be \$5 a day or \$50 a year.

I know much of this because I spend the bulk of my second day in Minneapolis with Gary Sjoquist, looking at bike paths and bike bridges (including the \$5 million Martin Olav Sabo bicycle bridge) and at Quality Bicycle Parts (QBP), the bike parts distributor that once employed Geno and Hurl and many other leading lights of the city's bicycling scene, and where Sjoquist works as bicycle advocacy director.

Sjoquist, who is 56 years old, rode motorcycles competitively until he suffered a series of concussions that prompted his wife to strongly suggest he quit that sport. Now he takes two-hour spin classes regularly and rides at least 5 miles every morning, often on ice, holding the leash of his 70-pound Labradoodle with one hand. As a former editor of technical journals who once worked on proposals for Swedish anti-tank guns, he brings precision and a wonk's passion to his job, which involves lobbying at local, state and national levels, following legislation through various committees, raising funds and generally trying to make Minneapolis—and the world—a safer, happier place for cyclists.

When I ask him why he thinks Minneapolis is such a great bike town, one of the first things he says to me, regarding a piece of federal legislation that passed a few decades back, is: "It was the first time the word 'inter-modal' was used in a Congressional setting!" I include the exclamation mark because Sjoquist utters the sentence in the same way another person might say, "Then I learned that there was a mysterious great-uncle and I was going to inherit 600 million dollars!"

He shows me another bridge and the Greenway. He takes me into Freewheel Bike's Midtown Bike Center, a mostly city-funded coffee house/repair center/bike shop on the Greenway. Inside, there is bicycle storage (which costs \$110 a year) and low-cost showers for cyclists who commute to downtown (office buildings, trains and buses are just steps away). Also, there is a replica of the rack found on every city bus, allowing cyclists to practice putting their bikes on.

Our last stop is at the office of city government employee Shaun Murphy, whose title is nonmotorized pilot project coordinator (which means he's in charge of implementing all kinds of programs, including figuring out the best way to mark and maintain bike lanes on city streets, and making sure no one gets too riled up about it). Murphy says, "Four percent of work trips and 10 percent of all trips is where we are

# #17

## Albuquerque

*From pricey projects to free lights, this Southwestern city has cyclists covered*

Biking has always been a big deal here. Albuquerque is situated near singletrack trails in the rugged Sandia Mountains, and its population includes thousands of bike fanatics working at Sandia National Laboratories and the University of New Mexico. The city has a 400-mile network of urban bikeways that features its own street sweepers. And there are more than 300 city-built bike lockers at 23 locations around Albuquerque, with plans for 50 more annually as companies like Intel and Honeywell participate.

Even as it sprawls outward, Albuquerque isn't taking its cyclists for granted. The city is in the midst of a bike-friendly building boom, including a \$7.4-million bridge across the Rio Grande set to open by year's end. Ten years in the making, the span, built with the help of \$5 million in federal stimulus money, will connect those living on the West Side to the network of bike lanes. Historically, those residents have been forced to detour several miles to cross the river. "The west-



side bridge will be a huge connection for us," says Jim Arrowsmith, a city bike-facility planner.

There are plans to build underground bike passages along the Diversion Channel Trail, avoiding three bad intersections. And last year, Albuquerque cops began stashing bike lights in their squad cars and doling them out to cyclists riding without illumination at night. Cyclists have a no-brainer choice: either get a ticket or install the light on the spot. Chuck Malagodi, the city's bike safety coordinator, came up with the idea after a close call with a skateboarder while driving at night. The city even sells its own high-visibility jersey for \$75. With all this plus an abundance of sunny skies, Albuquerque leaves locals with no excuses not to ride. —Dan White

**When the bike bridge along I-40 and across the Rio Grande is finished this fall, it will include a smooth concrete deck, glare-free lighting and swooping arch trusses.**





**Sjoquist (top) is an ambassador and an instigator of some of Minneapolis's best bike amenities, including the Midtown Bike Center (bottom), with its show-ers, storage and cookies.**



now. We need more connector links between dedicated bike paths and bike lanes on the streets. And we need to build partitions between traffic lanes and bike paths. In 10 years, it would be ideal if we were on our way to looking like a European city, where 30 to 40 percent of all work trips are on a bicycle."

\* \* \* \* \*

But it's so cold. That night, puzzling once more over the question of why so many people ride in Minneapolis, I study the graphs and charts about bicycle use given to me by Sjoquist and Murphy. Eventually, I decide the answer won't be found in a number. I log onto Mplsbiikelove.com, and post a message that says I'm looking for cyclists who want to take a ride with me and who can help me appreciate their city.

In the morning, looking out my window at the blanket of ice crystals that has settled on downtown, I can't believe this is anyone's idea of bike nirvana. Over coffee, I punch up my computer. The response from the cycling website is staggering.

# #23

## Long Beach

*A bike awakening in the kingdom of cars*

Not long ago, Long Beach was a car-centric Los Angeles-area burg—the city of Snoop Dogg, cult band Sublime and epic gridlock. Then last year, city leaders abruptly declared Long Beach “the most bicycle-friendly city in America”—and striped the motto across City Hall. Now they're working to live up to the boast. Last year Long Beach laid out 16 miles of new bike lanes, with 20 more miles set for this year, and installed 400 artsy bike racks in the form of coffee cups, palm trees and other objects. Work has begun on a \$500,000 bike boulevard; two more are in the pipeline.

Why the bike revolution in the land of superhighways? For one thing, influential city leaders—starting with city manager Patrick West—are longtime cyclists skilled at raising state and federal money for such projects. Transportation coordinator Sumire Gant and West spearheaded a drive that netted \$17 million for bike projects from regional, state and federal grants. For another, they had a good head start: Long Beach already had bikeways along its eponymous beachfront and beside the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers. Now city leaders are working to link those paths into a 33-mile loop that could become a regional biking destination.

Change is coming to the city's flat, cruiser-friendly interior as well. Long Beach recently painted “sharrows”—icons on the road specifically to remind drivers and cyclists to share the lane—on 2nd Street in the city's upscale Belmont Shore neighborhood, to lure bikers off the sidewalks. Thirty restaurants are helping the cause by offering discounted lunches to two-wheeled patrons.

City leaders say they're poised to compete with Minneapolis, Portland and others for the title of America's bike capital. “We are going to do in three years what it took them 15 to do, and compete with them head to head,” says Charles Gandy, a bike consultant and the city's mobility coordinator. It will take more than asphalt and paint to undo decades of monolithic Southern California car culture. But Long Beach is off to a promising start.—*D.W.*



**Long Beach emphasizes creativity—even in normally utilitarian objects like bike racks.**





There is a message from Andy Lambert, a former bicycle courier who's now sales manager for the local roaster Peace Coffee. "I delivered 83,659 pounds of coffee over 5,446 miles," he writes. After a few paragraphs of memories regarding delivering coffee on two wheels, he says, "My favorite part about our bike scene is the diversity: You can ride down the

Greenway and see roadies, fixies, Black Label kids, unicyclists, families, recumbents—you name it, we've got every stripe here. Minneapolis may be second to Portland in per-capita commuters, but how many days of the year do Portland commuters have to worry about icy roads, subzero wind chills and frostbite?"

A woman named Laura King (who signs off with "Bike Love,") writes that "as a lady cyclist I am always looking for events that cater to me. Some examples of why I moved from Southern CA to Minneapolis and stayed: Babes in Bikeland (babesinbikeland.com), a huge all-female alley cat—the highlight of the summer; Girls Gone Grumpy Ride, a casual ride for ladies at which men who attend have to wear a skirt; Grease Rag (greaseragmpls.wordpress.com), a free, open-shop night twice a month, for ladies, by ladies."

Someone suggests I take a night ride on ice, because "riding across a large frozen lake at night is very surreal. Riders on a static white twilight background take on this fantastic Wicked Witch of the West look; it kind of sticks in your memory. Plus hanging out in the middle of a city, but in a vast white emptiness on a lake is...go do it and

you can fill in the blank." A female professor of chemistry at the University of Minnesota, R. Lee Penn, who teaches a freshman seminar entitled "My Other Car is a Bicycle," writes that "I'll haul just about anything by bicycle (including my child and all of his hockey gear to the local ice for hockey games and practice) and run just about any errand by bicycle." She says she has pedaled in temperatures as low as -26 F, and likes to meet a group for prework morning rides when the weather is nice—"It gets into the teens for morning temps, and you cannot keep us inside." Jeremy Werst, founder and guiding light of Mplsbike.com, asks if I want to meet Thursday at One on One to go out for a ride.

And Jen Gallop writes that she'd love to join me on a ride, too, but she works from nine to five (commuting by bike, of course, 20 miles each way every day). Just as I think I might be beginning to understand the charm of Minneapolis, I read Jen's advice: "Be prepared for a lot of salt and sand on the roads and trails....Spray a bit of Pam cooking spray on your down tube, forks, rims, spokes and cranks. It will make them easier to clean."

\* \* \* \* \*

When I arrive at One on One, Jeremy Werst is already there, updating Mplsbike.com and talking about upcoming races and the local series of indoor "cold sprints" (races on stationary trainers with the

**"Roadies, fixies, unicyclists, families, recumbents—you name it, we've got every stripe here," says Peace Coffee's Andy Lambert.**

# #39

## Cleveland

***It's no joke: The city on Lake Erie has cycling dialed***

Apparently there have been a few Cleveland jokes told over the years: mostly lame jabs about inept sports teams or Rust Belt dreariness. We don't know about any of that. But we do know the city is dead serious about bikes, from Cannondale devotee LeBron James down to the devout commuters at the Cleveland Clinic.

What's to love? For starters, the stretch of bike lane that now runs the length of historic Euclid Avenue, linking the city's two employment hubs. A new towpath just beyond Cleveland's southern border reaches Akron—80 miles away. Plans call for webs of bike paths to unspool east and west as well. To lure tourists in, the Downtown Cleveland Alliance launched a bike-rental program last summer—it will expand this year into a parking garage with showers and lockers.

And then there's the diversity. In January, a nonprofit unveiled plans to build an indoor velodrome—the third of its kind in the country and the only one east of the Rockies. The city is home to the vast Ray's Indoor Mountain Bike Park and Pedal Republic, which organizes bike-polo tournaments, tall-bike rides and alley cat races.

Not that it's all for fun. Cleveland is one of the nation's poorest cities; a quarter of residents don't own cars. "This is not a yuppie thing," says Martin Cader, the city's bike and pedestrian coordinator. "This is a this-is-how-I-get-around thing." To that end, the Ohio City Bicycle Co-op awards bikes in exchange for sweat equity.

At press time, cyclists were pushing a car-centric state agency for a biking and walking lane on the new I-90 bridge spanning the Cuyahoga River. And mountain bike advocates are lobbying for access to Cuyahoga Valley National Park, just south of town. "It would be a huge, huge step for mountain biking nationally," says Lois Moss, founder of Walk+Roll Cleveland. Still, Cleveland's progress speaks volumes.—David Howard



**"All bikes welcome" is one of the policies at Ray's Indoor Mountain Bike Park—which exemplifies Cleveland's come-one, come-all cycling scene. The only requirement: You need to have brakes.**







participants hooked up to giant video monitors) with two friends of his, Bjorn Christianson and Landon Bouma.

After I get fitted to a one-speed Surly Karate Monkey, and after the guys insist that I lose my bulky down coat, which I have on top of my T-shirt and sweatshirt, and beneath my wind shell, we head out. I would like to detail how we tested

the new bike paths on Hennepin, then circled back on the newly designated one-way bike paths on First Avenue, then hit streets all over the metro area. But I was concentrating on looking for brown sugar and boiler plate and a new scourge called “ice warts,” which Bouma tells me to watch out for, right after he nonchalantly mentions to “be loose if you start skidding sideways.” I am not loose. I would rather not skid sideways. I’m as positive and passionate about that as my companions are about their bike city.

We ride along a few bike paths. No cars honk at us, and no taxi drivers scream (which I find disconcerting, being a New Yorker). After a while, we are on a dedicated bike path next to the river, then we’re on the great, vast Greenway, which at this cold, white hour—which Christianson calls “balmy in the 20s”—happens to be empty. We discuss all manner of bicycle subjects. We converse about Bouma’s ex, the only woman ever to win the Stupor Bowl, which leads to banter about a female messenger who punched out her boss. We talk about the website that Bouma is a majordomo for, Cyclopath.org, which lets you type in your starting point and your destination then view not only the best bike path route, but also bike-friendly coffee houses and stores and all sorts of other cool stuff on the way.

We stop at a grocery store, so the guys can show me the free bike pump outside, along with free bike tools including box wrenches, hexes, pedal levers, headset tools and a stand on which to hang your bike. Werst mentions that Babes in Bikeland is the largest all-female alley cat race in the country (and, I presume, the free world). This leads me to remember that the instructor of my winter-riding course told us there were more co-ops per capita in Minneapolis than anywhere else. Bouma replies that his mom, who attended The U (which is what Minneapolites call the University of Minnesota), used to tell him stories about the “co-op fire-bombings” when he was a kid—how rival co-ops would toss Molotov cocktails at each other. I spend a few quiet moments staring at the free tools outside this co-op. The people

**One Minneapolis institution, the Babes in Bikeland all-female alley cat race, meets another—one of the city’s bicycle-specific bridges.**



who live here seem so friendly and mellow, but underneath those placid exteriors run deep, raging rivers of incendiary passion.

The guys want to ride to a large warehouse right next to the Greenway, to introduce me to a couple of frame builders. The first is Chris Kvale, and he is lean, and white-haired and blue-eyed. The surfaces of his shop sparkle. Classical music hangs softly in the air. He has been making frames for 35 years—only steel, “only classic road frames.” He is a former racer, and at age 65 still rides 2.5 miles a day to work. When one of

## Worst Cities

### BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

It turns out Alabama’s largest city has a hip bike community: alley cats, cyclocross races and nice singlettrack. There’s a road scene, too. The problem is Birmingham has built only 10 miles of bike lanes over the past two decades while allowing multilane highways and shoulderless suburban streets to dominate the sprawl. Less than 1.3 percent of Greater Birmingham bikes or walks regularly, a lower rate than any other large metro area in the country, according to 2000 Census data (the latest available, but in our experience, not much has changed). “We have a lot of motorists who think cyclists belong on the sidewalk,” says Tom Maxwell, a senior planner there. The appetite for change exists, but with no strong bike-minded leadership—in City Hall or the advocacy community—progress has been negligible.—*Loren Mooney*

### JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

Sure, Jacksonville has sunny weather almost year-round, flat terrain and a vibrant cycling scene. It even has two city councilmen who are bike nuts. But outside the city center, Jacksonville is a jungle for cyclists: Its 758-square-mile sprawl is loaded with multilane highways, streets lacking shoulders and bridges with no bike lanes. Even much of the city’s core lacks such infrastructure. “It could be a lot better,” says Matt Uhrig, founder of advocacy group Bike Jax. The Florida Department of Transportation recently mandated that all new roads include bike lanes, but that alone won’t help much—the area hardly needs more asphalt. It doesn’t help matters that the city lacks a true bike-pedestrian coordinator, or that the North Florida Transportation Planning Organization disbanded the Bicycle/Pedestrian Planning Advisory Committee, citing economic struggles—even though it was an all-volunteer organization.—*Christine Mattheis*

### MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

After we tagged Memphis a “worst” in 2008, the city striped a couple of miles of bike lanes—the first within city limits—and in February broke ground on a recreational trail that will lead to popular Shelby Farms Park. Better yet, voters recently elected a new mayor, A.C. Wharton, whose campaign platform included a goal of creating 500 miles of bike lanes. So why is Memphis still on the list? Because the bike laws here were written in 1967, and the bike/ped plan developed back in 2001 has never been adopted. Livable Memphis, the local advocacy group, is pushing for updated laws and working with Wharton’s administration to see where repaving projects overlap with the bike/ped plan, hoping that construction can include bike facilities. The vastly improved attitude at city hall suggests Memphis might not be long for this list, but we’ll be watching to see if Wharton makes good on his campaign promises.—*L.M.*







the guys makes an old-man joke about his preference for tubular tires, Kvale says, "I'm a minimalist, and they're the simplest expression of the cyclist. Tubular tires demand something of the

cyclist. They demand an involvement with your bike. And that's what I demand."

Across the hall is a man whom Kvale's friends call The Anti-Chris. His name is Erik Noren and he starts cursing when we open the door, and continues doing so for the 30 minutes or so that we stay.

"Fuck Portland!" he opines upon learning I am trying to discover why Minneapolis deserves top status over what would seem the logical choice. "All I ever hear is about how cool Portland is. Who rides through the shit we do? We ride more by accident than they do on purpose."

Noren is short and has a gut and mutton chops. He is known among other frame builders, including old-school masters like Kvale, as a dedicated and talented, if wildly unconventional, craftsman. But he's popularly known as the foul-mouthed frame builder who plays his music loud at all hours and into whose office, late at night, young female artists sometimes wander and flash their breasts. Posters of naked women are plastered on the walls. There is a grimy, lumpy couch against one wall, with a grimy blanket on it. Noren has lately been having some trouble with his upstairs neighbor, who teaches "meditation and creative leadership."

Of the 20 to 40 Peacock Groove frames he builds a year, some are classic road bikes, but he does not consider that his directive. He show us one he's proud of: the "Homage to Uma Thurman from *Kill Bill*" bike, which is the canary yellow of the jumpsuit she wore in the movie, and has blood spatters all over the frame. "Yeah," he says, as we all stare at the Uma Thurman. "I like to wow people."

We leave and ride to the Midtown Bike Center, where I admire the bus-storage

**"All I ever hear is how cool Portland is," says frame builder Erik Noren. "We ride more by accident than they do on purpose."**

simulator some more, and tell the guys that a place with inexpensive secure indoor bike storage and showers is something they should never take for granted, and I probably get kind of incoherently emotional about the bike-bus-storage simulator (I'm cold and hungry and I think the Uma has unsettled me a little), and an employee intervenes and offers me a free giant cookie.

Back on the Greenway, we discuss the assaults (the three guys all agree that lights would help, and think the vigilante rides can't hurt, either) and the power of Mplsikelove. "We call it Jeremyslist," says Christianson, who mentions that its local reach is so vast that when some kids posted a video on YouTube of other kids slapping unsuspecting riders, the cyber-community circulated it so fast, and contacted the police so swiftly, that an arrest was made that day. We speak of Black Flag ("Oh, yeah," Christianson says, "they're badass"). All three riders express their affection for Noren, and reveal that they worry about his business because, surprisingly to me, he gives away too many frames to

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## Miami

**A 180-degree change—  
in less than two years**

In 2008, BICYCLING named Miami one of the nation's worst cities for cycling, citing poorly planned bike facilities and hazardous streets. That designation motivated area cyclists to lobby then-mayor Manny Diaz. "Diaz was a green mayor who saw our long-held status as something to change," says Collin Worth, who Diaz named bicycle coordinator that summer.

The gears began turning quickly. By late 2008, the City Commission had adopted the city's first-ever Bicycle Action Plan. A year later, it approved the Bicycle Master Plan, which puts bike projects—lanes, greenways, bike boulevards—on a detailed 20-year timeline. To seed interest, the city created Bike Miami Days, shutting down a 10-block stretch and offering bike rentals and check-ups, all free. The first eight events each attracted as many as 5,000 people.

The first phase of the master plan this year will add 11.5 miles of lanes, greenways and shared-use

lanes (in combination called bikeway network miles) and improve 2 more, plus build 6 miles of mountain bike trails on Virginia Key. Miami is also launching education initiatives. Safety flyers aimed at motorists are posted in bus shelters, and cyclists can attend free clinics. "We go over where you should be in traffic," Worth says. "We try to build confidence."

Miami hopes to finish more than 108 bikeway network miles by 2015. Diaz's successor, Tomás Regalado, was a commissioner who voted for the bike master plan, and as mayor told Worth it was "a no-brainer." Miami still has far to go, but the transformation now under way shows the power of a highly motivated populace.—Christine Mattheis

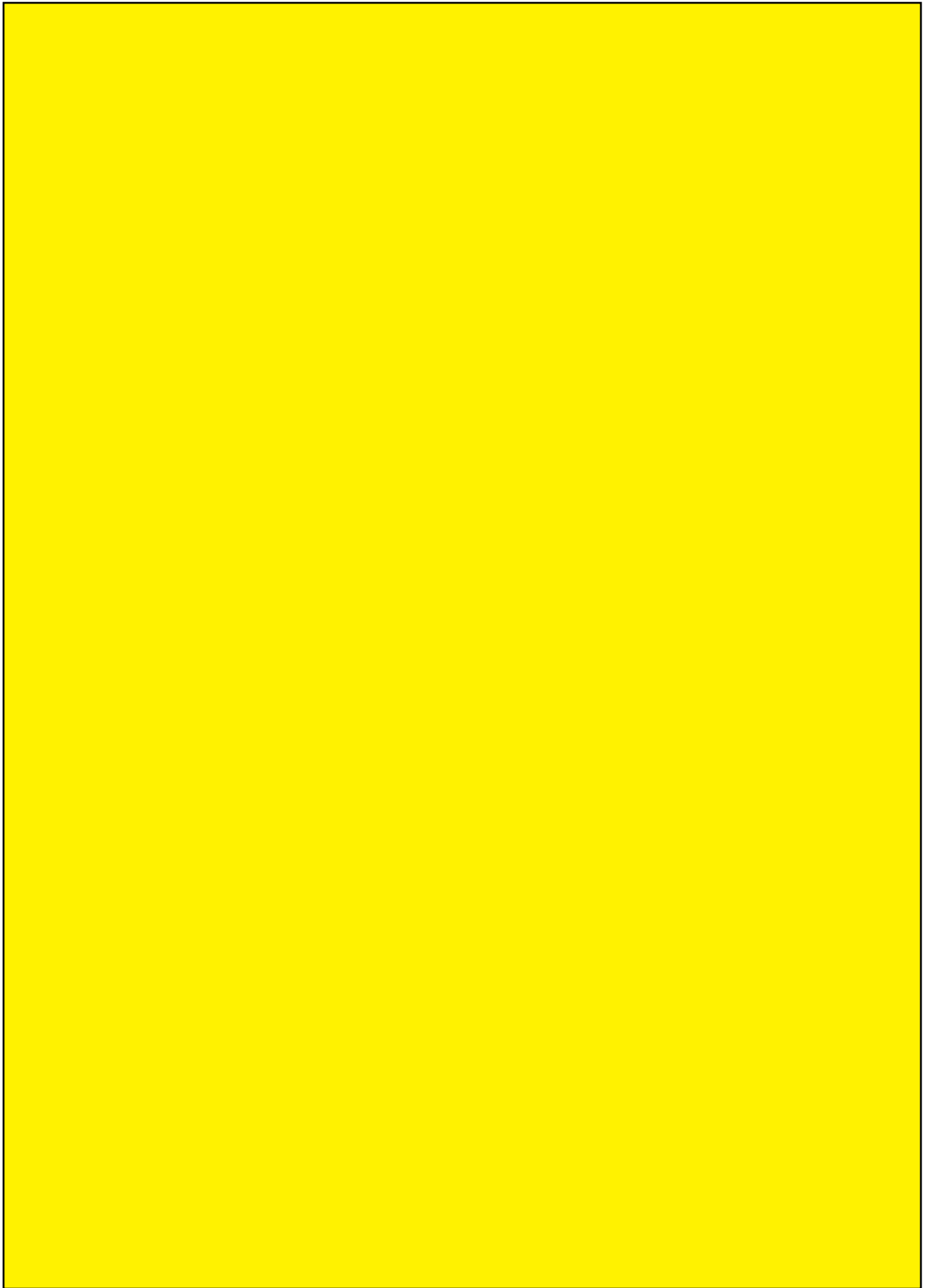
The city will hold more than a dozen Bike Miami Days this year. Car traffic is closed along a 10-block stretch of Flagler Street and Miami Avenue bordered on one end by Bayfront Park.



JORGE R. PEREZ/CITY OF MIAMI







*BEST CITIES continued from p. 66*

community organizations (including Babes in Bikeland). Finally, I ask them again, directly, why their city is so great for cycling.

"It's the liberal Northern attitude," says Bouma, son of the woman who remembers the co-op wars. "Civil rights, hippies, that stuff."

"The network of trails and parks," says Werst.

"Because of how great our government has been," Christianson says. "Every time I've reached out, they've been super-responsive."

We're all hungry, so we ride to Pizza Lucé, a hangout for bike messengers that isn't far from One on One. The trio is so polite and deferential toward each other that, even though I'm buying, it takes us 20 minutes to agree on a simple pizza. Is it this infernal niceness that makes the city so great for bicycling? And if so, how does one explain Noren?

\* \* \* \* \*

I spend my final day in the greatest bicycle city in the United States inside my hotel room. I want to type up my notes, to see if in so doing I might arrive at a Grand Unified Theory about why Minneapolis is such a great cycling town. I want to incorporate Babes in Bikeland, blood-spattered bikes, two-by-four jousting matches, night-time vigilantes, ice warts, grocery-store repair stations, bus-rack-mounting practice contraptions, the silent H that's pronounced, a 70-pound Labradoodle on a bike ride, Pam cooking spray and free giant cookies. Plus, it's still so *cold* outside.

Months later, I am still working on my theory. I have told some of my friends that I am considering moving to Minneapolis, and I actually do think of moving, brown sugar and boiler plate be damned. Without knowing why, I have fallen in love with the cycling culture in Minneapolis. I tell my friends how nice the cyclists there are, how even the badass Black Flag group sponsors a community shop that makes bikes for poor kids, how the most misanthropic frame builder in the world is a secretly sweet guy who is always losing money because he is forever giving away his home-made frames. (He recently donated one to the vigilantes.) I still receive responses to my Mplsbike love.com posting, outpourings of information, ride invitations, passionate (and long) discourses on the fun of this uniquely local cycling experience.

Among the e-mails is a message from a 36-year-old mother of two, a television producer named Angela Keegan Benson. She says she's not a serious cyclist, that she bikes to work only three or four times a week. I ask how far from the television station she lives. Ten miles, she says.

That's when the Grand Unified Theory of Minneapolis Cycling reveals itself. Here is a woman who commutes 20 miles round-trip four days a week, at least five months a year, yet does not consider herself a "serious cyclist." Maybe that's the secret. Maybe—along with decades of legislative support and a responsive government and friendly landscape and a cheerful community of cyclists—the Grand Unified Theory hinges on something essentially and particularly indigenous to the Midwest. Other cities might get more publicity, might brag about their famous hill and their local legends. In Minneapolis, cyclists (Noren notwithstanding) don't talk as much about cycling as they do it, through ice skids, along snowy bike superhighways, in the dead of winter and every other season. In Minneapolis, people ride and don't consider it that big a deal. **B**