

OK, can we please talk about something real quick before I get back to work? Today's issue is the puzzling phenomenon of locking one's feet to one's pedals. Fine, fine, as an engineer, I'm well aware of the benefits of being able to *pull* the pedal up in addition to *pushing* the pedal down. Energy conservation, looking slick in specialized bike gear, etc, etc— but I'm still not convinced that the aforementioned benefits even come close to outweighing the downright humiliation that falling onto the ground because of some silly pedal locks caused me in April.

Grant you, I'm the first to admit that there is nothing more bizarre in appearance than someone falling over sideways on a bike with their feet firmly planted on the pedals. It's laughable, I know. You can't *make* this stuff up. I've seen it happen to my dad countless times, and I was guilty of thinking, "What an idiot... all he had to do was plant his foot on the ground. It's *elementary*, dad! You taught *me* to ride a bike! How the tables have turned, old man!" I'm not afraid to admit it. And then April's MS150 came, and I had my own pair of locking pedal shoe things. Curse those shoes.

Fall over, I did. Early, and often. *Elementary*, it was not.

There is no feeling of utter helplessness quite like cantering over toward the asphalt like your ankles are welded to your Cannondale. And don't think your brain isn't saying over and over, "Your feet! PLANT YOUR FEET!!" I hate to disappoint you, brain, but once gravity gets you, your feet aren't going *anywhere*. Nothing can train you for this.

I think back to the ceremonial rite of passage that ranks right up there learning multiplication and swimming without Floaties™: removing the training wheels. Big step. Huge confidence boost. Looking back, however, I wonder... where was my dad, where was he, why wasn't he right there saying, "Look son, I'm awful proud of you right now, riding on two wheels and all. But don't forget, don't you *ever* forget, that in 15 years, we're going to lock your feet to your pedals and make it harder than Chinese calculus to get your feet free of your bike. Make me proud then, too, son."

Well, I kinda dropped the ball on that one, dad. In the process, I ran out of fingers on which to count my awkward falls, so I had to count my bruises instead. I offer a quick re-enactment of an actual exchange between my body and my brain on April 20, 2002, approaching Rest Stop 4 after leaving the park on Day 2:

Body: Sweet lord, thank you for putting this rest stop right here.

Mind: You ain't kiddin'. Oranges at this one?

Body: One can only hope, brain. Going slow feels really good right now.

Mind: It's a matter of necessity at this point, eh old friend? Here we go, *stopping time*. My favorite.

Body: The ground is rapidly approaching and I feel lopsided.

Mind: Crap, not again! Your foot. RIGHT foot!

Body: It's locked, brain! This is YOUR department. You take things for granted.

Mind: 9,000 other riders have the hang of it, and I get stuck with *this* body. OW!

As much as I thought I'd remember at the next stop, my knee broke my fall yet again. How my dad remains proud of his children is still as big a mystery to me as how to get my foot out of its pedal lock without spraining my ankle. Eventually, my determination will prevail.

And don't think I'm coming to Tahoe without a device that yells, "Your pedals, moron!" when the bike's speed drops below 5 mph. That'll be me.