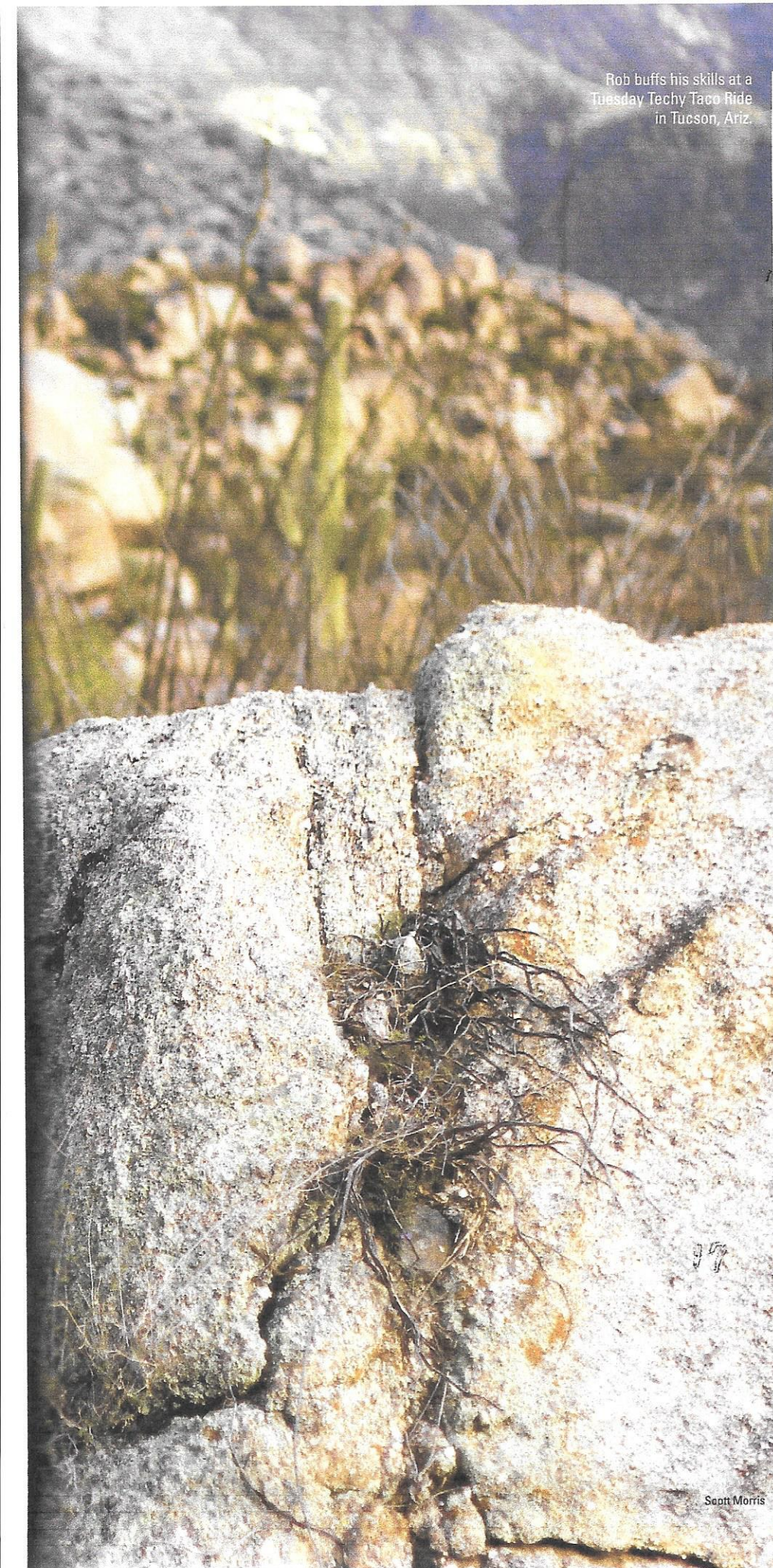


KLUNKER

ON A KLUNKER



Rob buffs his skills at a Tuesday Techy Taco Ride in Tucson, Ariz.

Thirty-six years racing and riding bikes, and it's over? I'm forced to fold because I can no longer afford my lifelong biking pastime?

This was my headspace a year ago, looking dumfounded at my bike with chronic diarrhea of the suspension—again. I wasn't closing in on my dream upgrade punch list. I was falling off the back, barely even keeping the bike rideable. Every time it broke, the repairs were in the hundreds and up. I couldn't justify any more bike dollars over daughter dollars. What an incredibly anticlimactic end to nearly four decades of dedicated riding. Rambo was ranting in my mind, "Nothing is over! You just don't turn it off!"

Power of the universe. My brother, Ed, had called from Denver and interrupted my pitiful moment. "Bro, I just stopped in a local bike shop to check out a Transition Klunker. I cranked the highest, longest, stand-up wheelie ever and bought that sucker on the spot!"

That single call was the catalyst I needed. The future was the past. A \$550 Klunker, cheaper than a new fork, was the solution. "Leaky" and its punch list were sold, and a new Klunker was ordered, sight unseen. In fact, I ordered two of them (one for my wife, Michele)—still cheaper than a new fork. 2014 was going to take on a new direction, or rather, a very old one. The Transition Klunker would be the only bike I owned.

A BMXer from 1978-1999 and a mountain biker 1989 to present. I still think of each calendar year as a season. This year would be purely on a Klunker, beginning to end. For the last decade, my schedule has been structured around a dozen events in the Epic Rides Series and the Arizona Endurance Series. Both put on long, tough endurance rides on the most beautiful trails Arizona has to offer. I saw no reason to change the routine just because of the change of bike. Nope, just stay the course.

The commotion grew exponentially when, early in the year, Drunkcyclist caught wind of my plan to dedicate the year to klunking. The attention generated was unforeseen, as were the relationships that soon blossomed, and I was surprised to discover the breadth of the klunking underworld. The more research I did on klunking and coaster brakes, the more groups I discovered that had already realized the uninhibited joy and satisfaction of

Scott Morris

KLUNKER



Chad Brown

simplicity. Through the year, I had a chance to meet up with several of these groups. They all had the common denominator of a love for riding and for keeping it real.

In the first week of January, with two Klunkers straight out of the box, Michele and I participated in a 35-mile ride on the Arizona trail. Among this group of about 50 riders, I was stunned at how many people were completely unfamiliar with coaster brake hubs. They thought that we had no brakes whatsoever. I started racing on BMX bikes that had coaster brakes. Resuming on one felt quite natural, and riding one turned out to be a simple, subtle step back. Most of these riders were born in a disc brake world. I never would have anticipated the gap.

That said, the klunker's greatest shortcoming is the mechanical limitations of the coaster brake hub. Overcoming this was a big one. Riding over mountains 50 miles at a time is not what they had in mind when they made these hubs. These hubs are made for paper route bikes, at best, not 6,000-foot descents eight miles long.

Initially, the hubs failed completely on a single downhill. They would fade to no brakes at all. Scary. Axles bent and the bearings and cones crushed. I had more than a couple long walks out of the desert with a disintegrated rear hub. I began to obsess on how to get a \$10 hub to tolerate this type of riding. I know some older hubs have superior reputations for strength and performance, but I wanted to refine a contemporary hub so sourcing parts, because of cost and availability, was not an issue. I focused on the Shimano CB-E110, which, in my opinion, is the best readily available coaster brake hub on the market.

Because the heat and pressures produced in the hubs are extreme, I began riding with an infrared thermometer. I logged 500-degree temps on the shell regularly. Serious heat. I've gotten flats from the heated spokes melting the tube. Descending the Tabeguache



How does a coaster brake hub hold up on a 6,000-foot descent? Junction Off Road in Silverton, Colorado.

Action Media

Trail on the 54-mile Sedona
Froggin Loop in Arizona



Trail during the Grand Junction Off-Road, the guy behind me said my bike was smoking and stinking worse than a truck coming down Loveland Pass. Special thanks in this department to Don Ferris of Anvil Bikeworks for crafting a beautiful, super one-off, coaster brake heat sink. Don is a master machinist and brought my concept to fruition and it works perfectly. Plus, it looks super cool. There were certain points on the trail when my hub had more smoke pouring out of it than Jeff Spicoli's van. With the heat sink bolted on, there was no smoke at all. It's possibly, the greatest refinement in the coaster brake's 125-year existence.

Grease is a big deal, huge. I experimented with many different grease compositions until I felt I had the ultimate blend. That process amounted to three months of trial and error, countless rebuilds, and about 50 pounds of destroyed hub guts. A cro-mo axle is also essential, greatly improving durability. Changing the wimpy 3/32 cogs to a true 1/8th cog prevents the three little indexing nubs from stripping off at the worst possible time, torqued out up some rock face with a bunch of cactus on either side. Chain line and tension are other vital elements. No chain equals no brakes.

With those issues addressed, I can consistently ride 50 milers without concern. I've gone a couple hundred miles without even repacking the hub. I started a little online effort called Coaster Culture (www.CoasterCulture.net) to share all I've learned.

You can lose the ability to brake in so many ways: being in the wrong pedal position, losing your chain, slipping your pedals or loss of traction on loose or steep terrain. You have to control your speed; often there is no way to scrub it down once you commit to a section. The back wheel feels as if it is constantly sliding. You can't back pedal, so pedal timing is crucial. Many times when you critically need the brakes you have to pedal forward even more to get the pedals to braking position. Nerve-racking? Very much for sure. I



The greatest innovation to the
coaster brake hub in the last century
is the result of the machining magic
of Don Ferris of Anvil Bikeworks.

Rob Bauer

KLUNKING



The klunker underworld comes alive at the Klunker World Championships in Bellingham, Wash.

Michele Bauer

often wish for a hyperspace button to push. Oh, and the bike is pretty heavy with some added drag to boot.

The klunker makes every trail exciting again. The thing is a dopamine machine, and that thrill hasn't subsided. Klunking is pure, simple, honest and earned. The bike doesn't assist you much. No, actually, it resists you quite a bit and will capitalize on any and every opportunity to pitch you right off. You have to become the trail, your line matters, and no mistake will be pardoned. It can get sketchy quickly.

Sound fun? Believe me, it is. For all of these reasons, klunking gives you a terrific sense of thrill and accomplishment. It will put you in tune with the trail again. Choice and consequence is absolute with no graces or buffers granted. When you thread through a tough section of trail, it's all you. It's an awesome feeling. You don't need hyper speeds or giant gaps to feel the thrill, so all in all, it's relatively safe. And the extra weight and additional drag? Well, drink all the beer you want, you'll burn it right off and then some.

It's been an incredible year riding the

Klunker—one of the best. The smiles-to-dollars ratio has been unbeatable. The bike cost savings has allowed Michele and me to take additional bike trips to California to attend Atomic Cycles' super fun Coaster Brake Challenge series; to Fruita, Colo., for a total riding, camping and beer-drinking submersion; and even a great pilgrimage to Transition's homeland of Bellingham, Wash.

In the beginning of the year, I was watching Transition's klunking videos online, laughing, thinking how well they captured the essence of riding. By the end of the same year, I was invited to attend the Klunker Worlds with the same guys in those videos. It was a surreal experience, from beginning to end. Upon arrival, Michele and I were greeted by the most enthusiastic, friendly and fun-loving crew. We quickly learned that klunking was only a part of their "all out" lifestyle. So, of course, we all over revved the night before.

The next day, we gathered for the start of the event, and it was more of the same—a party in the woods. I recognized almost everybody competing: DH legend Shaums March, Tony Jonsson, the Godfather of Klunk, Kelend Hawks, Kevin Hall and Will Porter.

We've all seen videos of how well they can ride. But fun and joking aside, the Worlds were on the line. There would be no practice. I had never ridden in such terrain, and I'd be on an untested, borrowed bike. Excited as I was to be sharing company with these heroes, my nerves shortened my breath. For the next two hours, we pushed our bikes up the mountain in the rain through a storybook forest with growth so thick it was dark at midday. Huge, soaking wet roots criss-crossed the trail. At first, I tried to mentally note lines though the more tangled sections, but then rainforest vertigo set in. Forget it, there would be no cognitive mapping of the course. The trail got steeper and steeper, and it got fast real fast. I knew their advantage would be in the root gardens. Flat-out speed on the steepers would be my only chance.

Once at the top, there was more partying even though the intensity was elevating. We dropped in one minute apart. I turned off my thoughts and handed full control over to my subconscious mind. I knew the ability was in me, but it had been years since I'd dialed up this kind of speed. The top was insane, with the growth across the trail whipping my face and the wind's siren in my ears. My front wheel fluttered side to side while the bike bounced and skipped around with my feet floating above the pedals. My goggles were so muddy, I could barely see. Stay loose! Stay off the brakes! I turned by sliding, having full faith in unknown traction, sometimes sliding 50 or 60 feet before my trajectory would finally change with no track to spare. I just let the bike dance between my legs in the root sections; the difference between fast and slow there wouldn't add up to huge time. When I spilled out on the less steep fire roads at the bottom, I was so happy I had made it that I laughed as I pedaled out the remainder of the course. We hung out the rest of the day and had a party in the park. When awards were handed out, I got fourth. I couldn't have imagined going any faster, but Shaums March, Kelend Hawks and Fred Phillips did. It was surreal, I tell you.

For 2015, count me in for all the same plus a few events, such as SingleSpeed Arizona in February and the Cruiser Nation Downhill in Flagstaff, that I haven't tried yet. Of course, paying homage to the founders of klunk with a ride over Pearl Pass come September, won't be missed. Maybe I'll even host Tucson's own Coaster Culture Classic.

Rambo was right. You don't just turn it off. No, Rambo, you simply downgrade and turn it up! 📍