

VELO VIGNETTE:



This month's interview is with the Sulankes, Bob & Joyce, and owners of George's Bike Shop in Boise, Idaho. They were around Lawrence in the late 60's, teaching Latin (Joyce) and working on a PhD (Bob in math) as well as organizing rides for the unnamed group of bike riders.

What they left us was the Octoginta, which will be run again this year on October 6th. What is interesting to know is how the Octoginta got started and how George's Bike Shop came about. George is George Lathas, owner of Gran Sport in Lawrence, Kansas.

NAME: Bob & Joyce Sulanke
ADDRESS: 2770 1/2 Warm Springs, Boise, Idaho 83700
OCCUPATION: bike shop owners
(Interview by Gene Wee)

GW: The last time I talked to you was in 1970 when Bob was finishing up his PhD work. I first met the Sulankes hanging around George's shop on 9th street and took my first long tour with them on the original Octoginta in 1969. How did the Octoginta ever get started?

S's: We would hang around George's bike shop as therapy to offset the burden of our studies. The Octoginta was just a well publicized ride of the many rides the unnamed club had. The club rides averaged between 40 and 80 miles, and turn out varied from 8 to 20 for a period of about 2 1/2 years. The Octoginta was so named because it was an eighty (octoginta is 80 in Latin) mile ride instead of a "Century" in October. Some motivation for the Octoginta came from a Century that Arnold Shields sponsored a month or so earlier.

GW: How did you pick the particular route?

S's: In our own personal rides we had ridden most of the roads of Jefferson County, paved & unpaved, and the route for the Octoginta was based on this experience (by the way, Gene Wee rode a UD-8 and wore a blue track suit on the first Octoginta). Basically we tried to get a cycling group going, specializing in day tours. We never really got a good turn out. The only people we could get in the club were graduate students and junior high students. High school and college students were busy doing more important things, we guess. The idea of racing never came up because we never had a significant number of interested riders, and we were isolated from the Kansas City racers by Georgian attitudes.

GW: Did you ever race here (in Lawrence)?

S's: No never, but we do race in Boise in the appropriate classes.

GW: When did the idea of George's Bike Shop come up? Any plugs for Boise to get us to come out?

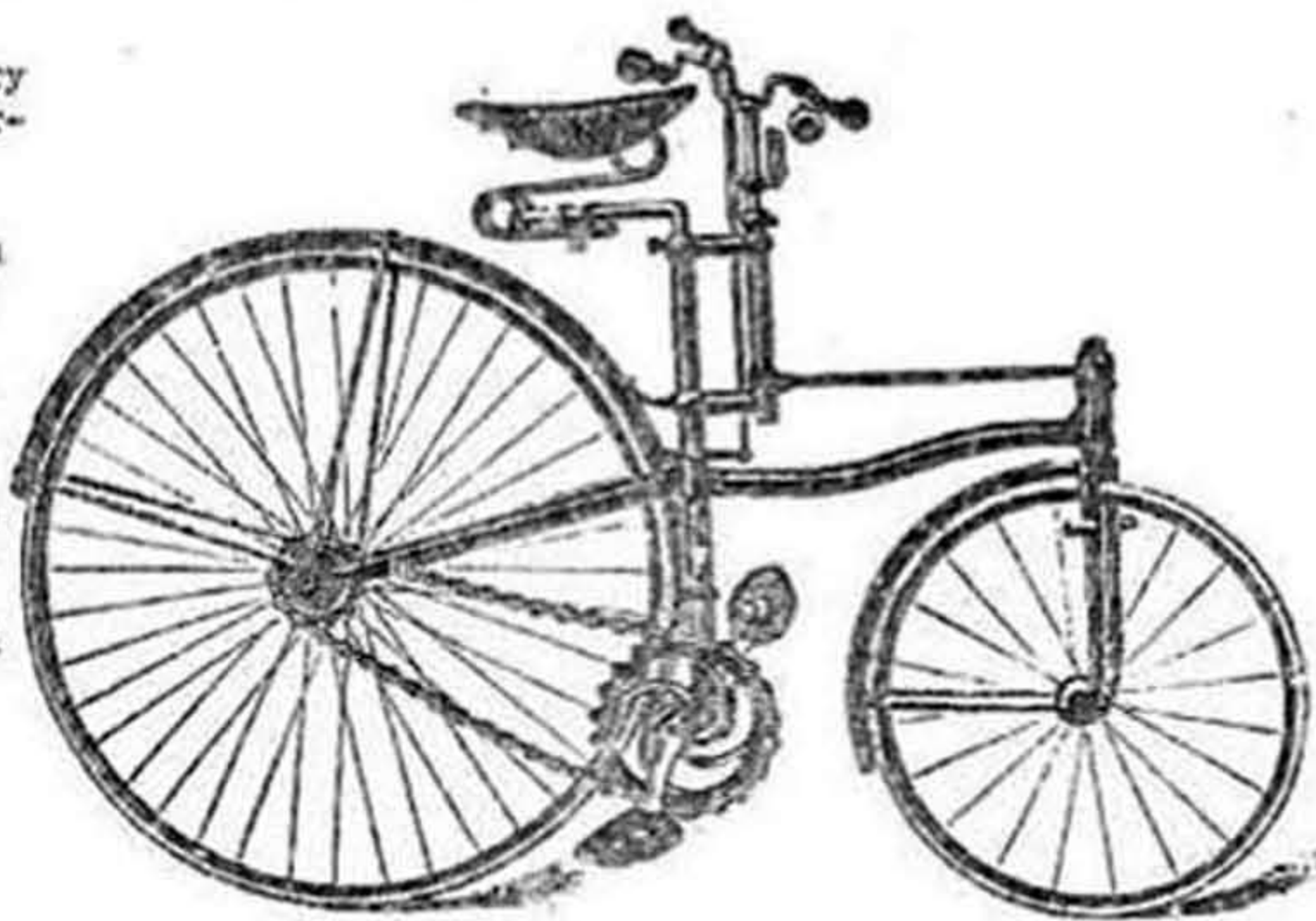
S's: When we moved to Boise, there weren't any decent bicycle shops so we started our own. It had been our intention to spend most of our free time hiking and mountaineering in the West. We have done quite a bit in the wilds, particularly enjoying a solid season of cross country skiing each winter. There is always good skiing within 8 to 50 miles from Boise. It doesn't snow much in Boise, and the winters average about 10 degrees warmer than in Lawrence. Snow in the mountains and rain in the town.

GW: I can remember when we used to stop at George's after every ride and invariably there was a Lowenbrau or Cola passed out. Coming in from the ride, we'd shoot the bull, drank, and slowly left. Do you remember your Lawrence days that way?

S's: We remember the after-ride Lowenbraus and cheese with great fondness. Two bike rides we remember the most were the time George and we went to Clinton and back in 5 degree weather one February morning and the time the club took a summer moonlight ride to the ghost town of Richland.

GW: Describe your experiences in setting up the shop? Is your philosophy of running the shop similar to George's?

S's: The bike shop was started two months before the bike boom was obvious. It was a hobby intended to serve serious cyclists and it was more Georgian than George. We would have gone out of business if Bob weren't teaching. In size the shop has outgrown the hobby stage but we continue to give first preference to serious cyclists and those who might become serious. We try to keep prices as low as possible, particularly on high caliber equipment. We have established a good supply of Campagnolo and other exotica. We are Idaho's exclusive dealer for several of the new California products and several English builders.



B.S.A. Safety, constructed largely with tricycle parts, 1884

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Each season we have been unable to obtain all the basic decent 10-speeds we could supply. The cost of operating an automobile should continue fueling the demand for bicycles; and as people become more aware of efficient cycles there will be a greater demand for quality equipment.

GW: What's the potential for cycling events in Boise?

S's: Since in the Boise area there are so many outdoor activities to choose from, there may be little potential for the development of a large touring club with an extensive schedule. We are sponsoring four tours a year, each between 50 and 100 miles, and about five races. The races have generated some interest with 40 or so riders. This area is too isolated to enjoy the racing activity of more populous areas as the Boise Cycling Club is located over 300 miles from another club.

GW: Have made any trips outside the Boise region?

S's: We made a trip to England last summer and visited many of the important shops and builders. The shops and builders are much less exotic than the picture that has been generated by American B.S.'ing. We also attended the British National Track Championships - a show - particularly Hugh Porter who lapped all the other pros in their 20 km race.

GW: Joel Martin (On BC, Wichita) tells us that one day Bob was wearing a Phil Wood cycling cap, someone walked in and said: "Hi, Phil, where's George?" I guess your answer to that is what I'm really looking for? Why George's Bike Shop?

S's: George is certainly the one responsible for our interest in cycling. When we started our shop we wanted it to be Georgian, so it was obvious that it had to be "George's Bike Shop". Many people come into the shop and ask, "are you George?" or "where's George?", etc. Sometimes we say, "George is our guru" or "George is in Kansas" or sometimes some male who is in the know just impersonates him. We don't have room for a refrigerator in our shop. However our air conditioning duct is becoming well stocked...

(NOTE: The Mt. Oread Bicycle Club is sponsored by Student Union Activities. SUA is the sole sponsor. The above article is not an endorsement of any particular bike shop in Kansas. While individual members have biases as to which shop they frequent, the official stand of MtOBC is neutrality. Velo Vignette is written to laud those individuals who have contributed much to cycling in general and particularly in Kansas and is meant in no way to endorse a business. We always welcome suggestions for more people to interview.)