



2006 World Tour: Sea Otter Classic

by Thanita Adams

Sea Otter Classic 4.6-4.9.2006 Monterey, CA

Ah, the Sea Otter Classic. That beginning of the year celebration of all that is bike shakes off our last vestiges of winter doldrums and signifies that, yes indeed, a new season of cycling is upon us. Four of us flew in to attend the Otter this year—Maurice, Chris, Michael and myself—and with the always appreciated help from Robert Studdiford of [Two Fish Unlimited](#), we managed to both cover the booth and scout some of the weekend's many, many happenings as well.

As always, each one of us saw but a bit of the whole picture. What with biz that needed to be attended to; races of every conceivable category and level going on, sometimes simultaneously; fun rides; the expo; unveiling of new product; and entertaining bits like Ryan Leech's trials demo and the Sumo bike derby (top prize, a trip to Costa Rica with Marla Streb's camp), there's no way ill ole me can report first hand on all the goings on. So here's an eclectic smatter of voices that will hopefully make all you fine folk who weren't there feel just a little bit more connected.

Me first? Sure...first up, the weather. Always a contentious issue, for early April in Monterey is notoriously fickle and, typically, rainy. All we'd been hearing for the weeks approaching the Otter was: rain. Record-breaking rain. Forty days and forty nights (some poetic license here on my part, but not much)—the sun hadn't been seen for weeks. When you're running a booth AND camping at the venue, it's easy to become a bit obsessed with such reports. So, it was with great relief that there was more lovely sun than rain for the bulk of the weekend. That's not to say the weather leading up to the event hadn't wreaked some havoc in the venue and on the course. Mud? Yep, and lots of it. But sweet as we are, we don't melt, so c'est la vie and on with the report!

Michael Browne, editor, was similarly slippery, and spent quite a bit of time running loose in the venue. As you can see, there is a bit of overlap with Chris in what piqued his attention, but not much. Check out the [4.14.2006 edition of Fresh Dirt](#) for another perspective on the weekend, along with some fun links to a picture gallery.

One aspect of the Otter that is notoriously difficult for us to cover in the flesh is the racing: most of the action isn't visible from the Expo venue, and there is just so darned much of it. Many of the courses were tweaked this year, the 20+ mile cross-country course being one of these. So, what was it like out there? How about we hear from our booth-neighbor Curtis Inglis of [Retrotec and Inglis](#) fame. Some wonderful details of how the course rode this year, how it's like to tandem it, and how important—dare I say crucial?—proper clothing can be for your racing psyche:

"I pre-rode the course on Friday afternoon, which was good, as the course was very different this year. Yes, it was muddy in some areas but super fun. Taking out the boring, long climb at the end of the race was great. I would much rather do shorter, steeper, technical climbs than a long, slow grind. Let's face it, who wants to end a mountain bike race with a boring climb that takes no skill? The only sucky part was when the single track got really fun, that's when the poison oak seemed the thickest! So as you are trying to enjoy the fun sections, you have to watch out for everything green and for me, I try to actually keep my stoker out of the poison oak also.

On Sunday, I rode the Tandem Cross Country Race in the morning with my friend Jeff Hantman of Clif Bar. This was our fourth year racing the tandem class. We have managed to podium every year too, not that either of us is competitive enough to want to win, but it's always nice to podium in a dress. We race the tandem only once a year, to keep it fun, and don't always pre-ride the course together. It's so much fun riding with Jeff on the back of the Retrotec tandem. He rolls with whatever I do. He's a great dismounter on hills, pushes me up when needed and can remount without missing a pedal stroke. It's pretty fun having somebody who can jump on a moving bike, Man do we have a good time riding together.

We have taken great care in selecting race outfits (albeit usually last minute runs to the Good Will store, some years matching, some years who knows!). I was in a Snow White costume (yes, cape and high stiff white collar included) one year and Jeff was in a pink tutu. Our outfit of choice this year had

a 1980's theme... a "Pretty in Pewter" sort of feeling. We wore matching shiny, pewter-colored, spaghetti strap, open back formal dresses circa 1985. This year, we decided to leave the dress length just below the knee, a great length overall except my dress kept blowing up into Jeff's face during the race. The overall mood was one of restrained elegance gliding down the hillsides (we always follow the Paris fashion protocol for the season). You could see us coming from a mile away in those things!

Unfortunately getting into our costumes is always really time consuming and leaves us little time to warm up and, in this year's case, almost miss the start. Had we not been alerted two minutes to the start gun by my wife, we would have missed the start of our class. As it was, we rode up to the line as the gun was firing and basically had a rolling start. A nice bonus, but completely unplanned.

The course was perfect in the morning. It hadn't rained since Friday night. All the rain made the really sandy sections much more rideable where friends had ridden the course weeks ahead and said it SUCKED. We came off the bike in a few sandy spots and actually took one really poor line down a steep section. With all the rain there were a lot of ruts so you had to watch where you were going. Have I mentioned there were about 40 small kickers that you could catch air off of? I was constantly telling Jeff not to jump due to turns right after the jump. Sometimes he didn't hear me and jumped anyway. We probably only got a few inches of air but it seemed like tons when we were drifting towards a big rut. Oh yeah, we finished in our usual fourth place, behind the really fast teams and in front of plenty of others.

Next we decided to race the Expert Singlespeed Cross Country Race...on a brand new 29-inch Single Speed Retrotec tandem! We didn't even know if they would let us on the course, but sure enough, after a little heckling at the start line from the announcers, we were off! It was raining at this point (we had decided to leave the dresses behind in favor of warm Swobo jerseys instead).

With just a little bit of rain and several hundred racers, the course was much more sloppy. I mean, it could have been that Jeff and I were a little tired from the first race or it could have been the rigid fork on a bike we hadn't really ridden prior to the race. We did do a really flat race in Santa Cruz with this bike in February and it seemed to work okay for that, so why not try it at Sea Otter?

We completed only one lap on the thing. We were actually surprised at what we could climb on it. During the singlespeed race we had a lot more time to stop and check out the scenery. We didn't notice the several hundred sheep over one hillside on our morning race but they sure surprised us on our second lap in the afternoon race. One of the mud pits sent Jeff onto my back, which was a first for us too. Not much else to say. It was fun doing single track climbing and having some fun single track at the end of the race. The single track at the end made this year seem like a mountain bike race instead of just a crappy fire road ride."

Thank you, Curtis, for that eloquent report from the trenches. And last but certainly not least, a thank you to our fine, fine sponsors, without whom our program as presented would not be possible. [Kenda tubes and tires](#) provided us with a tasty array of Kharisma, Klaw and Karma tires, and [Princeton Tec](#) lit the way with EOS commuter bike lights. As always, thanks to all the folk who came by the booth, even those who came only to heckle, because we really are The Mountain Bike Forum and we can handle it all.

Thank you, and good night.