

Reading Cycles: The Culture of BMX Freestyle

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation draws from and contributes to many traditions within the (interdisciplinary) discipline of communication studies. Serving the two primary objectives of the examination of the figure of the BMX freestyle cycling Pro and the analysis of the role of the magazines within this particular culture or field in the construction and maintenance of this figure, this project brings together studies of cultural intermediaries, magazine history, advertising history and theory, subcultures, audiences, commodification, cultural industries, celebrity, stars and professional athletes. The culture of BMX freestyle cycling is an interesting and heretofore unexamined phenomenon, and a focused examination allows the exploration and investigation of larger questions within the discipline. As such, this dissertation provides an informed interpretation of the culture of BMX freestyle, allows the examination of a number of other issues concerning the mediation of cultural practices, and suggests a theory of the special-interest magazine, thus contributing substantively to various literatures.

Special-interest magazines are a part of a larger system and industries within which the ultimate goal is the sale of commodities. At the same time, they function as a site of credibility within a larger field, both conferring star status on particular individuals and approving particular commodities that are being offered to the readers. Special-interest magazines construct and sell audiences to advertisers, create star systems, propose candidates for stardom, help build image careers, contribute substantially to a “star currency” within the particular field, negotiate (i.e.; mediate) tensions between the advertisers, the stars, and the readers, help organize the time of a culture and work to

infuse it with a sense of vitality through the punctual and ritualistic appearance of novel content, assist the consumer with their desires for commodities and stars by standing as catalogues of commodities (serving to educate newcomers in the protocol of the culture), provide new financial opportunities (such as the commodity form of the photo contingency), and in their complicity with the needs of those that provide their primary source of revenue, give more value to the advertising dollar in the construction of editorial content that could be seen as advertising.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse s'inspire de et contribue à plusieurs traditions au sein de la discipline (de l'interdiscipline) des études en communication. Répondant à deux objectifs principaux, l'étude de l'image du professionnel du cyclisme BMX freestyle d'une part et l'analyse du rôle que joue les magazines au sein de cette culture ou de cette discipline particulière dans la création et dans l'entretien de cette image d'autre part, ce projet propose à la fois une étude des intermédiaires culturels, de l'histoire du magazine, de l'histoire et des théories de la publicité, des sous-cultures, des lecteurs, de ce qu'il est maintenant convenu d'appeler la commodification (de la culture), des industries culturelles, de la célébrité, des stars, et des athlètes professionnels. La culture centrée sur les vélos acrobatique BMX freestyle est un phénomène intéressant qui n'a à ce jour jamais fait l'objet d'une étude sérieuse et dont l'analyse approfondie offre la possibilité d'examiner et d'explorer des concepts encore plus vastes au sein de la discipline. À ce titre, cette thèse présente une interprétation détaillée de la culture BMX freestyle, permet d'examiner un certain nombre d'autres questions concernant la médiation des pratiques culturelles, propose une théorie s'appliquant au magazine spécialisé, et contribue ainsi de façon substantielle à la littérature de plusieurs disciplines.

Les magazines spécialisés font partie d'un réseau plus vaste et d'industries dont le but ultime est la vente de produits de consommation. En même temps, ils représentent une vitrine crédible au sein d'un champ d'activité plus vaste, conférant à la fois le statut de star à certains individus et posant leur sceau d'approbation sur certains produits de consommation présentés aux lecteurs (dans leurs pages). Les magazines spécialisés

fabriquent et vendent des auditoires aux annonceurs, ils créent une culture du vedettariat, ils proposent des candidats qui se hisseront au rang de stars, ils favorisent la création de carrières fondées sur l'image, ils sont en grande partie responsables du fait que dans une sphère d'activité donnée certaines célébrités puissent devenir monnaie d'échange, ils sont médiateurs (i.e. négociateurs) lors de situations conflictuelles entre les annonceurs, les stars, et les lecteurs, ils règlent la cadence d'une culture en prenant soin de lui instiller une certaine vitalité grâce à la présentation ponctuelle et protocolaire d'un nouveau contenu, ils comblent les besoins du consommateur avide de produits de consommation et de célébrités en posant comme de véritables catalogues de produits de consommation (qui servent aussi à initier les nouveaux arrivants quant au rituel de la culture en question), ils représentent de nouvelles opportunités financières (exemple : la forme de commodité que représente la photographie prise sur le vif), et dans leur complicité et leur désir de satisfaire aux besoins de ceux qui représentent leur première source de revenus, ils procurent aux annonceurs une plus-value pour chaque dollar investi dans la publicité, en concevant un contenu éditorial s'apparentant en tout point à une publicité "traditionnelle."

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my brother, Scott Warren James Nelson, who was my first BMX Bro.



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INTRODUCTION

“What inspired you to ride earlier on?”

Magazines, always. *BMX Plus*, *BMX Action*, *Action Bike*. Back then, that was our only contact with what was going on in the rest of the BMX world. I used to read them cover to cover 10 times over; building imaginary dream set ups from all the parts in bike shop adverts and dreaming of what it must be like to ride in places where the sun actually shone. (Scotland isn't one of the most flatland-friendly climates in the world.) There was a total buzz to getting a new mag and opening it to hopefully see loads of new tricks to learn. Woody Itson, RL Osborn, Martin Aparijo, all the greats.” (from a profile on BMX freestyler Scott McDonald entitled “Unsung” in *Dig BMX Magazine*, July / Aug. 2006: pg 33 – 34)

At the end of the summer of 2003, it was announced that the Fall 2003 issue of *Chase BMX Magazine* would be its last. The magazine was the first and longest-running Canadian publication of its kind, having served this particular national BMX freestyle cycling community for nineteen issues over four-and-a-half years. As a member of this community and an avid (indeed, rabid) consumer of such periodicals, I initially found this distressing. Relatively quickly, however, I saw an opportunity: this corpse could be a corpus.

For some time, I have been interested in the association of commodities with particular renowned, *skilled* individuals (phenomena such as an Arnold Palmer golf sweater, a Wayne Gretzky endorsed hockey stick, an Eric Clapton signature model Fender guitar). As such, the (relatively uncomplicated) task was to connect this interest with the corpus that had presented itself. In actual fact, professional BMX freestylers (Pros), as stars within their particular culture or field, are similarly employed by

companies to endorse their products. That is, the cultural capital or Pro-status that is bestowed upon the riders by the magazines that serve the culture is mobilized by the BMX industry (i.e.; the magazine's advertisers) via the association of goods with the top stars within the culture. Importantly, the BMX Pro himself¹ also cashes-in on this cultural capital, as does the magazine. The BMX magazine, then, can be seen as a primary mediator within a particular star-system, and the Pros can be seen as the currency within this field.

Despite its recent popularity as an "Extreme" or "Action" sport, no one has as of yet undertaken a critical history of the culture of BMX freestyle cycling.² As discussed in Chapter Two, BMX freestyle is the younger sibling of BMX (**B**icycle **M**oto**C**Ross) racing.³ Using the same small wheel size (twenty inches in diameter) and general frame design as the racers, BMX freestylers spend their time performing tricks or stunts rather than racing head-to-head. In my experience, the explanation that leads to the quickest understanding is that BMX freestyle is "like skateboarding, but on bicycles." Indeed, (sub)culturally, BMX freestyle has often been seen as an inferior cousin to the much-hailed cultures of skateboarding and surfing. Furthermore, while there has been some academic work on these more popular of cultures (notably, Becky Beal's work on skateboarding⁴), BMX freestyle has not received the attention that I believe it warrants.

¹ As of this writing, there has never been a female Pro BMX freestyler.

² It should be noted that former Pro BMX freestyler and filmmaker Mark Eaton has recently released a documentary entitled *Joe Kid On A Stingray: The History Of BMX* (2005). Inspired by Stacey Peralta's *Dogtown and Z-Boys*, the eighty-seven-minute film serves as a decent (although necessarily superficial) introduction to the cultures of BMX and BMX freestyle, covering the years between 1970 and 1995.

³ As the "B" in BMX stands for "bicycle", I will avoid redundancy and refer to the culture that is the focus of this dissertation as "BMX freestyle", sans "cycling."

⁴ Beal, 1995; Beal, 2003; and Wheaton and Beal, 2003

Only a few studies have been published on the subject of the BMX freestyle culture (notably Kusz, 2003 and Rinehart and Grenfell, 2002), and as a cultural participant who is also a scholar, I must say that this work has not always reflected my experience. Thus, on the micro level, this dissertation contributes a learned insider's view of the culture. On the macro level, the examination of particular aspects of the culture of BMX freestyle allows an investigation of larger issues within the discipline.

Importantly, the period of study for this project (defined by *Chase BMX Magazine's* publication run between the Spring of 1999 and the Fall of 2003) covers the era within which BMX magazines (and the culture itself) enjoyed their most commercial success and greatest degree of influence. As discussed below, the industry was at its strongest with regard to sales during this phase, the publication of previously bimonthly magazines increased to nine and twelve issues, and new peripheral magazines (like *Chase*, which served a national, Canadian market) were viable for the first time. Since 2002, the importance of internet-based BMX websites⁵ and a general slump (or correction) in the BMX industry has affected the success and influence of the BMX magazines. As the intervention of the former is not likely to be reversed, the four-and-a-half years covered in this project may prove to have been the peak period for these print periodicals.

I have been purchasing and collecting BMX magazines compulsively since 1984. Indeed, many of my earliest memories of my participation in BMX freestyle culture are associated with the magazines that served it. For example, my favourite memory of my

⁵ According to Belinda Wheaton and Becky Beal, "...the two predominant forms of specialist media used by subculturists in skating and windsurfing were magazines and videos, although internet web pages were becoming increasingly popular..." (Wheaton and Beal, 2003: pg 160).

grandmother is an occasion when she agreed to drive me several treacherous kilometers in the snow because I “needed” to buy the latest *Freestylin’* magazine on the day that it was released. Growing up in a suburb of Vancouver in the 1980s and wanting to be involved in BMX freestyle necessitated reading its California-based magazines (and, due to publication lag-time, meant being three months behind). Appropriately, I rode my BMX bicycle two kilometers to the closest corner-store after school on Wednesdays (the day of the regular delivery by the distributor) to pick up one or more of the many titles that were available at the time. These magazines were hungrily devoured for any and all news of my distant subculture, and would be re-read dozens of times. If these publications were indeed bibles of the culture, then I (as a devout parishioner) could quote you scripture word for word. Over the years, these issues piled up, both forward and backward into time, resulting in a collection of roughly one thousand individual issues dating back to 1978.

By the time I “turned Pro”⁶ in 1990 during my first year of university, the magazines were still the primary connection to the culture (although other media, including videocassettes, had become available). This continued to be the case until the first few years of the twenty-first century, when internet-based BMX websites took over this role. Indeed, it is probably not a coincidence that several magazines have struggled and ceased publication between the years 2003 and 2006, as this is precisely the period

⁶ In the interest of full disclosure, my Pro career was minor at best. Indeed, after entering the Pro flatland classes at regional contests throughout 1990, I retired from this discipline and recommenced as a ramp-rider. My last Pro ramp competition was in January of 2005, wherein my partner (genuine world-class Pro Max Vincent) and I won a team tournament.

within which there has been both an increase in the prominence of the internet-based BMX media and a general decline in bicycle sales within the BMX industry.⁷

In the twenty-five plus years that I have been involved in BMX culture, I have worked in several “intermediary” positions ranging from bicycle shop employee to “Action Sports Consultant” to large corporate clients seeking to get in on (i.e.; exploit) the latest, hottest youth culture. I was hired as the local BMX expert and buyer for a bicycle shop at fifteen years old. I have attended and worked at several tradeshow. I have been a grassroots events manager and promoter for several years. I have been a featured performer within “shows” or demonstrations. I have served as a Master of Ceremonies / host for several events. In addition to having been sponsored by or “on flow” from several companies (having received free product in exchange for brand exposure), I have also worked as a team manager (coordinating sponsored groups of riders and ensuring that they receive their respective photo contingency cheques). With regard to BMX magazines, I have appeared in a few advertisements, been interviewed, been mentioned in the news columns, and have written several articles (which have been featured in each of the three magazines that are focused upon for this project). I also published several issues of my own ‘zine (the humbly titled *Wade ‘Zine*), and have authored three separate BMX-related weblogs.

Indeed, during the period of analysis for this project, I received some sort of coverage in each of the three magazines that are analyzed during the designated time frame. I can be found in almost every issue of *Chase*, news of my grassroots events were

⁷ “It’s good news then that while the BPSA statistics for BMX / Freestyle bikes for 2005 continued to show a decrease, it did so at a *substantially lower* percentage than the previous three years...” (*BMX Business News*, August 2006: pg 4).

reported in the news section of *Ride (US) BMX Magazine* over this time, my name was “dropped” by Pro BMX freestyler (and *Chase* publisher) Jay Miron in a Pro Interview in the first issue of *Ride (UK) BMX Magazine* under analysis (*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 37), and my having taught at McGill University was announced in the penultimate issue of the same magazine during this period (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. 2003: pg 38).⁸

So the obvious question is, am I too close to my object of inquiry? That is, can I be objective? In the “Preface to the English Edition” of *Homo Academicus*, Pierre Bourdieu asserts that “(o)nly a sociological self-analysis ... can really help to place the scholar in a position where he is able to bring to bear on his familiar world ... detached scrutiny...” (Bourdieu, 1988: pg xii). Proffering a rejoinder and a “heads up” to what he sees as poor sociology and what needs to be done to combat the worst tendencies of scholars studying phenomena that are near to them, Bourdieu reminds the reader that having a particular point of view implies “...a certain angle of vision, hence a particular form of insight and blindness” (Bourdieu, 1988: pg xiii). Importantly, he acknowledges that the worst of this (the “blindness”) is also accompanied by particular advantages (the “insight”). Not suggesting that scholars avoid examining phenomena that they are intimately familiar with, Bourdieu proposes a particular strategy.

The sociologist who chooses to study his own world in its nearest and most familiar aspects should not, as the ethnologist would, domesticate the exotic, but, if I may venture the expression, exoticize the domestic, through a break with his initial relation to intimacy with modes of life and thought which remain opaque to him because they are too familiar. (Bourdieu, 1988: pg xi)

⁸ Indeed, all three of the magazines announced that I was hired to teach at McGill. *Ride (UK)* has even described the current project to its readers more than once in its Canadian News section.

To summarize thus far, when studying phenomena that are close to a scholar, Bourdieu suggests that one must become aware of her or his position in the particular field so as to minimize “blindness,” and at the same time attempt to make a break with the subject so as to combine one’s privileged insights with an analysis that complicates that which is familiar to the researcher.⁹ To not make such a break, according to Bourdieu, would be to engage in “...indefensible forms of internal analysis” (Bourdieu, 1988: pg xvii).

One strategy in this regard might be the employment of multiple theoretical approaches (for example, drawing on political economy to supplement textual analysis). In their book, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Bourdieu and L  c J. D. Wacquant discuss the problems associated with “(r)igid adherence to this or that one method of data collection” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: pg 226). Mobilizing religious language, they lament that “...monotheism reigns supreme...” with regard to social research, and caution “...we must beware of all sectarian dismissals which hide behind excessively exclusive professions of faith. We must try, in every case, to mobilize all the techniques...” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: pg 226, 227). Again, the use of two or more approaches might instigate a rupture in the thought of a scholar who is examining a phenomenon or culture that she or he could be seen as too close to.

As such, I believe that cultural insiders who are dedicated to examining their subject through a multiplicity of theoretical lenses may in fact have distinct advantages over more disconnected scholars in their examination of a given subject. That is, the privileged insight, combined with an earnest commitment to the exoticization of the familiar, should outweigh any disadvantages and blindspots that might remain. Indeed, if

⁹ “Rupture in fact demands a *conversion of one’s gaze*....”(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: pg 251).

this is truly a worthy project, my dual identity as a communications scholar and cultural insider positions me as the perfect candidate to carry out this research, as I have the unique perspective of an insider who is trained academically. I am (perhaps paradoxically) both a distanced scholar, and a participant. As David Muggleton writes:

Lovatt and Purkis have observed how much research in the sociology of popular culture is being undertaken by relatively young academics, ‘many of whom are already immersed in their chosen culture prior to intellectual engagement with it’ (1996: 250). This situation is producing a new cohort of academic taste-makers for whom the deficiencies of established theories are likely to be thrown into sharp relief by their own personal experiences as, say, punks or clubbers. (Muggleton, 2000: pg 4)

Rather than this personal experience with my subject matter being seen as detrimental, I would hope that it would give me more insight than other scholars into what is “truly” going on. According to Muggleton, this insider knowledge is essential: “(h)ere, I would invoke my criterion of validity, that social scientific explanations should at least ‘fit’ the subjective reality of the subjects of the study” (Muggleton, 2000: pg 14). In fact, if “fit” or resonance of social scientific explanations is important, then a scholar who is also an insider has a distinct advantage over scholars who cannot in the end know if their work truly reflects an insider’s experience. Also, an insider can read signs within a subculture that an outsider cannot. And perhaps most importantly when focusing on flippant, irreverent subcultures that are prone to mislead the outsider, the insider may have advantages such as the respect of the participants or the ability to determine whether the respondents are attempting to deceive.¹⁰ Indeed, Muggleton argues that we must

¹⁰ One of the difficulties that outsiders have in studying action sports like BMX freestyle is that messing with the interlopers is part of the culture. As such, when Rinehart and Grenfell contend, “...one young rider was proud to recite the names of stunts like the

“...privilege the subjective meanings of subculturists rather than deriving these from a pre-given totalizing theory...” (Muggleton, 2000: pg 9).

Although I believe my closeness to the culture is an asset, I would also like to show that, like Sarah Thornton, I have been able to distance myself sufficiently from the subject matter:

Despite having once been an avid clubber, I was an outsider to the cultures in which I conducted research.... (...) I ... slowly aged out of the peer group I was studying, acquiring increments of analytical distance with each passing year.
(Thornton, 1994: pg 2 – 3)

I also believe that, as I have slowly aged out of my peer group, I have acquired analytical distance from my present subject matter while still “keeping my foot in the door.”

I have other significant advantages with regard to the execution of this research. My experiences within the culture have granted me personal access to and knowledge of many of the Pro BMX freestylers and the editors of the magazines under analysis. Perhaps most importantly, however, I have amassed a unique set of approximately one thousand BMX magazines dating back to 1978. As is often the case with particular disposable commodities such as special-interest magazines (“cultural waste”), this resource is not available in libraries, and one must rely on the collections of fans.¹¹

“Double X” and the “Goody Can-Can”...” (Rinehart and Grenfell, 2002: pg 308), they have most likely fallen victim to a prank (for although it is possible that these labels are specific to this site, in my extensive experience these trick names do not exist).

¹¹ “The sites in which unwanted cultural commodities (old records, books, etc.) accumulate are, at one level, museums of failure, but by collecting failure in one place they endow it with a monumentality and historical solidity” (Straw, 2000). Although Straw is referring to locations such as second-hand record stores, the closet within which my twenty-six boxes of BMX magazines are kept might also qualify as such a site.

CHAPTER ONE

Research Problematic and Literature Review

In this chapter, my goal is basically twofold: to describe a research problematic and to review pertinent literature relating to this. The former requires much less space, although its aim can be seen as quite ambitious: a theory of what special-interest magazines do. To be more specific, I want to explain, by bringing together sometimes disparate literatures, how special-interest magazines (for my purposes, BMX freestyle magazines) can be seen to create, maintain, and employ “stars” (or in this case, the figure of the “Pro”) to serve their primary (i.e.; commercial) concerns. Special-interest magazines are a part of a larger system and industry of selling commodities. At the same time, they function as a site of credibility within a larger field, both conferring star status on particular individuals and approving particular commodities that are being offered to the readers / consumers.

To the point, I believe that a central function (perhaps deferential only to the pecuniary imperative) of these particular BMX freestyle cycling magazines is to create and sustain imitable Pros. This activity can be seen to primarily serve the magazines’ advertisers, but it can also be seen as beneficial to the magazines themselves, the individual Pros, and the consumers. To oversimplify, the magazines create and sustain individual stars who are then employed by the advertisers to be directly associated with their product (i.e.; endorsements). As such, the BMX freestyle cycling magazine can be seen as a medium that serves as a site of legitimation and credibility for not only Pros, but also for advertisers, and their products.

With regard to these advertiser-serving objectives, I believe that the editorial content of BMX freestyle magazines can be seen to be performing two roles: 1) making (and sustaining) “Pros”, and 2) associating these Pros with brands. If the primary goal of such publications is commercial, and the principal source of income for these magazines is advertising, then it would follow that it is in the best interest of the magazines to serve their advertisers to the best of their abilities without alienating the consumers. I believe that the Pro can be seen as the embodiment of a strategy to achieve these goals. The magazines not only create and sustain this hybrid of star and professional athlete and actively associate these individuals with their respective sponsors (that are also advertisers within the magazines), but they also promote the sponsored Pro life as the goal of every reader.

This chapter contains a review of theoretical resources that inform this project. Importantly, this focused discussion does not attempt to offer a comprehensive history of the magazine as a cultural form. Rather, its goal is to prepare for the analysis of the corpus in subsequent chapters.

Appropriately, this literature review begins with a section discussing the *history* of the medium of the magazine and its relationship with the practice of advertising. Subsequent sections review the conception of the *audience as a commodity*, look at how magazines can be seen to function as part of a grander *system* of moving goods, examine the importance of *punctuality* with regard to periodical publications and how this relates to what can be referred to as the *ritual* function of magazines, and discuss the crucial importance of *novelty* to the medium of the magazine. This leads to brief discussions of *commodities* and *stars as commodities*. With regard to particular agents, a review of work

concerning *cultural intermediaries* is offered in order to highlight privileged positions within the field of cultural production, and discussions of *sports* and *professional athletes* precedes a section on *the Pro*. The *editorial content* of media (as opposed to the advertising) is examined to see how it has worked to serve the industry (i.e.; the advertisers). The chapter concludes by positioning the contribution of a theory of special-interest magazines as addressing a *theoretical rift*.

The focus of this study is not on advertising, but rather on the editorial content of magazines and how this supports the creation and sustenance of stars (who are subsequently used by advertisers). However, it is useful to review the literature on the history of advertising with regard to magazines as their materialization can be seen as both concurrent and interdependent. Indeed, the contemporary situation with regard to the relationship between magazines and their advertisers (and the consumers of both the magazines and the products offered by advertisers) can be seen as the result of over one hundred years of “evolution”. As such, beginning with a historical review is appropriate.

History (Magazines and Advertising)

“During the long maturation of the reading public in modern society, magazines carved out a special niche in mediated communication located somewhere between newspapers and books and borrowing ideas and writing styles from both.” (Leiss et al., 1990: pg 99)

“It is hard for us today, when magazines are sold as disposable products that are discounted, reformatted, and repackaged almost monthly, to realize that magazines were once treasured.” (Twitchell, 1996: pg 71)

The modern magazine (in all of its various contemporary manifestations) is the result of almost two hundred years of evolution. Although Benjamin Franklin's *General Magazine*¹² carried the first magazine advertisement in the colonies in its May 1741 issue (an announcement for a ferry service¹³), advertising was not a significant source of revenue for most American magazines until the 1870s. According to Dallas Smythe,

While *specialized* institutions for the mass production of communications (i.e., newspapers and magazines) appeared in capitalism in the eighteenth century, these institutions did not reach their mature form until monopoly capitalism shifted their principal economic base to advertising in the late nineteenth century. (Smythe, 1994 (1977): pg 267)

As James Twitchell explains, a defining moment in the history of American magazines was that of the American Civil War:

the Civil War transformed magazines. For the Civil War left in its wake a vast surplus of goods, clothing, shoes, guns, blankets... that had been produced by machinery that now could not be turned off. New branded products were appearing using the same machine technology. Products like Royal Baking Powder, Ivory Soap, and Bakers chocolate, then Kodak and Gillette, and finally all manner of branded objects like bicycles and farm implements needed a national medium for efficient promotion. (Twitchell, 1996: pg 72)

On the whole, American magazines (unlike newspapers) did not accept advertising until this time, receiving the bulk of their support from subscriptions. Both the readers and the magazines' producers saw magazines as "above" the nonsense of advertising. As Leiss, Kline and Jhally explain in their book *Social Communication in Advertising*, "...magazines thrived without the need for advertising revenue, and many of them, such

¹² Franklin's *General Magazine* appeared three days after the first publication of Andrew Bradford's *American Magazine*, the first North American magazine.

¹³ Sivulka, 1998: pg 11

as the better literary and religious journals, viewed it as a matter of pride not to sully their pages with ads” (Leiss et al., 1990: pg 100). Juliann Sivulka further describes the position of those at the helm of these early magazines: “(t)hese publishers depended on their subscribers who, being refined or aspiring to be so, regarded publicity as vulgar and dismissed most product advertising as a sham. And for the most part it was” (Sivulka, 1998: pg 33).

This stance against the inclusion of advertising in magazines changed relatively quickly, however. Interestingly, this change represented a major power shift, as magazines soon emerged to primarily serve their advertisers.¹⁴ For example, while the complicity of *The Delineator* (which began publishing in 1873) with its advertisers’ interests could be seen in their featuring clothing that had been made with Butterick brand sew-at-home patterns, competitors such as *McCalls* (1876) were actually *conceived* as advertising vehicles that would not be dependent on their subscription revenues (Sivulka, 1998: pg 34). That is, whereas initially the publisher served the subscribers (who, previous to the modern situation wherein they are only covering the cost of delivery, were originally charged a rate commensurate with covering the expenses associated with publication), the magazines were now in the business of delivering these readers to the advertisers. Furthermore, as the publishers were now primarily in the service of the advertiser, the magazines became vulnerable to meeting the demands of those paying the costs of publication. That is, there was a power shift in the relationship between the publisher and the advertisers.

As media became more dependent on advertisers, ad agencies lobbied for something far more subtle and important – control of content – not because they

¹⁴ Importantly, we must remember that the magazines still had to appeal to their readers.

had a political agenda but because they wanted particular audiences to see their ads. (Twitchell, 1996: 69)

It is in the interests of publishers that the editorial content of a given magazine be in accordance with the goals of its advertisers (i.e.; brand loyalty leading to increasing sales) with respect to their products. And, of course, it is in the interests of those who produce the magazine that their advertisers be happy. If a magazine does not cater to the needs of their advertisers (for example, by giving a poor review to a company's products), serious consequences can result. The worst-case scenario, of course, is that the advertising is pulled from subsequent issues, seriously affecting advertising revenue.¹⁵ As such, we should not be surprised to find that the editorial content of a given magazine works to promote the interests of its advertisers.

As was the case with the medium of the newspaper, the advertisers soon wielded enough power to influence not only the substance of the editorial content but also the format of magazines. An example of this is the advertiser-mandated "jump" or broken story within the newspaper that forces the reader to wade its way through pages of advertisements to reach the conclusion of a front-page story (Twitchell, 1996: pg 69). Importantly, the jump story predates the strategies of both product placement and radio and television commercial breaks that function in a similar fashion (advertising breaking up the entertainment content). To navigate through a jump story, the reader must work her or his way through the advertisements that interrupt the article to reconnect with the unfinished (broken) program (rather than being able to finish the story independent of the

¹⁵ Two examples: Toyota pulled its ads from *Road and Track* magazine after one of its cars did not make a top ten list (Twitchell, 1996: pg 117). German BMX company KHE pulled its ads from *Ride (UK) BMX Magazine* after an honest (poor) review of one of their products (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 2001 / Jan. 2002: pg 174). According to Twitchell, "(e)nthusiast magazines" are always advertiser friendly..." (Twitchell, 1996: pg 117).

consumption of advertisements). As such, having the advertisements moved from a separate classifieds-like section and having them woven into the editorial content serves the interests of the advertiser. A century later, Naomi Klein discusses a modern example of the integration of editorial content and advertising (which was aided by the magazine-funded research of their readership):

Details magazine, for instance, designed a twenty-four-page comic / advertisement strip in October 1997, with products like Hugo Boss cologne and Lee jeans woven into a story line about a professional in-line skater. On the page following each product's extreme cameo, the company's real ad appeared. (Klein, 1999: pg 41)

Thus, the editorial content of a given magazine and the advertising featured within it becomes less distinguishable and isolable. Magazines become catalogs featuring their advertisers' products.¹⁶

A policy change in the United States made the medium of the magazine even more attractive to advertisers. With the passing of the United States Postal Act of 1879, a special mailing rate for magazines was instituted. Despite the fact that magazines carried advertising, a low mailing rate was established allowing magazines to be distributed relatively inexpensively, giving the medium an advantage in the United States. Similarly, in Britain, the lifting of the advertising tax in 1856 instigated a parallel phenomenon (Leiss et al., 1990: pg 100). By the 1880s, then, companies in both Britain and the United States had a relatively inexpensive channel with which to advertise their goods nationally.

¹⁶ Conversely, Klein also observes "...designer catalogs have begun to look more and more like magazines..." (Klein, 1999: pg 41).

Therefore, a combination of factors, including post-Civil War industrial imperatives and the special mailing rate for magazines established in the 1879 United States Postal Act, contributed to the emergence of the American magazine as a phenomenon that is recognizable to modern consumers.¹⁷ Indeed, as Leiss, et al. explain, “(m)agazines underwent several periods of development and transformation, during which they were influenced by – and, in turn, themselves influenced – other media” (Leiss et al., 1990: pg 99).

One such influence on (and threat to) the medium of the magazine was the introduction of radio, as these forms (along with the newspaper) vied for limited advertising revenue. This competition forced magazines to adapt to their situation, as “...those magazines that did not meet the advertisers’ needs simply faded away” (Leiss et al., 1990: pg 105). One such adaptation changed the practice of audience measurement:

the magazines gradually became innovators of services desired by advertisers as well as contents. The use of audience research as opposed to circulation data became a widely accepted defensive measure against the encroachment by radio as an advertising medium. (Leiss et al., 1990: pg 105)

The magazine’s primary strategy for survival during the first half of the twentieth century, then, was to adapt to better serve the advertiser rather than the readers (although the attitudes and desires of the audience was what was being measured).

The subsequent success of the medium of television in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s also brought about some anxiety for magazine publishers, and

¹⁷ Of course, there were important technological developments that would benefit advertisers / advertising: “(t)he popularity of magazines was stimulated by faster linotype type-setting and the invention of halftone technology. A pioneer was the weekly *Canadian Illustrated News*, which combined these techniques with the new paper made from wood pulp, which took ink differently from rag paper and made illustrations of a far superior quality” (Leiss et al., 1990: pg 101).

further helped to shape the American magazine towards its “modern”, special-interests form. Indeed, television was seen as having seduced the audience away from mass-circulation magazines. Furthermore, even the strongest periodicals with regard to circulation were no longer taking in sufficient advertising revenue to subsidize rising production costs. As a result of this situation, magazines were forced to restructure. One strategy was to reduce the price of subscriptions with the hope that this would increase these numbers so as to be able to charge the advertisers higher rates. Conversely, other periodicals limited readership. These and other strategies failed, and dozens of magazines folded (Sivulka, 1998: pg 315). However, as a medium, the magazine would eventually find new success by reinventing itself.

As these big general-interest magazine giants toppled, publishers responded by developing special-interest magazines with well-defined audiences, including *Sailing World* (1962), *Runner's World* (1966), *Weight Watchers* (1968), and *Rolling Stone* (1967). Advertisers turned to these publications as a choice vehicle for reaching audiences of a specific age or interest. Thus, despite the casualties in the ranks of the big general-interest publications, magazines continued to flourish. (Sivulka, 1998: pg 315 - 316)

Once again, the magazine adapted to its environment, and today we find ourselves with access to thousands of advertising-laden special-interest titles that are employed as a means of reaching more and more specific target markets. This further fine-tuning of focus pertaining to the tracking of audiences is reflected in the practice of “lifestyle marketing.”

A significant development was the emergence of “lifestyle marketing,” the practice of segmenting the market based on the spending patterns of groups of consumers. Advertisers targeted specific income levels, consumer lifestyles, and interest groups, instead of directing their pitches at the broadest range of the

buying public. New magazines provided vehicles for advertisers to reach these audiences, such as *Jet* (1951) for the African American community and *Playboy* (1953). Other special-interest periodicals found a popular market by focusing on hot-rodding, surfing, home decorating, and television. (Sivulka, 1998: pg 265)

Historically, the magazine can be seen to have continually fought obsolescence by further focusing its efforts to serve its advertisers through the fine-tuning of its editorial content to attract the most desirable audiences for their advertising.

It can be said that the primary goal of advertisers is selling their respective *brands* (Coke, Ivory), and that the sale of their specific *products* (cola, soap) is secondary (although, paradoxically, product sales is the ultimate goal). Similarly, then, we can see that the primary product of the modern special-interest magazine has become (particular and specific) *audiences* to be sold to the advertisers. This may be accomplished via audience-seducing editorial content, of course, but this is merely the cheese to draw the mouse into the trap.

The Audience as a Commodity

Magazines, as advertising vehicles for industry, function in a fashion similar to that of television. According to Jane Gaines,

Scholars have recently called attention to the way television programs exist to deliver viewers to advertisers, who calculate the matches between commercial airing and hypothetical viewing as impressions made on consumers. (Gaines, 1991: pg 213)

Audiences or readerships become the true product of the medium, and these products are sold to the advertisers. The notion of the “audience commodity”, as developed by Dallas Smythe (1977, 1978, 1987, 1994) and others (Murdock, 1978; Livant, 1979; Jhally, 1982;

Maxwell, 1991; Streeter, 1996; and Newman, 2003), has been the focus of much debate. As Smythe famously argued, “I submit that the materialist answer to the question – What is the commodity form of mass-produced, advertiser-supported communications under monopoly capitalism? – is audiences and readerships...” (Smythe, 1994 (1977): pg 268). Put another way, magazines (and other media) are in the business of constructing and selling audiences of consumers to advertisers, and as such the programming and editorial content primarily serves this “higher” purpose. According to Smythe,

what they [advertisers] buy are the services of audiences with predictable specifications which will pay attention in predictable numbers and at particular times to a particular means of communication (television, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards, and third-class mail) in particular market areas. As collectivities these audiences are commodities. As commodities they are dealt with in markets by producers and buyers (the latter being advertisers).... (Smythe, 1994 (1977): pg 270)

Advertising (and indeed publishing and broadcasting), then, can be seen as the business of trafficking in audiences. An audience is constructed or gathered as a group of consumers that is likely to be interested in the same content. This audience, which is in a sense “owned” or “controlled” by the producers of the content, is rented out to companies that want to get information about their product to this specific desirable group. According to Twitchell, “(t)he audience pays attention because it is traded something in return, namely, entertainment” (Twitchell, 1996: pg 9).

As discussed above, it is in a magazine’s best interest that its editorial content works to serve the goals of its advertisers (or at least, does not work against such objectives). Of course, the conspicuous complicity with the interests of the advertisers could produce tensions with the readership of a given media product. Especially with

regard to the (sub) cultures served by special-interest publications, a magazine must balance its “prime directive” to serve its advertisers by creating and maintaining an environment that is friendly to their products and brand-message with the imperative to serve its readership (and, perhaps, the particular subculture). There are at least two general strategies that, when employed, could compensate for a publication’s complicity with the agendas of a magazine’s advertisers. Firstly, it is in a magazine’s best interest to be seen as an arbiter of taste and “authenticity” or “keepin’ it real” within the culture that it covers. Indeed, special-interest magazines must be at the forefront and on top of such debates (i.e.; what is “in” and “out”), as this is specific to each culture and changes over time. The optimal scenario would be that the publication takes the lead in such dialogues and thus be seen as the right institution to be policing authenticity and taste. A publication’s credibility with its readership hinges on its being seen as leading a culture with regard to authenticity and taste.

Second, a magazine benefits from the gratitude afforded to it in response to the materialization of entertaining editorial content that seems to have been included as a gift to the reader (especially when it does not blatantly serve its advertisers). Indeed, as alluded to above, it is the trade of entertainment for attention that is the key distraction of the readership from the business of a given media product. This could be characterized as a gift economy, in that while entertainment is offered seemingly for free (the gift), it is understood that the audience must reciprocate by “giving” up its attention to the advertising component of the program. Regarding the gift to the audience, Smythe characterizes this offering on the part of producers as a “free lunch”:

What is the nature of the content of the mass media in economic terms under monopoly capitalism? The information, entertainment and “educational” material

transmitted to the audience is an inducement (gift, bribe or “free lunch”) to recruit potential members of the audience and to maintain their loyal attention. The appropriateness of the analogy to the free lunch in the old-time saloon or cocktail bar is manifest: the free lunch consists of materials which whet the prospective audience members’ appetites and thus (1) attract and keep them attending to the programme, newspaper or magazine, and (2) cultivate a mood conducive to favourable reaction to the explicit and implicit advertisers’ messages. To say this is not to obscure the agenda-setting function of the “editorial” content and advertising for the populations which depend on the mass media to find out what is happening in the world, nor is it to denigrate the technical virtuosity with which the free lunch is prepared and served. (Smythe, 1994 (1977): pg 271)

As such, perhaps the combination of the two strategies that I have outlined can be seen in the editorial content (free lunch) in special-interest magazines that seems to serve the interests of the readers over those of the advertisers and speak to authenticity (i.e.; product-free how-to articles as opposed to fashion / product guides). Of course, this can be seen to ultimately “cultivate a mood conducive to favourable reaction” to a magazine’s advertisers’ goods.

System

“...many ‘promotions’ are now organized in the form of ‘cultural events’, from the bookstore which, in liaison with teachers, puts on display a couple dozen children’s books, to the use of shopping centers of cultural events as part of a selling environment. Thus in capitalist societies we are witnessing the promotion of culture by commerce and the promotion of commerce by culture.” (Miège 1989: pg 36)

Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptions of the “field” and the “field of cultural production” are, I believe, helpful to understanding how specific industries or subfields remain

homologous to each other as well as to the grander field of cultural production. As such, Bourdieu's specific comments with regard to the artistic field can be seen to be applicable to the general production and promotion of branded commodities.

The artist who puts her name on a ready-made article and produces an object whose market price is incommensurate with its cost of production is collectively mandated to perform a magic act which would be nothing without the whole tradition leading up to her gesture, and without the universe of celebrants and believers who give it meaning and value in terms of that tradition. (Bourdieu, 1993: pg 81)

In short, it is the entire field of cultural production that gives the object its meaning.

Therefore, we should expect that any given medium or outlet would exist as merely part of a greater system with regard to the offering of a given commodity for consumption.

Perhaps the classic example of a "well-oiled" system with regard to the promotion of commodities is that of the Hollywood film star system. This system has been characterized as a business strategy that aims to increase audience consumption of films while also differentiating programs and products, with the ultimate goal of securing returns on the investments of the major studios (Kindem, 1982: pg 79; Stacey, 1994: pg 106). With reference to the marketing of the Hollywood star, Jackie Stacey writes in *Star Gazing* that these stars

were not simply sold to audiences through the films in which they appeared, but were surrounded by a huge publicity machine which offered audiences information about their lives and activities. Their careers were carefully planned and orchestrated to feed into popular demands and to create new ones. Audiences obtained information about stars from the huge publicity apparatus which was developed by the various studios to promote their stars and protect their investments in them. (Stacey, 1994: pg 106)

As such, the audience of a given Hollywood star was not limited in its consumption to her or his particular films, but rather could find them in various other media, which constituted a system of stardom. A star's image, then, was constructed or informed by various mediated products that, in a sense, work together as a system and within a field.

Robyn Dowling observes that the organization of retail space (of, for example, a department store) works as part of a larger system to move goods (Dowling, 1993).

According to Cynthia Lury, "(t)he retail context is seen to be a created place, one that is deliberately moulded by retailers in their attempts to sell commodities" (Lury, 1996: pg 129). Perhaps magazines can be seen as performing a similar function; organizing retail space (i.e.; the magazine itself, both editorial content and advertising) as part of a larger system which ultimately works toward the goal of selling the commodities of the industry that advertises its goods in the magazine. Lury's comment with reference to a shopping mall, I would argue, could apply to the retail space of a magazine: "(i)n other words, the lay out of stores, the location of goods in relation to others, and their display were deliberately intended to become part of the meanings of commodities" (Lury, 1996: pg 129). The editorial content of a magazine, for my purpose, would work with the advertising to make the products offered meaningful and attractive to the reader / consumer.

Magazines, then, can be seen as an essential part of (or mediation within) a whole system that works to move the goods of a given industry. Magazines occupy a privileged position within a particular field of production wherein they mediate between the industry (advertiser) and the consumer (reader). As such, it is perhaps puzzling that the magazines' central position within a system would not give them more power over the

advertisers. However, it does (often) seem to be the case that it is the advertisers' needs that are catered to by the magazines.¹⁸ In the case of special-interest magazines, a weak industry (with insubstantial advertising budgets) could be at the root of this lack of power, as the publications might have to compete for the advertising dollars. Conversely, a magazine with a glut of advertising would not have to be as subservient to the their advertisers.

Punctuality and Ritual

According to Michael Warner, there is an intrinsic connection between the periodic nature of publications and the coherent emergence of the particular contemporary cultures that they service:

The key development in the emergence of the modern publics was the appearance of newsletters and other temporally structured forms oriented to their own circulation; not just controversial pamphlets, but regular and dated papers, magazines, almanacs, annuals, and essay serials. They developed reflexivity about their circulation through reviews, reprintings, citation, controversy. (Warner, 2002: pg 66)

As such, we should not be surprised that publications such as special-interest magazines are often at the centre of a culture, and that their periodic nature functions to continually reinvigorate that culture. Recalling the above discussion pertaining to systems and fields, Warner asserts that "(a) text, to have a public, must continue to circulate through time, and because this can be confirmed only through an intertextual environment of citation

¹⁸ Of course, there are examples of magazines that have (and exercise) more power over their advertisers than visa versa. The financial stability and thus security of the publication is a primary factor with regard to whether the magazine or its advertisers wield more power.

and implication, all publics are intertextual, even intergeneric” (Warner, 2002: pg 68). Any given periodical that serves a particular public, culture or subculture, then, exists within a system and a field with similar publications, other culture-mediating products (such as television broadcasts and films), and preceding issues and programs. These mediations, in-relation-to and in-tension-with each other, work to define and describe a culture and continue to give it meaning over time. According to Warner, “(i)t is not texts themselves that create publics, but the concatenation of texts through time. Only when a previously existing discourse can be supposed, and a responding discourse be postulated, can a text address a public” (Warner, 2002: pg 62).

Importantly, according to Warner, the new content of a given periodical is not as important as the fact of its “punctual” (re)appearance.

The temporality of circulation is not continuous or indefinite; it is punctual. There are distinct moments and rhythms, from which distance in time can be measured. Papers and magazines are dated, and when they first appear, they are news. Reviews appear with a sense of timeliness. At a further remove, there are now regular publishing seasons with their cycles of catalogs and marketing campaigns. (Warner, 2002: pg 66)

What is important, then, is that there is a consistent rhythm (“...rhythms that are widely known and relied upon” (Warner, 2002: pg 66)). Thus, a periodical publication can be seen to serve as a metronome, marking the passing of time for a given culture.

As such, I believe that the steady and consistent periodic appearance of particular special-interest publications such as magazines can be seen to serve a ritual function. This is perhaps a primary means by which magazines, for example, ensure the necessity for subsequent issues. According to Eric Rothenbuhler, “(r)itual is seen as an expression of social order that has the power to constitute it, and therefore functions in creating,

maintaining, and adapting it” (Rothenbuhler, 1998: pg 55). As such, ritual is part of a cycle by which a social order or culture expresses itself while also constructing that culture (which subsequently expresses itself via ritual, etc.).

Recalling Warner and the above discussion of the intertextuality that occurs over time with regard to magazines and the resulting creation and sustenance of publics, Rothenbuhler contends that “(r)ituals always refer in two directions: Backward, as it were, to the social order and the culture in which the ritual is embedded, and forward, as it were, to the people performing the ritual and those with whom they will interact” (Rothenbuhler, 1998: pg 63). Thus, the notion of ritual as communication, as outlined by Rothenbuhler, and the work of Warner with regard to how periodicals function can be seen as complementary. A further connection can be made with regard to the importance placed on punctuality by Warner and the privileging of repetition over the precise passage of time by Rothenbuhler. According to Rothenbuhler, “(m)any rituals are calendrical, being prescribed by the repetition of a cycle rather than the mere passage of time” (Rothenbuhler, 1998: pg 21). The important thing for both with regard to magazines, we could suppose, is that another distinct issue follows a previous one, and not that it comes out on the same day of each month. A subsequent issue of a magazine builds on the previous, and will inform the following one. Each new issue will appear punctually, and ritualistically. Thus, the content of a given issue is not as important as the fact that it followed the previous one, which legitimates and validates (via the implied assertion that the periodic, punctual, and ritualistic appearance of the publication proclaims vibrancy) the culture it serves. Indeed, Rothenbuhler discusses the idea that ritual is communication without information, and contends that “...ritual has more to do

with performing than with informing, more to do with transcendent patterns of order than with particularities, sometimes more to do with acceptance than with change”

(Rothenbuhler, 1998: pg 23). As such, we should not be surprised that there is a certain conservatism involved in this.

Novelty

“In the cultural industries there is a permanent crisis in ‘creativity’ and producers must constantly be on the lookout for new ‘forms’ or new talent; production must be constantly renewed, and occasionally long periods may elapse before a solution is found.” (Miège 1989: pg 44)

Even if the punctual and ritualistic appearance of a magazine is more important than what is actually contained within it, it is exactly this periodic nature that requires a consistent flow of novel content. A monthly magazine needs a monthly cycle of “news”, while a weekly publication requires an even greater supply of novel content to justify its existence (or perhaps, its cyclic appearance). Of course, the most obvious need for consistent novelty is for the news itself. According to Twitchell, “(t)he concept of news as a commodity is a modern development, in part a result of advertising’s need for a stable context” (Twitchell, 1996: pg 67). Thus, in addition to a need for editorial novelty (in the form of news and in other editorial content such as new product columns), the magazines have to have an air of newness about them to best serve their advertisers. Although this seems on the surface to be paradoxical (stability via constant change), it is perhaps this stable, consistent (that is, punctual, cyclical, ritualistic) movement that gives the culture that the magazine is addressing the appearance of constant progression and

vitality (otherwise, a yearly catalog or the one-time publication of a book would suffice). The advertisers benefit from the resulting atmosphere of vitality and progression, as it associates their latest products with an aura of newness and evolution (and thus, legitimacy or credibility). Furthermore, the constant change helps them to justify the introduction of ever more (slightly or incrementally) better products that displace the products that consumers have already bought. According to Sivulka,

Consumers soon became conditioned to accept the premise of planned obsolescence. Magazine articles, newspaper “women’s sections,” television programs, and advertisements dispensed advice on maintaining the good life through constant product “upgrades.” (Sivulka, 1998: pg 246)

In sum, the advertisers benefit in at least two ways from a magazines’ imperative and constant pursuit of novel editorial content. Perpetual novel subject matter provides a sense of vitality to the given culture (or lifestyle), and a concomitant discourse reflecting progression and evolution can be seen to “rub off” on the latest products that advertisers are offering (especially in the case of a new product spotlight column). Indeed, according to Lury, “...the market requires novelty to stimulate demand, and as a consequence the imposition of the commodity form, that is, the production of goods for exchange on the market, is necessarily characterized by standardized variation, or repetition within certain limits” (Lury, 1996: pg 162). Perhaps paradoxically, this also works to prepare the reader (as consumer) for the inevitability of the obsolescence of the very goods featured, ensuring that the next season’s models will not be received with contempt.¹⁹

Of course, the news cycle varies between media. Newspapers, for example, have long issued multiple daily editions. Daniel Boorstin explains: “(i)n order to justify the

¹⁹ Indeed, Stuart Ewen famously argued that advertising (and we can add, I believe, editorial content) trains readers to be consumers (Ewen, 1976).

numerous editions, it was increasingly necessary that the news constantly change or at least seem to change” (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 14). As one cannot truly control the timing of “real” (i.e.; spontaneous) news events, and since the news media requires a certain amount of news for each issue or program, “artificial” (created) news becomes necessary. Boorstin discusses what he calls “pseudo-events”, or events constructed to be covered as news. By way of the employment of pseudo-events, news-gathering is replaced or supplemented by news-making (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 14).²⁰ According to Boorstin, a pseudo-event is a happening that can be seen to have particular characteristics:

- (1) It is not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted, or incited it. Typically, it is not a train wreck or an earthquake, but an interview.
- (2) It is planted primarily (not always exclusively) for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced. Therefore, its occurrence is arranged for the convenience of the reporting or reproducing media. (...) The question, “Is it real?” is less important than, “Is it newsworthy?”
- (3) Its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. Its interest arises largely from this very ambiguity. (...)
- (4) Usually it is intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The hotel’s thirtieth-anniversary celebration, by saying that the hotel is a distinguished institution, actually makes it one. (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 11)

The interview with a celebrity is the classic pseudo-event: an interesting (in that it is of interest to readers) conversation that could fill the space within a publication during any slow news period. Arguably, perhaps, the celebrity interview is *newsworthy* but not

²⁰ “Nowadays, a successful reporter must be the midwife – or more often the conceiver – of his news” (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 24).

(spontaneous) news.²¹ While today we expect interviews in magazines, newspapers and on television, the interview was not always as welcome. According to Boorstin, “(v)ery early the institution acquired a reputation for being contrived” (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 15).

As part of their celebrity-making role within a larger system of celebrity construction and maintenance (within a particular field or culture), magazines use the interview to introduce candidates for the readers’ consideration.²² That is, they are part of the larger celebrity-making process that contributes to the education of the reader as to what makes a celebrity “tick”.

Of course, the interview is not the lone contrived regular feature of magazines. The news section itself reports happenings that could be characterized as pseudo-events. Indeed, perhaps most of the “news” that is featured in various news media forms today has been led or influenced by press releases and purposeful news leaks. According to Boorstin, “(t)he news leak is a pseudo-event par excellence. In its origin and growth, the leak illustrates another axiom of the world of pseudo-events: pseudo-events produce more pseudo-events” (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 31).²³ Reports of a film star agreeing to appear in a production or an athlete such as Tiger Woods signing an endorsement

²¹ Of course, the pseudo-event that is the interview often makes news.

²² It is important to remember that despite the facts that “(t)he star system lends itself particularly well to the manipulation thesis because of the enormous amount of money, time and energy spent by the industry in building up star images” (Dyer, 1998: pg 12), and “...the audience’s role in shaping the star phenomenon is very limited” (Dyer, 1998: pg 18), the star-making system can fail, and the consumers do have the agency to pick their heroes from the limited pool offered by those entrusted with (or rather, in control of) the nomination process: “(n)ot all manipulation works. There are many cases of stars who are given the full promotion treatment, but do not make it” (Dyer, 1998: pg 14).

²³ Thus, the (footnoted) earlier example of the interview that makes news (that is, a news report that something significant or controversial was said in an interview) might be seen as an example of a pseudo-event spawning a pseudo-event.

contract may keep fans informed of the goings-on of their favourite celebrities, but one might argue that such announcements work to promote the film, the company being endorsed, and the celebrity her- or himself.

Commodities

The new products section of a magazine could be characterized as (consumer) news, or as a pseudo-event, or both. Nevertheless, this recurring editorial column can be read as serving the interests of the advertisers, as it highlights and legitimates their latest products, giving them an aura of novelty and progression. As discussed above, perhaps more important than the content of a particular issue or edition is the faith that it inspires that there is indeed a vitality to the culture or lifestyle. As Boorstin explains, “(t)he half-intelligibility which we expect, or even hope, to find in the latest product language personally reassures each of us that progress *is* being made: that the pace exceeds our ability to follow” (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 223). Therefore, not only do the advertiser and the magazine depend on this impression of progress and evolution, but the consumer also “needs” this “...to discover and enlarge our desires. We are always ready – even eager – to discover, from the announcement of a new product, what we have all along wanted without really knowing it” (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 232). Although the consumer does have agency in making their decisions pertaining to their choice of commodities, it is also perhaps the case that consumers are willing to be led; or, in the words of Theodor Adorno, “(t)hey fasten on the culture-masks proffered to them and practice themselves the magic which is already worked upon them” (Adorno, 2001b: pg 95). Indeed, according to Boorstin, “(w)e then find ourselves occupied less with finding

products to perform certain obvious functions than with discovering what is the real function of objects that we think we want” (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 233). That is, we want things, and we want assistance in justifying our wanting of things.²⁴

Stars as Commodities

As stars can be seen as consumable commodities, it would follow that the audience may be appreciative of assistance in this process as well. The star system, within which magazines can play a role, can be seen to be aiding (or encouraging) the consumers with their choices. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, discuss what might be termed a strategy in this regard. Echoing Boorstin’s pseudo-events²⁵, Adorno and Horkheimer discuss “pseudo individuality”²⁶ in reference to the coverage and construction of stars:

Pseudo individuality is rife: from the standardized jazz improvisation to the exceptional film star whose hair curls over her eye to demonstrate her individuality. What is individual is no more than the generality’s power to stamp the accidental detail so firmly that it is accepted as such. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972: pg 154)

The reader / consumer may not be able to exhibit the particular skill set which has made the individual a star, but she or he may be able to emulate the hero in question through

²⁴ Again, Adorno: “(t)he phrase, the world wants to be deceived, has become truer than had ever been intended. People ... desire a deception which is nonetheless transparent to them” (Adorno, 2001a: pg 103).

²⁵ For Boorstin, the celebrity “...is the human pseudo event” (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 57).

²⁶ Although one might argue that only the prefix “pseudo-” is shared between the two concepts, both terms dialectically invoke the opposed “real”, implying the existence of an authentic.

imitation (often via commodity consumption) of the superficial. That is, it is the pseudo individualization of a star that makes them accessible.

On the faces of private individuals and movie heroes put together according to the patterns on magazine covers vanishes a pretense in which no one now believes; the popularity of the hero models comes partly from a secret satisfaction that the effort to achieve individuation has at last been replaced by the effort to imitate, which is admittedly more breathless. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972: pg 155 - 156)

For Adorno, the star-making system encourages restricted emulation through mere imitation of the superficial, and critical, deeper thought is discouraged.

However useful it might be from a practical point of view to have as much information as possible at one's disposal, there still prevails the iron law that the information in question shall never touch the essential, shall never degenerate into thought. This is ensured by the restriction of information to what the monopoly has supplied, to commodities, or to those people whose function in the business world has turned them into commodities. (Adorno, 2001b: pg 84)

As such, the star-making system does not truly want this process to trickle-down as a how-to or a guide to becoming a star for its audience. The ultimate goal of producing stars is actually to create and maintain consumers.

The star is made accessible to audiences of consumers via the mediations of the star-making system (magazines, television, etc.). That is, we are made acquainted with the candidates for "stardom", which Richard Dyer describes as "...an image of the way stars live" (Dyer, 1998: pg 35). According to Boorstin, "(c)elebrity is made by simple familiarity, induced and re-enforced by public means. The celebrity therefore is the perfect embodiment of tautology: the most familiar is the most familiar" (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 61). Of course, our familiarity with stars is not actually with their true selves,

but with their images. Indeed, as Dyer asserts, “(s)tar images are constructed personages in media texts” (Dyer, 1998: pg 97). Boorstin sees the star image as analogous to the pseudo-event: “*(a)n image is synthetic. It is planned: created, especially to serve a purpose, to make a certain kind of impression*” (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 185). Importantly, this synthetic image is often employed to sell goods. Indeed, one might argue that a central function of a given culture or pursuit is to produce stars to help move commodities.

Images are employed both by stars and corporations in the endorsement of commodities. Indeed, Twitchell sees the endorsement process itself as star-making: “(i)n adult, I contend, you are not known for what you did or what you were doing when you did it. You are famous for what you endorse while doing what you did that used to be what made you famous” (Twitchell, 1996: pg 131). In this case, an earlier, smaller fame is supplanted by the grander fame that comes with being a popular endorser. Boorstin would seem to agree: “(e)ndorsement advertising not only uses celebrities; it helps make them. Anything that makes a well-known name still better known automatically raises its status as a celebrity” (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 58). According to Gaines, this exchangeable notoriety can be seen as “cultural image capital” (Gaines, 1991: pg 207). Again, we see signs of an integrated system within the field of cultural production at work.

The celebrity endorsement is not a recent phenomenon. As Boorstin explains, “(t)he old practice, well established before the nineteenth century, of declaring the prestige of a product by the phrase “By Appointment to His Majesty” was, of course, a

kind of use of the testimonial endorsement” (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 58).²⁷ Twitchell more precisely locates the advent of this practice: “(c)reating fame, and then applying it to a purchasable object, starts in the industrial revolution. Lord Byron was acutely, at times painfully, aware that he was selling books of poetry in direct proportion to the selling of Byronism” (Twitchell, 1996: pg 132).

Of course, the celebrities and the companies that employ them can be seen to be trading on the cultural image capital accrued by the star when they enter into an endorsement agreement.²⁸ As Pierre Bourdieu explains with reference to the field of art, “(t)he quasi-magical potency of the signature is nothing other than the power, bestowed on certain individuals, to mobilize the symbolic energy produced by the functioning of the whole field ...” (Bourdieu, 1993: pg 81). Thus, the endorsement of the star (the employment of the signature) is meaningful within the field because its value materialized from within the field. As the star-making and the meaningful employment of a star in the endorsement process depend on the location of these processes within the field of cultural production, we can perhaps see this behavior as ritualistic. Indeed, Rothenbuhler notes that “(t)he star is a symbol of a social type, a ritual performance of an otherwise ordinary way of being...” (Rothenbuhler, 1998: pg 94). Furthermore, Rothenbuhler argues that “(s)tars must be understood as both commodity and communication” (Rothenbuhler, 1998: pg 94).

²⁷ While related, the testimonial and the endorsement can be differentiated: for while a testimonial implies actual use of the product, an endorsement merely asserts that the celebrity approves the product. “So straightforward a statement as one that someone approves or uses a product has become one of the most interesting of pseudo-events” (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 216).

²⁸ As discussed above, the celebrity’s profile (and cultural image capital) can also be raised by the endorsement process itself.

The stardom of a celebrity is often seen as coming from within the individual star.

Bourdieu complicates the identification of the author of a particular work of art:

who is the true producer of the value of the work – the painter or the dealer, the writer or the publisher, the playwright or the theatre manager? The ideology of creation, which makes the author the first and last source of the value of his work, conceals the fact that the cultural businessman (art dealer, publisher, etc.) is at one and the same time the person who exploits the labour of the ‘creator’ by trading in the ‘sacred’ and the person who, by putting it on the market, by exhibiting, publishing or staging it, consecrates a product which he has ‘discovered’ and which would otherwise remain a mere natural resource; and the more consecrated he personally is, the more strongly he consecrates the work. (Bourdieu, 1993: pg 76 - 77)

I would argue that the editors of magazines can be seen as producers of stardom and as having the power to consecrate those featured within the magazines as stars. Bourdieu contends with reference to the “art-businessman”

‘Discovering’ the ‘new talents’, they guide buyers’ and sellers’ choices by their writings or advice (they are often manuscript readers or series editors in publishing houses or accredited preface-writers for galleries) and by their verdicts, which, though offered as purely aesthetic, entail significant economic effects (juries for artistic prizes). (Bourdieu, 1993: pg 78)

In short, the cultural businessperson (or, for my purposes, the magazine editor) can be seen to have a disproportionate amount of power in the star-making system, in that they have the power to “consecrate” the stars. Indeed, as Lury insists, “(c)ertainly the role of commentators in constructing what they appear only to document should not be ignored” (Lury, 1996: pg 203). Furthermore, as Sarah Thornton argues regarding music magazines, “(m)edia and commerce do not just *cover* but help construct music subcultures” (Thornton, 1994: pg 187 -188). However, according to Lury, Thornton sees

magazines as not entirely deterministic and imposing: "...rather than seeing these magazines as strategies of hyperconformity, as incorporation or selling out, she argues that they are integral to subcultural formations" (Lury, 1996: pg 210).

As discussed above, magazines occupy a privileged position within a particular field of production that mediates between the industry (advertiser) and the consumer (reader). The currency in such a field is often a "star". The magazines can be seen to help create and maintain such stars (masters of their pursuit: e.g.: artists or athletes) within the given field to which they belong. Of course, it is the entire system, and not a given player or agent within a field that determines the status of the star. As Bourdieu summarizes in *The Field of Cultural Production*,

In short, what 'makes reputations' is not ... this or that 'influential' person, this or that institution, review, magazine, academy, coterie, dealer or publisher; it is not even the whole set of what are sometimes called 'personalities of the world of arts and letters'; it is the field of production, understood as the system of objective relations between these agents or institutions and as the site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated. (Bourdieu, 1993: pg 78)

Particular magazines, then, can be seen as part of a grander star-making system. Still, although magazines do not entirely determine who is a star, we might be able to say that particular players within a given field or system have more power. As Francesco Alberoni explains "... 'the star system...never creates the star, but it proposes the candidate for "election", and helps to retain the favour of the "electors"'..." (Alberoni,

1972 (1962); quoted in Dyer, 1998: pg 19).²⁹ Dyer, in his book *Stars*, acknowledges the power of the film industry in creating stars.

The enormous economic importance of the stars, the elaborate machinery of image-building and film's importance in establishing character-types all suggest the potential power of the forces of cinematic production for creating the star phenomenon. (Dyer, 1998: pg 17)

Regarding professional athletes, Robert Rinehart articulates the inequities of power within the field: "... the consumer-athlete nexus is a constructed one, one in which both athlete and corporate strategies conspire to create a market of celebrity" (Rinehart, 2003: pg 30).

Cultural Intermediaries

Inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, a "field" of scholarship has emerged around supposed privileged professions within the field of cultural production (as exemplified by the above "cultural businessman"). Although Bourdieu labeled this group the "new cultural intermediaries" (Bourdieu, 1984), the contemporaneity of these professions has been disputed, and for many the designation of "new" has been abandoned (notably, by Nixon and du Gay, 2002 and McFall, 2002).³⁰ The cultural intermediary designation includes not only the aforementioned dealers, publishers, producers, editors, commentators and "art-businessmen," but also talent scouts and agents and managers of stars, artists and athletes. These "workers involved in the

²⁹ With regard to the part played by the consumers in the star-making process, Dyer declares "(w)hat is clear from the account of the star / audience relationship is that the audience's role in shaping the star phenomenon is very limited" (Dyer, 1998: pg 18).

³⁰ As Liz McFall writes in her article "What About the Old Cultural Intermediaries? An Historical Review of Advertising Producers," "...despite its apparent newness the cultural intermediary position is not unprecedented" (McFall, 2002: pg 533).

provision of symbolic goods and services” or “middle men,” Bourdieu contends, are able to exert “...from their position within the cultural institutions, a certain amount of cultural authority as shapers of taste and the inculcators of new consumerist dispositions” (Nixon and du Gay, 2002: pgs 496, 495 and 497 respectively). According to Bourdieu’s original conception,

The new petite bourgeoisie comes into its own in all the occupations involving presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth) and in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services ... and in cultural production and organization which have expanded considerably in recent years. (Bourdieu, 1984: pg 359)

In a sense, the cultural intermediary is conceived and positioned as occupying the space or “gaps” between production and consumption. According to Keith Negus, there are “...indications of significant knowledge gaps, and clear evidence that employees engaged in intermediary activity – knowledge workers, those working with information and symbols – are involved in attempting to plug these gaps” (Negus, 2002: pg 508). The use-value of the figure of the cultural intermediary, argues Negus, begins with the understanding of this mediating function.

The central strength of the notion of cultural intermediaries is that it places an emphasis on those workers who come *in-between* creative artists and consumers (or, more generally, production and consumption). It also suggests a shift away from unidirectional or transmission models of cultural production towards an approach that conceives of workers as intermediaries continually engaged in forming a point of connection or articulation between production and consumption. (Negus, 2002: pg 503)

A further strength, according to Negus, is that focusing on cultural intermediaries entails a shift from structuralism and political economy "...towards a concern with how culture shapes the economic" (Negus, 2002: pg 504).

With regard to these cultural intermediary / gap-fillers and their role in bringing together the spheres of production and consumption (remembering that they most likely are employed by the production side), Negus explains that the aim of these promoters and marketers is to link a product to a potential consumer by "...seeking to forge a sense of identification" (Negus, 2002: pg 504). As such, the cultural intermediary is often directly involved in the employment of celebrities to move product via endorsements:

attempts are made to link a product, a service or celebrity and a citizen. As new products, celebrities and services are created, so cultural intermediaries become continually involved in explaining to us the use value of these new commodities.... (Negus, 2002: pg 504)

Cultural intermediaries, then, are involved in both the celebrity endorsement process and the commodification of the stars themselves. Consequently, particular cultural intermediary positions can be seen to be located in gaps that afford a great deal of power. From these positions of power, privileged cultural intermediaries (such as special-interest magazine editors) have the opportunity to affect or shape a given message. According to Negus, this can be seen in the example of the recording industry in "...the subtle ways in which the musical preferences of the president of business affairs, and the nature of his or her personal relations with artists, can influence the judgments made" (Negus, 2002: pg 506).

Of course, this is not the first or only media theory to acknowledge the power of individuals in particular positions. With regard to cultural industries, Paul Hirsch

famously adapted the figure of “the gatekeeper” as an editor that embodied a “filter” through which the messages of production had to flow to reach consumers (Hirsch, 1972). Having an ideological component, “(t)he gatekeeper concept sought to stress the editorial selection of very particular stories and hence the production of partial versions of complex events” (Negus, 2002: pg 509). Although this conception is seductive in that it seems self-evident, Negus describes an inherent blindspot:

Taken alone, the gatekeeper concept is limited by the assumption that cultural items simply appear at the ‘gates’ of the media or culture producing corporation where they are either admitted or excluded. Not only is content actively sought out (someone has to go and find the talent or the story), it can be systematically planned, with staff in the organization deciding in advance the genre of story, music or film they are seeking and encouraging its internal construction or sub-contracted production. (Negus, 2002: pg 510)

As such, the usefulness of the conceptualization of the gatekeeper can be seen as limited. Still, like the spotlighting of the cultural intermediary occupations, it does bring attention to privileged positions that are situated between production and consumption.

The notion of cultural intermediaries, too, has been critiqued. The first type of critique concerns the inadequacy of the account of activities in the space between production and consumption. Much as the proposal of a candidate for an archaeological “missing link” (which, in filling a gap in an evolutionary taxonomy, always produces two further gaps to be filled on either side on a continuum), the identification of a cultural intermediary occupation or position can be seen to expose additional spaces between production and consumption. Indeed, according to Negus, “...in significant ways, a focus on cultural intermediaries reproduces rather than bridges the distance between production and consumption” (Negus, 2002: pg 501).

A second critique of the notion of cultural intermediaries contends that there is a privileging of particular positions at the expense of others which could be seen to perform similar mediating functions: “(s)o, advertising executives, designers and magazine journalists are cultural intermediaries, whereas it seems that biologists, physicists, accountants, priests and trade union leaders are not” (Negus, 2002: pg 504).³¹

A third critique might be seen to undermine the usefulness of the notion of cultural intermediaries for the present project. Liz McFall points out that

The whole notion of intermediary status presupposes a conceptualization of culture and economy as separate and bounded domains. Whether the distinctiveness of the contemporary moment resides in the Frankfurt school vision of culture entirely subordinated to economy or in a later ‘post-Fordist’ view of culture as organizing the economy, it is clear that culture and economy are supposed to be separate. (McFall, 2002: pg 547)

McFall concludes that “...from a theoretical viewpoint, it is clear that the validity of the notion of the intermediary depends entirely upon an acceptance of culture and economy as normatively separate domains” (McFall, 2002: pg 549). If one views the domains of culture and economy or production and consumption as intimately and inseparably connected (as part of the field of cultural production, for example), and not as distinct spheres that need mediating or bridging phenomena, then the notion of the privileged cultural intermediary may not be applicable. That is, as I am proposing in this project that a given culture, its industry and the special-interest magazines that serve it are wholly integrated, the conceptualization may not be useful. If I see the agents that occupy such

³¹ Negus notes that “...it is perhaps ironic that the notion of ‘cultural intermediaries’ has been adopted from the work of Bourdieu, yet deployed in a manner that is prone to a strand of romanticism quite at odds with Bourdieu’s project” (Negus, 2002: pg 513).

cultural intermediary positions (such as special-interest magazine editors) as part of a larger process or system within a field, then the mediating or bridging component of this figure is ineffectual. Indeed, with regard to the notion of cultural intermediaries, McFall observes that “(w)hat recent reappraisal of the terms has done is to highlight that this separation is based more on intellectual habit than substantive evidence” (McFall, 2002: pg 549).

However, McFall’s critique seems to miss the point that Bourdieu is responsible for both field theory (which, in my reading, does not see production and consumption as residing in entirely separate domains) and the original notion of cultural intermediaries. It seems to me that these two areas may be easily integrated, with cultural intermediaries performing their production / consumption mediating duties within particular fields.

Sports

“...it is possible to consider the whole range of sporting activities and entertainments offered to social agents – rugby, football, swimming, athletics, tennis, golf, etc. – as a *supply* intended to meet a *social demand*.” (Bourdieu, 1978: pg 820)

The conception of the cultural intermediary is particularly helpful with regard to sports. Bourdieu explains that the development and emergence of a sporting entertainments industry led to the need for “...specialized executive personnel...” (Bourdieu, 1978: pg 830). Citing the example of American football, he notes that “...the squad of trainers, doctors and public-relations men is more numerous than the team of

players” and positions the sport itself as serving “...as a publicity medium for the sports equipment and accessories industry” (Bourdieu, 1978: pg 830 - 831).

Indeed, Bourdieu locates the historical appearance of modern sport as “...contemporary with the constitution of a field of production of ‘sports products’” (Bourdieu, 1978: pg 822). The missing part of the triad here, I believe, is a mediation. We should not be surprised to see a special-interest publication emerge precisely at the moment that a new sport emerges, which only is possible when an industry is ready. Or to restate, a new game or form of recreation bubbles to the surface, an industry springs up to supply equipment for this pastime, and what truly brings this process to fruition is the launch of a magazine to serve this “sport”. Without a means of broadcasting the parameters of the new pursuit, the phenomenon remains local. A local leisure activity does not support an industry. And a periodical publication cannot commence without the advertising support of an industry (or, alternatively, an adequate subscription base made up of participants or fans). The three must come together in a “perfect storm” of sorts for a full-fledged “sport” to emerge.

Of course, these games (that come from the people) are, in their elevation to “sport”, commodified and sold back to the masses. Bourdieu summarizes the process.

In brief, sport, born of truly popular games, i.e. games produced by the people, returns to the people, like ‘folk music’, in the form of spectacles produced for the people. We may consider that sport as a spectacle would appear more clearly as a mass commodity, and the organization of sporting entertainments as one branch among others of show business.... (Bourdieu, 1978: pg 828)

The demand for particular sports and their associated commodities is a product of the field of sport, which Bourdieu views as relatively autonomous.³² Bourdieu asks and then answers his own question: "...how is the demand for 'sports products' produced, how do people acquire the 'taste' for sport, and for one sport rather than another, whether as an activity or as a spectacle?" (Bourdieu, 1978: pg 820)

But while it is true that, here as elsewhere, the field of cultural production helps to produce the need for its own products, nonetheless the logic whereby agents incline towards this or that sporting practice cannot be understood unless their dispositions toward sport, which are themselves one dimension of a *particular relation to the body*, are reinserted into the unity of the system of dispositions, the habitus, which is the basis from which life-styles are generated. (Bourdieu, 1978: pg 833)

Elegantly, Bourdieu solves the paradox of the structurally determined agent.

Professional Athletes

"One central role of sports in American culture is to produce a never ending entourage of celebrities who appeal to one of the most difficult audiences to reach – adolescent males." (Twitchell, 1996: pg 137)

The professional athlete has long co-existed with the celebrity as endorsers of commodities. According to Sivulka,

In the 1920s cigarette consumption skyrocketed when baseball player Ty Cobb and comedian Charlie Chaplin endorsed their favorite brands. More than ever, however, brand identity has become one of the primary reasons that advertisers so

³² "The relative autonomy of the field of sport is most clearly affirmed in the powers of self-administration and rule-making..." (Bourdieu, 1978: pg 824).

closely link their products with sports; fans seem to identify as closely with the sponsor as with the sport itself. (Sivulka, 1998: pg 397)

According to Twitchell, there is an advantage to using the professional athlete with regard to endorsements: “(t)he athlete as pitchman is in many more ways more efficient than the movie star or celebrity because he is not playing anyone other than himself” (Twitchell, 1996: pg 137).³³ Rinehart seems to disagree with regard to the “authenticity” of the mediated professional athlete image.

For the most part, the images – of products, and now athletes as products or representations of brands – are media imaginings, images that have become almost caricatures of the athletes themselves. Still, they are viable and profitable methods of gaining audience – and selling product. (Rinehart, 2003: pg 37)

In order to reconcile the two citations, I offer that the synthetic image (media imagining) of the professional athlete, while perhaps not “real” or “authentic”, is viable, profitable and efficient because it reads as closer to the individual athlete than does the image of the film or television star, who is known for playing fictional roles.

One of the primary ways in which the professional athlete’s image is mediated is via the magazine interview. Discussing aggressive in-line (colloquially, rollerblading) magazines, Rinehart outlines the role of the recurring “profile” column.

In the skating magazines, the continual education of consumers is fundamental to their identification with any individual skaters. So, magazines have spent a lot of time establishing stars and potential icons. The profile is a staple of each month’s issue. Magazines are currently – of course informally – in the process of establishing rough hierarchies of these stars. And, as in mainstream sport, enthusiasts will claim that the hierarchies are solely based on the tricks each person can perform – but of course in establishing heroes in the magazines, personality, attitude, style all matter a great deal. (Rinehart, 2003: pg 37 - 38)

³³ Twitchell uses the term “celebrity” to refer to the television celebrity.

Ironically, perhaps, the subjects of the interviews can learn to play the game (that is, play the role of their desired image) to best position themselves within the culture as stars / professionals. Indeed, according to Rinehart, “(p)resentation of self in interviews establishes hierarchies” (Rinehart, 2003: pg 38).

Indeed, part of being a professional athlete is actively participating and benefiting from the commodification and construction of the star image. As Rinehart explains,

The process of commodification is surely not one-way (that is, for example, the “Big Bad Corporations” imposing structure on the solitary, rugged individual), nor is it necessarily even top-down in nature, with its effects percolating from the corporation to the individual. Rather, corporations produce commodities, and become inextricably linked with them; and individuals work, as, most consciously, did Michael Jordan in the NBA and Tony Hawk in skateboarding, to establish their ‘icon’ status. (Rinehart, 2003: pg 28)

As such, professional athletes can be seen to be complicit with their exploitation by corporate interests, in that they do benefit to some degree from this process. Indeed, the professional athlete can be seen as a partner in this practice (although not an equal one), as the relationship between the endorser and the endorsed is somewhat symbiotic. The ultimate goal, perhaps, is to transcend the public of amateur participants that emulate their heroes and sell, for example, basketball shoes to consumers who aren’t basketball fans (which was obviously the case with Michael Jordan). According to Bourdieu, this does more for the professional athlete than increase commodity sales: “...everything seems to suggest that, in sport as in music, extension of the public beyond the circle of amateurs helps to reinforce the reign of the pure professionals” (Bourdieu, 1978: pg 829). The professional athlete is thus further elevated from the amateur participants. Indeed, the gulf between the professional and the amateur widens in both directions:

More than by the encouragement it gives to chauvinism and sexism, it is undoubtedly through the division it makes between professionals, the virtuosi of an esoteric technique, and laymen, reduced to the role of mere consumers, a division that tends to become a deep structure of the collective consciousness, that sport produces its most decisive political effects. Sport is not the only area in which ordinary people are reduced to fans, the extreme caricatural form of the militant, condemned to an imaginary participation which is only an illusory compensation for the dispossession they suffer to the advantage of the experts.

(Bourdieu, 1978: pg 830)

As such, consumers are discouraged by this chasm and resign to emulate not the skill set but the product choice of their favourite professional.

The Pro

It is essential that a given magazine appear to its advertisers to have as its central mandate and primary fidelity the promotion of participation in the culture it documents through the consumption of commodities. In special-interest, subcultural, action sports magazines, the continual creation and maintenance of stars or “Pros” (who I am positioning as a hybrid of sorts of the “star” and of the “professional athlete”) serves to provide a currency or cultural capital within a field which is to be employed in the proffering of commodities. Rinehart, in his article “Dropping Into Sight:

Commodification and Co-optation of In-Line Skating,” includes skating magazines with the ESPN and Fox television networks as the primary mediators of aggressive in-line skating. Rinehart contends that such media work to individualize the athletes with the goal of getting fans to identify with them, knowing that such fans would be “...more likely to emulate the individual’s purported use of brand products” (Rinehart, 2003: pg 35). Furthermore, Rinehart emphasizes that there are differences between these media’s

respective “‘hero-making’ machines” within the culture of in-line skating, explaining that “...on television, the icons/heroes have taken on generalizable, more mainstream, status...” whereas in the in-line skating magazines, “...they are more niche types” (Rinehart, 2003: pg 36). As such, it may be the case that the heroes of in-line skating earn their “hardcore” (sub)cultural capital within the magazines, and cash-in on this credibility or “authenticity” via the medium of television. That is, magazines could be seen as a star-making “farm team” for television.

In the case of an imitable Pro (one who has been established and legitimated as such by magazines and other media), information published in magazines about the equipment she or he uses can be seen to function as a shopping list for the reader / consumer. According to Smythe,

The mass media of communications and advertising play a large and probably dominant role through the process of consumption (by guiding the making of the shopping list) as well as through the ideological teaching which permeates both the advertising and non-advertising material with which they produce the audience commodity. (Smythe, 1994 (1977): pg 274)

Interestingly, in light of the above discussion, Jack Goody distinguishes between the shopping list, the recipe, and the menu.

The use of the written menu for the sale of meals in restaurants and (to a lesser extent) in hotels is easy to understand. But its adoption for high-status dinners is equally interesting because it implies not only the complete separation between consumers and preparers, between table and kitchen, but also a marked separation between the servers (standing, mobile) and the consumers (sitting, immobile), since information about the content of the meal is mediated impersonally by a piece of paper. (Goody, 1977: pg 134)

Again, we see that there is a separation between the producers and the consumers, which is in this case is mediated by an impersonal menu. The recipe "...consists of two parts, the list plus the instructions, the ingredients plus the action" (Goody, 1977: pg 137).

According to Goody, "(b)ehind the recipe lies the shopping list, that is, the list of objects required to implement the recipe..." (Goody, 1977: pg 135). The shopping list "...serves as a guide for future action, a plan" (Goody, 1977: pg 80). As such, a special-interest magazine that lists the products used by more than one Pro can be seen to be functioning as a menu, providing recipes for emulation via consumption that contain shopping lists.

Once purchased, such goods communicate. In his book, *Culture & Consumption*, Grant McCracken outlines "...four aspects of goods that give them special efficacy in the expression of displaced meaning":

First, unlike the signs of other media of communication, (e.g., spoken language, music, etc.), these signs are concrete and enduring. (...) They create a kind of concreteness that stands emotionally as a kind of "proof" of the displaced meaning.(...)

Second, these signs have the advantage of appearing to exploit a rhetoric trope well known for its persuasive powers. This trope is the "synecdoche," a figure of speech in which a part is used to represent the whole (Sapir 1977).(...)

Third, the economic value of these objects helps give them symbolic value. (...) The fourth quality that gives goods a special efficacy in the representation of displaced meaning is plenitude. (...) Should one level eventually be achieved by the individual, there will always be a still greater one to which ideal meaning can be displaced. (McCracken, 1988: pg 113 - 114)

In the emulation (via consumption) of the equipment choices of Pros, these four aspects are easily applicable, as the commodities acquired communicate to others the owner's allegiance to the particular Pro. For example, if a skateboarder purchases the pro model

skateboard deck of her or his favourite pro, the deck communicates in “concrete” form to others its association with the pro, this component of the pro image refers to the pro’s image as a whole (the skill set, the lifestyle, the products used, etc.), the costliness of the object communicates a certain status with regard to disposable income, and there can always be further purchases of other components (wheels, trucks, etc.) and subsequent editions of the pro model skateboard deck to continue the performance (of an allegiance to the particular pro skateboarder). Furthermore, once one has acquired these items in the pursuit of the emulation of a star or professional athlete: “...goods serve as a kind of bulletin board. The “members” of the club are kept informed” (McCracken, 1988: pg 136). This of course echoes Thorsten Veblen’s discussion of conspicuous consumption, whereby the purposeful and extravagant (but not wasteful) employment of one’s goods performs and communicates socio-economic class standing (Veblen, 1992 (1912)). That is, at the time of the publication of Veblen’s *The Theory Of The Leisure Class*, it was the wealthy or “leisure class” that could afford to consume conspicuously and was posited as imitable with regard to consumption.

Veblen’s work can be contrasted with that of Leo Lowenthal, who observed a historical shift in magazine coverage from “heroes of production” to “heroes of consumption” (Lowenthal, 1968). In other words, Lowenthal traced a change within magazines from the glorification of Veblen’s leisure class to the veneration of what we would recognize as “stars.” For Lowenthal, then, stars became the models to emulate with regard to consumption. Importantly, these heroes of consumption are more accessible and thus more imitable: “(t)heir fashions are to be copied, their fads followed, their sports pursued, their hobbies taken up” (Dyer, 1998: pg 39). It is this figure of the

accessible, imitable star or professional athlete and the role of the magazines in the star-making system that I wish to focus on.

Editorial Content

“Guiding the worker today in all income and time expenditures are the mass media – through the blend of advertisements and programme content.” (Smythe, 1994 (1977): pg 276)

“Within a given programme or newspaper or magazine, there is an integration of style and content between the ostensibly “advertising” and “non-advertising” content. Both must meet the advertisers’ standards of what is entertaining, informative, and provocative.” (Smythe, 1994 (1978): pg 296)

Although I have positioned their role in the star-making system as a central purpose of magazines, this can also be seen as a means to an end. The ultimate goal of the system is, of course, to make profits via the selling of goods (the advertisers wish to do this through the selling of their products, the magazines are selling their advertising space and, secondarily, the magazines themselves). As such, magazines function as guides to consumption. Indeed, according to Leiss et al.,

The lifestyle magazine uses its editorial content to attract a narrow range of potential advertisers. In many cases, readers use them as “shopping guides” to assess products; advice to beginners is a regular feature inducting the reader into the special knowledge and skills of the activity. The lifestyle magazine blends advertising and editorial content until they are almost indistinguishable. (Leiss et al., 1990: pg 106)

That is, special-interest (lifestyle) magazines offer advice as to the question of what the reader should purchase. What is not questioned, of course, is whether or not one should

buy. This function is not entirely carried out by the advertising in magazines, as the editorial content supplements the advertising and trains the reader as a consumer. The editorial content thus works together with the advertising to send a consistent and persistent message: consume. Lury discusses women's magazines:

The representation of consumption dominates ... women's magazines. Not only is about half of the magazine taken up by advertisements, but almost all the colour photography, both in advertisements and features, illustrates commodities of some kind. (Lury, 1996: pg 133 - 134)

Of course this conformity to the imperative to consume is presented as a matter of choice and agency in connection with the construction of the self.

In feature articles and advertisements, the modern woman is represented as a superwoman, enjoying the skills and pleasures of consumption, not in a passive way, but by actively appropriating and reworking commodities to construct a lifestyle which expresses her *individuality*. (Lury, 1996: pg 134)

Thus, the consumer is empowered to consume in line with that which is presented by the magazine (and thus, industry): that is, one has the agency to choose from what is offered. With regard to special-interest magazines, a secondary implied message is that to be a member of the particular culture is to be a consumer of the culture-specific goods being offered. One is a skateboarder, then, because one buys skateboard branded and related goods (which include the skateboard magazines).

The blurring of the boundaries between advertising and editorial content is not a recent phenomenon. The "advertorial", or the advertisement which attempts to mask itself as editorial content, has existed for many years. As Marchand explains, "(i)n pictures and layout, such copy attempted to compete for attention with the popular features of magazines and newspapers through "camouflage" or "editorial imitation"

(Marchand, 1985: pg 103). This merging of the two forms may have been perfected in the 1980s. According to Twitchell, “(o)n MTV and the toy-based cartoons the entertainment is the advertisement and the advertisement is the show” (Twitchell, 1996: pg 104).³⁴ Whereas in the former example, advertising could be seen to be moving towards editorial content, in this latter case, the editorial content (the programmes) can be seen to have shifted toward advertising.

In the case of “action sports”³⁵ magazines (and admittedly, elsewhere), the employment of corporate logos on the athletes’ clothing complicates the distinction between editorial content and advertising. Much of the editorial space in such magazines is populated by pictures of athletes wearing clothing provided by their respective sponsors (often at events that have been sponsored by corporations that are not humble with reference to banner / logo placement).³⁶ As Twitchell reports, “(a)thletes sport as many advertising decals as Indy 500 cars, which look like billboards, which themselves are looking more and more like television, eternally blinking on and off” (Twitchell,

³⁴ Twitchell asks, “(w)hat are the videos but ads for the audio recordings? Like the infomercial and the advertorial, MTV videos show how the colonizing power of commercial speech can quickly consume discrete forms and make them one” (Twitchell, 1996: pg 21).

³⁵ “Action sports” is the preferred generic term that is used by insiders to refer to non-traditional lifestyle sports such as skateboarding, surfing, wakeboarding, BMX freestyle cycling and others. The classic “outsider” term for these pastimes is “Extreme Sports”.

³⁶ Referring to golf sponsorship, Twitchell observes, “(i)f you are clever, you can dress the players in all kinds of billboards to reinforce your corporate presence.” (Twitchell, 1996: pg 138)

1996: pg 2).³⁷ As such, the editorial content can be seen as serving the same function as advertising.³⁸

Ultimately, the problem with such editorial content can be seen as ideological, as this “edvertising” serves the interests of the companies that advertise in the special-interest magazines despite the fact that the magazine claims to be serving as a guide for its readers to the given culture. That is, there is a veneer of a culture-serving function that conceals the complicity with the agendas of the advertisers. As Adorno reminds us, “(t)he concoctions of the culture industry are neither guides for a blissful life, nor a new art of moral responsibility, but rather exhortations to toe the line, behind which stand the most powerful interests” (Adorno, 2001a: pg 105). As such, we should not expect that a culture that is ultimately based on consumption (as served by a magazine with economic imperatives that demand that it serve the interests of its advertisers) can or will exhibit behavior that is out of line with the general consumption patterns of society. Or, to the point, we should not be surprised that “...consumer goods serve culture in a perfectly conservative way” (McCracken, 1988: pg 132).³⁹

Theoretical Rift

³⁷ As there is only so much logo space on micro bathing suits, the players on the pro volleyball circuit have taken to wearing temporary tattoos of their sponsors’ corporate logos.

³⁸ Echoing Veblen’s conspicuous consumption, and McCracken’s third quality of goods that give them special efficacy in the expression of displaced meaning (“the economic value of these objects helps give them symbolic value”), Naomi Klein illuminates another task of such logos when worn by consumers as opposed to the pros being emulated: “(t)hese logos served the same social function as keeping the price tag on...” (Klein, 1999: pg 28).

³⁹ Magazines are a consumer good that works to sell consumer goods.

Although this project's primary (and superficial) focus is the figure of the celebrity- and star-like "Pro" and that individual's employment in BMX freestyle magazines (in the service of the magazines' advertisers), a secondary and perhaps more important contribution is a theory of the special interest magazine. In the amalgamation of various disparate literatures, I have in this chapter suggested (and perhaps outlined) such a theory, which is conspicuously absent from the literature. It is my hope that this conception, which develops further in the following chapters, will serve as the foundation of a theory of the special-interest magazine.

CHAPTER TWO

A History of BMX Freestyle: Bicycle Stunt Riding Until 1990

“Extreme BMX is simply a marketing catch phrase invented to earn money for television. BMX, which stands for bicycle moto-cross racing, is racing light weight 20” bikes around a dirt track with up to eight riders trying to cross the finish line first. Freestyle bicycling is an all encompassing term for stunt riding on bicycles. Be the riders on dirt jumps, vertical half-pipes, plywood ramps, street obstacles or simply a flat parking lot it is all Freestyle.” (Brett Downs: <http://www.notfreestylin.com>)

“They say you gotta know where you’ve come from to know where you’re at and more importantly, where you’re going. (...) Bicycle Motocross now has enough history for it to be justifiably documented. And documented it shall be, right here in the pages of *Ride* over the next six issues, so if you are an old skool die-hard or a new hand at this thing called BMX, read on and appreciate how we’ve come to this point in the journey so far...” (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2001: pg 153)

It could be said that the history of BMX is the history of the culture’s mediation. That is, the particular activities of BMX racing and BMX freestyle (trick riding “free” of the restraints and confines of racing) may have existed in some form prior to mediation, but it has only been post-mediation that these activities have become public (that is, have reached a larger audience). As such, much of this chapter draws upon the mediated sources in the form of BMX magazines to tell the (often mythological) story of how the emulation of motocross (“MX”) heroes by young bicyclists (the “B”) became a recreational activity, an organized sport (BMX racing), an anti-sport recreational activity (BMX freestyle), and an “alternative” sport (competitive BMX freestyle).

Importantly, stunt riding on bicycles is almost as old as the machines themselves. Indeed, those that rode the first bicycles in the 1800s were considered daredevils for even mounting the contraptions.

The Bicycle

Perhaps the first documentation of the conception of the machine that we understand as a bicycle is a drawing that has been dated to 1493 and is attributed to either Leonardo da Vinci or his student, Salai.⁴⁰ The earliest materializations of such an idea can be traced to the first half of the nineteenth century. These primordial machines were understood as human-propelled equine substitutes, as their nicknames of “hobbyhorse” and (the class-distinguishing) “dandyhorse” attest. These devices were clumsy at best, and dangerous at worst. Indeed, as Wiebe Bijker documents in his book *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change*, the first bicycle accident occurred in 1842, when the cyclist in question knocked over a child who was part of a cheering crowd as the rider triumphantly entered Glasgow. Aptly, the cyclist “...was arrested and fined five shillings” (Bijker, 1995: pg 25).

Throughout the mid- to late 1800s, many machines and their corresponding monikers competed for the attention of the consumer (indeed, the earliest use of the term “bicycle” is not found until 1869, in British patent granted to J.I. Stassen⁴¹). During the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, two different bicycle designs competed for the attention and adoption of the cycling enthusiast. Most people today know the “ordinary bicycle” (shorthand for “the high-wheeled ordinary bicycle”) by the nickname

⁴⁰ Bijker, 1995: pg 20

⁴¹ Bijker, 1995: pg 30

given to it after it had become obsolete after 1900: the “Penny-farthing”. (IMAGE #2-1)

These regal (if not awkward and indeed dangerous) bicycles featured oversized front wheels (and relatively tiny rear wheels) and a chainless, direct-drive cranks-and-pedal system which we see today only on unicycles and children’s tricycles. Literally a *steep* learning curve, mounting and riding one of these contraptions was truly difficult. The riding of these machines proved so daunting, according to Bijker, that

Few men over middle age, and even fewer women, attempted to ride the high-wheeled bicycle. The typical bicyclist – by this time meaning an Ordinary rider – had to be young, athletic, and well-to-do. Accordingly, bicycling still had, as in the early days of the hobbyhorse, an element of showing off... (Bijker, 1995: pg 40)

Interestingly, the danger involved in this form of recreation was seen as inherent to the machine. As Bijker explains, “(f)alls were such an accepted part of bicycling that producers advertised their bicycles’ ability to withstand falls, rather than claiming that they did not fall at all” (Bijker, 1995: pg 45).

Appropriately, the design that competed with and ultimately succeeded the ordinary bicycle was known as the “safety” bicycle. Akin to the familiar bicycle designs of the twentieth century, the safety bicycle featured wheels of (roughly) the same size, a chain drive, a diamond-shaped frame, and eventually, pneumatic tires. The design of this class of bicycle was both better-handling and was lower to the ground which made it more comfortable to ride and “safer” than the ordinary bicycle. Importantly, the “safety” of the new design allowed a wider use: “(w)ith the low-wheeled safety, more social groups started to use the bicycle” (Bijker, 1995: pg 93).

The Limited Liberation

"...to ride a bicycle meant to change one's life-style in irrevocable fashion."

(Marks, 1990: pg 203)

Bijker notes that "(w)hereas skiing began as a way of getting about and evolved into a sport, bicycling began as a sport activity and evolved into a means of transport" (Bijker, 1995: pg 37). As the machines became more accessible as they became less expensive, bicycles became an important means of transportation for more and more people.⁴² According to many authors, one of the groups that benefited the most from the technology was women.

The ultimately temporary design shift toward the high-wheeled ordinary bicycles discussed above worked to preclude women from cycling. As Patricia Marks writes of this period in her book *Bicycles, Bangs and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*, "(a)s the bicycle evolved, it became more and more unsuitable for women" (Marks, 1990: pg 185). As Nicholas Oddy explains, "...the widespread adoption of front-wheel drive, to all intents and purposes, precluded female bicycles," as it was "...almost impossible to ride the machine in a long skirt" (Oddy, 1996: pg 61). Of course, the social necessity of wearing a long skirt was the real issue. "The whole weight of Victorian prudery set itself against women taking such a masculine and, on the high-wheeler, revealing posture" (Bijker, 1995: pg 43).

With the arrival and widespread adoption of the "safety" bicycle, women had more freedom with regard to cycling. As Oddy discusses, this design still had one

⁴² Although, importantly, "For an instrument of the liberation of the proletariat, the bicycle was too expensive" (Bijker, 1995: pg 40).

significant problem to be overcome concerning women's utilization: the skirt-lifting "crossbar" or "top tube" of the diamond-style safety frame (Oddy, 1996: pg 63). The subsequent introduction of women's bicycles (with their removed or 'dropped' crossbars) in the 1890s both addressed the long-skirt problems and established gender differences in bicycles that have persisted to this day. (IMAGE #2-2) According to Oddy, if the first safety bicycles had been designed (in a unisex manner) with lowered tubes, the men's / women's schism "...might not have been established so early. As it was, both activity and object were defined as male" (Oddy, 1996: pg 61).

Show Offs

Owing perhaps to the inherent danger of the original machines, the original cyclists ("young men of means and nerve" (Bijker, 1995: pg 41)) were seen as daredevils and would perform that role in demonstrations of skill and audacity.

Before the bicycle became "King of the Road," it was the "Prince of Parks."

Aristocratic young men drove high-wheeled bicycles in Hyde Park to show off for their lady friends. The high-wheeled machine was not meant to provide ordinary road transportation, however, or to enable families to tour the countryside.

(Bijker, 1995: pg 19)

Although at first it was enough to simply ride a high-wheeled ordinary bicycle to impress "lady friends" and picnickers, the performance of stunts or tricks while riding was soon required to impress. According to Marks, "...exhibitionism motivates many neophytes to emulate the "scorcher," the publicity-hungry trickster who, racing around in checkered pants and jaunty cap (the 1890s version of the motorcyclist, perhaps), can gain an audience at the rink for fifty cents an hour" (Marks, 1990: pg 195). As bicycle design moved toward what would become the more modern "safety" design with pneumatic

tires, circus and music hall acts could be seen to perform what could be termed “artistic cycling” for paying audiences.

The Elliotts and the Seven Musical Savonas were famous in the 1880s for being the only cycling band. Later they split into two contrasting acts. The first was a trick cycling act, the second as *The World's Only Saxophone Band*, playing over 50 instruments between the seven of them. Hatsley, *The Boy Wonder*, rode a unicycle on the high wire while playing the trombone.⁴³

Such acts proved to be both popular and long-running.

The Kaufmann Troupe of Trick Bicyclists claimed to be “The greatest and most refined cycle act ever produced.” They made their debut at the **Alhambra**, one of London's leading music halls, in 1899, in an eight week engagement at £40 a week. They must have been well received as they reappear from time to time on the Alhambra bills until Kaufmann broke up the act in 1912.⁴⁴

Stunt acts such as these continued throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Indeed, with the exception of performing some of the maneuvers on ice (i.e.; Ice Capades) and within the context of circuses, the bicycle stunt riders' arsenal of maneuvers remained relatively unchanged until the 1950s and 1960s, wherein many young cyclists began to imitate the increasingly popular motorcycle cultures.

BMX History

“Traditional BMX, short for “bicycle motocross,” was a tense, highly competitive racing sport, a foot-powered all-American NASCAR.” (Browne, 2004: pg 25)

⁴³Quote from:

http://www.peopleplayuk.org.uk/guided_tours/music_hall_tour/music_hall_acts/speciality_cyclists.php

⁴⁴Quote from:

http://peopleplayuk.uk/collections/object.php?object_id=1002&back=%2Fguided_tours%2Fmusic_hall_tour%2Fmusic_hall_acts%2Fspecialty_cyclists.php%3F

As stated above, the history of BMX is the history of its mediation. As such, much of this history is recounted here through the media products produced from within the culture and by its industry.

What actually pre-exists the mediation with regard to the culture? According to Bob Osborn, former publisher of (perhaps) the most important BMX magazine in the culture's thirty-five year history, the emulation of earlier motorcycle styles by young cyclists predates the motocross years. Indeed, the 1950s phenomenon of the "chopped" or chopper motorcycles inspired some Californian youth to modify their bicycles in a similar fashion. According to Osborn, (renowned bicycle manufacturer) Schwinn sent one of its engineers (Al Fritz) to California in 1962 to examine the altered machines in person. Upon his return to headquarters, the design for the Schwinn Sting-Ray commenced. The motorcycle-inspired bicycle was introduced in 1963, and by 1968 the Sting-Ray (and its copies) accounted for seventy percent of all the bicycles sold in the U.S. (Osborn, 2005: www.vintagebmx.com). (IMAGE #2-3)⁴⁵ Importantly, these Schwinn Sting-Rays featured nimble handling characteristics, twenty-inch diameter wheels, long "banana" seats that shifted a rider's weight to the rear of the machine, and

⁴⁵ This information was retrieved from the homepage of vintagebmx.com on April 24, 2005 at 11:06 am EST. The document, entitled THE HISTORY OF BMX, features the following clarification by Bob Osborn:

*"This being a compilation of information published by this writer years and years ago, with a few authenticated modifications. Anyone interested in ripping off this article please note that much of it was copyrighted in 1982 (in **BMX Action** magazine) by Wizard Publications and in 1984 (in **The Complete Book of BMX**) by Wizard Publications, and that all of it in its present form was copyrighted in 2005 by Bob Osborn."*

tall, upright handlebars. The combination made these machines not only comfortable for cruising, but agile and wheelie⁴⁶-able.

By the late 1960s, the sport of motocross racing had come to the United States from Europe. This cross-country racing done on discipline-specific heavy-duty motorcycles caught on quickly, and many new participants began to compete in races in a growing number of locations across North America. The young Sting-Ray cyclists who had emulated the chopper motorcycle culture in the early part of the 1960s now found themselves already equipped with the machinery needed to emulate their new motocross heroes. As such, riding dirt trails on their Schwinn's was a popular activity. According to Osborn, the first *bicycle* motocross track appeared in California.

On July 10, 1969, some kids in the Santa Monica vicinity of West Los Angeles, California, not being old enough to race motorcycles like their motocross idols, decided that racing bicycles in the dirt might be almost as much fun. So they rode their Sting-Rays over to nearby Palms Park and convinced park attendant Ron Mackler to help them organize some races.

Right there, right that second, BMX was born!

As word spread, more and more kids showed up for the 'pedal-cross' races, as they were then called. (Osborn, 2005: www.vintagebmx.com)

B.U.M.S.

Most histories of BMX locate the first organized race events as occurring over a year later in Long Beach, California. Clearly pirated from an earlier Bob Osborn History of BMX document, *Ride (UK)* BMX magazine recounted:

One of the first guys to realize the true potential of this new sport for America's

⁴⁶ Wheelies, of course, are performed by pedaling the bicycle with the front wheel off the ground.

prepubescents was a guy called Scot – ‘Old Man’ Breithaupt. In 1970, this thirteen-year old motocrosser turned entrepreneur, organized one of the first real BMX races at his very own track called B.U.M.S. in Long Beach California. He dusted off his old Motocross trophies as prizes and charged an entry fee of a quarter (25 cents). The race attracted over thirty kids which Scot thought was impressive until the following week when over a hundred and fifty kids turned up to race. (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2001: pg 153)

The first riders’ organization, B.U.M.S. stood for the Bicycle United Motocross Society. Of course, reflecting a smart-ass-edness that stays with the culture to this day, Osborn explains that this acronym was constructed to serve the nickname that the track had already been using: “(a)ll the kids knew that BUMS really got its name from the bums who slept in tin sheds in the field” (Osborn, 2005: www.vintagebmx.com).

On Any Sunday

In addition to Breithaupt’s B.U.M.S. track and early organized races, the other oft cited influence on the early years of BMX was the 1971 Bruce Brown motocross documentary *On Any Sunday*. The Oscar©-nominated film, which documented the then-rising subculture of motocross racing, featured amateur motocross enthusiast and Hollywood star Steve McQueen and followed a group of professional motocrossers through several types of events (reflecting different subdisciplines) in a season. This film was doubly inspiring for young Sting-Ray riding motocross-emulating cyclists: not only did the film document the lives of imitable motocross heroes, it also began with a sequence during the opening credits that featured a group of young bicycle riders having an (seemingly) impromptu race in a vacant lot in the suburbs of Anywhere, U.S.A. (actually San Juan Capistrano, California). The audio track for the opening moments of

this section of the film contained what sounded like a group of young children making motorcycle sounds with their mouths, simulating both the engine-revving and gear-shifting noises. This brief (one minute, thirty-six seconds) moment has been mythologized by many authors (most notably by writers in BMX magazines). Indeed, the following quote from the January 1980 issue of *Bicycle Motocross Action* (interestingly, in an article discussing the film's sequel, *On Any Sunday II*) authored by the BMX guru himself (Bob Osborn) demonstrated the difference between historical facticity and mythology:

Even though it was eight years ago, I remember it like it was yesterday. My kid and I were up toward the front, slid down in our seats, with our feet propped up in front of us. (...) Just as we polished off the last of the Twinkies and were about to head for the snack bar to stock up again, the lights dimmed and the screen lit up with a picture of a vacant lot. We could hear a kind of “rreeenng, rreeenng, rreeenng” noise that didn’t make any sense at all.

Then, as the camera moved, we saw a line of about eight or ten kids on Stingray bikes with pie plates taped to their bars. All these kids were hunched over their bars, twisting their right grip madly, and making the weird noise we were hearing. It still didn’t make much sense.

Then, some other kid jumped in the air, waved a T-shirt back and forth, and hollered, “GO!”

Now we understood. These kids were pretending that they were racing motorcycles.

But it was wild: As they came off the line, the picture switched to slow motion and some “Bonnie And Clyde” getaway type of music started.

In slow motion these guys came wheelying off the line – one of them stuck his foot between his forks and front wheel and did an endo – going through turns and over jumps, just like on motorcycles.

While all of this was going on, the credits for the movie were overprinted on the screen. The title was “On Any Sunday.”

The rest of the movie was about motorcycles. Without going into a long thing about how good it was, suffice it to say that R.L. and I went back to see it again eleven times.

The whole bicycle sequence lasted only three minutes. But within that three minutes, time bombs that would one day explode into the sport of bicycle motocross racing were planted in the minds of unguessable numbers of kids and fathers across the nation. (*BMXA*, January 1980: pg 84 – 90)

Indeed, despite the alleged eleven viewings of the film, Mr. Osborn’s recollection was spotty at best (the bicycle sequence begins two minutes and thirty seconds into the film, it only lasted, as stated above, one minute and thirty-six seconds, the kids aren’t shown twisting their “throttles” at all, an adult started the race with a proper red flag, the film did not switch to slow motion as the kids came off the line, and the “Bonnie and Clyde” getaway music simply isn’t there (the brilliant “On Any Sunday” theme song begins about fifteen seconds into the sequence, as the picture freezes with the young racers in mid air and the first graphic, the name of the film, appears on the screen). Of course the factual inaccuracy of the reminiscence is not terribly important (and in the years before the widespread use of VCRs to refresh one’s memory, understandable). What is important is the overall sense that this was a significant mediation of the bicycle motocross experience, and that this moment was pivotal in the propagation and dissemination of the activity to a wider audience. That is, the myth of the importance of this film is perhaps more important than the actual importance of the film with regard to its impact on the proliferation of the activity. A more accurate commemoration appears twenty years later in *Ride (UK)* BMX magazine in an article entitled “The History of BMX: Part 1: 1970 – 1975; The plastic petrol tank and fender years.”

The 1971 movie *On Any Sunday* was a key influence in inspiring this new 'bike style' trend. The film was a documentary covering the rise in popularity of the motorcycle in American society and covered the many different forms of motorcycling both competitive and recreational. The opening sequences feature a mock off-road race with the sound of a dozen kids aurally making throttle and gear change noises as they sprint towards a two foot high dirt jump and then the action freeze-frames on these kids with the high rise 'ape hanger' bars of their 'Chopper' style bikes crossed up in mid air. Other footage included a shirtless ten-year-old wheelying (standing up no less) for about half a mile and it was these scenes that encouraged a nation of young men to use their bicycles for racing as well as day-to-day transportation and delivering newspapers. (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2001: pg 153)

David Browne, in his book *Amped: How Big Air, Big Dollars, and a New Generation Took Sports to the Extreme*, matter-of-factly notes that the celebrated Father of BMX freestyle, Bob Haro, was influenced by the film: "(m)otorcycle racing had been all the rage in his part of the country, and like many his age in his area, he had watched *On Any Sunday*..." (Browne, 2004: pg 30 - 31).

Early Motocross Bicycles

As discussed, the first bicycles used for the activity of bicycle motocross were the chopper-style Schwinn Sting-Rays. Once this activity caught on, it was natural for motorcycle companies to exploit this emerging niche market.

Yamaha, along with other motorcycle manufacturers such as Kawasaki, quickly realized that there was a market for a new breed of bike and some of the early machines spawned by these motorcycle giants even had plastic petrol tanks and fenders (mudguards) as well as shock absorbers front and rear. (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2001: pg 153)

These machines proved to be more of a hindrance than a benefit (they were heavy and

sluggish), and BMX enthusiasts returned to the Sting-Ray. However, these riders did not settle for the chopper-inspired handling of the '60s designed Schwinn. According to Osborn,

The progenitor of today's BMX bike was built late in 1973. It was a highly modified Schwinn Sting-Ray. Originally, the Sting-Ray had a short wheelbase, low bottom bracket, and 4_-inch cranks...geometry and leverage not conducive to racing. The modifications consisted of removing the curved top and down tubes and replacing them with longer straight tubes, thereby extending the bike's wheelbase. Reassembly involved rotating the rear A-frame structure in order to raise the bottom bracket. This allowed the use of Schwinn Diamond 6_-inch cranks, which produced more speed and power than the original 4_-inch cranks. The longer frame kept the front wheel on the ground when the increased power was applied and made the handling of the bike more predictable under racing conditions. (Osborn, 2005: www.vintagebmx.com)

An article in the December 1986, 10th Anniversary Special Edition of *BMX Action* got even more specific: "Marvin Church, a local So. Cal. Hotshoe, appeared at the tracks on a custom used-to-be Stringray frame that his dad made. It sported a higher bottom bracket and straight tubes for the front triangle. Towards the end of '74, mono-shocks died and rigid frames were born" (*BMXA*, Dec. 1986: pg 26).

In 1974, Yamaha motorcycles sponsored the first major BMX race series. According to *Ride (UK)* (again pilfering the earlier work of Bob Osborn), "Yamaha viewed this event as a prime opportunity to launch their new Moto Bike and put up an incredible \$100,000 to promote and run the event" (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2001: pg 154). This series of events (the first race was held at Birmingham High School in Van Nuys, California) were high-profile enough to be covered by the mainstream sports publication *Sports Illustrated* (Osborn, 2005: www.vintagebmx.com).

The first production rigid BMX frames were either those made by Gary Littlejohn (according to *Ride (UK)*) or those made in May of 1974 by Webco (according to Bob Osborn). Interestingly, the first production modern (tubular, chromoly steel) forks were those made earlier by Linn Kastan:

Linn's two boys were destroying Ashtabula blade forks at the rate of one set per week, which started getting a little expensive. So one day Linn fabricated a set of tubular chrome-moly forks for his sons to try. They proved to be so bulletproof that in February of 1974 Kastan marketed them. Red Line tubular chrome-moly forks were so successful that within three years Red Line Engineering's product line was exclusively BMX. (Osborn, 2005: www.vintagebmx.com)

Perhaps the most iconic BMX component throughout the mid 1970's was the BMX-specific twenty-inch mag wheel. Before the popular Dupont "Zytel" plastic models made by Skyway later in the decade (the Tuff Wheel, still offered today), the wheels were actually made from (heavy) cast magnesium:

In September of 1974 Skip Hess designed and marketed something previously unheard of for bicycles...a 20-inch mag wheel! Called the 'Motomag', it was, like Kastan's Red Line forks, an overnight success. The Motomag was the first product of Skip's new company, BMX Products, which went on to produce the Mongoose bicycle, probably the most popular BMX bike in the world for many years. (Osborn, 2005: www.vintagebmx.com) (IMAGE #2-4)

Professional Racing

““You mean for the top riders to get paid for using and endorsing products? ... It's coming.” Stu Thomsen, *BMX ACTION*, June 1978.” (reprinted in *BMXA*, Dec. 1986: pg 33).

According to the December 1986 *BMX Action* 10th Anniversary Issue, 1977 was the

year when BMX racing became a viable “profession”:

PRO RACING – It finally happened! They started an organized pro class. In the August 1977 issue of Bicycle Motocross Action, there was an article on the Professional Racing Organization (PRO). Money was now at stake. BMX could finally be considered a full-time job. (*BMXA*, Dec. 1986: pg 30)

It is, perhaps, interesting in light of the current project that the slick BMX magazine (which, as explained in Chapter Four, first appeared in December of 1976) therefore existed before the Pros.

Other Early Mediations of BMX Culture

In addition to the introduction of periodical BMX publications (discussed in more detail in Chapter Four), there were other important mediations during the early years of BMX that raised its profile amongst the general public. Bob Osborn released his *The Complete Book of BMX* in 1984. Some important early network television programs in the early years of BMX include episodes of *That's Incredible* (R.L. Osborn raced a horse), and *CHiPs*. With regard to the latter, *Ride (UK)* reports that “...one of the main characters was Jon played by Larry Wilcox. He really got into BMX as a result and even had his own cheesy BMX clothing line” (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2002: pg 165). In fact, Wilcox was even featured on the cover of the August 1983 issue of *Super BMX Magazine*.

Although BMX riders were featured in other films in the 1980s (notably, *Quicksilver*), there are four films that are important to BMX culture that introduced the activity to millions. As I have already discussed *On Any Sunday* above, I shall focus on the remaining three.

Steven Spielberg's *E.T.* (1982) featured probably the most famous BMX bicycle action, as the adorable alien famously made the BMX bikes fly. In an interview in the March 1982 issue of *BMX Plus!*, Bob Haro discussed stunt work that he did on a Spielberg film entitled "A Boy's Life" (*BMX Plus!*, Mar. 1982: pg 36). In the letters section of the August 1982 issue of *BMX Action*, Bob Osborn discussed the soon-to-be-released film:

So what's the big deal, you ask?

The big deal is that the five kids who are E.T.'s friends spend a lot of time in the movie ripping around on their BMX bikes, with E.T. riding in a milk crate lashed to the bars of one of the bikes. (...) If you haven't figured it out already, this whole thing is going to help our sport and industry tons. Tons and TONS!"

(*BMXA*, Aug. 1982: pg 8 and 10)

Two months later, in an article in which the Kuwahara-brand E.T. BMX was tested, Osborn wrote, "(t)he *E.T.* movie may do for BMX what *Urban Cowboy* did for honky-tonkin' and dressin' up down-home like" (*BMXA*, Oct. 1982: pg 30). A second film, an Australian release entitled *BMX Bandits* (1983), was noteworthy for two reasons: it was the first BMX-based film, and it featured the film debut of a teen-aged Nicole Kidman. The most important BMX movie, however, was the Talia Shire (of *The Godfather* and *Rocky* films)-produced, Hal Needham-directed *Rad* (1986). The November 1985 issue of *BMX Plus!* featured an article within the news section entitled "Rad is coming:"

Director **Hal Needham** (*Smokey and The Bandit*, *Cannonball Run*, et al.) is about to begin filming **RAD**, a BMX adventure movie, at a specially built BMX track in Calgary, Canada.

Needham's **Bandit Productions** film company has hired top BMX stuntman **Pat Romano** to serve as stunt coordinator on the project. (*BMX Plus!*, Nov. 1985: pg 8)

The December issue of *BMX Action* also discussed the stunt coordination job, and added that the magazine has a cameo in the movie (*BMXA*, Dec. 1985: pg 77). In the next month's issue, a twelve-page article entitled "Sneak Preview: The Making Of Rad" appeared. According to the article, "(t)he movie itself is being described by Hal as the KARATE KID of BMX" (*BMXA*, Jan. 1986: pg 60). In the June 1986 issue of *Freestylin'*, it was reported that freestylers went on a promotional tour to support the film (*Freestylin'*, June 1986: pg 14).

Unfortunately, even the BMX magazines could not feign enthusiasm after having viewed the film. The first review appeared in the May 1986 issue of *BMX Plus!*: "(t)he film isn't the greatest one we've ever seen, but most BMXers will probably enjoy it" (*BMX Plus!*, May 1986: pg 77). The magazine offered some good advice: "(w)e suspect that the film will probably meet with limited success, so we'd advise those of you who are interested to see the movie when it first comes out. It may not be in the theatres very long" (*BMX Plus!*, May 1986: pg 77). Two months later, the bad news was relayed to the readers in an article entitled "*Rad Bombs*":

Rad, the first full-length Hollywood movie about BMX, has bombed at the box office. The film opened to generally unfavourable reviews and even worse business. Three weeks after its release in some 700 theatres nationwide, the film had only grossed two million dollars – not nearly enough to profit the producers, Taliafilms.

Rad's producers plan to show the movie at the France's Cannes Film Festival this spring in order to find foreign distributors for the film. (*BMX Plus!*, July 1986: pg 8).

The tenth anniversary issue of *BMX Action* summarized BMX's Hollywood experience.

"THE MOVIE "RAD" – The long awaited, much anticipated, and overly exaggerated BMX flick, "Rad," came out towards the first part of the year. As

most people probably noticed, the raddest parts were the intro and ending shots with R.L., Wilkerson, Fiola and Martin. Great action and lame acting sum it up perfect. (*BMXA*, Dec. 1986: pg 64)

Although the film focused on the BMX racing side of the culture, for many freestylers, the opening and closing credits (which featured top Pros riding at skateparks and performing flatland tricks at the beach wearing their logoed uniforms) were the first moving pictures of freestyle maneuvers that could be studied and copied. As such, the release of the film on videocassette on September 24, 1986 was an important moment in the history of freestyle.

Freestyle BMX History

“...the appearance of a new sport or a new way of practicing an already established sport (e.g. the ‘invention’ of the crawl by Trudgeon in 1893) causes a restructuring of the space of sporting practices and a more or less complete redefinition of the meaning attached to the various practices.” (Bourdieu, 1978: pg 833)

“Freestyle was what we racers did after school, or whenever we were NOT racing. Pushing the limits of what was possible on a bike. Anything that was done on a banked piece of real estate, or on flat ground. Period. If we weren't in a moto at the time, it was considered FREESTYLE!” (posted by “fatoldracer”, member #2755 of vintagebmx.com, on April 6, 2005 at 12:40am)

As discussed above, almost since the very introduction of the bicycle cyclists have been performing stunts. Whether this was showing off for “lady friends” or part of a music hall act, the execution of extraordinary maneuvers has been associated with the bicycle. As the new style BMX racing bicycles were even more nimble than the Schwinn

Sting-Ray, it would follow that they would be better suited for trick-riding as well.

Initially, BMX trick riding could be seen as horsing around when not racing, that is, between individual motos⁴⁷ at a race or between race days. Although tricks like wheelies had been done by cyclists for many years, BMX-specific trick riding has been traced back as early as 1975.⁴⁸ This trick-riding, according to Bob Osborn, evolved independently of the 90 years of bicycle stunt riding that preceded it. In fact, Osborn argues, there are only two “progenitors” of what would come to be called BMX freestyle: BMX racing and skateboarding.

It seems obvious to many that BMX trick riding was inspired by skateboarding (Browne, 2004: pg 9). Importantly, the appearance and evolution of modern skateboarding (as documented in Stacy Peralta’s film *Dogtown and Z-Boys*) should be seen to be concurrent with that of BMX freestyle. One must acknowledge that the skateboarders were the first to utilize empty Californian swimming pools in a new and exciting way (carving the transitioned and curved walls in the pursuit of a sort of surfing sensation on a permanent, unchanging concrete wave), but the evidence seems to show that the BMXers were only days behind. Indeed, it seems that some of the pioneering skateboarders used their Sting-Rays and BMX bikes as transportation to the pools: “Spring 1975, Escondido Reservoir, San Diego County; bikes are joining skaters,

⁴⁷ Most BMX races require multiple rounds of qualifying races or “motos” before one has qualified for the finals or “main” event.

⁴⁸ During the spring of 2005, the message board at vintagebmx.com contained a thread of over thirty pages in length whose purpose was to document the birth and early years of freestyle BMX riding. Again, Bob Osborn took the lead in this project and is listed as the author of the final document that appeared on July 17, 2005 on that website’s homepage. Osborn lists as important contributors Byron Friday, Tim Hughes, Brett Downs, Johnny Johnson, Thom Lund, Maurice Meyer, Paul Crow and Daniel Winquist. Bill Curtin, Hal Marshman, and Rick Thomas run the website.

sometimes because the skaters have ridden bikes up the trail to get there...sometimes taking two-wheel passes at the walls” (*Skateboarder*, Feb. 1980; cited by Osborn, 2005, History of Freestyle, vintagebmx.com). This phenomenon was happening in both San Diego and Santa Monica (colloquially, “Dogtown”). In a spelling- and grammatically-challenged email, Wes Humpston (one of the original Z-Boys featured in Peralta’s film) excitedly recounted for *Dig BMX* magazine his early experience riding bicycles with BMX pioneer John Palfreyman to and in empty pools:

We would get to the Pool & Skate all day & Ride BMX Bike’s Home. One day JP said Im gona Rip this Muther on my Bike! We hooked the Diveing board up as a ramp & JP Hit the bowl so fast he stuck on the wall like the carnival guy’s that ride Motercycles Around and Around in the Tunnel thing! You could hear the knobbie’s going Rippp Rippp as he Ripped By. It was so Intence it still get’s me Amped 25 Year’s later! JP RULED! (*Dig*, Nov. / Dec. 2002: pg 32) (IMAGE #2-5)

The first skateboard park to open in California was Carlsbad Skatepark (on March 13, 1976). According to *Skateboarder* magazine, bikes were using the facility from the beginning: “(t)he park was found to be highly functional terrain for bikers. Their carves in the bowl were as high and rad as those of their skating peers” (*Skateboarder*, Feb. 1980; cited by Osborn, 2005, History of Freestyle, vintagebmx.com).

For many years, the pioneers of BMX freestyle who rode the empty pools with the skateboarders were forgotten (importantly, the BMX magazines can be seen to be responsible for this, in that the information seems to have been “lost” until 2002). Instead, the pioneers of BMX trick riding for many years were said to be John Swanguen and the “Godfather of Freestyle,” Bob Haro. After the divorce of his parents, Haro took a job as the staff artist at *Bicycle Motocross Action* magazine (under the supervision of and

moving in with editor Bob Osborn). Haro would spend weekends in San Diego with his BMX buddy Swanguen. Around 1977, Swanguen came up with a flatland (ramp- or pool-free) maneuver called the “Rock Walk”. One day in late 1978, Haro was trick-riding in the parking lot of Wizard Publications (publishers of *Bicycle Motocross Action*) with Osborn’s son R.L. during a lunch break. The elder Osborn spotted Haro executing Swanguen’s Rock Walk and ran from his desk to take pictures. This resulted in a much-celebrated article in the January / February 1979 issue of *Bicycle Motocross Action* entitled “Trick Riding...A Whole New Thing.” According to the Osborn-penned article, “Haro and Swanguen used to ride Skateboard Heaven in San Diego, trying to out-trick each other. Gradually the tricks evolved out of the skatepark bowls and onto the flatlands, where they were refined and improved to fit the new environment” (*BMXA*, Jan. / Feb. 1979). This marked the first appearance of a trick-riding “how-to” article in a BMX magazine (offered for the imitation of the reader). As Swanguen was not credited in the article as the originator of the maneuver, Bob Haro has been seen as the architect of BMX trick-riding for over 25 years.⁴⁹

As R.L. Osborn and Bob Haro increased their repertoire of maneuvers over lunch breaks at Wizard Publications (with their proud father / editor documenting their progress), the idea to form a stunt team to perform shows at BMX was hatched. The Bicycle Motocross Action Trick Team was formed in November of 1979, and in an Editorial that appeared in the April 1980 issue, Bob Osborn explained the rationale to the magazine’s readers:

⁴⁹ Haro would eventually publish an important book, *Bob Haro’s Freestyle Moves*, in 1982.

Due to popular demand, we are putting together a full blown official BICYCLE MOTOCROSS ACTION Trick Team, with a huge half-pipe plexiglass ramp and the whole shot ... starring none other than our own resident tricksters, Bob Haro and R.L. Osborn. (*BMXA*, April 1980)

On February 9th, 1980, the newly minted Bicycle Motocross Action Trick Team performed their first (of many) choreographed show at the American Bicycle Association's Winternationals race in Chandler, Arizona. This provided new content for the publication, as the show was documented in the May 1980 issue of the magazine. For many years, the "trick team" or "freestyle" show was the most important performance opportunity for professional BMX freestyle cyclists.

The earliest use of the term "freestyle" to refer to trick-riding on BMX bikes, according to research done on the vintagebmx.com website, was a reference in a skateboard magazine called *Action Now*, referring to the lack of participation with regard to racing by BMX bicycle owners: "(w)ith only three percent of BMX bikes actually competing, there's [sic] a lot of riders who are going to take up freestyle trick riding" (*Action Now*, Jan. 1981; cited by Osborn, 2005, History of Freestyle, vintagebmx.com). The earliest use of the term that I have found in a BMX magazine occurs in an editorial by Bob Haro in *BMX Plus!* magazine (interestingly, the main competitor of *Bicycle Motocross Action*). As Haro explained in the March 1982 issue,

For most, the word "Freestyle" brings to mind fluid skaters, choreographed programs, and dancing on shimmering ice. Enter BMX. Who would have ever thought that FREESTYLE would imply small 20" motocross bicycles. Sure skateboarding or skiing, but BMX? Hardly. (*BMX Plus!*, Mar. 1982: pg 13)

Enthusiastically (and indeed romantically), Haro continued: "(f)reestyle has few limitations – basic bike knowledge and coordination, along with a vivid imagination, are

the basic ingredients for the participant” (*BMX Plus!*, Mar. 1982: pg 13). One year later, an issue of *BMX Plus!* featured a six-page article on BMX freestyle and the following declaration: “(r)ecently, freestyle has emerged as a very popular and unlimited form of free expression on a BMX bike. It’s no-holds-barred bicycling, complete with its own set of rules – and that’s no rules, no limitations, except your nerve and imagination” (*BMX Plus!*, March 1983: pg 63). It seems that it was imperative, then, that the magazines conveyed that the “free” component of the term was essential.

The term “freestyle” first appeared in (the newly rechristened) *BMX Action* magazine in the April 1982 issue. On the table of contents page, the cover photo was explained as “(a) one-footed X-up kickturn. Finesse freestylin’ by R.L.” (*BMXA*, Apr. 1982: pg 3). The regular “Trick Riding” column had also been renamed “Freestyle BMX” for this issue. As this change of terminology appeared only one month after the term’s adoption in *BMX Plus!*, it seems that there was indeed a consensus that “freestyle” captured the spirit of what these particular BMXers were doing. A book covering the pastime, *BMX Freestylin’*, was published by Osborn’s Wizard Publications later that year, and was promoted via an advertisement in *BMX Action* (*BMXA*, Sept. 1982: pg 84). Four years later, Wizard would publish a sequel: *Freestylin’ II: The Book*, which would be promoted in the “DIRT” news (editorial) section (*BMXA*, Nov. 1986: pg 73).

1984

“I think it’s safe to say that this was the worst year for BMX. Not because the racing lacked and no one was any good – that wasn’t the case. The quantity of riders lacked, not the quality.

People will testify that the decline was because of freestyle. Maybe. A lot of

things happened in the freestyle world in 1984. The Potts Mod came out, FREESTYLIN' magazine made its debut, and most of the smart manufacturers started making freestyle bikes. The June 1984 issue of BMX ACTION had a special section on freestyle, introducing all of the above, and sending a new wave across America. Freestyle had arrived.” (*BMXA*, Dec. 1986: pg 50)

For the first five years of its promotion in the BMX magazines, freestyle was mostly portrayed as an offshoot of BMX racing; that is, something to do between races. The equipment used was still primarily designed for BMX racing, with two important early exceptions. As the strong tubular chromoly racing forks pioneered by Redline and Linn Kastan for BMX racing were ultimately not strong enough for skatepark abuse, Jeff Bottema designed what would be the first trick-riding specific component, the Bottema Skatepark Fork. The first mention of these was in a May 1981 *Bicycle Motocross Action* article entitled “Jeff Watson: Aerial King,” within which Watson discussed the necessity of and his gratitude for his then-custom forks (*BMXA*, May 1981: pg 56 – 61). The July 1982 issue of *BMX Action* contained two advertisements that must have teased the BMXers of the day. Eagle-eyed readers would have noticed that an ad for Vector brand handlebars featured Bob Haro riding a new frame (*BMXA*, July 1982: pg 39). The copy for the second ad, for Haro’s eponymous company’s crash pad set, promises “(t)here’s also a highly specialized Freestyle Frame and Fork nearing completion...” (*BMX Action*, July 1982: pg 85). This first freestyle-specific BMX frame (the Haro Freestyler) was featured in the magazine’s annual product guide three months later (*BMX Action*, Oct. 1982: pg 41). The Haro Freestyler fork was featured in the next issue’s new products column (*BMX Action*, Nov. 1982: pg 90). As it would be almost two years until further

freestyle components were released, BMX freestylers had limited choice with regard to freestyle-specific equipment until 1984.

The explosion of freestyle can be seen to have occurred over three monthly issues of *BMX Action* in the spring of 1984. No less than five new freestyle frames were introduced in the April 1984 issue of the magazine: an advertisement featured the second Haro freestyle frame (the Sport), and the “Trackside” (importantly, still implying racing) news column featured “spy photos” of freestyle frame prototypes from GT Bicycles, Kuwahara, Hutch, and Redline (*BMX Action*, April 1984: pg 5, 15 - 16). To have one’s choices suddenly increased after two years from one to six showed that the bicycle manufacturers were hastily getting behind the subdiscipline. Anticipating the rush yet to come, and not above a bit of self-promotion, the magazine’s “HOTTEST RUMOUR OF THE MONTH” was in the form of a question: “(i)s Wizard Publications REALLY going to do an all freestyle special issue in ’84” (*BMX Action*, April 1984: pg 12)?

The May 1984 issue featured a five-page “Freestyle Tech” column within which the revolutionary Potts Modification was introduced. (IMAGE #2-6) Still used to this day on millions of BMX freestyle bicycles, the “modification” entails routing the front brake cable through the handlebar stem and fork to allow the handlebars to spin three hundred and sixty degrees without affecting performance or getting tangled on the frame (its inventor, Steve Potts, is the half-brother of Mike Buff, Bob Haro’s replacement on the BMX Action Trick Team).

The June 1984 issue of *BMX Action* was the special “all freestyle issue” which was “rumoured” in the April issue. The main article, “Freestyle: *New Wave BMX*” began

Shhh. If you’re real quiet and listen carefully, you can almost hear it. It’s a low rumbling just ahead. It sounds sort of like something’s about to explode.

You can make out bits and pieces, but the picture isn't completely clear.

You can feel the energy.

It's just out of reach and you can't quite put your finger on it, but make no mistake, it's there.

What is it?

Freestyle BMX. (*BMXA*, June 1984: pg 84 - 92)

The writer justified this enthusiastic restlessness with the following:

By a recent tally somewhere in the neighborhood of two out of every three letters we get here at Mighty *BMXA* deal EXCLUSIVELY with freestyle, and almost ALL of the readers' photos that we get are of guys riding ramps- mostly quarter-pipes. And we get HEAVY quantities of both letters and photos.

Us folks here at Wizard pubs are so pumped on freestyle that we're already in the start-up stage on an all new international newsstand magazine, *BMX FREESTYLE*. At first it will be coming out quarterly, but that will probably only last for one or two issues. Then it'll be bi-monthly for maybe a couple more issues, and then who knows? It's highly possible that it will go monthly very soon! (*BMXA*, June 1984: pg 84 - 92)

Under the subtitle of "The Sponsorship and Coverage Potential," the article continued.

It's never been better. The same thing is happening now as when *BMX* first started. The factories are starting to look for hot local riders all across the U.S. and in foreign countries to help promote their freestyle equipment.

As far as magazine coverage goes, this will be getting way easier with our new publication, *BMX FREESTYLE*. The crazy crew over on the other side of the hall will be hitting the streets, seeking out hot up-'n-coming freestylers. (*BMXA*, June 1984: pg 84 - 92)

In short, the industry was ready to get behind the activity, and a new magazine was now feasible and necessary to promote the new products and to build a star system to facilitate this. Of course, it was presented to the reader as a bounty of new products (including the new magazine) and sponsorship opportunities. Put differently, the magazine did not

spring to life to service the culture of BMX freestylers that had been growing in numbers for five years (since the aforementioned first “Rock Walk” how-to article in 1979), but rather when the BMX racing industry was ready to expand or diversify. Or perhaps, the culture did not exist until the industry was on board, and only then (as the industry is the culture?) was a freestyle-specific BMX magazine viable. Regardless, (and appropriately) a subscription offer for the new magazine appeared on the first page after the nine-page article: “Introducing: Freestylin’ A new magazine from Wizard Publications” (*BMXA*, June 1984: pg 93).

Freestylin’ magazine appeared in the summer of 1984 as a quarterly periodical focused solely on the freestyle side of BMX (*BMX Action* continued to cover both racing and freestyle). After three issues, the magazine had enough industry support to become a bimonthly publication, beginning with the March 1985 issue. (As I discuss in Chapter Four, *Freestylin’* would eventually appear monthly, and eventually morph into another title.)

The new freestyle BMX bicycles were indeed much better for trick riding than the racing BMX bikes that had been employed in the early years. During the last half of the 1980s, several further improvements were designed, marketed and used. The “Rotor”, marketed by ACS (and later Odyssey’s “Gyro”) allowed the rear brake cable to also be routed in such a way that when coupled with the Potts Modification for the front brake, one could spin the handlebars infinitely without concern to snapping cables. This combination quickly became essential to the serious freestyler, both facilitating classic maneuvers and inspiring fresh ones. Wheels also became stiffer and stronger in the late 1980s, as riders switched from plastic mag wheels or 36 spoke racing wheels to 48 spoke

wheels, first introduced by Peregrine (and endorsed by the by-then-professional R.L. Osborn). Indeed, there were literally hundreds of new freestyle specific branded components introduced between 1984 and 1988, all seemingly requiring the professional endorsement of the most popular (thanks to magazine coverage) riders.

Another important BMX freestyle featuring medium to emerge in the late 1980s was that of the videocassette. Although there were several home videocassettes available featuring freestyle riding in the mid- to late-1980s (including four releases from *BMX Plus!*, and a dozen or so released by bicycle companies such as GT and General), the most important of these is the Mark Eaton produced *Dorkin' In York*, released in May of 1988. In an article entitled “A History Lesson,” Mike Daily recounted that “... Mark Eaton dubbed 400 copies of his first freestyle video, *Dorkin' in York*, by hand” (*Ride UK*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 105). The first Dorkin' video documented the riding of York, Pennsylvania's Plywood Hoods, a group of riders that were geographically isolated from the Californian freestyle centre. The video was not backed by a major sponsor, and was indeed “...the first homemade underground video made by riders for riders” (*Ride UK*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 106). Daily (former *GO* and *BMX Plus!* editor, and original Plywood Hood) explained the importance of the video and its many sequels: “(n)o question about it, the Dorkin' video series helped make cult heroes out of Jones, Eaton and the crew of mostly east coast riders who were featured in them” (*Ride UK*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 105).

The Fall

The initial boom years of freestyle BMX did not last, however. After four years of new products and new professionals being paid very well to promote them, freestyle “died” in the late 1980s. As Browne recounts,

Then, catching everyone by surprise, it was over. Companies were churning out so many bikes that the market became oversaturated – BMX bikes, it turned out, didn’t have to be replaced as often as skateboards – and a natural correction of the market was inevitable. Overnight, sales of Haro models were cut in half....

(Browne, 2004: pg 37)

Furthermore, the young professionals who were paid to promote the goods of the suddenly struggling companies were “dropped” by their sponsors en masse.

The fifty or so pro freestylers who lived large in 1987 dwindled to a handful by 1990, with purses dropping to a hundred dollars and sponsorships drying up.

Before anyone could adjust, freestyle BMX went back from whence it came, into the darkness and the night. (Browne, 2004: pg 37)

As such, freestyle was pronounced dead by the end of the 1980s. Of course, this proclamation was premature, as it was not the activity that stopped but merely the feasibility and profitability of the industry that was at issue. In a reversal of the earlier phenomenon, the magazines that covered the culture were no longer viable without the support of the industry. Again, we are reminded that an advertising-based special-interest magazine can not serve a culture or activity that does not have an industry to exploit it. As such, of the seven North American BMX magazines that were available in 1987, only one (*BMX Plus!*) was still covering the goings-on of BMXers (and the industry) after March of 1992.

CHAPTER THREE

The Comeback: BMX Freestyle Since 1990

Eddie Roman's 1992 BMX freestyle video, *Ride On*, featured a mock funeral of a BMX bicycle. The film began with the following superimposed prologue:

America 1992

BMX is dead

BMX bicycle sales have reached an all time low. Large factory teams are a thing of the past. Only a very small number of professional riders remain. Of these riders, only a few receive money from sponsors. A sport that once had five monthly magazines now has one. Contest arenas that were once crowded with spectators are now made up of only the most dedicated riders. Professional freestyle exhibitions are nearly non-existent. Many bike shops no longer carry 20 inch bikes and accessories because in their eyes, "BMX is dead". (Roman, *Ride On*, 1992)

As the action begins in the film, an audio sample of a proper British voice proclaimed "I'm not dead yet I tell you!"

The early half of the 1990s saw much progression with regard to the activity of BMX freestyle, without the aid of big corporate support. Indeed, only two companies seemed to survive the BMX market crash; Haro and GT Bicycles. When GT pulled its (substantial⁵⁰) advertising from Wizard Publications' final effort, *GO: The Riders Manual* (a title created to merge *BMX Action* and *Freestylin'* in November 1989), in early 1992,

⁵⁰ GT Bicycles was responsible for ten pages of advertising in the eighty-four page January 1990 issue of *GO* and twelve of seventy-six pages in the July 1990 issue. By the last issue (March 1992), GT ran five pages of advertising in the sixty-four page magazine (importantly, it must be noted that the editors seemed to be wooing their main advertiser, as there are sixteen pages of editorial content that could be seen to have functioned as GT advertising in this final issue).

BMX Plus! was left as the only magazine to service the culture / industry (both BMX racing and freestyle).

Beginning in 1992, the professional riders began to take over the industry. At the first of the B.S. (“Bicycle Stunt”) Series contests held in Texas in 1992, former Haro sponsored professionals Rick Moliterno and Mat Hoffman (who had also organized the event) debuted their new bicycle companies (Standard Byke Co. and Hoffman Bikes, respectively). Former *BMX Action* test rider and professional racer Chris Moeller had started S&M Bikes (Greg “Scott” Swingrover and Chris Moeller) in 1987, and his “garage” company was also a big part of the “rider-owned” revolution (although the freestyle-specific company that he financed, the cleverly named Menstrual Cycles, did not last). These rider-owned companies brought not only higher quality products that addressed the needs of the riders (who, as the tricks progressed, required stronger products than those that were being offered by the big companies), but also an ideology that promoted an allegiance to the businesses run by riders and encouraged the consumers to “support-those-who-support-the sport.” This, perhaps, can be compared with the “indie” ideology within the (un)popular music sphere.

Along with the introduction of an American rider-owned magazine, *Ride BMX Magazine* in late 1992, the B.S. contest series was perhaps the most important factor in keeping the sport alive during the early 1990s. According to Plywood Hood Brett Downs,

The BS series from 1992-1994 was like a series of family reunions based around a contest. The riding had progressed incredibly throughout the world and the BS contests brought everyone together. The series was all about the independent rider and having a good time. This rebirth was one of the most exciting times to be involved in freestyle. The BS contests were successful and began to get noticed by the media, particularly ESPN. Hoffman was approached by the sports network

and was offered backing for the contest series. This was the beginning of the Extreme culture. (Downs, www.notfreestylin.com)

1995: The Extreme Games

In the December 1994 issue of *Ride (US)* BMX magazine, the first stirrings of big-time corporate interest in freestyle for many years appeared in the “Deep Seat” news column:

It may seem hard to believe, but ESPN is putting on a BMX jumping contest and freestyle vert _ pipe contests during their Extreme Games next year. The event is set to go down next June in Rhode Island and will feature a \$3000 pro purse for dirt jumping and \$7000 purse for vert. In an attempt to make the level of competition top notch, the contest is invitation only. (*Ride (US)*, Dec. 1994: pg 53)

Already showing the contempt for the “Extreme” label, the next issue’s Deep Seat column announced that there was “(m)ore news from those “extreme folks” at ESPN” (*Ride US*, Feb. 1995: pg 59). The BMX events of the Extreme Games, run by BMX riders and contest promoters Hal Brindley and Steve Buddendeck for ESPN, were covered in the October / November issue of *Ride (US)* (a few months after the June 24 – July 1, 1995 event dates). The cover of this issue featured a photo of top pro Mat Hoffman riding at the contest site with plainly visible corporate logos from ACG Nike, AT & T, and Chevy Trucks on the course. The coverage began with the contempt for the “Extreme” moniker that BMX freestyle was being saddled with:

“Extreme” is one of those words that can start to gag you with disgust and irritation. Hear it pounded in your head 1,000 times a day by a gleeful media who finally found a blanket word for everything you do and it’ll drive you bonkers. It stops being funny and starts becoming one of the most abrasive things you can

hear. This is the story of the Extreme Games, a story with a name I can barely stand to write. (*Ride (US)*, Oct. / Nov. 1995, pg 25)

The disdain was further evident in the excessive punctuation of the title of a short editorial in the Deep Seat section of the issue: “EXTREME!!!!” (*Ride (US)*, Oct. / Nov. 1995, pg 59).

It was with some satisfaction, then, that the magazine could report on “The Death of Extreme” in its August / September 1996 issue. In an interview with Chris Stiepick, the marketing director of the newly rechristened “X Games,” *Ride (US)*’s editor (Chris “Roni” Hargrave) got to the bottom of the name change.

Who came up with the title, the Extreme games? They came from a guy named Ron Semiao, he’s the director of programming for ESPN2. **So that’s the guy that coined the phrase?** You got it. **Does he cringe when he hears extreme tacos, and extreme this and that, is he kicking himself for it?** (laughter) He says that he created a monster. Absolutely. The other thing is, we plan on having this event around for a long time, and five years from now we don’t want to have the Extreme games and have the word extreme be like the word groovy is now, you know? It’s passé. So, we made the switch. (*Ride (US)*, Aug. / Sept. 1996, pg 80)

Of course, the struggle with cooptation continued in the magazine despite the name change, as evidenced by the title of the coverage of the second annual event in the next month’s issue: “contradiXtion GAMES” (*Ride (US)*, Oct. / Nov. 1996, pg 24).

By all accounts, the organizers were surprised when the two BMX freestyle events proved to be the most popular events on broadcast on ESPN2. As corrupted as it might have been by ESPN and the big corporations (Nike, for example, forced Pros sponsored by other shoe companies to place duct tape over the brand names or symbols on their shoes), BMX freestyle was resurrected. According to Browne, “(f)or better or worse, the X Games represented an inevitable juncture for the world of action-sports: the

moment when it became a trade. In that regard, it paralleled the rock and roll with which it had long been linked” (Browne, 2004: pg 251). Furthermore, as Browne contends, “...the X Games were like a stern parent informing an unruly child that it was time to grow up and be serious, and many didn’t want to hear the lecture” (Browne, 2004: pg 251).

Mat Hoffman’s Hoffman Sports Association took over running the freestyle events of the X Games from Brindley and Buddendeck in 1996. After the inaugural event and its unexpected success (especially the popularity of the BMX freestyle events), ESPN and Hoffman decided to work together. Subsequently, 1995 was the last year of the “underground” B.S. contest series, as it became part of ESPN programming the following year. Having attended many of these events before and after ESPN’s involvement, I can confirm that there was an ambivalence on the part of the riders that oscillated between being grateful for the respect while feeling an animosity for how the outsiders were exploiting the sport / culture. As such, it was an exciting time that was met with some apprehension that the 1980s’ boom-to-bust phenomenon was repeating itself.

Hoffman and his crew were forced to juggle two events simultaneously during the summer of 1996. In addition to the B.S. contest happening in Chicago, Hoffman and a select group of riders joined skateboarders and in-line skaters in the closing ceremonies of the Olympic Games in Atlanta. In the course of one year, the culture had again traveled from underground to mainstream at warp speed. As Browne observes with regard to future Olympic participation,

In the eyes of the mass audience, freestyle BMX was a fringe sport: It didn’t yet have the cachet or high profile of skateboarding or snowboarding, and do one seemed to speculate, as they always did with skating, whether freestyle would

eventually be incorporated into the Olympics. When the International Olympics Committee announced in 2003 that BMX would be a part of the 2008 summer games, few were surprised that it was the racing contingent, not the freestylers, who were invited. (Browne, 2004: pg 25)

BMX Freestyle Culture

According to Pierre Bourdieu, "...it is the relation to one's own body, a fundamental aspect of the habitus, which distinguishes the working classes from the privileged classes..." (Bourdieu, 1978: pg 838). The choice of which sporting activity to participate in is also, Bourdieu argues, correlated with socio-economic class. Working class sports require "...a considerable investment of effort, sometimes of pain and suffering (e.g. boxing) and sometimes a *gambling with the body itself* (as in motor-cycling, parachute jumping, all forms of acrobatics...)" (Bourdieu, 1978: pg 838). As such, we might expect the participants of "extreme" or "action" sports to be predominantly from a working class background. Browne describes his impressions with regard to action sports and class.

Those who gravitated toward these sports were not upper-middle class, not the captains of the sailing team nor the honor-society students. Most were the products of the working class, with parents who had little interest in holding them back; if anything, their guardians actively encouraged them to rake on whatever sport or hobby appealed to them, no matter the risks. (Browne, 2004: pg 275)

BMX racing, always more of a family sport akin to little-league baseball (complete with screaming parents vicariously living through their children's wins and losses), seems to be populated by what might be called the "successful working class." BMX racing is indeed a dangerous, risk-taking activity, with up to eight racers racing head-to-head with the same goal. The cost to be an active participant, however, is prohibitive. In addition to

the expense of the bicycle (costing anywhere from \$500 to \$4000), and the safety equipment (up to \$500), a racer must pay weekly entry fees (and yearly membership fees) and, most notably, be able to afford to travel to the often weekly “national” events. As such, the activity requires the risk-taking that Bourdieu positions as attractive to the working class, but requires the disposable income of the middle class.

As for BMX freestyle, the bicycles are of comparable cost. Although helmets and safety gear should be a financial burden, personal safety does not seem to be a priority: when forced to wear a helmet (at, for example, a private skatepark), inexpensive skateboard helmets are used rather than the higher quality (and much more costly) motorcycle helmets. As competition is not as central to freestyle as racing, entry fees and travel expenses are infrequently an issue. Entry fees to skateparks are comparable to a night at the movies. Since the lean years of the early 1990s, and in a parallel pattern with skateboarding, the culture has focused on the “free” use of public space, or “street” (sometimes referred to as “real street” as opposed to the discipline of contests which has been called “street,” recently rechristened “park”). As such, BMX freestyle is an inexpensive pursuit relative to BMX racing. Indeed, once one has the bicycle, one may participate without further cost (with exception to time and personal injury).

BMX freestyle riders have embraced an image that could be described as “poor white trash,” despite the fact that one must have a certain amount of disposable income and “free” time to devote to the activity. Indeed, according to Robert Rinehart and Chris Grenfell, “...the allure of this “ostentatious” display of seeming poverty runs throughout alternative sport enthusiasts...” (Rinehart and Grenfell, 2002: pg 307). Of course, the truly poor do not ride \$2000 bicycles. Nevertheless, and interestingly, the culture’s

overall aesthetic seems to have devolved to an early 1980s, heavy metal music loving, hard-partying way of life. Several of the smaller companies, and some larger ones, seem to have their marketing based on such a lifestyle. S&M bikes, for example, built its reputation in the early 1990s as the black sheep of the industry, and companies such as F.B.M. (originally “Fat Bald Men”, perhaps now more commonly known as “Fire Beer Mayhem”) and Shitluck have followed suit. The young riders have bought into this image, and it is not uncommon to see teenaged riders spectating at freestyle events who have both grown their hair out and who are wearing brand new AC/DC shirts (that is, in uniform), and who seem to be acting as “crazy” as their heroes are portrayed in the various BMX media (predominantly in the magazines and branded videos).

Women?

One of the first things an outsider notices when confronted with BMX freestyle culture is the lack of a feminine presence. Somehow, this “alternative” sport has evolved to be *even less* welcoming to women than traditional sports. Indeed, the culture can be fairly characterized as hypermale, anti-feminine, and homophobic (if not in a conspicuous manner).

This fact may not be surprising to many, as BMX freestyle no longer seems as alternative since the advent of the X Games and the subsequent mainstreaming of the activity as an organized sport. According to Varda Burstyn, “(s)port developed as part of a widespread antifeminine and antifeminist social impulse on the part of men” (Burstyn, 1999: pg 61). In her book, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport*, Burstyn argues that sport has been an alternative, resilient site “...for the same values of

woman-distancing ritual, masculine bonding, and intergenerational socialization that the men's lodges cultivated" (Burstyn, 1999: pg 62). BMX freestyle does seem to be unique amongst the action sports as featured at the X Games, however. According to Browne, "(m)ore female skateboarders seemed to be popping up at demos and contests; at least two, maybe three professional women's freestyle motocross riders were revving their engines alongside the boys. (BMX, by comparison, appeared to be exclusively male)" (Browne, 2004: pg 222).

Not unlike other mainstream sports such as football, being "a man" and not complaining when hurt is a part of the action sports as well. In these high-risk activities, one expects to get hurt, and to brag about one's injuries can be seen as heroic ("No guts no glory. Bones heal. Chicks dig scars."), and conversely, "...to gripe about it was nothing less than emasculating (Browne, 2004: pg 223). Browne writes of an unfortunate potential corollary of this attitude.

One consequence of such a mind-set was an unsettling strain of homophobia that lurked within segments of the action-sports community. It would be wrong to say such a belief was prevalent, but a conspicuous strain of intolerance among athletes manifested itself by way of adolescent mockery. It was not uncommon to hear the word *gay* used as a kneejerk catchall for anything unpalatable, from corporate involvement in contests ("a fucking *gay* fest," in the words of one) to a slur against the in-line skaters. (Browne, 2004: pg 223 - 224)

Indeed, and for the past ten years, the word used to refer to in-line skaters in the BMX community is "fruitbooter."

Nicholas Oddy argues that the bicycle is a de facto male-gendered object because there has existed since the late 1800s the phenomenon of the "women's bicycle" (that dialectically implies that the bicycles that are not "women's" are thus "men's"). As

discussed in Chapter Two, the women's "dropped" frame was necessary to accommodate women's long skirts. According to Oddy, "(a)s social conditions changed it became more acceptable for female cyclists to ride the male diamond frame, but for a male cyclist to ride the female dropped frame was, and still is, a different matter" (Oddy, 1996: pg 67). With the notable exception of the Specialized "Fat Girl" bicycle (the short lived, baby blue hued, dropped-frame version of their "Fat Boy"), BMX frames have utilized the "male" diamond-shaped frame. As such, should women not feel free to ride this "unisex" frame? Alternatively, should they feel excluded from BMX freestyle by the intrinsically male diamond frame?

Importantly, women have been BMX racing since the early 1970s. However, as late as 1982, whereas the men's classes would be referred to as "intermediate" or "expert" (for example, "16 and over expert"), women's classes were known as "powderpuff" (*BMXA*, Dec. 1982: pg 75). In an article that appeared in the October 1984 issue of *BMX Plus!* entitled "The Girls of BMX," editor John Ker, observed that "(g)irls are one of the most overlooked minorities in BMX. Outnumbered by the boys 25-to-1 (latest NBL figures), the girls get little help or attention anywhere" (*BMX Plus!*, Oct. 1984: pg 21).

On the freestyle side, female participants have been scarce. The November 1985 issue of *Freestylin'* featured a picture of a female rider in the letters section (*Freestylin'*, Nov. 1985: pg 8). Eleven months later, a second picture appeared in the letters section of a woman in the midst of a freestyle maneuver (*Freestylin'*, Oct. 1986: pg 10). The same woman, Krys Dauchy, appeared in two pictures in the April 1987 issue, along with the caption "(p)ossibly the first sponsored girl rider? Could be. Meet Krys Dauchy"

(Freestyle, Apr. 1987: pg 12). This sporadic pattern of magazine coverage of women freestylers has held for years (if anything, the frequency slowed down for some time). In keeping with the shift to the outlaw “street” riding, a recent BMX Plus article entitled “Nina’s Barrier” (with, by my reading, did not self-consciously reference women’s difficulties with regard to entry into the culture) documented a situation whereby a male rider helped Nina Buitrago build her own “street spot” by using quick-drying concrete to smooth the approach to a subsequently ride-able road barrier (the half-meter tall semi-portable cement blocks that separate lanes or block construction areas) (BMX Plus! Jan. 2005: pg 84 – 85). At a freestyle contest in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada in September of 2005 (which featured a “girls” freestyle class which was won by Buitrago), I spoke with several women freestylers who consistently expressed that their conscious struggle is to be seen as one of the boys (as opposed to being accepted as women who freestyle). As such, there was a tension amongst the women when a female competitor, Natalie Wagner (4th place), playfully (and in my opinion, quite boldly) decided to wear her lucky skirt rather than jeans (asserting her femininity in a hypermasculine arena).

Rinehart and Grenfell, in their ethnography of young riders entitled “BMX Spaces: Children’s Grass Roots’ Courses and Corporate-Sponsored Tracks,” describe BMX freestyle as “...a world in which young boys and men (but not girls) ride daily...” (Rinehart and Grenfell, 2002: pg 303). Discussing the particularities of one site, they report, “(a)s a solely male preserve, the Flats covertly restricted admission to girls” (Rinehart and Grenfell, 2002: pg 309). In short, the culture of BMX freestyle is at best unwelcoming and at worst hostile to women. It is a hypermasculine world that seems to be more and more closed to women over time.

Subculture?

Despite the fact that there were a “couple million BMXers” by the early 2000s (Browne, 2004: pg 10), BMX freestyle still considers itself as a subcultural or alternative activity. Indeed, David Browne calls the sports of skateboarding, snowboarding, motocross and BMX the “punk rock of the sports world” (Browne, 2004: pg 9), which is exactly how the BMX freestylers like to see themselves. Although it is a unique pastime, to be sure, “...a parallel sports universe with its own stars, history, language, culture, and sensibility” (Browne, 2004: pg x), one must ask how a culture can maintain an “outsider” posture when it has been adopted as a lifestyle by millions.

One means of self-othering is, of course, by rejecting another tribe. For BMX freestyle, the first “other” to be rejected is BMX racing (again, the “free” of freestyle can be read as “free from the constraints of racing”). As former professional BMX freestyler Maurice “Drob” Meyer wrote in the January / February 2003 issue of *Dig BMX* magazine,

During the mid-eighties freestyle was struggling to define itself and break away from the BMX racing look. The idea that a rider could do freestyle wherever they wanted was a welcome relief to the regimen of training and motos and the ‘organized-everything’ image racing was projecting. There was a “keeping the sport clean” attitude left over from the existing BMX industry, and Nancy Reagan’s “Just say no to drugs” campaign was in full force. While most every kid’s dream was to be a “factory rider” like the guys they saw in the magazine, the sport would soon realize that this artificial image just wasn’t sustainable. Not everyone was going to be driving around in a lowered Porsche with their bike hanging out the back. (*Dig*, Jan. / Feb. 2003)

So, BMX freestyle is not BMX racing. Interestingly, this tribal behavior is not new to cycling. Bijker documents the schism between the two-wheeled and three-wheeled cycles

of the late 1800s: “(i)t was no surprise then that the Tricyclists’ Association sought special privileges in the London parks because tricyclists were supposed to be better bred than bicyclists” (Bijker, 1995: pg 57).

Skateboarding would be the second thing that is not BMX freestyle, despite a common history and shared sites of practice. The relationship between the BMX freestylers and skateboarders has oscillated between amiable and loathsome over the past thirty years. Most recently, the fire was fueled by a call-to-war published in a skateboard magazine. According to Nick Combs’ article “The Imaginary War,” published in the June 2005 issue of *Dig*,

I assume that the catalyst for bringing this whole thing to a pinnacle of stupidity was the June 2003 issue of Thrasher. The contents spread of which, declared, ‘We’re not being dicks for no reason, there’s legitimate beef.’ This was a quotation pulled from an article it contained entitled, ‘BMX Jihad, Keep it in the Dirt.’” (*Dig*, June 2005: pg 57)

As such, the BMX freestylers can further define themselves as “not skateboarders.”

In the mid-nineties, the BMX freestylers and skateboarders honoured a truce of sorts and temporarily put aside their differences to battle a common foe: the fruitbootin’ rollerblader. In-line skating is the red-headed step-child of the action sports world, in short, because it is seen as too accessible and easy. As Browne observed at the Woodward action sports summer camp,

when it came to overall disapproval verging on wrath, in-liners were in an anti-league of their own. All one had to do was bring up the subject to skateboarders, BMXers, even counselors, and merciless ridicule ensued: “What do you do without ramps? You’re a *roller skater*!” or, “They stole our moves.” Or, “Their parents are like soccer moms. (Browne, 2004: pg 144)

A less tribal explanation is offered by Duncan Humphreys;

Rollerblading is also seen as having sold out because of its popularity among the wrong types: it has been embraced by the body-beautiful Lycra set as a means of aerobic exercise, and by ice skaters, and cross-country and downhill skiers as a training tool. Although young adherents perform tricks, skaters sneer at them. (Humphreys, 2003: pg 417)

Rinehart and Grenfell suggest a third explanation: “(i)n other cases – in cases like in-line skating, for example – there is less resistance to this encroachment of “inauthentic” participants and players” (Rinehart and Grenfell, 2002: pg 304). As such, in-liners embody the commodification of the action sports.

BMX freestylers are definitely not in-liners. Nevertheless, there were at least two benefits to the influx of in-liners to spaces previously occupied by skateboarders and BMX freestylers: the aforementioned common enemy it supplied to (and short term reconciliation of) BMXers and skateboarders, and perhaps more importantly, women (in-liners) began to come to the skateparks.

Most recently, BMX freestylers have had to reaffirm that they are not mountain bikers. Mountain biking is a slightly younger activity (the pioneers can be traced back to the mid- to late-1970s), and was welcomed at the time of its emergence by the BMX magazines as a cousin (no doubt seeing more advertising revenue opportunities) (“Full Bore Cruisers,” *BMXA*, Jan. 1980: pg 74 – 78). Throughout the 1980s, the larger wheeled (twenty-six inch vs. twenty inch), multi-speed mountain bikes were seen as the more “grown-up” bicycles, whereas the diminutive BMX was deemed “juvenile” (to this day, the BMX is considered part of the juvenile market segment in the bicycle industry). Add to this the increasing market share and eventual takeover of the bicycle industry in the 1980s by the mountain bike (as BMX was fading) and one can understand the tribal animosity. However, after the return of BMX freestyle as the “cool” cycling discipline

after the 1995 Extreme Games, mountain bikers wanted to be friends again. In the 2000s, the mountain bikers began to engage in what they call “urban assault,” or “street” riding on mountain bikes. As they have also moved into the skateparks, there is now a tribal tension between the two cycling cultures (essentially BMX freestyle versus MTB freestyle), as space is limited. It is still to be seen as to whether this will bring the skateboarders and BMXers together again (as with in-liners, against a common foe), or whether new alliances will be formed (for example, the two types of cyclists vs. the skateboarders, or the coming together of the maligned in-liners and the mountain bikers).

From the outside, the distinctions between the tribes may be unapparent or trivial. However, a reading from the inside can illuminate the differences.⁵¹ According to Eric Rothenbuhler,

The problem is that the substance of the sacred varies wildly from community to community, culture to culture, historical setting to historical setting. This creates difficulties in categorizing social activities, objects, and ideas as sacred or profane. (Rothenbuhler, 1998: pg 23)

Concerning the divergence of the action sports, the first appearance and status of a particular shared maneuver is enlightening. The nac-nac (“can-can” with reversed spelling) emerged as a BMX trick in the early 1990s and was quickly relegated to the “profane,” only done while dorking-around for a laugh as an inside joke. By the mid 1990s, motocross superstar Jeremy McGrath started doing the motorcycle version of the trick during races to the delight of stadium crowds. Mountain bikers, emulating the motocrossers, began doing nac-nacs more recently. As such, a discarded, joke-trick in

⁵¹ Again, the footnoted example from the Introduction regarding Rinehart and Grenfell’s listing of non-existent maneuvers is exemplary.

BMX (what the “mullet” or “hockey hair” is to hairstyles) is considered a “classic” maneuver by the other tribes. To the BMX freestylers, the other tribes are a joke because they are still doing nac-nacs *for real*. To the others, BMXers look like snobs.

Resistance to Commodification

As BMX freestyle sees itself as outside, alternative, and other, we should not be shocked that there has been some resistance to the culture’s commodification and exploitation. Nevertheless, the appropriation of a hypermale recreational activity should also not surprise. According to Burstyn, “...the mass media have created and used the myth of hypermasculinity to group huge and highly lucrative audiences of men – the masculinity market – whose relation to the sport spectacle is primarily one of consumption” (Burstyn, 1999: pg 262). Indeed, once it was determined how to best market and present this activity to a mass audience (as ESPN has done successfully), it was only a matter of time before the “alternative” culture would be associated with Nike, Slim Jims, and Chevy Trucks, as “(c)orporations are willing to pay a great deal to get exclusive access to the male sporting audience” (Burstyn, 1999: pg 118). On contest sites such as the those of the Triple Crown events,

The long, narrow lot was now a sponsors’ carnival: Mountain Dew, Right Guard Xtreme Sport deodorant, Ford Ranger, and Xbox each had booths, tents, and trailers that were helping to underwrite the costs for the event in exchange for exposure to a desirable young-male demographic. (Browne, 2004: pg 38)

If the corporations have not actually embraced to action sports themselves, they can be seen to have wholly embraced the marketing associated with them. Browne outlines an “extreme” day:

Before heading to work, one could shave with Xtreme 3 razors, scrub one's teeth with Aquafresh Extreme Clean toothpaste, freshen up with dabs of Xtreme Sport deodorant, and if so inclined, apply one of Clairol's Extreme FX line of hair colors. During lunchtime, one could stop by Taco Bell for an Extreme quesadilla and, afterward, wolf down a bag of Xtreme Doritos, a stick of Xtreme beef jerky, a container of Xtreme Jell-O, or a box of Xtreme popcorn. If such high-intensity snacks made one's mouth taste stale, Xtreme breath spray was there to assist. After school, young boys or girls could rev up with the X-treme wheels scooter sold at toy-store chains. To wind down at night, one could rent movies with titles like *Extreme Days* or soft-core drool-fests like the *Girls Gone Wild Extreme* video. (Browne, 2004: pg 175)

Indeed, Browne writes that 1141 products with "Extreme" or "Xtreme" have been trademarked with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (Browne, 2004: pg 175).

A successful subculture might be seen as an oxymoron: when a subculture succeeds, it is part of popular culture or the mainstream. In the action sports world, those involved from the beginning (or perhaps merely before the turning- or tipping-point) appreciate the success, but fear the transformation of the activity they love.⁵² Browne spoke with skateboard pioneer and director Stacy Peralta at the ESPN Action Sports and Music Awards after a staged "Bones Brigade" reunion of the top Powell / Peralta sponsored skaters of the mid 1980s:

"I'm not trying to be puritanical, but it's very easy to play along with marketing the whole bad-boy image. I just feel like they're taking the bone marrow out of these sports. They're making everything look like pro wrestling. I know they

⁵² Conversely, according to Rinehart and Grenfell, "(y)ounger participants (...), often criticized for not understanding the "history" of the activity (that is, the importance of the old timers to either the origination story or the actual growth of the activity), and perhaps reflecting their own ethos within the activity at the time of *their* entry into it, seemingly have no problem with becoming commodified and with the mainstreaming of their activity..." (Rinehart and Grenfell, 2002: pg 304).

provide a service; they do distribute the sports to millions of kids, which is cool. But the thumping beat of the way they present it is horrible.” (Browne, 2004: pg 21)

Strangely enough, it is precisely this outsider attitude that is so marketable. ESPN does it wrong, the culture protests, and the protest itself is integrated into the next broadcast. According to Cynthia Lury, “(c)ommericalization is seen to make it impossible to sustain authenticity and [this] means that resistance is no sooner expressed than sold back to young people” (Lury, 1996: pg 198 - 199). Referring to snowboarders’, action sport athletes’ and punks’ common denunciation of cooptation, Humphreys explains, “(t)he basis of this rejection resides in an artistic philosophy that values freedom and self-expression, but which, ironically, is responsible for increasing the popularity of snowboarding” (Humphreys, 2003: pg 407).

According to Grant McCracken, subcultural protest is particularly ineffective when it takes the form of communicative possessions (such as an anti-corporate slogan displaying t-shirt): “(r)adical groups may express their protest in the language of goods but in doing so they inevitably create messages that all can read” (McCracken, 1988: pg 133).⁵³ Dick Hebdige has famously discussed the UK punk subculture in his book

Subculture: The Meaning of Style:

Youth cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new

⁵³ According to Wheaton and Beal, “ Attempting to explain the meanings of alternative sports and their media in relation to ‘market incorporation’ and ‘resistance’ to the market ignores the centrality of consumer capitalism and the media industries in their very inception and meanings. Alternative sport cultures were produced within the context and discourse of consumerism; processes of commercialization and commodification were integral from the creation of the products of consumption (equipment, clothing, etc.), to impacting the meanings and distribution of cultural knowledges” (Wheaton and Beal, 2003: pg 173).

commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones (think of the boost punk must have given haberdashery!). (Hebdige, 1979: pg 96)

Perhaps the most effective form of resistance that has been shown in the BMX freestyle culture is the promotion of an ideology of supporting (often professional) rider-owned companies. Of course, this is not truly resisting the commodification and exploitation of the culture, but rather asserting that if this is going to happen, the riders should “keep it in the family.”

Indeed, it is the professional BMX freestyler or “Pro” who finds himself⁵⁴ at the intersection of the “authentic” (keepin’ it real) and the “commodified” (gettin’ paid), and who must negotiate between these imperatives so that he is both compensated and compensatable (that is, he must not appear to have “sold out,” as this would mean that his endorsement of products would be undesirable). Humphreys describes the situation: “(h)ere is the paradox of the new leisure movement professional: no matter how esoteric they believe their activity to be, professionals cannot separate themselves from the reality of capitalism” (Humphreys, 2003: pg 417). Again, it is the oxymoronic situation of the subculture becoming successful: “(i)n the action-sports world, mainstream success was a tricky business; everyone wanted a taste, but *just* a taste, since the risk of alienating the devout was too great” (Browne, 2004: pg 145). According to Browne, there are parallels with the music industry: “(t)he ways in which indie rockers grappled with corporate-label offers mirrored the inner struggles of action-sport athletes and their big-ticket sponsorships” (Browne, 2004: pg 161).

⁵⁴ Again, all BMX freestyle Pros thus far have been male.

The BMX Freestyle Pro

(an excerpt from the November 1979 *BMX Action* Editorial by Bob Osborn entitled “Are The Pro’s Worth It?”)

“...what will the sponsor get out of the arrangement? If it works, which means if the rider does build toward national dominance, the sponsoring company gets media coverage of his rider, which sells his bike; and a superstar to endorse his products in ads, which sells his bikes; and a goodwill ambassador that the kids across the U.S. will listen to and emulate, and that sells bikes. So what the sponsor gets is sales, tons of sales. (...)

And a final necessary question: Are the Pro’s worth it?

Look at it this way ... The Pro’s are the stars, the guys on the firing line.

They are the fastest, most colorful, the most radical, the ones everybody wants to read about. They’re the trend and style setters, the ones who sell the sport and the equipment.” (*BMX Action*, Nov. 1979: pg 4)

“...the working-class cult of sportsmen of working-class origin is doubtless explained in part by the fact that these ‘success stories’ symbolize the only recognized route to wealth and fame.” (Bourdieu, 1978: pg 832 – 833)

In this project, I wish to position as the central figure of the particular culture of BMX freestyle the BMX freestyle Pro. The Pro can be seen as the currency of this particular system / industry / field. The Pro is imitable. If he was not, then the system would at worst collapse and at best be forced to radically reorganize. The Pro is at the forefront of the culture concerning the evolution and performance of the latest maneuvers (which ensures his status).⁵⁵ This progression is followed and mediated by the magazines, which bestow status upon the Pro. The Pro is subsequently employed by the industry in

⁵⁵ Importantly, this performance does not have to take place in a competition setting. In fact, many BMX freestyle Pros eschew the contest scene.

the endorsement of their commodities. In the following section, this key concept is outlined with regard to practice, the particular culture, and mediation.

As in other celebrity cultures, the Pros of BMX freestyle receive salaries and product in exchange for their endorsement of commodities and services. It is his professional, imitable status that makes the Pro valuable to the sponsoring company. In short, the (sub)cultural capital that is possessed by the Pro is “rented” by corporations in the hope that this will influence particular audiences to consume the associated products. Importantly, the endorsement process can feed back on itself, increasing a celebrity’s stardom and thus influence (and of course, this increased stardom works to the benefit of the sponsoring business).

In the culture of BMX freestyle, becoming a factory-sponsored Pro is clearly the promoted ideal and goal. The Pro is positioned by the magazines as worthy of worship and emulation. An article entitled “Heroes” that appeared in the June / July 2002 issue of *Ride (UK)* could be seen to have been justifying the admiration of Pros as a traditional (and thus legitimate) activity in BMX.

Well, in 1980 BMX was in its infancy over here in the UK. Being 17 at the time and having a friend of the same age with a BMX bike, the first place we rode our bikes was Slades Farm Skatepark. We skated anyway so we took our boards everywhere, it made sense. Bunnyhopping, cross-ups and 360s were the tricks that everyone wanted to do and the mythological tabletop was out of bounds to all but the coolest of riders, and one kid who had one footed tables down was the Ace sponsored Cav Strutt. (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2002: pg 165)⁵⁶

⁵⁶ The “tabletop” jump is a rudimentary maneuver in which the bicycle is laid flat, 90 degrees from the normal vertical upright position. A “bunnyhop” is performed by jumping the bike off of flat ground without the aid of a ramp or another obstacle.

In an article entitled “Becoming a Pro Freestyler: Eddie, Martin, & Woody Pave the Way to Stardom” that appeared in the June 1986 issue of *BMX Plus!*, the Pro life was positioned as the ideal, and a road map of sorts was provided to the reader: “(w)hat’s one goal most every freestyler sets for himself early in his career? You might not go so far as to call it a “goal,” but turning pro and making money like the top stars is a common desire. Well, who are we to stand in your way of becoming a top star?” (*BMX Plus!*, June 1986: pg 46) Importantly, all three riders positioned magazines as central to the process:

Martin (Aparijo): It helps to be at the contests and be seen. I’m living proof that entering the contests will get you more coverage, but you have to promote yourself to the important people – the magazines, the sponsors – you have to meet the right people.”

Eddie (Fiola): My big break came when I was at the Lakewood skatepark, and I saw Bob Osborn from – another magazine – drive up. I didn’t have my bike there, but I said to myself, this is my big chance. I went home, got my bike, and rode until he noticed my riding and shot some photos of me.”

Woody (Itson): A magazine can make or break a rider. If a magazine drops a rider and won’t cover him anymore, that rider has a serious clamp on his career.” (*BMX Plus!*, June 1986: pg 51)

In articles such as *GO* magazine’s “Paid In Full: Rapping With The Pros,” an inside view of the Pro lifestyle was shown, and this existence was positioned as the goal to which readers should have been aspiring (*GO*, Feb. 1990: pg 24 – 31). The centrality of the figure of the Pro could also be seen in the perspective afforded by particular articles. For example, features on safety gear often were not presented in a consumer reports fashion, but rather as a matter of “Pro Choice” (*GO*, Apr. 1990: pg 50).

As to the employment of Pros in advertising, a survey of the final issues of each of the magazines that make up the corpus of the project reveals that the professional

BMX freestylers were indeed a significant part of this practice. The Fall 2003 issue of *Chase BMX Magazine* contained twenty-seven advertisements. Twenty-one (seventy-eight percent) utilized a Pro. Adjusting for mail-order ads, subscription offers and non-industry ads wherein one wouldn't expect a Pro endorsement (reducing the total number of ads to twenty-three), the figure rose to ninety-five percent. The November 2003 issue of *Ride (US)* magazine contained fifty-two ads, thirty-nine (seventy-five percent) of which featured a Pro (again, adjusting for relevant ads changed the percentage of ads that employed a Pro to ninety-two percent). Interestingly, the November 2003 issue of *Ride (UK)* contained eighty-two ads, thirty-seven (forty-five percent) of which featured a Pro. Once adjusted, the figure rose to sixty-six percent. As such, we can see that the Pro endorsement was an oft-employed tool exploited by advertisers (although, curiously, not to the same extent in different markets).

The endorsement process counts on the imitability of the celebrities employed. That is, the emulation of the star or professional athlete by the audience through the consumption of commodities is relied upon by the advertisers. In the sports world in general, this faith is often embodied in the signature-model commodity. Indeed, as consumption has been often seen as a feminine enterprise, the signature of a respected professional can perhaps be seen to allow males to participate in consumption (for example, signature model baseball gloves, Tiger Woods endorsed golf clothing, etc.). Following skateboarding's lead, the BMX industry has wholeheartedly embraced the Pro model commodity (bicycle frames, shoes, handlebars, grips, handlebar stems, sprockets, pedals, seats, tires, t-shirts, etc.). With regard to Pro model shoes, an interviewer in *Ride*

(UK) asked Etnies footwear's BMX team manager John Povah about the level of input from the Pro.

How much control do the team riders have in their shoe's design?

It's actually about 90% the rider's decision how their shoes look, here at Etnies they have always had the mindset that the riders / skaters / surfers etc are the trendsetters in what they do so they feel they need to listen to them, the market does somewhat determine what kids are into, but without these sports those same kids would be clueless. (*Ride (UK)*, July 2005: pg 145)

Of course, the image of the Pro in a sense determines his imitability. Whereas many Pros struggle to keep a "hardcore" image in the face of their exploitation, there is more money to be made if one's image is more palatable to a general audience. Browne discusses Pro BMX freestyler Ryan Nyquist, who has probably been the second highest-paid rider (behind only Dave Mirra) over the last ten years.

This was the side of Nyquist – earnest, clean cut, antismoking, antidrinking, antidrugging – that his manager of four years, Steve Astephen, called, with a big, pleased smile, "American pie," In addition to his X Games medals, Nyquist had a slew of sponsors and corporate tie-ins, from phone companies to candy bars, that added up to a six-figure income; Adidas was about to introduce an upgraded version of his signature shoe, which would retail for \$80 and include the extra padding he demanded. "He's very corporate friendly," Astephen said. "Butterfingers couldn't be happier." Nyquist and Astephen even jointly owned a real-estate business. Other riders cultivated images of hard-living, skuzzy wild boys on two wheels. Nyquist knew them all, even liked many of them, but that image was not for him; he was and remained a dedicated professional BMX rider. (Browne, 2004: pg 42 - 43)

The trick for these top riders, the ones who have "sold out" the hardest, is to maintain a level of inscrutability. What is not to be denied of the riders at the very top of the freestyle food chain, like Nyquist, is that they are *the best* in terms of skill and

professionalism. Their fans are not the hardcore riders, perhaps, but the real (i.e.; desirable and profitable) market is the “poseur” riders or the “extreme” sports fan that doesn’t even have a BMX bicycle. It is precisely this larger audience that the big corporate sponsors are truly after. Interestingly, it might be easier to be consistent when “selling out” than trying to cash-in while maintaining a “hardcore” image. According to Rinehart,

This is one of the problems of previously resistive sports forms’ “stars” seeking to become more and more cultural icons. They become celebrated because they represented, in a real sense, the outer limits of choice; but, having been swallowed whole into the mainstream culture, their presence is even more pathological than if they were clearly mainstream. They demonstrate the punishment that an individual may suffer if she/he chooses to remain individual. (Rinehart, 2003: pg 46)

Since ESPN’s inaugural Extreme Games in 1995, the action sport athletes at the top of their respective disciplines have been elevated to the level of popular music celebrities. Discussing skateboarding icon Tony Hawk’s ESPN sponsored “Gigantic Skatepark Tour,” Browne notes that the skateboarders on the tour “...were rock stars now – ones with skate decks in place of guitars, but rock stars nonetheless – and they had the fully equipped bus with the two large-screen TVs and video-game consoles to prove it” (Browne, 2004: pg 60). Browne continues,

Here, in their element, they truly were rock stars. Real rock stars had become increasingly packaged and programmed; after Kurt Cobain died, it was rare to find someone who sliced himself up, literally or figuratively, onstage with such determinism. (Browne, 2004: pg 93)

The Tony Hawk of BMX freestyle, Dave Mirra, has hosted his own MTV show, appears in television commercials for Oxy and Wendy's, and was recently featured on ESPN Bowling Night, teamed with NBA stars.⁵⁷

Of course, one must remember that although these rock star Pros are living lives of leisure, they are also working. According to Humphreys,

the sponsor-professional relationship is ultimately an employer-employee relationship. Employers demand that employees satisfy their needs. Professionals must deal with the concrete world of commercialism, as opposed to the abstract, idealistic world of art. Ultimately, professionals in the new leisure movement find it increasingly difficult to indulge in endless play. A similar problem occurs when musicians become successful, and therefore, in a sense, "professional."

(Humphreys, 2003: pg 418)

Furthermore, only those at the very top can be classed as rock stars: "(o)nly a few earned six or seven figures a year, while the remainder of these fifteen-to-thirty-year-old men took home only about \$30,000 annually" (Browne, 2004: pg 27).

For most Pros at B-level and below, a significant part of their work is done while dressing and deliberately stickering their equipment. The sporting of one's sponsors' logos is a primary responsibility. Depending on the mediation (magazines versus television coverage, for example), the strategic placement of corporate logos might be on the beak of a full-face helmet (most famously, Dave Mirra's Slim Jim sticker) for television close-up headshots, or on the inside of the fork or under the frame for magazine photo shoots. Indeed, a Pro's body is his ad-space for rent. In a recent interview concerning Redline Bicycles' return to sponsoring a freestyle team after focusing on BMX racing for many years, Craig "gOrk" Barrette discussed the differences and

⁵⁷ ESPN Bowling Night, Oct 24 /2005 on TSN, 1:30 – 2pm est.

difficulties in shifting from one discipline to another with regard to using a Pro's body as advertising space.

Part of the delay was dialing in the contracts and wording, to fit in each rider's individual cosponsors. That was something totally new for us. In the past, we've owned everything about our riders, and coming from the racing side of things, we've always thought of our riders as walking, riding billboards. But I know that the freestyle scene is way different. Sure, we still want logo placement, but we gave in a bit, to make it happen. Each rider has their own deals to bring to the table: Rooftop with Etnies, Hurley and Nixon watches, Hirsch with Lotek and Salvation, and then Dustin's just signed a Red Bull deal for his helmet, so I guess that's what took us so long to seal the deal; to reach an agreement where both sides of the sponsorship were satisfied.

How different is it dealing with a pro freestyle rider regarding contracts compared to AA Pro racers in 2005?

VERY different! In racing, we own every inch of the rider's body. A guy like our No.1 Pro Bubba Harris is our own little Nascar--emblazoned with logos from head to toe. In every photo, from any angle they shoot it, we like to have at least three logos showing. The most surprising thing I found with sponsoring a freestyle rider is that most of them have already sold-off their shirt. While we were shopping around, I was kind of shocked that a rider's biggest billboard space has already been bought by a clothing company. In the past, that would've been a deal-breaker. But I wanted this to happen, and had to face the fact that this isn't a race sponsorship. (www.bmxonline.com)⁵⁸

The Pros themselves have a vested interest in having these logos visible in media coverage beyond that of pleasing their sponsors. Pros are paid photo contingencies for any coverage that appears in a magazine (or in videos or on television) based on size of the photo and the visibility of their sponsors' logos. It is in the Pro's interest to ensure

⁵⁸ <http://www.bmxonline.com/bmx/biz/article/0,15737,1026460,00.html> downloaded Feb 10/ 2005 at 11:30am EST.

that a logo will be visible if he is photographed from any angle or position, as "...if the photos prominently (display) the logo of one of his sponsors, the sponsor could pay him anywhere between a few hundred and a thousand dollars" (Browne, 2004: pg 112).

Significantly, this has positioned the magazines as very important to the Pros. According to Browne, "(t)he rise of photo incentives revealed the clout of the action-sport press, which had itself become a formidable enterprise" (Browne, 2004: pg 112). Interestingly, a magazine and two pros could be seen to be abusing a contingency program in the November 1989 and January 1990 issues of *GO*. In the case of the former, the A'ME sunglasses contingency (offered to Pros who appeared in magazines wearing the company's eyewear) seemed to be promoted by the magazine: "(s)ee the shades? Ronnie just became the first person to cash in on the A'ME contingency program" (*GO*, Nov. 1989: pg 86). In the case of the latter, the magazine's regular "Random Disruptive Sequence" within the "Section 8" news column (which normally featured a step-by-step trick sequence) showed two pictures of Pro BMXer Chris Moeller: one without, and one with the sunglasses on. The caption read: "(l)isten for the sound of a cash register. Mad Dog seizes the opportunity to put the A'me sunglasses contingency program to use" (*GO*, Jan. 1990: pg 84). What was unique here was that, in a sense, the seams were showing: that is, the inner workings of the Pro system were being exposed.

Importantly, there is another option for both X Games-style television and magazine coverage for the BMX freestyle Pro with regard both to keeping the sponsors happy and to maintaining one's star status. According to Browne, a different course is "...devoting time and energy to video parts, an alternate route to recognition and status that did not involve dealing with ESPN rules and regulations and had an inherent

credibility the games could never attain” (Browne, 2004: pg 251). Indeed, since the introduction of Props Video Magazine in 1994 and the expansion of the phenomenon of the branded team video, this has become a focus for many BMX freestyle Pros.

Still, it is magazine coverage that has historically been the most important exposure for a BMX freestyle Pro with regard to his career. Indeed, the (since discontinued) trade publication *BMX Business News* tracked such magazine appearances in its regular feature entitled “BMXposure Meter” (*BMX Business News*, Sept. 2005: pg 46). (IMAGE #3-1) In the inaugural column, the purpose of this new offering was explained to the bicycle shop employees that are the assumed audience:

Who Rules The Media?

Welcome to the first rendition of BMXposure Meter. What exactly is this, you might be wondering. In the simplest terms, it’s a ranking of athletes based on points earned through editorial and advertising coverage. How is this information useful to you? First, it’s an easy way to get to know the most popular riders in the sport (very helpful to know when communicating with your typical BMX customer), and second, it’s a great way for manufacturers to see how far their sponsorship and advertising dollars are going in promoting their athletes. (*BMX Business News*, Sept. 2005: pg 46)

Interestingly, the BMXposure Meter tracks both editorial coverage and advertising’s use of Pros. These statistics are kept separate, but are also presented together in a fashion that asserts the importance of both the editorial content and advertising to the overall status of the Pro’s image career. This information is presented to the audience of this trade publication (again, bicycle shop employees and industry insiders who receive this periodical free of charge) to further facilitate the exploitation of the Pro’s image career. Importantly, statistics are not presented with regard to television coverage or video

appearances of Pros, implying that it is still the magazine that is the most important medium to the BMX industry with regard to Pro creation and exploitation.

Conclusions

The lowest point in BMX freestyle's history was the seven months during which it was served by only one magazine. The release of the first issue of *Ride (US) BMX Magazine* in the fall of 1992 by rider Brad MacDonald marked the beginning of the slow comeback of the culture that would be eventually turbo-charged by the inclusion of BMX freestyle in the inaugural ESPN Extreme Games in 1995. In between the materialization of these two phenomena, particular Pro BMX freestylers "stepped up" to take care of their culture when corporate interest was low. Rider-owned companies such as S&M Bikes, Standard Byke Co., and Hoffman Bikes (founded by Pros of the first BMX boom of the 1980s) and rider-run events such as Mat Hoffman's B.S. series and Hal Brindley's Play contests put these Pros in control of the culture, and ensured that such Pros would have a say in the corporate exploitation that followed the Extreme Games intervention. Indeed, Brindley and Steve Buddendeck helped ESPN at the first Extreme Games, and Hoffman has been involved with the management of the annual event since 1996. As such, particular Pro riders have run the high-profile events for corporations and have thus retained a degree of power, but they have also given up ultimate control of the sport side of the culture to these companies.

The intervention of television provided more professional opportunities to the top riders. Mainstream (non-BMX) companies such as Mountain Dew began to offer sponsorships to individuals and teams. Bicycle companies that previously had been

uninterested in the BMX markets began to compete with the rider-owned companies for both the consumers' dollars and for the opportunity to sponsor the top Pros. As televised BMX freestyle events reached a wider audience, these Pros were paid a higher salary, enjoyed more substantial contest winnings, and received photo *and* television-coverage contingencies. In short, more top riders were better compensated for their efforts than ever before. As the participants within the culture had gotten used to being the underdogs, this newfound wealth and success proved to be problematic to a group who seemed to pride itself on poverty. Such tensions were not played out in television coverage of BMX freestyle events, but rather in the pages of the magazines that served the culture. Indeed, if television was the medium of prosperity and stardom, BMX freestyle magazines could be seen as a site wherein the editors were charged with mediating between the interests of their advertisers (who weren't so bad), the Pros (who earned and deserved their success), and the readers (who, over the years prior to television's interest in the sport side of the culture, were instilled with a sense that they were part of an alternative subculture).

The BMX freestyle Pro must be both an imitable star and an accessible "everyrider." The construction and maintenance of such an image is largely realized within the pages of BMX freestyle magazines. Indeed, the relationship between the BMX freestyle Pros and the magazines is a symbiotic one, as the magazines' financial success is directly linked to the Pros, and the Pros' Pro-status is conferred by and constructed within the magazines. The Pros themselves serve as a currency within a field that includes the industry, the magazines and other mediating forms, and the consumers.

CHAPTER FOUR

A History of BMX Freestyle Magazines

“Without question, any exploration of the world of action sports must start with the spunky, invigorating media that cover it full-time.” (Browne, 2004: pg 293)

“... the action-sport army did indeed number in the millions, and the army needed gear. (...) They lived to pore through the magazines that diligently covered the sports....” (Browne, 2004: pg 98)

“The relationship between the spectacular subculture and the various industries which service and exploit it is notoriously ambiguous. After all, such a subculture is concerned first and foremost with consumption.” (Hebdige 1979: pg 94 - 95)

Stunt or artistic cycling was, from the advent of the practice, documented in various media. Indeed, one of the earliest Thomas Edison-made films featured stunt cyclists. Predating this by some years was a set of trading cards that documented the maneuvers being performed by such daredevil cyclists. Of course, neither the tricks featured nor the cards themselves were truly the products offered for consumption: “(t)he American Tobacco Company issued this set of 25 tobacco insert cards in the early 1890s to advertise chewing and smoking tobacco....”⁵⁹ These cards “...were designed to appeal to men by showing scantily clad show girls riding various types of bicycles popular during that period,” and featured women riding backwards, riding one pedal, and performing a trick called the “Maltby Coast.” (IMAGE # 4-1)

⁵⁹ <http://www.tradecards.com/articles/tr/>, March 2, 2005, 11:21am EST

With regard to periodical publications, Bijker documents "...advice given by *Cycling* in 1887..." and the fact that new bicycles "...were routinely tested and reviewed in the various journals" within which "...most of these new machines were well received" (Bijker, 1995: pg 65). Another early example from the special-interest periodical press was the July 30, 1904 issue of *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* that featured ten pictures of cyclists performing stunts that are recognizable today to modern BMX freestylers (the modern names for these tricks are surfers, boomerangs, pedalpickers, and wheel-walking). (IMAGE #4-2)

This chapter reviews the history of BMX freestyle magazines. Mirroring the practice itself, the freestyle magazines emerged from the preceding BMX magazines. As such, the following historical discussion is organized chronologically by publisher. Within the discussion of each magazine, notable issues with regard to editorial content and the Pro-creation and -maintenance project are addressed. The second section of this chapter focuses on particular genres of recurring editorial content that can be seen to serve the Pro making and sustenance function of BMX freestyle magazines (specifically, the cover, the news section, rider profiles, Pro Interviews, and Pro Bike Checks).

Bicycle Motocross News

The first periodical BMX publication could be found in bicycle shops in California in June of 1974. Published by Westword Publications in Orange, California, *Bicycle Motocross News* was offered in a tabloid newspaper format and was edited by Elaine Holt. (IMAGE #4-3) Appropriately, the first issue contained an interview with Scot Breithaupt (the "Old Man" of BMX who started the B.U.M.S. races discussed in Chapter

Two), and the first ever BMX bicycle test (the Yamaha Moto Bike). The appearance of a bicycle test in the first issue of a BMX publication is telling, as it confirms the assertion that a special-interest publication only emerges when there is an industry ready to support and employ it. Of course, one could understand that the industry was not ready to support a full-fledged slick newsstand BMX publication, as this first issue only listed four BMX racing tracks (all in California). As such, there was not much in the way of news to report at the time "...until issues 3 & 4, when the Yamaha Gold Cup series began" (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2001: pg 154).

The contents of the first issue were, as one would expect, promoted by "cover blurbs." The reader was informed via text on the cover of this first issue that this was a "Complimentary Copy" (as is often the case for a first issue of a BMX publication). Furthermore, the cover copy informed the reader of the aforementioned "Interview With Scot Breithaupt," that the "The Latest In New BMX Products" were featured within, and that one could also expect to find "Personalities, Endos, Etc., Etc.,." Indeed, by the eleventh issue (December 1975), familiar article-types were advertised in cover blurbs: "Free Inside: The BMX Christmas Gift Guide," "2nd Annual Yamaha Bicycle Gold Cup," and "Motocross Pants For Under \$8.00" (*Bicycle Motocross News*, Dec. 1975, Vol. 2. No. 11). It is apparent, then, that from the outset BMX publications were positioned as consumption guides. That is, one is a BMXer when one consumes BMX related products.

Reflecting a longstanding pattern within the world of BMX publications (that of a relatively small pool of employees jumping from one magazine to another), this periodical featured the freelance work of Bob Osborn (*Bicycle Motocross Action*). The

last issue to which I have found reference is the March 1978 issue.⁶⁰

Minicycle / BMX Action: Challenge Publications

Although most histories of BMX position Bob Osborn's *Bicycle Motocross Action* as the first "slick," newsstand BMX publication (which is understandable, as most BMX historians reference Osborn's various historical accounts), it could be argued that this distinction belongs to Challenge Publications' *Minicycle / BMX Action*. According to Scott Towne (an editor of the publisher's 1980's titles, *Super BMX and Freestyle* and *Freestyle*), Challenge can claim to have published the "...the first nationally distributed BMX periodical."⁶¹ The magazine, originally entitled *Minicycle Action* when it was released in 1974, was rechristened to include "BMX" in its title during the early half of 1976. Importantly, *Minicycle Action* had covered the BMX culture before the name change, as the November 1975 issue lists in its contents "BMX REPORT" and "Building a super BMX racer."⁶² Another magazine that covered the smaller motocross motorcycle culture, *Minicycle*, also included BMX content. Its January 1975 issue's contents include coverage of "Yamaha Bicycle Gold Cup - Pedal power at L.A.'s Coliseum final in series."⁶³ The inclusion of BMX culture within these particular motocross magazines makes at least two points apparent: that BMX has from the outset been associated with motocross, and that it has been associated with youth ("mini") as opposed to adults.

⁶⁰ <http://www.23mag.com/mags/bmn/bmn.htm>, March 1, 2005, 8pm EST

⁶¹ Posted on May 14, 1999 at <http://members.aol.com/menotomy5/bmx12.htm>, Nov. 30, 2005, 8:00 pm EST

⁶² <http://www.motorcyclememories.com/mags/1975.htm>, Nov. 30, 2005, 7:00 pm EST

⁶³ <http://www.motorcyclememories.com/mags/1975.htm>, Nov. 30, 2005, 7:00 pm EST

Minicycle / BMX Action would eventually refocus to be an exclusively BMX publication in 1981.⁶⁴ *Super BMX* (later *Super BMX and Freestyle*), was published until the BMX market crash in the late 1980s. According to Towne, “*Super BMX* was laid to rest in October of 1988, when ad sales failed to generate enough income to make it profitable for Challenge Publications, Inc. However, the support of GT BMX kept *Super* afloat for a fairly long time.”⁶⁵ Challenge also published *Freestyle* magazine from Summer 1984 to August 1988. In a historical review of magazines that appeared in *Ride (UK)* in 1993, editor Mark Noble inadvertently showed the reader the incestuous nature of the BMX magazine editorial world in his discussion of the Challenge publication.

This was a curious magazine, sort of in between *BMX Action*, *Freestylin'*, and *BMX Plus!*. Steve Giberson was the editor, Lew's best mate Scott Towne added the rider-input, and indeed it was quite a good read during the late '80's. The main problem behind its death was that the publishers jumped right into mountainbiking and forgot about the twenty inchers. (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 1993) As will become apparent below, the different publishers (*BMX Action* and *Freestylin'* were Wizard Publications titles, Hi-Torque Publications is responsible for *BMX Plus!*) would employ the same editors at different times during their (insecure) careers (Steve Giberson worked for *BMX Action* and *Super BMX*, Mark “Lew” Lewman worked for *Freestylin'*, *BMX Action*, *Homeboy*, and *GO*, and his “best mate” Towne worked for the two Challenge Publications and has contributed to others).

Curiously, and after seventeen years, the associate publisher of *Super BMX and Freestyle* and *Freestyle*, Dave House, launched a new BMX magazine in 2005. House's

⁶⁴ During its first year, of publication *Super BMX* issues were designated as belonging to “Volume 8,” which reflects that it was a continuation of what had begun in *Minicycle Action* in 1974.

⁶⁵ Posted on May 14, 1999 at <http://members.aol.com/menotomy5/bmx12.htm>, Nov. 30, 2005, 8:00 pm EST

new company, H3 publications, employed Kevin McAvoy as the editor of the short-lived *Twenty BMX Magazine* (2005 – 2006).

Bicycle Motocross Action and Freestylin': Wizard Publications

Whereas *Minicycle / BMX Action* may be able to claim first-magazine-that-serviced-BMX status, the first magazine to focus solely on BMX culture (as opposed to serving both the juvenile motocross and BMX cultures) was Wizard Publications' *Bicycle Motocross Action*. Wizard's founder, Bob Osborn (arguably the most important figure in BMX culture's history⁶⁶) had freelanced for *Bicycle Motocross News* and had the opportunity to buy the publication in 1976 (*BMXA*, Dec. 1986: pg 70 – 73). Shocked by the asking price into the realization that he could start his own proper, slick newsstand magazine, Osborn published the first issue of *Bicycle Motocross Action* in December of 1976. (IMAGE #4-4) The calculated risk that he took at this point was that the culture and (more importantly) its industry were ready to support the emergence of a BMX-only magazine. That is, again, the viability of a magazine depends on the advertising revenue it can produce, and thus on the strength of the industry.

In his first Editorial column in the December 1976 issue, Osborn clearly set out what he had hoped to accomplish with the magazine for the reader.

Before your very eyeballs are going to appear big tests and whamo shootouts, exciting coverage of the big races, zoomy how-to-do-it articles, inside racing tips from the experts, profiles of the superstars, and a vast array of incisive, penetrating, and mind-boggling things that cover every phase of BMX equipment, racing, and

⁶⁶ Osborn was easily the most influential player in the early years (1976 – 1986) of BMX and BMX freestyle. Today, many would point to Mat Hoffman as the person who saved BMX freestyle culture in the 1990s and has piloted it to its current location within popular culture.

people. (reprinted in *BMXA*, Dec. 1986: pg 28).

Expanding on the format of *Bicycle Motocross News*, and no doubt drawing from other special-interest publications such as motocross magazines, *Bicycle Motocross Action* set the template for all subsequent BMX magazines with regard to regular column types. Importantly, this consumer-guide format holds to this day (i.e.; the formalized “free lunch”).

Indeed, *Bicycle Motocross Action* (after April of 1982, “*BMX Action*”) set the standard by which all other BMX magazines were measured during the 1970s and 1980s, and is quite often discussed by the old-timers (now in their late 30s and 40s) with reverence.

What can you say about *BMX Action* magazine? This was widely considered to be the bible for anyone who has ever shod a set of Comp 3's. Riders still miss it, even today. I've even known people to have *BMX Action* parties, where old issues would be read cover-to-cover by all present. It deserved massive amounts of respect and was the epitome of the very essence of BMX in printed form. (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 1993)

BMX Action was the primary mediation of the BMX culture and the location of BMX's star system for a decade. According to *Ride (UK)*, “*BMXA* was the bible for many, many years and many household names in BMX today were launched through the glossy pages of *BMXA* during the mid eighties” (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2002: pg 165). These Pros were created and their stardom was sustained in *BMX Action* via the recurring column types that both asserted their (imitable) status and associated them with the products of the BMX industry. The October 1979 issue, for example, featured an article that combined elements from the profile and the Pro Bike Check columns: “(f)or all you equipment and fashion-conscious dudes, we bring you... Superstar Profile: Gary

Renteria” (*BMXA*, Oct. 1979: pg 26 – 27). (IMAGE #4-5) This two-page article featured a picture of Renteria, a picture of his BMX bicycle that was captioned with a list of precisely the components he was using (that is, a recipe for emulation and a shopping list), and a list of his sponsors (which both gave further exposure to the companies that supported him *and* legitimated his sponsored-status). The December 1979 issue contained an eight-page article entitled “The Complete Racer,” in which three such profiles (with the generic action photo, posed studio photo of bicycle, shopping list of components used, and list of sponsors) appeared. The copy could be read as having let the seams show: “(o)wners of BMX bikes have become highly equipment conscious, much like skiers or motorcycle motocrossers or fathers with their car. This is an awareness built on knowledge of quality, brand names, new innovations, weight, materials, methods of construction, etc...” (*BMXA*, Dec. 1979: pg 80 – 87). In an example of its actively working to create and promote new Pros, the August 1980 issue of *Bicycle Motocross Action* featured an article entitled “New Wave Superstars” which announced: “(l)adies and hombres, introducing BICYCLE MOTOCROSS ACTION’s picks for the sport’s New Wave Superstars. Look for these guys, they are going to be leaving some hefty footprints on 1980” (*BMXA*, Aug. 1980: pg 36). Again, it can be seen that this Pro-making process was hardly hidden from the reader: “(the) point of this article is to introduce a few of these guys to you, give you a few stats on ‘em, and show you what they look like” (*BMXA*, Aug. 1980: pg 36).

With the emergence of BMX freestyle Pros in the early 1980s, *BMX Action* began the process of creating a new star system for a new sub-market. A nine-page article in the June 1983 issue entitled “Top Pro Freestylers” began with a two-page colour picture

featuring seven riders. (IMAGE #4-6) Although pictured in their street clothes (as opposed to in their logoed uniforms), these riders were obviously grouped into their respective “trick teams”: R.L. Osborn, Mike Buff and Pat Romano of the BMX Action Trick Team, Bob Haro and Ron Wilton of the Haro Freestyle Team, and Bob Morales and Eddie Fiola of the MF team. The text clearly showed that Pro-creation was the goal:

Fiola, Morales, Osborn, Buff, Romano, Haro, and Wilton. These guys are the Board of Directors of the world of freestyling.

They are the innovators, the stylists; boldly going where no man has gone before. Establishing radical new dimensions of what is possible on a bike. (...)

They are as serious about what they do as the top professional BMX racers. Whether they are involved in physical conditioning, long hours of practice, secretly perfecting insane new moves, psyching up for a show, or putting it all together in an actual performance, they are fiercely intense.

These guys are the Mohammeds of BMX, going to the mountain so that later the mountain will come to all of us. They are spreading the gospel of BMX in places where unportable tracks and races cannot go.

And they are doing it in a highly professional manner. (*BMXA*, June 1983: pg 72)

Having appeared one year before the introduction of Wizard Publications’ all-freestyle magazine and six months before the aforementioned sudden expansion of the market which preceded the new publication, the article now seems to not only have been published for the Pro-creation and -maintenance function, but also as an ignition to the industry.

An example of how the editorial content of a single issue can be seen to maintain a Pro’s status and associate it directly with products could be found in the October 1984 issue of *BMX Action*. The cover photo featured BMX Action Trick Team member Mike Buff on his new candy-apple red Hutch Trick Star freestyle frame and his signature white

Mike Buff Z-Wheels. Within the issue, Pro emulation was clearly encouraged within the annual buyer's guide's "Freestyle Equipment" section, in which the wheels were shown with the caption: "(w)anna get tough like Mike Buff or build your own Buff-O-Matic repliscoot? Then you'll definitely want to check out a pair of these units..." (*BMXA*, Oct. 1984: pg 88). Buff's Hutch-branded frame was also featured in the buyer's guide: "(y)ou too can be a trick star and ride the same scoot as Buff the Fluff." (*BMXA*, Oct. 1984: pg 89).

One of the most interesting regular features in *BMX Action* was inaugurated in 1979. In that year, Bob Osborn introduced the Number One Rider Award, or NORA Cup. The NORA cup was voted on by the readers, and was thus a Pro popularity contest. Over the years, the awards expanded to include favourite team, bike, and eventually advertisement. In 1982, Osborn announced that there was to be an official NORA Cup label that would be available to the advertisers for promoting the fact that their Pro, team, or bike had won the award (*BMXA*, May, 1982: pg 10). Indeed, Daniel Boorstin might refer to this award process as a pseudo-event.⁶⁷ This tradition of the NORA Cup would be continued in Wizard's *Freestylin'* magazine, and later by *Ride (US)*, *Snap* and *TransWorld BMX* magazines.⁶⁸

As discussed in Chapter Two, Wizard's *Freestylin'* magazine emerged not at the advent of the practice of trick riding on BMX bicycles, but only when the industry was

⁶⁷ "Customers themselves seemed more effectively persuaded, more personally interested in being sold by a pseudo-event which in this fashion they themselves helped to create" (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 222).

⁶⁸ *Ride (US)* is now the steward of the prizes. The awarding of the NORA cup, now voted on by the Pros themselves rather than the magazines' readers (who kept voting the same people as winners each year), takes place, appropriately, at the annual Interbike tradeshow in Las Vegas.

ready to support such a publication (with advertising featuring freestyle components).⁶⁹

As such, the first issue of *Freestylin'* appeared in the summer of 1984, a few months after the expansion of investment in freestyle by the major BMX racing companies. (IMAGE #4-7) Andy Jenkins, who had won a drawing contest in *BMX Action* two years earlier,⁷⁰ was appointed by Bob Osborn to be the editor of the new publication. In the Editorial featured in the inaugural issue, Jenkins outlined what the reader could expect.

You're probably asking yourself, "So what's this magazine gonna be like anyway?" Well we're takin' FREESTYLIN' to the streets, to the parks, to the competitions ... wherever the primo freestylers are. Wherever the action is hot.

We're also makin' it informative. You'll see the latest and raddest tricks broken down in how-to articles. The latest in freestyle technological advances; the bikes, the equipment, the accessories. You'll hear the latest rumors and gossip in the world of freestyle, PLUS we'll be pushin' interviews and profiles of the sports celebs at ya (and there are a lot of you out there yet to be discovered). Phew, we're talkin' heavy duty here, spuds. (*Freestylin'*, Summer 1984: pg 4)

Not surprisingly, there was a focus on the "primo freestylers" and "celebs," and the "bikes, equipment, and accessories" (although, interestingly, these were not directly linked in the Editorial). A perusal of this issue's table of contents shows that although this was a new publication showcasing a relatively new practice, it was also business as usual: the aforementioned Editorial was followed by news section called "Graffiti" ("The latest poop in the world of freestyle"), a local riding-spot article entitled "Street Scene" that featured a look at the riders who gather at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, a standard, Pro-performed how-to column ("How To Do A 180 Rollback"), a profile of soon-to-be

⁶⁹ Indeed, it must be noted that Wizard published a book, *BMX Freestylin'*, two years before the release of the premiere issue of *Freestylin'*. Importantly, a book requires consumers who are interested in the practice to buy it, and not an industry to advertise in it.

⁷⁰ *BMXA*, June 1982: pg 25

Pro Brian “Blyther at Home” (which contained another how-to: “How To Do A 360 Tailspin”), a photo section labeled “Freestyle Focus,” a (nine-page) interview and bike test combination article entitled “Eddie Fiola and the GT Pro Performer: The Performers perform” (which, of course, directly associated a bike/product and a Pro), a second such (six-page) article that featured two Pros and their individual bike set-ups (recipes / shopping lists) using the same frame (“Mike Buff, Woody Itson, and The Hutch Trick Star”), and the requisite crazy photo on the last editorial page (“Last Bite”) (*Freestylin'*, Summer 1984: pg 3). As such, one can see that many of the Pro-creating and -sustaining editorial column types were in place from the very first issue of the first BMX freestyle specific magazine. In a bid to get the magazine into the hands of the desired audience of consumers, this first issue was sent to the subscribers of the magazine’s sister publication, *BMX Action*.⁷¹

As discussed in Chapter Two, *Freestylin'* was initially a quarterly publication. The magazine became a bimonthly periodical in March of 1985 (after three issues), and would appear monthly one year later beginning with the March 1986 issue. Like *BMX Action* before it (with regard to BMX racing), *Freestylin'* was considered to be the first and last word on all things freestyle. The international importance of the magazine was conveyed in an issue of *Ride (UK)*.

If *BMXA* was the bible for BMXers, then *Freestylin'* was the Koran for freestylers. On top of that, AJ, Lew and Spike Jonze were gods and definitely the most hardcore people ever known to mankind.

Freestylin' even grew in large proportions and at time was 160+ pages big, glorious layout, beautiful photos, and more. This was at the time when the sun shone out of

⁷¹ Meyer, *Dig*, Jan. / Feb. 2003.

Wizard's backside, their Torrance HQ was unquestionably the place to be and a rider magnet for the UK hardcore. (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 1993)

Indeed, the editorial staff of *Freestylin'*, Andy Jenkins, Mark "Lew" Lewman, and Spike Jonze (who would in the 1990s direct music videos for Weezer and the Beastie Boys and would earn an Academy Award® nomination for *Being John Malkovich*), were cult figures in the world of BMX freestyle. As these three were also skateboarders, skateboard content started to increase in the magazine (although it should be noted that infamous Pro skateboarder Tony Hawk made an appearance in the first issue of *Freestylin'*). As a matter of fact, the April 1986 issue (and many subsequent issues) featured a skateboarder on the cover. Perhaps frustrated by the constraints of working for a magazine that focused on only one activity, Wizard allowed the editors to put out one issue of *Action: The Mag* (1987) and seven issues of *Homeboy* (1987 – 1988) which featured BMX freestyle, skateboarding, and anything else that the editors found interesting (music, art). The editorial content in *Freestylin'*, meanwhile, began to push the idea of being "dual;" that is, riding both BMX freestyle and skateboards. Although this opened up the magazine to skateboard advertising, many have seen this move by the editors as having contributed to the "death of freestyle" in the late 1980s. Indeed, in an article entitled "The ten worst moments in freestyle" that appeared in the June 1993 issue of *Ride (US)* magazine, the second such event was listed as "2. Lew, Spike, and Andy get skateboards. *Freestylin'* puts skating in the mag every month. You didn't need to be Nostrodomus to see what happened next. Jacked" (*Ride (US)*, June 1993: pg 38). Jenkins would later admit his crime in a subsequent issue of *Ride (US)*: "...I'm not sure BMX would take me back after the heinous violation Lew, Spike, and I committed against it – killing off its brother, Freestyle, the sport..." (*Ride (US)*, Oct. / Nov. 1995: pg 6).

The collapse of the BMX industry (and the concomitant reduction in advertising budgets) in the late 1980s meant that it was no longer viable for Wizard to publish two independent titles. As recounted in *Ride (UK)*'s discussion of *Freestylin'* "(t)he bubble burst along with Wizard, and the magazine combined with *BMXA* to create *GO Magazine* around '90. On hearing this news, I almost topped myself" (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 1993). The two magazines were combined in November of 1989 to form *GO: The Rider's Manual*. Interestingly, the first three issues of the new magazine featured the logos of both earlier magazines (*BMX Action* and *Freestylin'*) on the cover, while the new logo would not appear until issue four. The interior, however, had been reorganized around the new BMX and freestyle focus. Mike Daily (of the Plywood Hoods, *Aggro Rag* 'zine, and later the editor of *BMX Plus!*) took over as editor from Mark Lewman in June of 1991, and discussed his intentions for the magazine in the "Vocal Point" Editorial column.

Being GO's new Editor-in-Chief has given me that same stoked feeling, which is being transfused into a 20" biking magazine with more enthusiasm and more substance than it had before. **"More stuff, less fluff"** is the light bulb burning in the thought bubble here, which means changes for the better will be a-happenin'. Such as...

More photos. Better interviews. More technical how-to-type articles which will cater to the beginners (the future) as well as the experts. Track drawings of the major races. This issue contains the first Official Bike Test Go has ever done, which will be a regular feature from here on into the Nineties. Our focus has basically shifted from format to *content*. Our aim is to use to its fullest what editorial and design space we have to work with every month.

VOCAL POINT will be a forum open to not only my views as the Editor-in-Chief, but to anyone who may have something important to voice about whatever. That means anyone – from "average joes" to famous Pros. That means YOU, the rider holding this issue right NOW.

Analyze out title again – **GO: The Rider's Manual** – and prepare yourself for the serious bikers Guidebook to BMX and Freestyle that you've been waiting for, and sorely deserving of. We're going *riding*. (*GO*, June 1991: pg 6)

Interestingly, Daily wanted to steer the magazine away from anything artistic and "cultural" (which was what the "Master Cluster" of Jenkins, Lewman and Jonze tried to do during their tenure) towards a manual or guidebook to the culture. That is, from a reflection of what one inside group saw as going on in the world of freestylers (i.e.; a focus on lifestyle, perhaps) back to the special-interest magazine as consumption guide model. *GO* hadn't featured a (debatably industry-serving) bike test in almost two years! How would the consumer know what to buy?

As industry-friendly as this new focus should have been, *GO* still managed to ruffle feathers. Indeed, in what would prove to be the final issue of the magazine, Chris "Mad Dog" Moeller's monthly column "Dog Bites" directly attacked the ABA BMX racing sanction, pledging to "...watch how much money I spend on the American Bicycle Association..." (*GO*, March 1992: pg 13). Paradoxically, this final issue of the magazine can also be seen to have been obsequious with regard to its advertisers, featuring sixteen pages of editorial coverage that served GT Bicycles, its most important advertiser (in the sixty-four page final issue, GT ran five pages of advertisements). A combination of a weak BMX market and the withdrawal of advertising support by the industry led to the magazine's demise. As Mark Noble summarizes for *Ride (UK)*, the magazine was still a favourite of the hardcore rider.

The cocktail of *BMXA* and *Freestylin'* although the previous editorial people had flown the nest; Mike Daily was now in charge, Brad McDonald was shooting, and Jeff Tremaine was art director [before moving on to *Big Brother*]. Plenty of soul and good stuff inside, and indeed things looked good for the skeleton that

remained from Wizard's original staff list. *GO* continued to fuel on the fire, only the industry didn't get it and pulled their money, hence it's now dead. (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 1993)

Appropriately, *GO* was memorialized by Chris Moeller in a special issue of his S&M Bikes' 'zine entitled *GOne: The Rider's Eulogy*:

GOne – The Rider's Eulogy might look like Wizard Publication's old 20-inch periodical, but it's not. This is issue #2 of DDHT, the Official Newsletter of the S&M Owners Group. We could have sat around like the rest of the world and whined over "GO's" demise, but we thought it would be better to make fun of how gay it was instead. (*Double-Diamond Hard-Tail*, No. 2: pg 2)

The 'zine used the same font types as *GO* (easily done, as Moeller was employed by the magazine until it ceased publication) and sophomorically altered the column names for the sake of parody ("Vocal Point" became "Vocal Pointless," "Artistic Statement" was changed to "Autistic Statement," "Random Disruptive Sequence" turned into "Random Dyslexic Sequence"). A column entitled "Erections" (formerly "Directions") explained "How To Run Your Own Magazine (Out Of Business)."

Since you're starting a BMX magazine, it's important to exclude "BMX" from the title. Including the letters B-M-X might give your publication some identity at the newsstand – a definite mistake. Memorable dead BMX magazine titles include: *Bicycles & Dirt*, *Freestylin'*, *GO – The Rider's Manual*, *The American Freestyler*, *Freestyle*, and perhaps the most generic title of all, *Homeboy*. It's helpful to include the word "free" in the title; doing so encourages newsstand readers to take your publication without paying for it, thereby insuring poor revenue. (*Double-Diamond Hard-Tail*, No. 2: pg 12 – 13)

The demise of Wizard publications shows the power of the advertisers with regard to special-interest magazines. Indeed, it is an extremely rare occurrence to witness the crossing of an advertiser by a BMX magazine. As such, magazines can be seen as the

puppets of the industries that they serve. Furthermore, special-interest magazines can be seen as complicit in the larger program of capitalism, in that “free” time and recreation can also be seen as organized through media and by industry. According to Adorno and Horkheimer,

By subordinating in the same way and to the same end all areas of intellectual creation, by occupying men’s senses from the time they leave the factory in the evening to the time they clock in again the next morning with matter that bears the impress of the labor process they themselves have to sustain throughout the day, this subsumption mockingly satisfies the concept of a unified culture which the philosophers of personality contrasted with mass culture. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972: pg 131)

The complicity of the magazines with the desires of the advertisers can be seen in the strategies hatched and employed by the staff of the magazines themselves. In an interview that appeared on roostbmx.com, former editor Steve Giberson described his time working for Bob Osborn at Wizard publications.

ROOST : Working for the mighty *BMXA* was every kids dream job. What was the atmosphere like working in the *BMXA* environment?

SG : It was pretty cool. All BMX all the time, and always trying to better the previous issue. It's always fun to be tapped into the nerve center of an industry. There were also some fun creative people to work with. Andy Jenkins, Spike, Lew, etc. The only bogus part was ... having a required amount of R.L. (Osborn) to put in every issue, stuff like that. I mean, I liked R.L., he and I were roommates for quite a while, but having recommended monthly allowances of coverage was a little weird.

ROOST : What circumstances lead you to leave *BMXA*?

SG : Long story. Oz had a "vision" of what the industry would be like in a few years. He used the motorcycle industry as a comparison, where there were originally many companies, including the European brands like DKW, Monarch,

Maico, Montesa, Bultaco, etc., plus the Japanese brands. He figured that BMX would narrow down to a few major players, and devised a plan. He went to four of the major companies, and told them that if they advertised a certain amount per issue, maybe 4-5 pages, that they would get the dominant editorial coverage. It was promised to them. Honestly, I wasn't too psyched about the idea, but I had to play along, it was his magazine. Anyway, the first issue came out, and it had a lot of GT in it. The next issue came out, and it had a lot of Hutch. All of a sudden, every other company is complaining, and it was all my fault. I don't think I was there much longer after that.⁷²

Osborn's "vision," then, was to serve the industry (which would best serve the interests of the magazine).

The power of the publisher and the editors at Wizard Publications was not always hidden from the reader, as the aforementioned instances of "letting the seams show" do attest. Although the link to serving the industry is very rarely made, the conscious star- or Pro-making by the editors (which ultimately serves this purpose) has appeared in the editorial content of the magazines. Perhaps this was most conspicuously accomplished in the Craig "gOrk" Barrette penned piece on his tenure as the editor of *BMX Action* which appeared in the "A Tribute To *BMX Action*" article in the April 1990 issue of *GO*. With regard to making new Pros, Barrette wrote

So I guess my plan of "reviving" BMX in the minds of the industry was simply to make it look rad. Bring in new faces. Make new stars. Expose the dedicated undergrounders who are the REAL soul of the sport. Make things fun again and not so "professional". Let there be unknowns on the cover – give everyone hope that they can "star" in the magazine.

⁷² Found at <http://www.23mag.com/mags/ba/ba85.htm>, Aug. 10, 2005, 5:21pm EST.

LESSON TWO IN EDITORSHIP: The magazine can make and break riders, but never try to do the latter (bad riders will break themselves). Give the readers new, competent, responsible, respectable heroes to idolize.

As it turns out, the LOCAL THRASHIN' articles introduced many now famous riders. "Zellwood U.S.A." (August 1986) was a turning point for Todd Corbitt. No one had ever heard of Chris Moeller until "So. Cal Scene" (June 1986). Also featuring the younger factory amateurs and keeping an eye open at all times brought good results besides helping them in their careers and sponsorships.

Interviews and Character Checks were always one of my favorite ways to "make" heroes. (*GO*, April 1990, pg 33)

Curiously, Chris Moeller (and others) took offence to this self-ascribed "star-making" power. In an interview entitled "Who Does Chris Moeller Think He Is?" which appeared in the June 1993 issue of *Ride (US)* magazine, Moeller (naïvely) attacked the man who had "discovered" him:

What happened between you and Gork? Weren't you guys friends at BMX Action?

Yeah, we were friends, and then ...I guess maybe we are still friends, I don't know. No, we're not friends at all. I don't like Gork, actually. I don't like Gork at all. Gork completely changed, I think, when he moved to Arizona. He turned into a fruitcake. He takes himself too seriously and thinks he's like responsible for guiding the direction of BMX. When in actuality, he's involved in BMX, but he doesn't know that much, he's not as important as he thinks he is. He's not holding "the reins" to the whole sport of BMX, like he thinks he is. It's really terrible. I started thinking he was kind of a fag when he wrote all that stuff when he left *BMX Action*, you know about "making and breaking people" and how it was the editor's job to "make or break stars," "make new stars." I don't think there are any real stars in BMX, but I think people get most of their success on their own merit – not off of "Gork's guidance." He's the magazine editor, it's the job of the magazine editor to cover what's going on, not "guide." You know, "create heroes," all that shit. It's a bunch of crap, I think. (*Ride (US)*, June 1993: pg 12)

BMX Plus! and American Freestyler: Hi-Torque Publications

BMX Plus! is currently the longest running BMX periodical publication, having appeared regularly since November of 1978 (founded by Scot Breithaupt and Jim Stevens, it was purchased by Hi-Torque Publications in 1983).⁷³ *Ride (UK)* recently summarized the general feeling about the periodical: “(n)ot quite as cutting edge as *BMX Action*, *Plus!* was for a more mainstream market...” (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2002: pg 165). *BMX Plus!* has always seemingly focused on the young teen-aged reader, and stays away from anything too controversial.⁷⁴ As Mark Noble explained in 1993,

On magazine racks, *BMX Plus!* is more at home amongst *Minitruck Monthly* and *3&4 Wheeler* than with bmx mags - it's from a big publishing company and the art director guy lays out all their magazines, so they all look the same – i.e. cheesy. Hi-Torque [publishers] brought in riders to edit the mag and give it cred, but it didn't work: the suits still pull the strings and the art guy still makes it look terrible [ex-editor Karl Rothe quit 'cause he hated him so much]. Ex-*GO* and nice guy Mike Daily is now editor, but it's still much the same thanks to the head honchos in the boardroom - pull out an issue from '84 and it'll look just like the latest one. Photos range from incredible to downright tacky. (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 1993)

Daisy / Hi-Torque Publishing Company, Inc. is a large publishing house that is responsible for many titles, including *Motocross Action*, *Dirt Bike*, *Dirt Wheels*, *Mountain Bike Action*, *3&4 Wheel Action* and *Crash 'N' Burn*.

Importantly, *BMX Plus!*, no doubt due to the diversity and strength of its publisher, was the only magazine from the 1970s and 1980s to continue past 1992

⁷³ Breithaupt left after the premier issue, which was the only one to carry the title *Inside BMX Plus!*.

⁷⁴ One notable exception is the April 2003 issue that challenged the entire industry over the movement to a new standard in bottom brackets.

(surviving the “death of BMX”). In a further example of the editors of BMX magazines moving between publications, Mike Daily (who was the editor of *GO* when it ceased publication) was brought in as editor as of the July 1993 issue. His assistant editor at the time, Mark Losey, would go on to be editor of *Ride (US)* for almost a decade.

In the 1980s, Hi-Torque was as prolific as Wizard with regard to putting out freestyle products. In addition to a series of videos (*Freestyle's Raddest Tricks* (1985), *Rad TV: The Sequel* (1986), *101 Freestyle tricks* (1987), and *101 Trix Part 2: Psycho Version* (1988)), the publisher released special issues such as *BMX Freestyle Action* in July of 1984, and *Rad Gallery Spectacular* (in July of 1985 and July 1986). The *BMX Plus! Buyer's Guide Spectacular* appeared annually in 1986, 1987, and 1988 (and sporadically since, including an issue in 1996). The *BMX Plus! Posterbook*, a publication featuring 10 large posters, appeared in August of 1987 (this special issue focused on Pro BMX racers and freestylers, and featured many full page colour, mini bios of these stars). A monthly freestyle focused magazine, initially called *Freestyle Spectacular* (1986 – 1987) before its rechristening as *American Freestyler* in August of 1987, lasted until October of 1988. According to the November 1988 issue of *BMX Plus!*,

We have good news and bad news this month. The **good news** is that *American Freestyler* staffers **Karl Rothe** and **Tony Donaldson** have joined the *Plus!* staff. The **bad news** is that we've stopped publishing *American Freestyler*. (...)

The decision to stop publishing *American Freestyler* was not an easy one to make. The circumstances that prompted the move were a nationwide dip in the popularity of freestyle, and the decisions by **Mike Collins** (of *American Freestyler*) and **Todd Britton** to leave California for new ventures. (*BMX Plus!*, November 1988: pg 8)

Much like at Wizard, although a full year earlier, the two publications were regrouped as one in the face of the BMX market depression.

Other American 1980s BMX Magazines

In addition to BMX racing magazines that are associated with their respective racing sanctions (the aforementioned ABA and the National Bicycle League or NBL) such as the *BMXer* (formerly *ABA Action Magazine*), *BMX Today*, *Bicycles and Dirt*, and *Total BMX*, at least two issues of *BMX Mania* were released in 1988, and one issue of Mike Daily's freestyle magazine *Shreddin'* (July 1985) appeared in the 1980s.

Ride (US) Publications

After the demise of *Super BMX and Freestyle*, *Freestyle*, *American Freestyler*, *BMX Action*, *Freestylin'*, and *GO: The Rider's Manual*, *BMX Plus!* was the only remaining newsstand BMX publication. From March of 1992 (the last issue of *GO*) until October 1992, *BMX Plus!* had a monopoly on the BMX and freestyle audience (and more importantly perhaps, the advertisers). Brad McDonald, a photographer for Wizard's *GO* magazine, found himself with few career options:

Before starting *Ride*, I was the part-time staff photographer for *GO Magazine* in 1991. I was 20 years old and was paid \$650 a month to shoot photos for the best BMX magazine-that was my dream job. I had been into riding since I was ten years old, and started shooting photos when I was 15. That was when I realized that I wasn't likely to make it as a pro rider. Working for a BMX magazine seemed like the next best career option, so I taught myself how to shoot photos. Unfortunately, *GO* went out of business seven months after I started there, so I was out of luck. The only remaining BMX magazine at that time wasn't very

good, so I knew there was a need for someone to make a better magazine. I figured it might as well be me, so *Ride* was born.

(www.23mag.com/mags/rus/rus.htm, Nov. 20. 2005, 12:30pm EST)

Although there was an effort made to include BMX racing (and attract the sport's advertisers), *Ride (US)* was a freestyle magazine from the outset (and the first to emerge since *Freestylin'*'s amalgamation with *BMX Action* to form *GO*). The forty-eight-page premier issue featured Pro dirt jumper Tim "Fuzzy" Hall on the cover, interviews with Hall and emerging star Chad Herrington, coverage of the B.S. contest in San Jose and the "King Of Concrete" contest from the UK (a contribution by *Ride (UK)*'s Mark Noble), and a review of a Cure concert by Mike Daily. (IMAGE #4-8) Once again, the patterns relating to column type and drawing from a small pool of contributors / editors can be seen to have continued.

In another interesting example of letting the seams show, Brad McDonald (B) discussed both his intentions with regard to the magazine and magazines' obligations to their advertisers and to their readers in an interview with veteran BMX racing Pros (and industry employees) Greg Hill (G) and Harry Leary (H).

B: What about the meeting at Hi-Torque (publishers of *BMX Plus!*)? (ed note: Greg Hill asked *BMX Plus!* to host a focus group with industry representatives to discuss the state of BMX. The owners of S&M, Hoffman, Standard, and Haro – among others – were not invited)

G: That meeting at Hi-Torque was simply to address a situation where they were running – and I don't want to slam Hi-Torque because they've made some changes – but they were running full page, two-page pictures of guys without helmets, without jerseys – without the stuff that all of us are trying to sell. The bottom line is that if you have a two-page spread from a company saying, "Buy our racing pants, and buy our helmets, they're really cool," and then on the next page you see a picture of a guy in cut off jeans and a t-shirt. You're basically

telling people that they don't need to buy these things, that they don't need to wear safety equipment.

B: I find it hard to believe that they're telling people not to wear stuff. I think that they're just going out and taking pictures of people who happen not to be using the stuff.

H: Which isn't right, and that's why they've changed. Now you won't find a picture, unless it's someone doing some flatland tricks, where a guy is not wearing a helmet and safety gear. Roland (Hinz), the publisher of Hi-Torque, has promised that there will not be any action depicted without helmets on.

B: But my point is, most people don't ride with helmets on, unless they are racing.

H: (...) It's a business thing again. They're selling magazines, other people are selling clothing, helmets, bikes – it's all a full circle, and we are in this together and there's no reason to slam each other.

G: (...) but how can we spend \$2500 on a full page ad for a new product that we have, when you're throughout the magazine showing the pictures and saying that it's alright to ride without safety gear?"

B: (...) I just think it's the job of a magazine to cover the sport, and just to show people how it really is. (...)

B: Do you think the magazines have a stronger obligation to their readers or to their advertisers?

G: I don't know, I would think the readers.

B: It seems like a magazine should try to come off from the same point of view as the reader, so that the reader can relate to the magazine.

G: The magazine's all about the readers, obviously.

B: Right, and by doing that, they'll create a market for the advertisers to sell their products to. (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 2003: pg 39)

McDonald's (and thus, *Ride (US)*'s) outsider status was apparent in this exchange. At the very least, in editing this interview and presenting it in the way he did, it was clear that he was positioning himself on the side of the riders, as opposed to on the side of the industry.

McDonald would serve as the magazine's editor (and, indeed, staff) until issue 20.

As he recalled after one hundred issues,

I was still in college studying business when I started *Ride*, so it wasn't a real company with an office or employees. I ran it out of my apartment bedroom. I did pretty much everything from typing in subscriptions to selling ads to shooting photos. I scanned photos at night at the computer lab at school (a cheap flatbed scanner back then was over \$1,500). I did the magazine out of my apartment for about three years before getting an office. People who came over usually thought it was a pretty strange setup. I slept on the floor, had no TV, the living room was filled with thousands of extra magazines, and the place was a complete mess. The only furniture I had was a chair and a desk with my computer on it. Looking back, it was a little strange, but I didn't even think about it at the time. Once I hired my first employee in California, I decided it was time to get an office. Considering I was about to get married, plus the odd hours that making a magazine requires, having people working in my apartment every day would not have been a good idea. (*Ride (US)*, September, 2004: pg 116)

Chris Hargrave served as editor from issue #19 to #31. After a brief three-issue stewardship, Ike Taylor would leave the magazine, making way for a six-year run for ex-*BMX Plus!* associate editor Mark Losey in April of 1998. Bimonthly for almost eight years, the resurgence in the popularity of freestyle allowed *Ride (US)* to publish monthly as of June 2000.

In an effort to serve the BMX racers and an emerging "trails" scene (and their respective industries' advertisers), McDonald introduced a second publication, *Snap*, in September of 1994. A hybrid of BMX racing and freestyle: trails riders were riding in backyard and vacant-lot dirt trails, (initially) free from competition, and curiously, without drawing on freestyle culture's arsenal of maneuvers. In what could be seen as a back-to-basics, grass-roots practice, the BMXers were riding dirt tracks without racing

each other, but also not trying to out-trick each other (i.e.; they were freeing themselves from freestyle). The focus was on “flow and style,” rather than speed or stunts.

Interestingly, *Snap* magazine also represented the first time that a BMX racing magazine was introduced after a freestyle magazine by a publisher. The magazine was edited by Steve Buddendeck for two years before being handed over to Keith Mulligan in 1996 (who currently serves as the editor of *Ride (US)*).

In 1996, McDonald launched a third periodical. A trade publication in the form of a tabloid newspaper, *BMX Business News* was targeted at the bicycle shop owners who buy the industry’s goods. According to McDonald,

We launched *BMX Business News* (...) to help the BMX industry grow. We publish it six times a year and send it out for free to bike shops. The goal is to help inform shops about what's going on in BMX as far as new products and general industry news. A lot of bike shop owners are older people who may not be into BMX, so we help them stay educated so their shop can stay current. A more informed bike shop owner hopefully translates into riders having a better selection of good products, and it helps the industry stay healthy financially.

(www.23mag.com/mags/bmxbusin/bmxbusin.htm, Nov. 20. 2005, 12:30pm EST)

Indeed, it can be seen that the original focus to serve the culture and the riders had shifted over the years to serving the business side of the equation.

If the debut of *BMX Business News* aroused conversations concerning “selling out” to business interests, then McDonald’s January 1998 sale of his titles to Times Mirror in 1998 (subsequently acquired by the AOL / Time Warner company in 2001) should have caused widespread panic in the hardcore BMX freestyle world. *Ride BMX*, *Snap*, and *BMX Business News* were added to the TransWorld family of magazines, which included *TransWorld Skateboarding*, *TransWorld Snowboarding*, *TransWorld*

Skateboarding Business, *TransWorld Snowboarding Business*, and *Warp* (a lifestyle magazine for boardsport enthusiasts). Varda Burstyn recounts an article in *The Nation* (June 3, 1996) that chart-grouped corporate players and the sports that they are linked to.

Time-Warner, for example, is one of the big players, with (to name only a minority of its corporate holdings) *Sports Illustrated*, *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, *People*, HBO Home Video, Little, Brown, and Time Life Books, The Atlanta Braves, World Championship Wrestling, the Goodwill Games, Warner Brothers motion pictures and Warner Brothers Animated, Hanna Barbera Cartoons, CNN, CNN Sports, and Turner Retail Group and Home Entertainment Licensing and Merchandising. (Burstyn, 1999: pg 116)

Burstyn goes on to illustrate that Time-Warner is linked to "...Seagrams, Capital Group of institutional investment managers and Houston Industries" (Burstyn, 1999: pg 118). In short, and indeed in less than six years (and exactly paralleling the path of freestyle), *Ride (US)* Publishing went from deep underground to absolute mainstream.

The most noticeable result of the sale to the magazine reader was that *Snap* was reworked into *TransWorld BMX Magazine*. (IMAGE #4-9) As such, the June 2001 issue featured a new logo and a new focus (looking to appeal to younger readers than its sister publication, *Ride (US)*). Unfortunately, with the most recent market slump in the BMX industry (roughly 2002 to present), two magazines from one publisher was (again) not deemed to be viable, and *TransWorld BMX* was discontinued after the January 2005 issue (according to a November 2004 report on AdAge.com, "*TransWorld BMX's* circulation was slightly below 50,000, while *Ride BMX's* is 51,000"). While some of the editorial staff moved over to *Ride (US)*, as mentioned above, Kevin McAvoy started (the now defunct) *Twenty* magazine with former Challenge Publications publisher Dave House in 2005.

Ride (US) has also released a selection of home videos over the years, beginning with 1997's *Thunder*, and followed by *Generation*, *Role Models*, *Through The Lens*, *Basics 2000*, *Industry*, *Turbulence*, *Parts*, *In The Life*, *Reincarnation*, *Momentum*, *Digital Interface*, *Drop The Hammer*, *Livin' in Exile*, and *Flipside*.

Other American BMX Magazines: 1990 to Present

The first BMX freestyle magazine to emerge in the 1990s to challenge *Ride (US)* and, to a lesser extent, *BMX Plus!*, was *Tread BMX Magazine*. Mirroring the backwards move of *Ride (US)* Publishing of following the publication of a freestyle magazine with the release of a title that covers BMX racing, *Tread* was published by the makers of *Props Video Magazine* (that first appeared in 1994). Only four issues were published, the last appearing in the Summer of 1997.

Pusher magazine, seemingly aimed at the lucrative “pothead freestyler” market, first appeared in the Winter of 1998. Hardly periodical, it sporadically reappears to the surprise of many (the latest issue was released in July 2006).

As no one had been using the name “BMX Action” since 1989, John Paul Rogers decided to resurrect the title (with the financial backing of Chris Moeller) in 2000. *BMX Action: Twenty Inch Rider's Guide* first appeared in early 2000, and lasted for ten issues before being forced to change its name by Bob Osborn in 2001. Renamed *Faction* for the January / February 2002 issue, the magazine continued to cater to the drunken, strip-club frequenting BMXer. In a November 2002 review of the magazine for his FatBMX.com online magazine, Bart de Jong writes

Faction has gone through some changes. It started out on the West coast as *BMX Action* magazine and the mag is now located on the East side of the USA in Philly.

This will make the "BadBoy of the BMX magazines" only better. Not that the content isn't world wide, but to have a magazine on top of it on the East is good. Riders there deserve coverage, contests need to be reported about and a whole lot of companies are based far away from the Golden State. If some ads can't run in other magazines, they'll find their space in *Faction*. It's the hardcore mag that *RIDE BMX* wanted to be in the beginning.

With JPR and Billy R. on the helm things won't get soft soon. Once an HDT member, always an HDT member. The mag is made by a bunch of drunks, for a bunch of drunks and apparently there are plenty of drunks around to read about the drunk stories every other month. Cheers to *Faction*, long live the mag.

(www.23mag.com/mags/faction/faction.htm, Nov. 20. 2005, 12:30pm EST)

The last issue of *Faction* was published for December of 2004.

Looking Glass, published by Denis Stancavich of Animal Bikes, lasted for a total of two issues between 2002 and 2003.

At a time when the BMX industry was experiencing a depression of sorts and BMX magazines had been struggling and folding, it was perhaps surprising that two new magazines appeared in 2005. The aforementioned H3 publication, *Twenty*, did not deviate too far from the generic BMX magazine, and folded within a year.⁷⁵ Pro freestyler John Parker and Pro skateboarder Paul Zitzer's *Sophisticated Rider*, however, seems to represent something new. The magazine, which focuses on BMX freestyle, Skateboarding and Freestyle Motocross (or FMX⁷⁶) Pros and their lifestyles almost exclusively, is unusual in that it seems to be written for other Pro riders. Indeed, the

⁷⁵ Only eight issues of *Twenty* were released. According to editor Kevin McAvoy, "(i)t's unfortunate that we couldn't have launched at a time when BMX magazine sales across the board were stronger; H3 is a startup, and doesn't possess the deep roster of other titles that larger publishers do, so they couldn't support *Twenty* until the market came back around" (<http://www.23mag.com/mags/twenty/twenty.htm>, July 3, 2006 4:30pm EST).

⁷⁶ In an ironic twist, the motocross riders have created a sport based on the emulation of BMX freestylers, but on motorcycles.

industry has yet to support the magazine via advertising. The magazine reads as a union newsletter, and as such, it will probably continue to struggle for advertiser support.

According to John Parker,

Sophisticated Rider is built by riders so the entire world can catch up and catch on. This is for the riders that buy a bike or board and enjoy it for a month, a year or a lifetime; for the guys and girls that used to ride; that never did and yes, even for the guy behind the desk wanting to sell you all more tires, wheels or hair gel. Here you can find insight into riders and the sports that drive them. Here you can find discussion of current events and happenings that shape the world we ride in. Soon there will be an open forum where sophisticated riders and writers can share thoughts, ideas and opinions. The goal is to open dialogue with the integrity and prosperity of action sports at heart. (www.sophride.com/about.html)

Unusual for a BMX magazine editorial mission statement, women are addressed, and there is a call for an “open dialogue.”

International Publications: Non-American BMX Magazines

The first significant Canadian BMX freestyle magazine was published within a twenty-four hour drive from Southern California, a simple trip north on the I-5 interstate highway. The first issue of *Chase BMX Magazine*, dated May / June 1999, was published by BMX freestyle Pro Jay Miron's World Bicycle Sports to serve the Canadian BMX scene (and of course, the associated industry). (IMAGE #5-6) Unique among BMX publications, *Chase* was published by a parent company that also owned a BMX component distributorship, a BMX mail-order business, and eventually a BMX freestyle events company (which would become its own separately incorporated company in 2003). Importantly, Miron also owns a separately incorporated company, MacNeil Bikes, that designs and markets a line of BMX freestyle components. Thus, although presented

as a hardcore, made-for-riders-by-riders publication, it can also be seen as a central part of the most integrated group of companies (under the same ownership) in the history of the culture. Indeed, as the magazine soldiered on without much (outside) industry support, the periodical came to serve as a catalogue (or “magalogue”) for World Bicycle Sports’ BMX distributor, Ten Pack.

Ken Paul (who had won a *BMX Plus!* trivia contest in June of 1986⁷⁷) was the logical choice to be the editor of *Chase*, as he had produced seventeen issues of the important Canadian ‘zine *Back Door* before 1992. Other staff members were also employees of World Bicycle Sports’ Ten Pack Distribution, Up North BMX Supply, and / or MacNeil Bikes, and the offices for all of these were housed in the same building. World Bicycle Sports would also become a contest / event planning company, and these “La Revolution” and “Metro Jam” events (featuring the Pros sponsored by MacNeil Bikes and Ten Pack) would be diligently covered in the pages of *Chase*. Due to a lack of industry support (the aforementioned lull in the BMX market, coupled with the reluctance of other distributors to advertise in a magazine so closely associated with their competition), *Chase* ceased publication in the fall of 2003.

Movement magazine (two issues, 2002 – 2003) failed to fill the void left by *Chase*. Receiving more industry support has been former *Chase* and current *Ride (UK)* Canadian correspondent David Hawthorne’s *R.E.D. (Ride Every Day) BMX magazine*. First released in the summer of 2004, the magazine is published biannually (once in the spring/summer, and again late summer/fall). As Hawthorne explained to www.23mag.com,

⁷⁷ *BMX Plus!*, June 1986: pg 9

RED BMX Magazine is the Canadian BMX art, life, and cultural magazine. We cover local and national BMX events coast to coast, contests, park openings, video premiers, BMX bands, and parties. We interview Canadian Pros, personalities, and local rippers. We cover the BMX scenes in Canadian cities, in scene reports and roadtrip articles. RED BMX Magazine presents exhilarating photography, including feature articles with the best underground and internationally accomplished Canadian BMX photographers. We are a voice of, and an insightful look into Canadian BMX. (www.23mag.com/mags/red/red.htm, Nov. 20, 2005: 12:35pm EST)

An interesting deviation from intention statements made by other editors was the commitment to “BMX art, life” and culture via covering events such as “park openings, video premiers, BMX bands, and parties.” Although this seems to be looking out for the interests of the readership over those of the advertisers or the industry, it could also be the case that Hawthorne refused to let the seams show.

After the announcement of the inclusion of BMX racing in the 2008 summer Olympics, *Pedal*, a Canadian cycling magazine, added a small regular BMX section. In the annual 2004 Buyer’s Guide issue, the “Slam BMX” section contained a total of four pages (*Pedal*, 2004, Vol. 18, No. 1).

The second most prolific region with respect to the publication of BMX magazines is the United Kingdom. The first BMX publication in the UK was called *BMX News*, a spin-off of *Motor Cycle News* that would become the weekly newspaper *BMX Weekly* before settling on *BMX Bi Weekly* (which ran from 1981 to 1985) (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2002: pg 165).

In 1984, the publishers of *BMX Bi Weekly* released the first issue of their *Freestyle BMX* magazine. Mark Noble, who worked for the magazine, discussed the name change to *Invert* in August of 1989:

We changed the name, when we relaunched the magazine and started **bringing in skateboarding as well**. We kinda mixed it up a bit, we had good skate photographers, the whole scene was changing, and it was so small, and people were getting into both. And the name *Invert* covered both, so it fitted. (*Ride (UK)*, August 2003)

Invert magazine, edited by Mark Noble (with international contributors Brad McDonald, Chris Moeller, Mike Daily, Bart de Jong, and Spike Jonze), was published until September of 1992. In October of 1992, *Invert* ditched the skateboarding and became *Ride BMX Magazine* (the same month that the same title was first used for Brad McDonald's American publication). (IMAGE #4-10) According to Noble,

We launched *Ride BMX Magazine* in summer 1992, because we just wanted to grow a pure BMX magazine. It made sense - times change. It's not called *Ride UK* though - that is just the nickname people give it to differentiate it from the American version of *Ride BMX*. The proper name is *Ride BMX Magazine*... and since then the magazine has not stopped growing. (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 1993)

As of issue #74 (February, 2004), the magazine has been released roughly every six weeks (or nine issues per year). *Ride (UK)* has also produced home videos: 2002's *True, Rear Wheel Drive*, 2003's *Cassette*, and most recently *No Front Teeth*.

A contemporary of *Freestyle BMX* magazine, *BMX Action Bike* was published between 1982 and 1987. This publication morphed into *RAD* magazine after May of 1987, adding skateboarding to the mix (akin to Wizard's *Freestylin'*). According to Mark Noble,

some blame this magazine for slamming BMX into the doldrums due to its influx of skateboarding in the late 80's. Nick Phillip nudged his way and added a lot of life and colour into a previously stale mag, but gave himself 3 or 4 covers in the process, launched *Anarchic Adjustment*, and [along with *Freestylin'*] made being dual [i.e. skating and biking at the same time] cool. At it's peak they claimed a

circulation of 100.000 plus, but then it sunk, turned into *RAD* magazine, ditched the biking and the rest is history. It was never really that good anyway. (*Ride* (UK), Dec. 1993)

Dig magazine was first released in Northern Ireland in 1993 (its offices are now based in Scotland). Reflecting a lack of stability for the publication, by 2000, the “periodical” had only reached its twelfth issue. By the end of 2005, approaching its fiftieth issue by sticking to a nine-issue per year schedule (more issues in the summer than in the winter), the editors of the magazine decided to pull back (perhaps reflecting the lull in the market). According to a November 17, 2005 press release authored by editor Brian Tunney, this move would be beneficial to the readers and the advertisers.

After completing two years under a 9 issue per year cycle, Dig BMX Magazine has recently announced plans to move into a bi-monthly production schedule for 2006. Some might say this is a bad thing, but we see it as a very good thing for all parties involved. Wanna know why? Keep reading.

For our readers, this means stronger, exclusive writing and photography, detailed and in-depth coverage of riders and original artwork that isn't restricted by release dates and what everyone else is doing. The shift also affords us improved production for each issue, with full-color presentation, added pages of content, new departments and more. In the simplest terms, we spend more time perfecting each issue for our readers. That's good, right?

For our advertisers, this means greater exposure time on the shelves, increased pass-along readership, a manageable buying schedule and better positioning in a magazine where readers are interested in seeing the ads as well as the editorial.

Simply put, you get more bang for your buck. (<http://www.digbmx.com/>, Nov. 17, 2005, 5:00 pm EST)

As it was written, the paragraph explaining to the readers the benefits of this change can be seen as both a justification and a plea for understanding (“...right?”). The relatively well-composed rationale offered to the advertisers, however, perhaps reflected that this

move to fewer issues annually was in actual fact a business decision (as opposed to improving the content for the readers). Again, it was interesting that a magazine was letting the seams show to their readers (that the service of the advertisers was of at least equal importance).

Other UK-based BMX magazines that have ceased publication include *BMX Biker* (first released in 1983, a monthly periodical that lasted for at least eleven issues, including a special freestyle issue: *The A–Z of Freestyle*), *BMX Grind* (one issue in 1996), *BMX Now* (five issues over two years beginning in 1991), *Official BMX* (the “father” of *BMX Action Bike*), *BMX Racer + Freestyle* (1984 – 1986), and the recently deceased *BMX Rider* (2002 – 2004).

Australia is the home to two current publications. The first issue of *BMX Express* appeared on Australian newsstands in June of 1999. *20/20 BMX* magazine released its first issue during the summer of 1999.

“Peripheral” international publications, then, can be seen as emerging and existing in reaction to the “central” publications located in the United States (or more specifically, in Southern California). These publications serve their local / national scenes while also mediating (and drawing legitimacy from) the distant American scene.⁷⁸ This is especially clear with regard to the creation and sustenance of local Pros (which serves the localized BMX industry), and the employment of the internationally renowned Pros (which legitimates the publications themselves and works to elevate the local Pros by

⁷⁸ In their article concerning the cultures of skateboarding (in California) and windsurfing (in the UK), Wheaton and Beal explain that the “...niche magazines served a variety of purposes but, in particular, they informed readers about the (local and global) sports subculture and were important ‘membership documents’ for the wider community” (Wheaton and Beal, 2003: pg 161).

association).

Editorial Content Types

Thirty years after the publication of the first BMX periodical, BMX freestyle magazines continue to use the same generic editorial columns in their mediation of the culture and in the creation and maintenance of Pros. These regular, recurring column types are not unique to the culture, of course, and were almost certainly inspired by the periodicals that served the culture and industry that BMX originally emulated: motocross. Indeed, these columns are most likely a part of all special-interest magazines. A short list of such columns would include the *cover* of a given magazine, a *news* column, *profiles* of up and coming stars, *interviews* with current stars, and in-depth *analyses of the equipment* that such stars use in practicing that which they have earned their status within the culture. The significance of such editorial coverage (as opposed to advertising) in the career of the star is addressed by Richard Dyer in *Stars*.

The importance of publicity is that, in its apparent or actual escape from the image that Hollywood is trying to promote, it seems more 'authentic'. It is thus often taken to give a privileged access to the real person of the star. It is also the place where one can read tensions between the star-as-person and her/his image. (Dyer, 1998: pg 61)

As such, editorial coverage in special-interest magazines is important to both the star's career and to those that have financial stake in her or his career. Corporate advertising does indeed contribute to a star's image, but it is the "publicity" or editorial content of special-interest media such as magazines that "seems more 'authentic'." Of course, a distinction needs to be made between stars and their respective images. With regard to cinema, Dyer uses the phrase "a star's image's career" to "...emphasize the fact that we

are talking about a film star as a media text not a real person...” (Dyer, 1998: pg 63).

What one actually finds with regard to stars in media texts such as special-interest magazines, then, are “constructed personages” or star images (Dyer, 1998: pg 97). These star (or Pro) images are created and sustained within special-interest magazines’ recurring generic editorial columns and are employed by the stars themselves, the advertisers, and the magazines themselves, and are offered for the consumption of readers.

The Cover

In the culture of BMX freestyle, there is no greater publicity or “coverage” that a Pro can receive in a magazine than appearing on its cover.⁷⁹ In addition to the honour itself, an appearance on the cover both increases a Pro’s status in the culture (cultural capital) and earns him contingency money from sponsors (especially if the companies’ respective logos are visible). To maximize the potential contingency money, Pros logo or sticker their bicycles in such a way that the maximum number of sponsor logos will appear from any photo angle. For example, we would expect to find stickers on the sides of the frame, but as these may not be visible from particular angles, it may be in the Pro’s best interest to strategically locate the stickers under the frame, on the inside of the forks, or on the rims between the spokes. This strategy holds for all contingency-awardable

⁷⁹ The medium of the videocassette has increased in importance over time, and may have indeed supplanted the magazine as the most influential medium with regard to BMX freestyle in recent years. The phenomenon of the video magazine, best exemplified by the Props series that began in 1994, combines the benefits of video with the punctuality and ritual components of a periodical. Still, getting one’s picture on the cover of a BMX magazine is a more favoured honour than being featured in a BMX freestyle video.

media coverage (in a magazine, this means all photo opportunities, including those within news sections, interviews, event reports, and Pro Bike Checks, as well as those that are featured in photo sections and on posters).

The appearance on the cover of a BMX magazine might lead to further editorial coverage (usually a head-shot and a mini-interview), as some magazines have featured a regular column devoted to whoever gets the cover shot (*BMX Action*, *Ride (US)*).

News

The news column has always been a central part of BMX magazines, and one of the chief ways in which Pro image careers are constructed and mediated. The primary focus on the Pro with regard to the news section seems to be on sponsorship. This most often takes the form of “Rider X just got picked up by Generic Clothing,” or conversely “Pro X was recently dropped from the Name Brand Bikes team after three years and is currently shopping for a new frame sponsor.” As Jane Gaines explains, with regard to a 1943 article in *Motion Picture*,

“Crazy Contracts of the Stars” ... bridges the gap between the life of the star and the life of the fan and at the same time holds out the star’s exoticism and specialness, without which there would be no justification for the institution of stardom. (Gaines, 1991: pg 147)

As such, the news section also reports on injuries to Pros, the weddings of Pros, and any other bits of information that are fit to print and might be entertaining. An example of a Pro being directly associated with a product in the news section might take the form of a “spy” report that he is currently testing a “top secret” prototype. This, of course, can be seen as the classic “news leak”, which Boorstin characterizes as “...a pseudo-event par

excellence...” which, “(i)n its origin and growth, ... illustrates another axiom of the world of pseudo-events: pseudo-events produce more pseudo events” (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 31). The important thing, as discussed in Chapter One, is that there appear to be novel news content each month (if there were not, a subsequent magazine would not be needed, and the culture would seem stale). It is not the content or quality of the news that is important, then, but rather that a cycle of news appears periodically and ritualistically.

Profiles

The profile usually features a young, up-and-coming rider or an emerging Pro. Much shorter than a full-length interview, the profile is most often presented in the form of a mini-interview or as a quick paragraph written by an acquaintance. The overall tone of the profile tends to be that of “watch out for this guy, he’s going places!” It most often consists of the aforementioned text, an action-shot, and a candid “chill”-shot or a posed head-shot. The perfunctory purpose of the profile may be to introduce the new “hot guy” or future Pro to the cultural consumers, but perhaps it can also be seen as a first step in the magazine’s long-term commitment to build stars, and as the (ritualistic) proposal of new candidates for stardom.

The Pro Interview

For most BMX freestyle Pros, the interview is something that is earned over time: a sort of reward for paying one’s dues. The Pro Interview is usually referenced on the cover of the issue that it appears in (“Rider X Interview”), and is often promoted in previous

issues of the magazine (“Next month: our interview with Rider X!”). The interview itself is generally seven- to twelve-pages in length, and the text (the interview itself) is often interspersed within and intersected by several pictures and photo sequences of particular spectacular maneuvers. The interview usually begins with an introduction, often by another Pro, which adds to the process that already has a legitimating air similar to that of the knighting of an accomplished warrior (or perhaps, the conferring of an honorary degree).

As discussed in Chapter One, the interview is novel content that can be inserted into any issue. That is, it is new, and it may make news, but it might be described as a pseudo-event. Nevertheless, the BMX magazine interview can be seen as an important part of a larger Pro-making system of celebrity construction and maintenance that ultimately serves the interests of the companies that are associated with him. Indeed, in addition to the multitude of corporate logos that appear on the Pro and his bicycle in the pictures that populate the feature, almost every BMX magazine Pro interview ends with the interviewer giving the subject the opportunity to give thanks to those that have helped him get to this level (i.e.; worthy of an interview), and the riders’ sponsors are always listed (“Bob at Generic Bikes has always had my back”).⁸⁰

Pro Bike Checks

Although the Pro Bike Check has been a feature within BMX magazines from the outset, this column type has recently become a prominent and popular part of the publications. This feature can be seen to be part news, part profile (of the bicycle), and

⁸⁰ Of course, the fact that a BMX freestyler has a list of sponsors works to legitimate his status as a Pro, which again works to (cyclically) benefit the companies.

part shopping list. Indeed, it can be seen to bring together several column types, and cuts to the chase. Pro Bike Checks are the most transparent of the columns with regard to the association with Pros and product. That is, the Pro Bike Check is the most direct means of positioning the Pro as both worthy of emulation and as imitable.

In a sense, the Pro Bike Check can be seen as a profile of the Pro's bike. Indeed, this type of column also may feature an action-shot and a head-shot (in addition to the multiple photos of the bicycle and its constituent components), with the mini-interview with the Pro of the profile being replaced by a sort of interview with the bike, or with the Pro about his bike. The components are listed individually, providing a shopping list to allow the reader / consumer to gather the parts necessary to approximate the Pro's bicycle set-up. This list often ends with a listing of "Custom Modifications" that both allows the Pro to show a measure of individuality ("I cut two inches of each side of the bars, and trim my axles on the left side. I run 95psi in the front tire and 110psi in the rear. The '80s purple dice valve caps were found in a shop in Pennsylvania, and were a gift from my girlfriend."), and upgrades the shopping list to a recipe, facilitating the exact reproduction of a Pro-replica bicycle. Close-up shots of the custom modifications or prototype components are common. In a recent *BMX Plus!* issue, a two-page spread featuring six Pros and their bikes appeared documenting the special bicycle set-ups used for ESPN's annual X Games (the biggest event of the year). (IMAGE #4-11) Pro freestyler Alan Cooke was pictured with his bicycle, wearing his heavily logoed helmet. Discussing his particular set-up, the magazine turned a statement into a question: "(a)s with most riders at the event, complete new frames, parts and decals are a must to project some level of, professionalism?" (*BMX Plus!*, Dec. 2005: pg 58 – 59). Interestingly, while still

seemingly struggling to believe that the culture had gotten to the level where “professionalism” was a consideration, this statement also defined exactly how one should be or act professional (new frames, parts and decals for the most important event of the year).

CHAPTER FIVE

Chase BMX Magazine

This chapter, the first of three analytical ones focusing on individual magazines and their Pro-creating and -maintaining editorial content between the Spring of 1999 and the Fall of 2003 (i.e.; the period within which *Chase* was available), focuses on the nineteen issues of *Chase BMX Magazine* that were published in Canada by SuperPro⁸¹ Jay Miron's World Bicycle Sports. *Chase's* story can be read as one of integration. Indeed, what distinguished *Chase* was that it was owned by the proprietor of both a BMX bicycle brand and a BMX distributorship that were served by the magazine's purposeful promotion of these companies' interests. Furthermore, *Chase* can be seen to have been played a central role in the Canadian BMX freestyle star system. As discussed above, the BMX freestyle Pro can be seen as the currency within such systems. The analysis of the editorial content featuring particular Pros shows that their mediated Pro images were used to particular ends to serve the magazine and the owner of the magazine's interests. In this chapter, *Chase BMX Magazine* is examined, specific recurring editorial column types within the magazine are discussed with regard to their roles in the building and maintenance of Pro BMXers' image careers, and the function of *Chase's* editorial content in the creation and sustenance of particular Pro image careers over time is addressed. Importantly, a secondary goal of the analysis is to confirm or challenge the notion that the publication operated merely as a catalogue for particular interested parties.

⁸¹ Like a "superstar," a SuperPro is at the very top of his field. Although this group would have been limited to the "Fab Four" in the early 1990s (Mat Hoffman, Jay Miron, Dennis McCoy, and Dave Mirra), membership opened up during the X Games era to include many (but not all) others.

Historically, special-interest and lifestyle magazines were not actually founded or created by advertisers themselves (Leiss et al., 1990: pg 106). As such, the Canadian publication *Chase BMX Magazine* can be seen as a modern exception (although, undoubtedly, not the sole one). *Chase*, which was once confused by *Ride (UK)* as *Jay's BMX Magazine*⁸², was first published in the spring of 1999 by World Bicycle Sports. This incorporated company, founded by Canadian BMX freestyle Pro Jay Miron, also served as the parent company of Ten Pack Distribution, (the also now-defunct) Up North BMX Supply mail-order company, and (the now separate) Metro BMX Jam events company during the magazine's four-and-a-half year run. Miron continues to serve as the president of World Bicycle Sports, Metro BMX Jam, and MacNeil Bikes, a BMX freestyle brand founded in 2000 (MacNeil is Miron's mother's maiden name). The magazine, then, was published by a company whose other companies could advertise within it, and whose president also served as the president of a separate BMX freestyle bicycle brand that could also exploit the opportunity to reach the Canadian consumer. Indeed, fatbmx.com's Bart de Jong explained in his review of the magazine (within which he gave the periodical three out of five stars) what he felt was a prime motivation for the magazine's publication:

What do you do when you have a BMX business and need to spread the word? Start a magazine. World Bicycle Sports (Jay Miron) has published CHASE BMX magazine for a while now. Also Chase BMX magazine is free of charge, we like free stuff. Ten Pack Distribution (Jay Miron) is distributing the magazine to bike shops all over Canada. The content is based on everything that is going on in Canada (BMX-wise), or about Canadians representing somewhere else. Ken Paul (Jay's friend) is responsible for the biggest part of the full colour magazine. It has

⁸² *Ride (UK)*, April / May 1999: pg 37.

a fresh lay-out and covers everything from racing to freestyle. Although you could see this magazine as Ten Pack's quarterly promo catalog, I say praise the ones who put back into the sport! Fuckin' ey right!

(<http://www.23mag.com/chase/chase.htm>, Mar. 1, 2005, 8:20pm EST)

Importantly, de Jong (an old friend of both Miron and *Chase* editor Ken Paul) was able to both point out that the magazine was somewhat tainted (as Ten Pack's quarterly promo catalogue) and imply that this was acceptable as long as it was the riders who were doing the exploitation. This reflects a rider-owned ideology that pervades the culture and contains at least two presumptions: 1) if business is going to be a part of BMX culture, then it is the riders that should profit from the process, and 2) the riders can be trusted to do the right thing by the culture. Indeed, in an interview in *Ride (US)*, Miron was quoted as saying that "...the magazine just seemed like the right thing to do. You need a good magazine to keep people informed" (*Ride US*, Oct. 2000: pg 75).⁸³ While Miron may have had good intentions with regard to the publishing of a Canadian BMX magazine, this statement could also be seen as an example of strategic spin control and as an attempt to position the veneer of a gift economy (publishing the magazine for the Canadian riders) over the true motivations (organizing a Canadian market for the BMX industry).

The rider-owned ideology was perhaps best displayed in *Chase* in an article that appeared in the Spring 2002 issue entitled "Who Cares? What's up with the current state of BMX: A discussion with Robbie Morales, Ian Morris, and Jay Miron" (*Chase*, Spring 2002: pg 26 – 29). According to Miron, "(t)he good magazines right now are the rider-owned magazines. The good distributors are the rider-owned distributors... The good

⁸³ Curiously, Miron seemed to be hiding his ownership in the magazine in the interview, asserting that he merely "...put the money up to help my friend start *Chase BMX Magazine*..." (*Ride US*, Oct. 2000: pg 75).

companies are rider owned...” (*Chase*, Spring 2002: pg 28). The article, which was the most blatant example of ideological propaganda that the magazine exhibited in its run, could be seen to be taking the Pro-making and -sustenance function of the publication to the next level: that is, to the point of using the cultural capital of the Pros to legitimate both the businesses they ran, and more generally, the rider-owned ideology that served these businesses. The introduction of the article framed the interview that follows.

This is a great time, probably one of the best times to be riding a BMX bike. We’re getting the legitimacy we deserve on all fronts, parks are being built left and right, and finally, there are lots of companies out there producing quality bikes without compromises. Not only that, we’re all seeing a lot more riders involved with bike shops, distribution and contests. Three guys that fit the bill to a “T” would be Ian Morris, Jay Miron and Robbie Morales. All three of these guys are still riding harder than ever, taking part in contests, running their respective companies and helping BMX into its new direction. (*Chase*, Spring 2002: pg 26)

This is of course related to a discourse of authenticity or “keepin’ it real”. According to Pierre Bourdieu,

‘Sincerity’ (which is one of the preconditions of symbolic efficacy) is only possible – and only achieved – when there is a perfect and immediate harmony between the expectations inscribed in the position occupied ... and the disposition of the occupant. (Bourdieu, 1993: pg 95)

The article in question could be seen to have been an exercise in asserting the sincerity of the Pro / business owners, which may have (strategically) worked to legitimate their power within the culture / field. In short, it is implied that the reader can trust these individuals to use their power to steer the culture because they are Pros (the highest level reachable within the culture for participants) and they are sincere (that there is harmony between the expectations of the position occupied by the Pro and his outlined disposition

/ intentions).

Interestingly, *Chase* was offered for free to riders / readers / consumers as of the third issue. Although originally offered as a bimonthly publication, editor Ken Paul announced in the Fall 1999 issue a shift with regard to the periodical frequency of publication and the reduction (removal) of the cover price: “(w)ell, this is our third issue and we here at *Chase* have decided to scale down to a quarterly publication. Not only that, we have decided to keep this magazine **free** indefinitely” (*Chase*, Fall 1999: pg 7). Importantly, catalogues are also usually free. Second, as this announcement could be seen to have been the façade of a new strategy of survival independent of any desire on the part of the editor to give away the publication, this could be seen as advertising a “free lunch” (and as reflective of a gift economy as outlined above). These strategic moves on the part of the publishers of the magazine can be seen as adjustments to the realities of the local, national market that the magazine served. That is, a bimonthly magazine demands a larger annual advertising expenditure by companies, and altering distribution practice by giving out the magazine through bicycle shops (those that are customers of Ten Pack Distribution) both focuses efforts on the desired consumers and superficially increases circulation. Indeed, if seven thousand copies were produced and distributed to shops, and there was no incentive for the shops to return back issues for a refund, the magazine could tell its advertisers that the circulation was perhaps higher than it truly was.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ The strategic reduction of cover price by magazine publishers is not a recent phenomenon, however. As Leiss et al. recount, the aforementioned *Munsey's Journal* was “...one of the first to exploit the dynamic relation between advertising and magazines. In 1893, its price was reduced to ten cents a copy and one dollar (formerly three) for a year's subscription. The result of this pricing was a fantastic increase in

For the first eleven issues of *Chase*, the average number of copies printed of each issue was seven thousand. Starting with the Winter 2001 issue, 4000 copies of *Chase* became available in both the UK and the US via the (then) Ian Morris-owned Seventies Distribution in the UK and Tip Plus Distribution in the US. Importantly, these BMX component distributors also handled the Jay Miron-owned BMX freestyle line, MacNeil Bikes (*Chase*, Winter 2001: pg 12). During this time, approximately twelve thousand copies of each issue were printed.

It can be seen that a central goal of World Bicycle Sports' *Chase BMX Magazine* was to create a Canadian star-system of Pros that could be exploited by Canadian distributors. Indeed, it was in the interest of such distributors to have these (relatively) local, national Pros linked with the brands that they represent. These Pros might get exposure outside of the Canadian market (via the distribution of *Chase* through UK and US distributors), but this was secondary to the need to create and sustain a Canadian Pro-system that could be employed by the Canadian BMX freestyle industry (of which Ten Pack was and continues to be a large part). This peripheral, somewhat independent scene / market can be seen as similar to that which Jackie Stacey describes with regard to the British film industry in relation to Hollywood.

For audiences in Britain, the Hollywood star system was in another league from the British film industry. Whilst stars did exist and were used to sell films in the British industry, they did not function on the same scale as the Hollywood stars. (Stacey, 1994: pg 108)

Although there has historically been some overlap (both with Canadian Pros such as Miron being used internationally to sell goods, and international stars being employed to

circulation and a flood of ads" (Leiss et al., 1990: pg 101).

move goods in Canada), the Pros featured in the American magazines (such as *Ride (US)*) are seen as the international stars. *Chase*, via its Pro-creation and -sustenance work, would anoint relatively local, national Pros to be employed by the Canadian BMX freestyle industry.

In Canada, *Chase* was distributed freely to bicycle shops that had accounts with Ten Pack Distribution. It featured advertisements for Miron's bicycle company, MacNeil, and for most of the product lines that Ten Pack distributed. Furthermore, much of the editorial content focused on the Ten Pack sponsored Pros and the products used by them. In sum, the magazine can be seen to have been a well-integrated catalogue for World Bicycle Sports, its companies, and the companies that its distributorship represented. Importantly, other Canadian distributors found this integration to be problematic, and their support for the publication was inconsistent. It is perhaps fair to ask if the periodical ultimately failed to serve the (outside) advertisers' needs.

Chase was published until the Fall of 2003, its nineteenth issue. In the end, as other Canadian distributors chose not to advertise the brands they carried and riders / writers outside of western Canada failed to support the magazine with editorial submissions (stories and photographs), *Chase* was left as merely a catalogue for Ten Pack Distribution that focused on primarily on the Western Canadian scene.⁸⁵ This, cyclically, discouraged outside support. Although the magazine did (in my opinion) seem to have the best intentions of serving the culture (consisting of both the riders and the industry), ultimately the good intentions of the editor and publisher were not enough in the face of

⁸⁵ Although it is not unheard of for a company to invest in a catalogue to represent its products, a slick, quarterly newsstand-quality publication proved to be too much of an expense.

lack of advertising support and the resulting financial strain on World Bicycle Sports. In short, the editorial content (that could be seen as the “free lunch” in exchange for the readership’s attention) only existed to sell its audience to the advertisers, and as the advertisers were not buying this audience commodity, the magazine folded. Editor Ken Paul posted on the magazine’s website the stated rationale for the periodical’s demise.

It was always my dream to do this, and to have a dream fulfilled, no matter how far fetched it may seem is always the greatest reward. It goes with a little bit of sadness that this is the last issue of Chase. It’s been about four and-a-half years, and I figured I’d get out of here while the going is good... sort of good. The mounting debt of producing this thing (which is in the tens of thousands each year), the politics, and the sleepless nights have finally forced me (and everyone involved) to make a decision. (...)

Sure, there are those who will never really understand and never support it, and that’s fine. Without them, we probably never would have progressed. I’m not here to bitch and moan about having to fold my little baby, I’m just here to say goodbye and to say thanks. In the end, we just can’t afford the cash to keep Chase afloat, and I’m forever grateful to Jay Miron and everyone else at Ten Pack Distribution. I believe we’re leaving behind a scene that has prospered and has come to its own, and it’s time to move on. (*Chase*, Fall 2003: pg 14)

The saving grace seemed to be that the scene has been established, and perhaps that the Pros had been created and were in place. However, for all of the talk of doing it for the scene, an editorial by *Chase* webmaster Chris Young implied that the bottom line for the demise was financial: “(s)pecial thanks to Jay Miron for keeping Chase going as long as he did—you can only lose money for so long before you have to pull the plug” (*Chase*, Fall 2003: pg 15). Thus, in the end, despite any and all best intentions, the editors let the financial “seams” show. Indeed, in an article written by former *Chase* (and current *Pedal*)

contributor Colin Field, editor Ken Paul explained how the magazine contributed to both the riders and the industry.

“Chase brought a voice to all the BMXers out there, and it provided a voice for all the BMX companies who wanted to get involved with the Canadian scene,” says Paul. “It brought the whole Canadian BMX scene together and helped elevate some riders to professional status. It helped scenes grow, it even helped businesses grow and it gave a lot of writers and photographers a place to showcase their work.” (Field, <http://www.echowekly.com/printer.php?storyid=616>, May 8, 2006 at 5pm)

Paul was quite aware, then, that *Chase* played a significant role in the Canadian BMX freestyle culture. Not only did he acknowledge the magazine’s role in the creation and sustenance of Pros, but he also took credit for (and thus implicitly acknowledged the power of) the publication with regard to the establishment of national and local scenes (and thus markets), helping the Canadian BMX freestyle industry, and providing writers and photographers with opportunities to publish their work. As successful as this may have been, however, Paul was not optimistic with regard to the viability of a BMX freestyle magazine in Canada post-2003.

“I don’t want to sound too morbid when I say this, it just seems like the scene can’t support a magazine right now. A Canadian BMX magazine would have to look to outside sources for advertising dollars and support, whether it be foreign BMX companies, or non-BMX companies. It’s definitely a hard go. A Canadian BMX magazine would have to be a pretty tight ship in order to survive in today’s world.” (Field, <http://www.echowekly.com/printer.php?storyid=616>, May 8, 2006 at 5:00 pm EST)

The time period of analysis for this project is defined by the length of publication of *Chase BMX Magazine*. An implication of this is that such a publication was only

viable between the Spring of 1999 and the Fall of 2003. Indeed, the BMX industry did peak during this time, and has struggled to reset itself since 2002. This begs the questions: Has such a publication been viable since 2003? Was such a publication viable before 1999? Indeed, was the magazine truly viable during its four-and-a-half year run?

Intentions

Although one could argue that the intentions of the publishers of such a periodical are not ultimately important for a project that is examining how it functions (irregardless of intentions), as stated above, I do believe that the *Chase BMX Magazine*'s staff and publisher did indeed have the "best intentions" before and during the magazine's run. Examples of editorial content that could be seen to serve the riders / readers as opposed to directly serving the advertisers / industry include a how-to article on wheel building (*Chase*, Spring 2002: pg 46 – 48) and a "Park Etiquette" article within which riders were educated as to how to handle the social situation of sharing riding facilities with other BMXers, skateboarders, and inliners (*Chase*, Winter 2001: pg 22 – 26). Of course, such articles could be seen to have been "free lunches" that were offered in an attempt to seduce or maintain a readership / audience which is ultimately sold to the advertisers.

As we cannot glean the "true" objectives of the magazine's publishers from the texts themselves, perhaps the best indications of intentions within the magazine are those stated in Editorials. Editor Ken Paul outlined his hopes for *Chase* in the first issue.

What you hold in your hands is a piece of work that myself and others have wanted to put together for a long time now. What was once just a dream and a small idea has blossomed into the real thing. The hurdles we faced along the way were immense, but the work has been worth it. Getting something going in

Canada on a national level isn't easy. We have a lot of kilometers to cover and many different riding scenes to check out. To top it all off, as we pieced this issue together, the whole country was blanketed in snow. As a result, you won't find much racing, trail or street riding in these pages. However, I want to assure you that we will be covering all aspects of BMX, racing included, with each issue.

There are many people to thank for making this possible. The advertisers you see within this magazine are committed to BMX in Canada. Without them and the trust they have given us, you wouldn't be reading this right now. The old saying "support those who support the sport" couldn't have more meaning than now.

This magazine is for you, the rider. Show your support by buying a subscription. (*Chase*, May / June 1999: pg 10)

The Editorial could be read as a manifesto of sorts, in that it stated the intentions of the publishers. Furthermore, it could be read as a sort of contract with the reader: we will be a national publication, we will cover many different riding scenes, we will cover racing, trail riding and street riding. It also showed the commitment of *Chase* to supporting the Canadian BMX industry, both in its mobilization of a recurring phrase within BMX magazines in the 1990s ("support those who support the sport") and in its suggestion to the reader concerning brand-loyalty to the magazine's advertisers. Appropriately, the Editorial ended with the assertion that the magazine was "for you, the rider," before asking for reader-support of its own in the form a paid subscription. Although it might seem unusual for a magazine to assert its commitment to the reader and confuse this by offering the readers up to the advertisers in the same Editorial, it is noteworthy that the creation and sustenance of Pros to mediate this process were not mentioned.

A second Editorial by Ken Paul in the ninth issue justified "The Music Issue" to the readers.

I've always wanted to provide Chase readers with something more than a circle-jerk of a bunch of guys sitting around talking about gear ratios. That is why I have been gathering stories and photos from BMXers who are actively involved in their local music scene. Collecting them to bring to the forefront and to show you that there is more to life than just BMX. (*Chase*, Spring 2001: pg 12)

Of course, this could also be seen to have been an attempt to get music industry advertising into the magazine, which was part of a larger project of treating the activity of BMX freestyle as a lifestyle culture, and the readers as consumers of more than just BMX industry commodities.

A third Editorial discussed the aforementioned move to international distribution.

Announcing intended changes to editorial content, Paul wrote that

it's always been our mandate to cover the Canadian scene as best as we can....

What we are doing now is branching out a little bit beyond our borders, because – really – there's a lot of cool stuff out there. (...)

For the first time, we're now available in the UK and the USA. A big high-five goes out to all you readers, both new and old. (*Chase*, Winter 2001: pg 12)

One could argue that this move to reach a wider (international) audience through expanded distribution (coupled with changes in editorial content to engage these new readers) would have added value to the advertising opportunities within *Chase*. That is, an advertisement in the publication could have subsequently reached more consumers in more markets. Indeed, after struggling to convince Canadian advertisers that the magazine's advertising rates were reasonable for several issues, this expanded focus beyond the Canadian scene with regard to content and distribution could have been seen as a survival strategy. Of course, this was presented (in fact, spun) as beneficial to the readers.

A final Editorial worth discussion in light of the current project appeared in the Spring 2002 issue of *Chase*. In it, Paul outlined further changes to the editorial content and introduced a new column type that centred on the Pro BMX freestylers and their creativity.

Holy crap, thanks for sticking with us as we head into our fourth year. Things have been switched around in this issue just for the hell of it and I added a new column called *Clean Slate*. It's my intention to give a different pro rider the entire page to do whatever they want with it each issue. For the inaugural installment it's Dom Mach's artwork. Next issue it might be a story, photos or whatever. It should be pretty interesting. (*Chase*, Spring 2002: pg 12)

Through the *Clean Slate* column, then, *Chase* not only legitimated and asserted the superior creativity of the Pros, but also could be seen to have been (in Bourdieu's terms) consecrating artists within the field of the BMX community. Furthermore, it asserted an inherent creativity beyond cycling skills. In an interesting reciprocal-legitimation maneuver, a picture accompanying the Editorial featured the editor with three notable Canadian Pros (*Clean Slate* author Dom Mach, Jason Enns and Greg Nicholson). This can be read to show that Paul had special access to the Pros, or conversely, that the Pros had access to the editor of the magazine.

Analysis

The remainder of this chapter is split into two parts. The first section, consisting of five sub-sections (the Cover, News, Profiles, the Pro Interview, and the Pro Bike Check), examines particular types of recurring editorial content that play an important role in the creation and sustenance of Pro BMXers' image careers. The second section examines the development over time of such image careers in the magazine for particular

Pros. These individuals were chosen as representative examples to best illustrate the Pro –creation and –sustenance function of *Chase BMX Magazine*. A secondary goal of the analysis is to confirm or challenge the notion that the publication operated merely as a catalogue for World Bicycle Sports, Ten Pack Distribution, and their associated companies. The Pro image careers of these same four individuals (Jason Enns, Dustin Guenther, Dave Mirra, and Alistair Whitton) are also tracked in the subsequent chapters concerning *Ride (US)* and *Ride (UK)*.

Recurring Editorial Content: The Cover

As discussed above, the cover of the BMX freestyle magazines is often considered the most valuable form of editorial coverage for a Pro's image career. Indeed, as only nineteen individuals "got the cover" of *Chase* over its four-and-a-half year run, this was an exclusive club. Of the sixteen Canadian riders featured on the cover of *Chase* over this period, ten were sponsored by Ten Pack Distribution, nine were from British Columbia, and only four⁸⁶ could not be connected in an obvious way to World Bicycle Sports and its employees (i.e.; being close friends with the staff).

The fifth issue of *Chase* (Spring 2000), which featured Terrible One-sponsored Pro Paul Buchanan on its cover, provides an example of how an appearance on the cover of a BMX magazine can function to benefit the parties involved. (IMAGE #5-1) The shot clearly showed a Terrible One brand sticker on the downtube of the BMX bicycle frame, and an FBM logo on the handlebars (Ten Pack distributed both of these brands). This picture contributed to the image career of Buchanan via the status accrued from

⁸⁶ Dave Mirra (#3), Ted Hale (#12), John Pratt (#13), and David Lombard (#17).

appearing on the cover of such a publication, and may have contributed financially to him through photo contingencies awarded as a result of having plainly visible brand logos displayed in the shot. Of course, this picture also served Ten Pack well (and the companies represented).

John Heaton did not make an appearance in *Chase BMX Magazine* until the sixth issue (*Chase*, Summer 2000: pg 8). “Blowing up”⁸⁷ faster than any other rider featured in *Chase*, he was on the cover and was featured in a Pro Interview in the very next issue. (IMAGE #5-2) In a sense, Heaton appeared suddenly as an already formed Pro, and furthermore did not have to wait long for the international press to take notice. A cover blurb introduced the stranger to the readers: “John Heaton: The Woodstock Boy Who’s Turning Heads In The Pro Ranks” (*Chase*, Fall 2000: pg 1). Already Pro-fessionally strategically logoing his bicycle and body, Commercial-brand stickers could be seen on his helmet and under the downtube of his frame.

Travis Collier was the only rider during *Chase*’s tenure to advance over time from an appearance in the Rookies column (*Chase*, Winter 2000: pg 37) to an appearance on the cover of the magazine (*Chase*, Summer 2002: pg 1). (IMAGE #5-3)⁸⁸ In his first editorial coverage in eighteen months (six issues after his appearance in the Rookies column), Collier was featured on the cover of the fourteenth issue. Now a Ten Pack-sponsored rider, Collier had strategically stickered his bike and covered his body with logos from his co-sponsors and favourite brands. As such, the logo-savvy consumer

⁸⁷ “Blowing up” is a commonly used metaphor within BMX freestyle culture signifying the “explosion” of a rider who seems to arrive abruptly and whose talents and activities lead to a sudden glut of media coverage.

⁸⁸ This demonstrates, perhaps, that the implied path to Pro stardom through the recurring editorial columns in *Chase* is actually rarely traveled.

would notice that he was wearing a (Ten Pack distributed) Little Devil toque, and a Vans shirt and shoes. Furthermore, his bicycle carried brand logos from (the Ten Pack distributed) wethepeople, Ronin (also Ten Pack distributed), Vans, and SoBe (the MacNeil Bikes team sponsor). Collier was also featured in a Ten Pack-constructed wethepeople ad in this issue. The two-page advertisement showed the entire Ten Pack-assembled Canadian wethepeople team (Jamie McIntosh, Doug Pilkey, David Osato, Dustin Guenther, and Collier) (*Chase*, Summer 2002, pg 38 – 39). Leaving little doubt that the advertisement had been constructed by the same staff that laid out the magazine, the action photo of Collier was evidently from the same photo shoot that supplied the Collier picture used for the cover. Again, the line between editorial coverage and Ten Pack-constructed and -placed advertisements was blurred.

News

The news section is of central importance to special-interest magazines. If a central role of such magazines is to be a medium of punctual circulation, then the news section is the most transparent recurring editorial column with regard to providing (over time) senses of progression, evolution and vitality to a culture.

The importance of the news column to this particular publication was conveyed from the first issue in that the words “Canadian News” were prominently displayed on the cover (*Chase*, May / June 1999: pg 1). A review of the stories featured in the first news column gives an idea of the types of news that will be covered in subsequent issues. The column, which was only allotted half a page in the first issue, discussed an injury to Pro Rob Sigaty, new BMX racing tracks in Alberta, the residency of Pro Paul Buchanan

in Austin, Texas, that Pro Jason Enns was now sponsored by Little Devil clothing, that (new) Pro Greg Nicholson was now sponsored by Solid Bikes, that Pro Nathan Penonzek was now sponsored by Split clothing, that Pro Jamie Delaney was now riding a S&M frame “courtesy of Revolution Bike Supply in Calgary,” that distributor Revolution would be sponsoring a BMX racing Pro for Huffy, that Pro Eric Gagne might be sponsored by S&M Bikes after “being kicked off GT,” that (new) Pro Dustin Guenther was now sponsored by wethepeople and Etnies shoes, that Pro Travis Fontaine was riding a “flowed” Haro bike (and that he was previously on a Skull Skates frame), that veteran Pro Ryan McDowell was on a flowed K2 bike, that many new parks were opening, that #1 CBA racing Pro Greg Calette was unsponsored, that Pro Brian Onofrichuk might be sponsored by Free Agent bikes, that veteran Pro Kevin O’Brien would be helping to get a Mosh bikes program going, that Pro Corey Fergusson would be the first to be sponsored by Mosh, that ATI grips would sponsor the Mosh team, and that Brett King was moving to California to work for a bike company (*Chase*, May / June 1999: pg 11). Of the twenty news items, fourteen concerned particular Pros, ten were sponsorship announcements linking particular Pros to particular companies, one announced that a particular top Pro was (incongruently) unsponsored, and two stories discussed company news independently of particular Pros (although they both concerned finding Pros to sponsor).

Within the news section Pros were often intimately associated with their sponsors’ products via news of a signature model component. In the Spring 2002 issue, within which the news column was moved toward the back of the magazine, the reader was informed that “**John Heaton** has been riding his prototype signature frame with MacNeil for a few months” (Spring 2002: pg 52). This item directly associated Heaton

with Miron's MacNeil Bikes, and the revelation that he was on a prototype added a sense of mystery (the implication being that spy photos of such a prototype would appear in subsequent issues).

The news section can also be employed in a more obvious way with regard to the blurring of lines between editorial content and advertising. Within the news section of the Summer 2001 issue, a half-page story announced a contest: "Win A Pair Of Rooftop Shoes From Etnies."

Etnies just released their BMX signature shoes and Etnies distributor Timebomb Trading would like to give you a pair of Rooftops, the Mike Escamilla signature shoe. All you have to do is tell us which other Etnies team pro riders have signature shoes (there are two other riders who have them). (*Chase*, Summer 2001: pg 18)

This is a perfect example of editorial content, in the form of a news item, serving a specific advertiser (the Canadian distributor for Etnies shoes, Timebomb, was a consistent advertiser during *Chase's* run). It is also an example of both *using* the Pro image career and *sustaining* it at the same time: Mike Escamilla was "Pro" enough to get his own signature shoe from his sponsor, which circularly served to make him even more "Pro" (which rubbed off on the shoes).

With regard to injuries to Pro BMX riders, the magazine's publisher was featured in the news column of the fourth issue.

Jay Miron took a hard bail to the face as well, resulting in 40+ stitches to his face. Thanks to makeup, Jay appeared unscathed on the TV show *Open Mike with Mike Bullard*, alongside a Playboy Playmate, no less. Oh yeah, Jay managed to buy a house in Coquitlam, BC. (*Chase*, Winter 1999: pg 6)

Here, as is common, a series of news stories were presented in combination. In this case, Miron may have suffered an injury, but that didn't impede on his rockstar / celebrity / Pro lifestyle, or his ability to buy himself a home with the fruit of his labour.

Miron was also mentioned in a news item in the Summer 2002 issue that spoke to an implicit national-pride mandate of the magazine: "Canadian sweep in Louisville, KY? It happened at the B3 contest this spring. **Dave Osato** won street, **Jay Miron** took vert, and **Nathan Penonzek** whipped the flatland class" (*Chase*, Winter 1999: pg 6). It is perhaps interesting, if not telling, that Miron *took* the Pro vert win from the (implied) Americans, and Penonzek *whipped* the seemingly defenseless Pro flatland class.

In addition to news concerning Pro sponsorships, injuries, and honours, news of personal matters and experiences (moving, traveling, getting married, etc.) often appeared in the news column. These items, often presented in combination with other news stories, helped to build the individual Pro image careers and contributed to the mythology of the Pro lifestyle. An example of a combination of news items that presented a Pro as living a glamorous or exotic lifestyle, the news section in the Spring 2003 issue of *Chase* announced that "Nathan Penonzek is riding camels in Algeria and riding an Ares for this year" (*Chase*, Spring 2003: pg 65). However, the reports did not necessarily need to have a sponsorship announcement coupled with news of exotic travel to have qualified as newsworthy or to have elevated a Pro's reputation: "**Nathan Penonzek** should be making his way back to Vancouver at the end of September, but not for long. He plans on driving to the southernmost point of South America – Tierra del Fuego, Argentina" (*Chase*, Fall 2003: pg 62). Importantly, it is the concatenation of such stories over time that works to sustain a Pro's image career. That is, it is the ritual, periodic nature of a given special-

interest magazine and the resulting accretion that sustains a subcultural star's image career. Conversely, a one-time report of exotic travel would not have functioned to build Penonzek's reputation as a world-traveling Pro BMX rider.

Another interesting Pro-creation and -sustaining phenomenon that regularly appeared in the news section of *Chase* was that of the Pros who are "Bros" (brothers or close friends). One month after getting sponsorship-plus-injury coverage, ("... **Max Vincent** just snagged a little hookup with Duffs. Max flipped a dune buggy the other day and ended up breaking his neck in two spots! Thank the heavens that Max will be okay" (*Chase*, Summer 2003: pg 64)), Vincent received another combination of coverage which repeated the sponsorship news and asserted his Pro-ness by association with another more-established (American) Pro: "**Max Vincent** is sporting Duffs on his feet nowadays, and just spent some time in Philadelphia with **Van Homan**." (*Chase*, Fall 2003: pg 62). As such, not only did Vincent get double the coverage for the same sponsorship story, he also got a rub by being associated with a veteran Pro.⁸⁹ These stories, over time, worked to establish and sustain the idea that Vincent is a Pro worth respect (and, his sponsors hope, emulation).

Profiles: "Rookies"

As the magazine was published in a country within which ice hockey is central to its culture, it is appropriate that *Chase*'s version of a profile (a one- or two-page regular editorial column that spotlights an up-and-coming rider) was christened "Rookies."

⁸⁹ This recalls Daniel Boorstin with regard to stars: "(w)ith the mushroom-fertility of all pseudo-events, celebrities tend to breed more celebrities. They help make and celebrate and publicize one another" (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 65).

Indeed, the term has a special resonance in Canada, embodying the hope of “potential” and “promise” in its reference to “fresh” junior-level professionals.

In the nineteen-issue run of the magazine, forty-four Rookie columns appeared. Although this would mean an average of between two and three riders profiled per issue, the frequency was not stable. In fact, the column did not appear in the tenth and eleventh issues, while eight people are featured in the Fall 2002 issue. Surprisingly, over the period of four-and-a-half years, there was only one instance of a Rookie going on to appear on a subsequent issue’s cover (as discussed above, Travis Collier). There was also the anomaly of a rider appearing on the cover of the same issue within which he is featured as a Rookie (Karl Engstrom: on- and-in issue number fifteen / Fall 2002). Of those featured in the Rookies column, only nine went on to receive significant international media coverage.⁹⁰ Eight riders featured in Rookies were or have been sponsored by Ten Pack.⁹¹

As with the examples cited above within Editorials with regard to the magazine in general, the editors’ intentions for the Rookies columns were outlined in particular instances of the column. In the ninth issue, regular contributor (and MacNeil product manager) D’Arcy Saccucci explained why a particular rider was a perfect candidate for the column.

Jay Rutherford is the ideal rider for this *Rookies* page. Young, talented and cocky as hell. The first time I saw him ride was out at Lucky Trails and he was blasting – throwing variations over every set. Even the ones that were giving the older

⁹⁰ Max Vincent, Travis Collier, Jeff Desroches, Robby Compartino, Wade Lajlar, Sebastien Keep, Matt Puorro, Corey Fester, and Chris Silva have become significant Pro riders.

⁹¹ Greg Nicholson, Max Vincent, Travis Collier, Harrison Boyce, Chris Smith, Ben MacPherson, Wade Lajlar, and Karl Engstrom.

riders trouble. If you would like to see more of this little punk, check out the web site that he has erected in honour of himself: www.cockylittlepunk.bc.ca. (*Chase*, Spring 2001: pg 42).

A more expanded vision for the column was outlined in the introduction to the Rookies column for Breen Chornyj in the sixth issue.

Usually here in the *Rookies* column, we introduce you to up-and-comers, the ones who have the gusto and the eye of the tiger. I also like to think of this column as a way of showing you, the reader some unique personalities and introduce you to different scenes and ideas. (*Chase*, Summer 2000: pg 40).

Although this can be read as reserving the right to take some latitude with regard to interesting (non-rookie) characters and featuring them in the column, the Rookies column primarily featured the young, hot, rising stars.

Evidently part of the master plan for the magazine from the outset (and following the lead of every profile-containing BMX magazine that predates it), the first episode of the Rookies column appeared in the premiere issue. Focusing on future Ten Pack rider (for the Solid Bikes brand) Greg Nicholson, the one-page article contained an action photo, a list that included his name, age, and hometown, and a mini-interview. (IMAGE #5-4) Appropriately, it was publisher and Canadian SuperPro Jay Miron that introduced the first candidate.

Welcome to our first installment of up and comers in Canada – Rookies. Each issue, we will be introducing you to some of the riders across this nation who are getting' down in their hometown. Know of someone? Drop us a line!

The first time I heard anything about Greg, I was on my way to the Surrey skatepark with Jason Enns. He asked me if I had ever seen the local kid there who rides the red bike. I hadn't, and asked why. Jason said he ruled the place. So, I was hoping to see him when we got there. Sure enough, he was there, and he did rule the place. I couldn't believe how high he jumped and how smooth he was. So

I figured I should interview him for a Rookies page. (Chase, May / June 1999: pg 19)

Not only does this presentation by Miron work to legitimate and elevate Nicholson's rising-star status, but one gets the impression that the two Pro Bros mentioned (Miron and Enns) were part of a Pro-scouting system for finding young talent. This, coupled with the announcement in the news column of the same issue that revealed that Nicholson was (freshly) sponsored by Solid Bikes, communicated to the reader that there were opportunities to succeed for young, talented riders, and provided evidence that there was a system in place that rewarded excellence. That is, hope was given to the reader / rider with regard to access to the Pro lifestyle.

Another instance of a Pro / Ten Pack staffer presenting a Rookie is Jamie McIntosh's profile on Jeff Desroche which appeared in the Spring 2001 issue.

Jeff Desroche is one of the fresh new breed of Canadian flatlanders. In only a few short years he has worked his way into the pro class with his aggressive riding style. Many of Jeff's links have to be seen to be believed as he's pushing his own limits as well as the limits of the sport. (*Chase*, Spring 2001: pg 40)

Once again, one gets the impression (if one is aware that Jamie McIntosh is a veteran Pro flatlander) that a rider was being knighted by a senior Pro.⁹² It is also important to note the (recurring) theme of newness or novelty (i.e.; the culture was progressing; there were new riders emerging) and the associated accelerated pace with which these new riders were improving ("In only a few short years...") that gives the culture a sense of vitality.

⁹² Much like with the cover and other photo-based forms of coverage, the Rookies column offers a chance to the emerging rider to represent for his sponsors. In this case, Desroche may have been able to cash-in on his prominent London Bikes frame sticker and his strategically placed Krusher logos (on the top of the down tube of the frame, and on the inside of the fork legs), which are visible in the two pictures within the two-page article.

Eric Myre, a photographer and Québec correspondent for *Chase*, consistently indicated how briefly the Rookies he profiled had been riding. In an early issue of the magazine, he introduced Max Vincent (who would go on to be a top international star): “(s)tyle and technical are two words used to describe Maxime Vincent; a Montréal local whose been riding for less than two years but is already making a name for himself” (*Chase*, Fall 1999: pg 33). Myre profiled Francois Côte for the next issue:

Francois Côte is probably the best flatlander in Québec right now. He has won all the contests he has entered so far, does the hardest front wheel links you can imagine – all with a style all his own. Not bad for a kid who has been riding for three years. (*Chase*, Winter 1999: pg 38)

Myre also profiled Robby Compartino: “(a)fter riding for only four years, Robbie has already established himself as one of the top riders in Québec” (*Chase*, Winter 2001: pg 35). Indeed, it seems that a common pattern within the Rookies column was that those featured had come to possess remarkable talent in a short period of time.

Issue fourteen featured two friends in the Rookies column (*Chase*, Summer 2002: pg 20). Their “age,” “resides” and “sponsors” were listed for both, each was featured in an action-shot and they shared a head-shot together. Ben MacPherson’s bike displayed a clearly visible Terrible One logo, and SoBe, MacNeil, Little Devil, and wethepeople banners can be seen behind them as they were photographed riding in the Ten Pack warehouse. Both riders went on to ride for Ten Pack, and “Little Wade” Lajlar currently rides for MacNeil Bikes.

During *Chase*’s nineteen-issue publication run, there were two instances of profiles that were not Rookies columns. In both cases, the riders were not rookies, but rather established riders. As such, the profiles functioned to maintain their status in a

smaller-than-Pro-interview form. It would seem that while they did not warrant a full Pro Interview, they were not “Rookies” either. The first of these appeared in the Spring 2003 issue, within which friends Erin Donato⁹³ and Ed Nussbaum took turns profiling each other (*Chase*, Spring 2003: pg 32 – 33). The second appeared in the subsequent Summer 2003 issue, profiling Canadian veteran pro Rob Sigaty (*Chase*, Summer 2003: pg 38 – 39). Sigaty’s profile was creatively presented as a filled-in job application, within which the form asked for information on sponsors and associates (i.e.; other Pros that are Bros). Featured in three action-shots and in one head-shot, veteran Pro Sigaty made sure that many Etnies shoes logos were visible from every angle. Again, this profile functioned to sustain Sigaty’s Pro image career at a time when he found himself in a sort of limbo: not a rookie, but not warranting a full-blown Pro Interview.

Pro Interviews

It is interesting that *Chase* did not always feature full-sized Pro Interviews. Indeed, only eight of nineteen issues contained this type of recurring editorial content. Of these eight Pros, four were featured on the cover of the same issue (#2 Bob Holliday, #7 John Heaton, #11 Darren Berrecloth, and #16 Matt Beyers). Second only to the cover in status (thus making the combination of the two in the same issue quite desirable), the Pro Interview is a big deal within the culture, having the aura of an award that has been earned by the rider, and bestowed by the magazine. Although the column occupies the most pages of the recurring editorial types, it is notable that the average length of a Pro

⁹³ Erin Donato, probably the best female flatlander in the world, would not be classified as a Pro. There has never been a Pro Women’s flatland class at a contest. And although there are male Pros that do not enter contests, the concept of a female Pro is a foreign one within the culture.

Interview in *Chase* was only four pages (compared to over ten pages in both *Ride (US)* and *Ride (UK)*).

Again, as with the aforementioned announcement of “Canadian News,” a cover blurb on the premiere issue confirmed that Pro Interviews would be a feature of this new publication (“Pro Interview With Andrew Faris”) (*Chase*, May / June 1999: pg 1). Inside the issue, the four-page interview featured three action photos, one non-riding shot, and a listing of Faris’ “Age” and “Sponsors.” (IMAGE #5-5) The interview’s subject was introduced by editor Ken Paul.

Andrew Faris qualified in his first pro flatland contest in 1996. In 1997, he won two B.S. Series contests and also snagged the World Champion title in the Netherlands. Andrew had made his mark in flatland in barely two years and had set the pace in the pro ranks. (*Chase*, May / June 1999: pg 24)

In this case, themes similar to those of the Rookies column were employed (“barely two years” and “set the pace in the pro ranks”). The introduction continued with a “you ain’t seen nothin’ yet” tone.

For the past six months at a private warehouse in Edmonton, he has been working on tricks that no one else has even considered, honing them down and preparing to reveal them shortly. He will once again prove to the rest of us how much of a talent he really is. (*Chase*, May / June 1999: pg 24)

The words “private” and “reveal” imply that there had been some reconnaissance going on by the magazine’s staff, and that its spies had special access to the (imminent, evolving) future. Paradoxically, interviews (as a communicative form) purport to grant access to the real, while working to help construct the image careers of celebrities. Asserting the real-ness of the interview that is to follow, Paul dismissed previous mediations and the resulting image that surrounded the “true” Andrew Faris.

Before you read this interview, dismiss all preconceptions you may have of Andrew. The persona portrayed in the media and in the videos and the gossip and rumours floating around about his personal life. They are just that – gossip and rumours. There is nothing Andrew would like more than to have them buried away once and for all and have his riding and his true personality take centre stage once again. (*Chase*, May / June 1999: pg 24)

In this instance, one gets the impression that *Chase* is involved with Faris in a project to reconstruct his image career to be closer to his “true personality.” As such, one can see that *Chase* was complicit with the needs and desires of Faris with regard to his image career, and that Faris was complicit with his own exploitation by the magazine.

As if being the only rider to receive two photos on the cover of the same issue (one action-shot and a photo of him on a tree swing) was not enough coverage, we are also informed via a blurb on the cover of the Winter 2002 issue of the “Matt Beyers Interview” inside. The five-page interview by Ken Paul featured six pictures of Beyers riding, one head-shot, one picture of him in his BMX-picture plastered room, and another of him riding a tree swing (*Chase*, Winter 2002: pg 26 – 30). In these pictures, there were visible Commercial Bikes logos on his bike and t-shirts, and 1664-branded parts, stickers and t-shirts that show that Beyers was working to represent his sponsors. According to Paul, “Matt Beyers is a guy who has been getting lots of attention lately from his peers. Whether it be a street, ramp, or a dirt session, this 19 year-old from Sidney BC can hang with the best of them” (*Chase*, Winter 2002: pg 27). Paul then verified that he had had his eye on this young Pro for a while.

After meeting Matt briefly a few years ago, it wasn't until this year's Palavas, France event that I was able to get a front row seat to check out his riding. Trekking around Europe with Kara, his girlfriend at the time, Matt easily placed

second in the amateur street contest and was automatically bumped up to the pro class the following weekend. (*Chase*, Winter 2002: pg 27)

With regard to mediation, Paul implied that both one's performance and the *broadcast* of the performance were equally important: "Matt blazed it that weekend and ended up with a lot of coverage in the magazines" (*Chase*, Winter 2002: pg 27).

Australian Colin MacKay was the first non-Canadian (of three) to be featured in a Pro Interview in *Chase*. Ken Paul provided hope to the assumed reader's ambition to be a sponsored Pro in his introduction to the interview.

Colin MacKay has had his dream of becoming a professional BMX rider flash before him in less than a year. As this dream unfolds upon him from day to day, he meets new people and explores new sights and lands. At times he can't believe what is happening is actually true. This is one guy who couldn't be happier. I was fortunate enough to meet Colin during his brief stay here in Canada and I was instantly blown away by his friendly demeanor and positive attitude. Read on, he may just change your outlook on life. (*Chase*, July / Aug. 1999: pg 24)

The interview, which also listed his "age," "hometown," and "sponsors," stressed to the reader that not only was the lifestyle of the Pro (traveling to Canada!) desirable, but it was attainable.

Pro Bike Checks

The Pro Bike Check column, which dates back to the 1970s and the earliest BMX periodical publications, became a more prominent feature in all of the international BMX magazines during the period of *Chase's* publication. Indeed, this column has become even more notorious (if not ubiquitous across BMX media) since *Chase's* demise in the autumn of 2003, as most of the current publications are featuring one or two riders per

issue in this fashion. Curiously, this type of column only appeared three times during the magazine's tenure (#6, #7, and #8), and was absent from the last eleven issues.

The Pro Bike Check can be seen to serve the Pro himself in a few ways. Most generally, it is yet another form of coverage that works to sustain the rider's image career. Indeed, with regard to monetary rewards, there is usually at least one action photo and one head-shot that provide opportunities for cashing-in on photo contingencies. The unique trait of the Pro Bike Check is that the equipment that a Pro uses (and thus implicitly, endorses, regardless of sponsorship deals) is "revealed" in the form of a shopping list. This list of components, coupled with the requisite listed "special modifications," thus constitutes a recipe for the creation of a replica. As such, a magazine featuring more than one such column can be seen as a menu from which the reader can pick and choose from items offered. Indeed, the Pro Bike Check facilitates the imitation and emulation of the Pro with regard to his choice of equipment. Of course, this directly benefits companies whose products are featured, as it is a payoff for their sponsorship-of or "flowing"-free-components-to the Pros. Furthermore, under the assumption that the readers want this information about their favourite Pros, this column may also work to sell more magazines.

In a discussion concerning what he sees as the problems with a trickle-down theory of consumption, Grant McCracken reverses the poles.

For what drives this diffusion dynamic is not the downward, gravitylike force that the term implies. What drives the dynamic is an upward "chase and flight" pattern created by a subordinate social group that moves on in hasty flight to new ones. It is an upward movement, not a downward one, that drives this system of diffusion onward. (McCracken, 1988: pg 94)

It is interesting in light of the subject of this chapter that McCracken uses the term “chase” in this explanation. The BMX magazine facilitates such a chase through columns such as the Pro Bike Check. This is of course not unique to the magazines serving this culture.

The lifestyle magazine uses its editorial content to attract a narrow range of potential advertisers. In many cases, readers use them as “shopping guides” to assess products; advice to beginners is a regular feature inducting the reader into the special knowledge and skills of the activity. The lifestyle magazine blends advertising and editorial content until they are almost indistinguishable. (Leiss et al., 1990: pg 106)

Indeed, could one imagine an editorial column that would serve the needs of the BMX magazine advertisers more than the Pro Bike Check? It is the (obvious) missing link of the BMX star-system project of magazines creating and maintaining stars which are subsequently used by the advertisers via endorsements to sell their products to the readers. In case the process was too opaque for the consumer, the Pro Bike Check (situated both within the context of and indeed as part of the accretion of information in magazines over time) states clearly that *this* Pro, which you should *admire* and thus *emulate*, uses *this* product. In fact, it is curious that this form has only recently become widely employed within BMX media.

The first Pro Bike Check to materialize in *Chase* appeared in the sixth issue, and focused on BMX racing Pro (and editor Ken Paul’s roommate) Steve Calette. Paul introduced the column type and the subject.

Everyone is curious as to how some people set up their bikes. From custom paint colours to cutting down handlebars, we all seem to make some minor adjustments to fine tune our factory, or maybe not so factory rides. It gives our bikes a personal feel both on and off the track. Steve Calette has one slick looking

machine and he's definitely focused on attention to detail. Let's get a closer look at what's cookin' with one of the CBA's top Elites. (*Chase*, Summer 2000: pg 23)

The first edition of this article catalogued more than the components that made up Calette's "machine." Information listed included name, age, "originally from," "current residence," sponsors, co-sponsors, all the individual parts of the bike, his "race equipment" (helmet and uniform), and "modifications." There were also two close-up pictures of the bike, and a shot with Calette in his fully-logoed (NASCAR-esque) uniform crouched beside his bike which had its logoed number plate turned toward the camera.

Corey Stratychuk and his bike were featured in the eighth issue. Again reflecting a reconnaissance theme, the article was entitled "Pro Bike Inspection".

As we make our rounds from racer to street rider, we now come to the flatlander. As in the previous issues, we have the low-down on the machine of choice for today's pro, and this time it's Corey Stratychuk. Corey just started riding for Ares / 88 this year, so let's see how he decided to set up his new ride. (*Chase*, Winter 2000: pg 23).

The third and final installment of the column type in *Chase* listed Stratychuk's age, sponsors, parts list, and modifications. The two pictures on the page are an action-shot and a close-up on the bike. Appropriately, the Ares frame was featured in the new products section within the same issue, and the reader was alerted to the fact that it was "(a)vailable from Ten Pack" (*Chase*, Winter 2000: pg 44). As in the aforementioned case of Greg Nicholson being featured in both the Rookies column as an emerging star and in the news section of the same issue as being newly sponsored by a Ten Pack distributed company, we again see two editorial column types appearing in the same issue working together to promote a brand that was represented by the magazine's sister company.

Pro Image Careers

The remainder of this chapter examines how *Chase BMX Magazine*, through its recurring editorial content forms (cover, news, profiles, Pro Interviews, and Pro Bike Checks), contributed to the creation and maintenance of particular Pro image careers. Again, being featured in particular columns not only serves the Pro via the elevation of his Pro image career, but also gives him an opportunity to cash-in on the photo contingencies paid for visible logos in pictures featured in the magazines. In order to maximize the return afforded by this opportunity, the Pros strategically logo their bicycles so that the brand names will be apparent from almost any angle. As such, and in playing by the rules of this game, the Pros can be seen to be complicit with their exploitation by their sponsors. Indeed, this can be seen as ritual (and according to Eric Rothenbuhler, communicative) behavior.

All such discussions depend on the almost always unidentified presupposition of a communicative principle: Everyone who performs a ritual accepts the idea, at least implicitly, that his or her patterned behavior is symbolically meaningful and effective. That is, participants in ritual are doing something symbolically; they are using symbols to achieve social purposes. (Rothenbuhler, 1998: pg 26)

Indeed, it would follow that the complicit, conspicuous logoing of one's bicycle and body is a *professional act*: "*Ritual is the voluntary performance of appropriately patterned behavior to symbolically effect or participate in the serious life.*" (Rothenbuhler, 1998: pg 27: italics in the original). According to Rothenbuhler, all forms of ritual behavior (for example, following the lead of the veteran Pros and their logoing practices) are socially communicative: "(r)ituals are always symbolic behavior in social situations; therefore, they are always as if written to be read" (Rothenbuhler, 1998: pg 53). Discussing the work of Erving Goffman (1959, 1967), Rothenbuhler asserts that if one *acts* as a

particular type of person (that is, performs the roles associated with that type), then one *is* that type of person (Rothenbuhler, 1998: pg 56). Or, for the purposes of the present project, if one acts as a Pro does (performing the rituals associated with professional BMX freestylers), one is a Pro.

Importantly, a Pro's image career can change over time (Dyer, 1998: pg 64). A Pro can play along with his image if it serves his own interests (Gaines, 1991: pg 33), or actively work to redirect it. As such, a Pro BMX freestyler can also manage his image career over time in the interest of longevity.⁹⁴

Jason Enns

Jason Enns is an example of a Pro who had become a (minor) star prior to the release of *Chase*, and as such his appearances in the magazine functioned to elevate and sustain this status. Enns is also the best example I have found of a Pro who takes the logging of his bike for the purposes of representing / cashing-in-on his sponsors seriously. Furthermore, he has a record of controlling his coverage over time so that while he is never over-exposed, he is also not absent for too long. In fact, his image career has been such that he has "blown up" (suddenly receiving a significant increase in coverage) about every eighteen months. Despite Paul McDonald's assertion that "...distinctions need to be drawn between 'popular' stars and 'cult' stars" (in Dyer, 1998: pg 199), Enns can be seen as a Pro that has fit into both categories over the course of his image career.

⁹⁴ "To extend their celebrity-lives, they offer their images more sparingly – once a month or once every two months instead of once a week" (Boorstin, 1971 (1961): pg 64).

Enns appeared on the cover of the first issue of *Chase* performing a one-footed tabletop on the ramps in the Ten Pack warehouse (*Chase*, May / June 1999: pg 1).

(IMAGE #5-6) This particular maneuver, shot from this particular angle, afforded an inverted side view of his Kink-branded and -logoed bicycle. In addition to the Kink logos (on the bicycle frame's downtube and on his handlebar ends), there were also visible logos representing Little Devil clothing (on the top tube and chainstays of the frame), Etnies shoes (on the downtube, seatstays and on the bottom of his shoes), and Primo components (on the forks and seat tube). Enns' appearance on the cover worked to maintain his image career, provided him with an opportunity to cash-in on photo contingencies, provided his sponsors (all either Ten Pack distributed brands or *Chase* advertisers) with exposure associated with a cover-worthy Pro, and legitimated the new magazine (as he is an established internationally renowned Pro).

In the news section of the first issue, it was revealed that Enns was now riding for Little Devil clothing (a Ten Pack brand) (*Chase*, May / June 1999: pg 11). As stated above, his name was dropped in the Greg Nicholson Rookies column in this issue, which positioned him as an established Canadian Pro, and associated him with Jay Miron.

In the second issue, further sponsorship information for Enns appeared in the News section.

The big news this month is that **Jason "Cougar" Enns** has left Kink Bicycles to ride for the brand new **Volume Bicycles**. With this new sponsor, Jason becomes the latest Canadian to join the signature bike club. It will be a few months before his model is available and he'll be in California designing it around the time you are reading this. (*Chase*, July / Aug. 1999: pg 6)

The fact of his imminent membership in the "signature bike club" conveyed that his star continued to rise (and his enviable Pro lifestyle was confirmed by his time spent in

California). With regard to interests served, both Volume and Enns benefited from the association with each other, as would have Volume's Canadian distributor at the time, Ten Pack. This new-sponsor news was reinforced in the news section in the next issue, which featured five small black and white sequence photos of Volume owner Brian Castillo and Enns wrestling. "Meanwhile, over at Volume Bikes, Jason Enns and Volume's Brian Castillo battle out contract negotiations for Jason's signature frame. Jason has been testing the prototype for the last month" (*Chase*, Fall 1999: pg 6). Importantly, a Volume advertisement featuring Enns appeared in the same issue (placed by Ten Pack Distribution) (*Chase*, Fall 1999: pg 39). This new-sponsor story extended into the next issue of the magazine as well. Under the heading of "2000 Product Preview" a picture appeared of Enns with his bike featuring the new Volume "Destroyer" model signature frame and the first LHD (left-hand drive) Profile-brand rear wheel hub. The "story" featured two pictures (one close up of his bike and one of him with his bike), wherein he could be seen representing Etnies shoes (stickers on the bike and an Etnies hooded sweatshirt) and Little Devil clothing (his hat) (*Chase*, Winter 1999: pg 8). Enns, his sponsors and the magazine benefited from an implied discourse of progression that was associated with the introduction of the latest and greatest products.

In the next issue, there was good (sponsorship) news for Enns again: "**Brian Castillo** has a new BMX product line called Demolition. Plans call for some signature series parts from the likes of Brian, **Jason Enns**, and **Kris Bennet**." (*Chase*, Spring 2000: pg 6). Again, Enns' image career received a boost from being sponsored by a new company that would allow him to design signature-model components. The same issue

contained a picture of Enns within a contest report with visible Etnies and Volume stickers on his bike, and a logoed Little Devil shirt (*Chase*, Spring 2000: pg 30).

Further establishing (or confirming) Enns' status as a world-class Pro, the seventh issue of the magazine featured a head-shot of him (wearing a Volume shirt) at the World Championships in Köln, Germany (*Chase*, Fall 2000: pg 26). Ken Paul justified Enns' appearance in a Pro Bike Check article entitled "Pro Bike Inspection with Jason Enns" later in the same issue. (IMAGE #5-7) "The Volume Destroyer was designed by none other than Jason Enns, so we saw it perfectly fit to take a closer look at Jason's personal setup for this issue" (*Chase*, Fall 2000: pg 45). The article contained two close-ups of the bicycle itself, and a picture of Enns and his bike with the caption "(o)ur worldly traveler Jason Enns and the Destroyer on the banks of the Rhine River in Germany" (*Chase*, Fall 2000: pg 45). This was yet another instance of the magazine contributing to the myth of the Pro as world traveler. Importantly, ownership was asserted over Enns, in that he was described as "our" worldly traveler / Pro (belonging to the Canadian BMX freestyle scene). One of the captions for the close-up pictures asserted the pro-worthiness of his parts: "(w)ith the riding Jason does, his parts take a beating and they continually take it well." The other close-up caption highlighted a specific (Ten Pack distributed) component: "(c)heck out the Profile rear cassette hub. There's a reason why so many pros are running them these days – they're simply the best." In addition to a listing of the particular parts Enns used and his personal modifications, statistics listed included age, sponsors, and co-sponsors. Visible sponsor logos included Etnies, Dragon (sunglasses), Little Devil, Volume, and Demolition. Enns was also seen wearing a Dragon-branded t-shirt.

Enns was featured in the Summer 2001 issue of *Chase* within the contest coverage of the Ten Pack-run “La Revolution” event in Toronto, Ontario. Within the contest story, a moment of innovation was praised: “ Jason Enns was attempting to icepick grind the whole flat rail, which was quite impressive. He came close and ended up with tenth place” (*Chase*, Summer 2001: pg 31). Generally, media coverage of contest success works to establish and sustain a Pro’s image career. However, it is important to note that it was not the tenth-place finish that was the most enviable feat with regard to this story. The reporting of the specific maneuver that he was attempting would do more to impress the savvy readers of the article, as (at the time) this trick represented a progression in the culture.

In the next issue of *Chase*, Enns was amongst the riders on the “Destruction Island” roadtrip. Recalling Boorstin’s “pseudo events,” the rationale for the trip was stated: “Jason wanted to get some new footage for his parts in the upcoming Etnies and Demolition videos...” (*Chase*, Fall 2001: pg 20). As *Chase* tagged along, this also provided further coverage for the trip’s participants and content for the magazine. Enns was featured in a head-shot wearing a Little Devil hat (*Chase*, Fall 2001: pg 20), and a quarter-page colour shot of Enns in an Etnies sweatshirt (with visible Dragon, Etnies, Volume logos on his bicycle) appeared (*Chase*, Fall 2001: pg 23). In a shot that captured his (image’s) playfulness, Enns was pictured launching for distance out of a skateboard bowl (*Chase*, Fall 2001: pg 25).

In an announcement in the news section that listed the Pros expected to participate in the Snow Jam series of events during the summer of 2002, Enns was included amongst an impressive group of Pros (*Chase*, Summer 2002: pg 66). Not only would this

association rub off on him, but such an announcement would also benefit his sponsors and the organizers of the events. In the next issue's news section, an announcement of a new bicycle shop (a customer of Ten Pack) in the Vancouver, British Columbia area also carried the news that Enns will be working there (*Chase*, Fall 2002: pg 66). Of course, this Pro-association worked to legitimate the new bicycle shop, whose long-term success was in the best interest of Ten Pack Distribution. This also added a new ("Aversion") logo to Enns' bicycle, which was visible (along with Little Devil and Etnies logos) in a photo that was accompanied with a one-word caption: "Destroyer" (*Chase*, Fall 2002: pg 68).

Further (potentially destructive) news concerning Enns appeared in the news section of the Spring 2003 issue: "(o)n the subject of fire, both **Dave Osato** and **Jason Enns** recently bought big industrial torches to dry off cement parks. That's right, they both have flamethrowers" (*Chase*, Spring 2003: pg 64). This news item conveyed at least two points beyond the rightful questioning of their sanity: that Enns and Osato were "partners in crime" or Pro Bros, and that they were "large" enough to be able to drop serious money into personal industrial torches.

The final issue of *Chase* that Enns appeared in was the eighteenth. Throughout the coverage of the Toronto Metro Jam event (formerly the La Revolution contest, now fully under the authority of the World Bicycle Sports / Ten Pack Distribution staff), over fifty head-shots of Pros and infamous non-pro riders appeared (*Chase*, Summer 2003: pg 30 – 35). Enns was not only one of the fifty (appearing with beer bottles in both hands and still managing to flip the bird to the photographer), but he was also featured in a separate picture with the actors who play Julian and Bubbles from the hit Canadian television

program *Trailer Park Boys* (*Chase*, Summer 2003: pg 31 and 33). Enns' final appearance in *Chase* was in the news section of this issue, wherein he was pictured with Osato playing hockey (*Chase*, Summer 2003: pg 64). Throughout this issue, then, Enns was given coverage not for his riding talent, but for his celebrity and lifestyle (which, ultimately, still served the interests of all involved).

If advertisements are included, Jason Enns can be found in all but two issues of *Chase* (he did not appear in issues eight (Winter 2000) and nineteen (Fall 2003)). Again, Enns is an example of a Pro whose image career was sustained (in part) by *Chase BMX Magazine*. Indeed, it can be seen that Enns was complicit in his own exploitation by his sponsors (via his ritual / serious / professional logoing of his body and bicycle) and by the magazine. Furthermore, the magazine and his sponsors can be seen as his partners in the construction and maintenance of his Pro image career.

Dustin Guenther

Whereas Jason Enns was an already established Pro at the start of *Chase's* run, Dustin Guenther was hardly known beyond his local Vancouver, British Columbia scene in the spring of 1999. As such, Guenther's image career was to a great extent established and constructed within the pages of the magazine. Now a world-class renowned Pro, Guenther was groomed for the international stage over the four-and-a-half year period of *Chase's* publication by his friends at World Bicycle Sports. As we see below, his rise was slow and steady, culminating in what could be termed a "tribute" in the final issue.

Guenther's first coverage in *Chase* was appropriately found in the premier edition's news section, in which it was reported that he was now freshly sponsored by

Etnies shoes and wethepeople (*Chase*, May / June 1999: pg 11). A full-page colour photograph of Guenther also appeared in this issue, along with an introductory caption that can be seen to have employed somewhat of a “watch out for this guy” Rookie discourse: “(c)oming soon to a vert ramp near you. Dustin Guenther – a good lookin’ guy with a good lookin’ tabletop” (*Chase*, May / June 1999: pg 29).

Guenther was knighted by Jay Miron himself in the second issue. In an article written by Miron covering an event called the Pro Vert Challenge, Miron discussed the “...new school ripper...”: “Dustin was the guy who had a full-page shot riding vert in our last issue. The guy is for real – he’s 19 years old and has only been riding vert for about a year, but is already super good. He doesn’t have many tricks on vert yet, but goes really high and does it with silky smooth style” (*Chase*, July / Aug. 1999: pg 13). A quarter-page colour picture of Guenther accompanied the article (*Chase*, July / August 1999: pg 12). Notably, there were no sponsor logos visible in the photo (one can imagine that Guenther was still learning how to be a Pro and how to “play the game”). Proving his recent Pro-status worthiness and justifying his new sponsorship, the issue also contained a report that Guenther had pulled a 720 (two full horizontal rotations) in a jumping contest (*Chase*, July / Aug. 1999: pg 16). Guenther was also featured in a Ten Pack Distribution-placed advertisement for wethepeople in the issue (*Chase*, July / Aug. 1999, pg 31).

The third issue featured a contest report written by D’Arcy Saccucci concerning an event held in Nelson, British Columbia: “(a)mong those stand-outs was freshly turned pro Dustin Guenther. The “Gunth” was all over the park hitting rafters, spinning the bars and stretching variations, all while making it look easy with his smooth-ass style”

(*Chase*, Fall 1999: pg 27). The caption to a small picture of Guenther that accompanied the story explained that Guenther already had admirers: “Dustin Guenther had a big cheering section who came to Nelson to watch him ride. They left amazed, I’m sure. Here, Dustin wraps himself around the rafters” (*Chase*, Fall 1999: pg 28). Guenther evidently not only had fans that followed him to the events he attended, but also within the offices of the magazine. Significantly, the references to the building rafters implied that he performed his maneuvers quite high in the air.

By the fourth issue of *Chase*, Guenther was properly displaying his sponsors’ logos. For example, in a wethepeople advertisement placed by Ten Pack Distribution, a Ten Pack sticker was clearly visible on the underside of his frame (*Chase*, Winter 1999: pg 22). The exposure of the sticker from the particular camera angle indicated that Guenther’s strategic placement of a sponsor’s logo was successful. Guenther was also seen wearing an Etnies t-shirt, which undoubtedly pleased his shoe sponsor. This advertisement was the only coverage he received in this issue, and similar advertisements were his only coverage in three subsequent issues (*Chase*, Spring 2000: pg 41, Summer 2000: pg 26 – 27, and Spring 2001 pg 6).

Returning to proper editorial coverage (although, again, the lines were often blurred in *Chase*), Guenther made an appearance in the Fall 2000 issue within its news section. “**Dustin Guenther** broke his foot at Woodward this summer, but now he’s back on his bike and plans to be moving to Phoenix, AZ for the winter. He’ll soon be riding a smaller version of the Thrillseeker with a 20” top tube” (*Chase*, Fall 2000: pg 8). It is interesting perhaps that this combination of news stories (injury, move, and product use)

included the imminent change in his equipment to a smaller frame-size, combining the announcement of a new product with the insistence that it was Pro-worthy.

“Two Bros From the Sunshine Coast” was the title of a joint Pro Interview with fellow Canadian Pro and friend Nathan Penonzek that appeared in the tenth issue of *Chase* (*Chase*, Summer 2001: pg 20 – 25). The six-page article featured four pictures of Guenther with visible wethepeople and Etnies logos. Ken Paul introduced the subjects.

Really, how can two guys grow up in a small town, dodge the drugs and distractions and end up being at the top of their game?

Growing up in Gibsons, BC, the clock runs on ferry time, Molly’s Reach is always busy and someone, somewhere is getting thrown in the drunk tank. With the mountains on one side and the ocean on the other, two guys found BMX as a way out. They grew up together, rode the skateparks and saved up their cash to go to “The Mainland” to ride with other BMXers. Today, Dustin Guenther and Nathan Penonzek are rarely in Gibsons. They’ve become what we Canadians like to call “Snowbirds”, though they never seem to come home after wintering in warmer climes. Dustin flows around a skatepark like mad and Nathan, well, let’s just say that Nathan is usually unstoppable when it comes to flatland. This is the long-awaited interview with two bros from the Sunshine Coast. (*Chase*, Summer 2001: pg 21)

This introduction confirmed their Pro status, reinforced the image of the world-traveling Pros, directly associated the two Pros as Bros, and asserted their small-town Canadian roots. Pro-ness was presented both as something to strive towards and as within the reach of driven young riders.

Later in the same issue, in the aforementioned Ten Pack-run La Revolution contest coverage, Guenther and (former Rookie) Greg Nicholson were praised for qualifying for the finals: “Greg, with some rather large airs over the street spine and

Dustin with his technical side, smoothness and good looks” (*Chase*, Summer 2001: pg 31). Again, Guenther’s Pro-level smoothness and good looks were stressed.

In a Pro Bros roadtrip that appears in the Winter 2002 issue, Guenther was featured in three action-shots and seven chill-shots (*Chase*, Winter 2002: pg 42 – 47). Guenther was seen clearly sporting logos from sponsors wethepeople, Demon Seed, Aversion, and Etnies. Guenther was also featured in the news section: “**Dustin Guenther** has left Demon Seed to ride for Matt Beyers’ and his brother’s new clothing company Indelible. Dustin just broke his finger, but still managed to ride in some sort of MTV music / sports event in San Diego” (*Chase*, Winter 2002: pg 66). In this combination of news stories, young Pro Matt Beyers’ clothing company got a rub from the fact that Guenther left his previous clothing sponsor to represent the new brand, an injury was reported, and Guenther’s triumph over the injury was relayed in association with a rockstar MTV event. Finally, a Guenther-penned story on the Camp Care charity event (wherein Pro BMX freestylers donated their time for sick kids), showed a different side to the Pro experience (*Chase*, Winter 2002: pg 69).

Within the aforementioned Summer 2003 issue story on the Toronto Metro Jam contest, the caption of an action-shot of Guenther explained that “(o)ne of the bombs of the weekend was definitely Dustin Guenther’s whip to feeble across the driveway” (*Chase*, Summer 2003: pg 30).⁹⁵ This Pro-level maneuver was also described in the accompanying article

⁹⁵ Tailwhip to feeble grind: a tailwhip is performed by jumping the bike, holding onto the handlebars, and kicking the bike in a horizontal three-hundred and sixty degree spin before landing back on the pedals (i.e.; whipping the tail of the bike around); a feeble grind is a maneuver in which the front wheel of the bike is rolling on top of an object while the rear axle peg is sliding (grinding) on the edge of the same object. As such, a

Pro Finals – Dustin Guenther: three whips off the spine into the wedge, 720s over the spine and... tailwhipping the driveway to feeble grind down the ledge! He tried it a few times in qualifying, and it was amazing how close he was getting.

The place erupted when he pulled it in the finals. (*Chase*, Summer 2003: pg 31) Here a trick list was provided to both awe and explain to the reader exactly what a Pro must do to inspire a crowd to the point of eruption. Guenther was also shown in a top-three head-shot of the winners of the Pro Street discipline (both his name and the words “Pro Street” actually appeared superimposed on the picture) (*Chase*, Summer 2003: pg 32).

In the news section of the same issue, another combination of Guenther-related news appeared: “(w)hile on the wethepeople road trip through Spain, **Dustin Guenther** smashed his knee up. To make matters worse, Dustin had his wallet stolen while at a bar in Malaga. To make matters better, Dustin’s been hooked up with Square One” (*Chase*, Summer 2003: pg 64). In this case, the good news of his third different clothing sponsor during the run of the magazine was used to show the bright side of Pro life in the face of injury and larceny.

Indeed, the final issue of *Chase* read like a tribute to Guenther. He appeared on the cover with strategically-placed logos on both the bottom of his bicycle (Etnies and Square One) and on the fence that he is riding (Etnies) (*Chase*, Fall 2003: pg 1). (IMAGE # 5-8) The Table Of Contents page contained the explanation for Guenther’s appearance. “On the Cover: With this being our last issue, there was only one person we wanted on the cover, and that’s Dustin Guenther” (*Chase*, Fall 2003: pg 11). Guenther was also featured in a two-page, poster-like photo entitled “Photo Spread” which was subtitled

tailwhip to feeble is a combination of maneuvers wherein the rider jumps his or her bike, tailwhips in the air, and lands on an object in a feeble grind.

“The Last Grind” (an Etnies logo is prominent on his hooded sweatshirt) (*Chase*, Fall 2003: pg 40 – 41). The final news section featured a Pro Bros picture of Guenther with John Heaton and Dave Osato (*Chase*, Fall 2003: pg 62). On the same page, it was announced that Guenther would appear on the Score Network on a show called *BMX Basics* (rockstar).

Despite the fact that Dustin Guenther did not appear in five issues (#8, #11, #12, #13, and #17), and is featured only in advertisements in four more issues, his substantial coverage in the remaining ten of *Chase*’s nineteen issues (that is, over time) worked well to establish and sustain his Pro image career. Today, Guenther is enjoying an internationally-recognized Pro’s lifestyle that was begun in 1999 through the mediation of *Chase BMX Magazine*.

Dave Mirra

SuperPro Dave Mirra was the first non-Canadian to be featured on the cover of the magazine (*Chase*, Fall 1999: pg 1). Perhaps part of a new, more global marketing plan (this third issue was also the first one to be offered for free), the Slim Jim-logoed Mirra appeared in a (low quality) picture taken at an American contest. As the most renowned Pro in the history of BMX freestyle, it was not surprising that he would be featured on the cover of a BMX publication. However, Mirra’s appearance on the cover of *Chase* was especially surprising to those in the culture that were aware of the longstanding tension between Jay Miron and Mirra. This disbelief would have been compounded by the respect shown to Mirra in the Miron-penned contest story.

So who was the streetiest of the street? Dave Mirra. He did a barspin acid drop from the 14’ high vert wall into the transition of the mini-ramp. Say what you

want about Dave, but I have a feeling that if we took the mini out of the street course, he would still be at the top. (*Chase*, Fall 1999: pg 31).

Within the contest coverage, Mirra was listed as the winner of the Street contest, and as having placed second in vert behind Miron.

Having won a coveted year-end B.S. contest series title, Mirra was also featured in the fourth issue's news section in a small black and white photo of the four title winners (*Chase*, Winter 1999: pg 7). This type of coverage would have worked to sustain his Pro-status, which would have served Mirra and his sponsors (and thus *Chase* advertisers).

Although it was surprising for Dave Mirra to be featured on the cover of Jay Miron's magazine, as their longstanding feud would seem to have blocked or impeded Mirra coverage, it is interesting to note that Mirra did not make another editorial appearance in *Chase* after the fourth issue (although he was featured in advertisements placed by his sponsors). Indeed, as Mirra's pro image career did not need and would not have significantly benefited from editorial coverage in *Chase*, his exile after the fourth issue most likely only negatively impacted on the Canadian distributors of his sponsors' goods.

Alistair Whitton

Representing the United Kingdom, Alistair Whitton made far more appearances in *Chase* than Dave Mirra (although he was not featured on the cover). One could argue that this was due to his status as (a distant) member of the family, in that he was a prominent international member of the MacNeil Bikes team.

Whitton's first appearance in the magazine was actually in a Little Devil advertisement (a Ten Pack distributed company) in the twelfth issue (*Chase*, Winter 2001: pg 32). His first proper editorial appearance was in the Summer 2002 issue, within which fellow MacNeil Pro Bro Dave Friemuth praised both Allan Cooke and Whitton with regard to their performance at the Roots Jam in Florida: "Allan Cooke and Alistair Whitton both managed to put together a run each that were probably the most complete and bad-ass contest runs I've seen" (*Chase*, Summer 2002: pg 28). Although written by another member of the extended World Bicycle Sports family, this worked to both introduce and legitimate Whitton to the readers of *Chase*. Whitton's first editorial picture also appeared in this article, with conspicuous MacNeil and SoBe logos on his BMX frame (*Chase*, Summer 2002: pg 29). Further working to elevate his Pro-status, the news section of this issue reported that Whitton had been invited to be on the *Road Fools* 10 invite-only Pro roadtrip (*Chase*, Summer 2002: pg 65).

The Winter 2002 issue featured a picture of Whitton riding an emptied pool in Las Vegas in the coverage of the annual Interbike tradeshow (*Chase*, Winter 2002: pg 60). Another example of Pro-as-world-traveler lifestyle, this shot also implies some "badass" mischief in that he was probably trespassing, and that he had evidently placed a sticker from one of his sponsors (appropriately, The Shadow Conspiracy) on the pool surface (although this can be seen as mischief that served the interests of his sponsor).

In the Summer 2003 issue, Whitton received editorial coverage in the forms of both a picture and within the Ken Paul written story on the FISE⁹⁶ contest that took place

⁹⁶ Festival International des Sports Extrême.

in Montpellier, France. Paul recalls Whitton's performance in the Pro "Combo Ramp" class.

Alistair blasted the spine into the bowl like no one else, turn down 180'd the spine and (this was my favourite) downside toothpick to icepicked the quarter. If you blinked, you missed it, and if you listened to the "ching-ching" of the front peg and then the back peg, you caught it. Alistair caught first place in this one, followed by Montréaler Max Vincent, who showed some big tech skills. (*Chase*, Summer 2003: pg 53)

Perhaps to bring the story closer to home, Paul associated Whitton with a Canadian Pro. Indeed, a picture of Whitton and Vincent appearing on a Jumbotron television ("Everyone loves a Jumbotron") at the event was also included in the article (*Chase*, Summer 2003: pg 54). Whitton's last appearance during *Chase*'s run was also in the news section of this issue: "Alistair Whitton broke his toe and rolled his ankle just before the Global X Games." (*Chase*, Summer 2003: pg 65). Importantly, even though he would be forced to miss the event, the Global X Games were still linked to Whitton, maintaining his Pro status.

Despite the fact that British Pro Alistair Whitton's star rose precisely during the period of *Chase BMX Magazine*'s publication, it is not the case that *Chase* was instrumental in establishing his Pro status. In contrast to the image career of Dustin Guenther, Whitton arrived in the pages of *Chase* as an internationally renowned Pro (merely requiring a formal introduction by teammate Dave Friemuth). It reveals more about the focus of *Chase* than in his relative Pro status that Whitton received much more editorial coverage during the magazine's nineteen issue run than veteran American Pro Dave Mirra. That is, as a MacNeil Bikes sponsored rider that was also an international star / Pro (whose coverage would thus legitimate *Chase*'s claims to be an international

publication), Whitton was destined to receive more coverage than a Pro that did not represent Jay Miron-owned companies in this Jay Miron-owned magazine.

The 2003 MacNeil Catalogue

“...magazines that are pure advertising, like *Colors* from Benetton, *Le Magazine de Chanel*, or *Sony Style*, (...) remove the line between advertising and content so that you cannot tell what is text and what is hype.” (Twitchell, 1996: pg 77)

“Ideally, the entertainment and the advertisement would melt into a seamless “advertainment.” Put that in the past tense. It’s already happened.” (Twitchell, 1996: pg 104)

It is fair to say that *Chase BMX Magazine* did indeed at times blur the lines between a magazine that served its readership and advertisers and a catalogue that served the interests of its parent company (World Bicycle Sports), its fraternal companies (Ten Pack Distribution and Metro BMX Jams), and its step-sibling (MacNeil Bikes). As such, it is perhaps not surprising that the reverse might manifest. Although MacNeil Bikes has since returned to a standard catalogue format, the 2003 issue of the company’s catalogue was constructed to resemble a periodical publication analogous to a special issue of a magazine. (IMAGE #5-9) The document was prepared for distribution at the annual Interbike tradeshow in Las Vegas that took place in the Fall of 2002.

On the cover of the publication (entitled “*MacNeil Bikes Annual*”) the company’s website address appeared, along with copy proclaiming “issue one – 2003 FREE”. The “magalog” was magazine-sized and styled, and filled thirty-two pages. MacNeil Pro John

Heaton was featured on the cover along with cover blurbs advertising the magazine-like contents within: “Ruben Alcantara – The Interview”, “Dave Friemuth – Five Things You Didn’t Know”, and “Travelling The World – The MacNeil Video in the Making”.

Curiously, the publication also featured seven pages of advertisements from companies associated with MacNeil or their Pros: Axion shoes (Miron), Etnies shoes (Ruben Alcantara), Ripcurl shoes (Romuald “Bibi” Noirot), and SoBe beverages (a MacNeil team sponsor).

With regard to “editorial content,” the catalogue featured a magazine-like two-page table of contents spread featuring a photograph of one of the MacNeil team Pros, Dave Friemuth (*MacNeil Bikes Annual*, 2003: pg 4 – 5). A two-page “letter from the editor” by Miron mimicked a magazine editorial (*MacNeil Bikes Annual*, 2003: pg 8 – 9). Three magazine-inspired profiles on MacNeil Pros (Dom Mach, Alistair Whitton and Romuald “Bibi” Noirot) appeared throughout the catalogue (*MacNeil Bikes Annual*, 2003: pg 10, 11, and 25). An alternative profile-type article that was advertised on the cover promised and delivered “Five Things You Didn’t Know About Dave Friemuth” (*MacNeil Bikes Annual*, 2003: pg 18 – 19). Also as promised on the cover, a five-page interview with MacNeil Pro Ruben Alcantara was included (*MacNeil Bikes Annual*, 2003: pg 20 – 24).

More akin to a catalogue, but formatted like a magazine, was a six-page product section (*MacNeil Bikes Annual*, 2003: pg 12 – 17). Not unlike a magazine, within this section was found an Alcantara frame and Pro Bike Check entitled “Ruben’s Ruben” (*MacNeil Bikes Annual*, 2003: pg 14). John Heaton was also featured in this way, with

“John’s Heaton” (*MacNeil Bikes Annual*, 2003: pg 15). Both of these featured a chill-shot photograph of the Pro with his personal bike.

Paralleling the Pro-as-World-traveling-rockstar discourse, the catalogue’s two-page “Filming the Four Corners of the Globe With the MacNeil Team” section upheld the myth (*MacNeil Bikes Annual*, 2003: pg 26 – 27).

In the end, the seams were allowed to show in the masthead. Indeed, “MacNeil Bikes, Inc.” was exposed as the publisher, with Miron and D’Arcy Saccucci listed as the editor and assistant editor, respectively (Saccucci was also revealed to be MacNeil’s product manager) (*MacNeil Bikes Annual*, 2003: pg 28 – 29). More comparable to a catalogue than a magazine, this area of the *MacNeil Bikes Annual* also listed the brand’s international distributors. Nevertheless, this publication (like *Chase BMX Magazine*) worked to both establish and sustain the image careers of the Pros that were also employed within it to be associated with branded product. The 2003 *MacNeil Bikes Annual* merely appropriated the established format of the BMX magazine and their use of the figure of the Pro to take advantage of the aspects of these magazines that best serve the interests of the industry.

Conclusions

We can see then, that *Chase BMX Magazine* was positioned as central to a Canadian BMX freestyle star system, within which the currency was the BMX freestyle Pro. The magazine’s periodic publication and the recurring editorial content within these issues worked to both maintain the image careers of established Pros and build the careers of young emerging Pros (Rookies). These Pros could be seen as having been

complicit with their exploitation by the magazine and the industry through their strategic logoing of their bodies and bicycles with the intention of cashing-in on photo contingencies. Indeed, this ritual behavior could be seen as serious and professional.

Chase was a unique case in that it was owned by the owner of a BMX bicycle brand and a BMX distributorship that were served by the magazine's purposeful promotion of these companies' interests. As such, we can see that particular Pros were used to particular ends to serve the magazine and the owner of the magazine's interests. Jason Enns, as an established Pro, brought the magazine credibility and represented and used product from brands that were distributed by Ten Pack (Volume, Little Devil, Profile). Dustin Guenther was a fresh young Canadian Pro whose image career had not been established prior to the publication of the magazine, and thus was more pliable when it came to promoting the interests of *Chase* and Ten Pack Distribution (the wethepeople brand).

Dave Mirra's image career (that of the international superstar) did not truly need *Chase*'s support in any way. However, we can see that the reverse was not the case, as he appeared on the cover of the magazine at precisely the moment when the publication was redefining itself as more international in scope in order to reach a wider audience (third issue, first to be offered for free). MacNeil Bikes sponsored Pro Alistair Whitton's image career probably did not receive or require a boost from appearances in *Chase*, but being featured in the magazine served both MacNeil Bikes and the magazine itself in that the excitement of an emerging international superstar rubbed off on both. Not surprisingly, much of the same staff that worked to make *Chase* a magazine that functioned as a catalogue also published a catalogue that was designed as a magazine. The *MacNeil Bikes*

Annual may have flipped the model on its head, but also showed that the line between the media of magazines and catalogues could be blurred.

CHAPTER SIX

Ride (US) BMX Magazine

“It was the beginning of the end of the BMX magazines. *BMX Action* was gone, then *Freestylin’*. There was a breath of fresh air when *Go* emerged from the ashes of the two, but that didn’t last long, and *Go* soon met its demise. BMX was dead and mags were just not selling. It was a dark time for BMX-hungry kids like myself. There was no BMX on TV, and there were no video magazines. Even videos were scarce back then, which is probably why I know the few I had by heart. BMX was desperate for some kind of media worth a crap, and when *Ride* appeared it was a big bright hope for us all.” (Pro BMX freestyler Taj Mihelich, quoted in *Ride (US)*, Dec 2002, pg 87)

“When FBM first started, it was so we could go on road trips and try to sell a few T-shirts to pay for the gas. Ten years later, I’m typing a story about a trip we took in a \$100,000-dollar rig for a magazine that’s sold at 7-Eleven and Barnes & Noble. Outrageous.” (FBM brand owner Steve Crandall, quoted in *Ride (US)*, March 2003, pg 93)

As discussed in Chapter Four, *Ride BMX Magazine (US)* was started in 1992 by a former photographer of the then recently folded *Go: The Rider’s Manual* (which was the magazine that was created to combine and replace the two BMX bibles of the 1980s, *BMX Action* and *Freestylin’*). After publishing articles critical of one of the main BMX racing sanctions and of the primary advertiser within the magazine (resulting in that advertiser pulling its many pages of advertising), *Go* ceased publication after the March 1992 issue. Filling a void that was only perceptible to perhaps a few thousand participants (the culture being at an all-time low in terms of popularity and participation), Brad McDonald released his primitive, black and white newsprint BMX magazine later

that year. *Ride US* has gone on to become the most successful BMX magazine of the last decade (publishing its 100th issue in August of 2004).⁹⁷

As also discussed above, *Ride (US)* has been a part of the AOL / Time Warner family since 2001, having been initially purchased by Times Mirror Publishing in January of 1998. The magazine was started by McDonald at the low-point in BMX freestyle's history, and its success exactly paralleled that of the culture during the last two decades. As perhaps the most important medium within the culture with respect to subcultural capital and star-making, the magazine's success was intimately connected to the rise in popularity of BMX freestyle after the intervention of the (televised) ESPN Extreme Games in 1995. Unlike other publications (notably, *Chase*, sister-publication *Transworld BMX*, and *Twenty*), *Ride (US)* has also managed to survive the post-peak lull in the industry since 2002. And as the culture restabilizes at a level that is somewhat below the boom years of the late 1990s (but much healthier than any time before 1995), *Ride (US)* is arguably still the most important mediating institution within BMX freestyle.⁹⁸

The fifty-two issues of *Ride (US)* under analysis here (April / May 1999 to November 2003 inclusively) not only reflect the time period of *Chase BMX Magazine's* publication, but also represent the peak years within the BMX freestyle industry. Indeed,

⁹⁷ To be fair, *BMX Plus!* has been published continuously since 1978. However, this magazine has never had the clout of magazines such as *BMX Action*, *Freestylin'*, or *Ride BMX Magazine (US)*.

⁹⁸ Still, an important sign that the best years may be behind the culture (or, perhaps, that the importance of magazines as a medium within the culture has diminished) may be that founder Brad McDonald left the magazine after fourteen years to start up an internet-based company: "(a)dvertisers have been slow to dedicate ad dollars to the Internet, but consumers have totally embraced online media. But wherever readers go, advertisers will follow" (*BMX Business News*, May 2006: pg 3).

this was also the period within which the previously bimonthly *Ride (US)* became a monthly publication (beginning with the June 2000 issue), implying that the advertisers were ready to support the magazine year 'round. During this boom period, *Ride (US)*, *Snap* (later *Transworld BMX*) and *BMX Business News* were published simultaneously by Ride Publishing / Transworld Media.

As magazines must track and organize information about their audiences for their advertisers, reader surveys have been an annual feature of *Ride (US)*. Importantly, responses to such surveys allow the publishers to produce demographic information and present this to the advertisers to assure them that the audience that they desire is paying attention (or to be truly more precise, filling out surveys). The annual surveys also work to collect data that serves to establish that the readers of *Ride (US)* are also consumers of goods outside of the BMX industry (i.e.; information is gathered on household spending on non-BMX related consumer spending such as on stereo equipment and DVDs and CDs). According to the results of the most recent survey relayed in the December 2001 issue of *Ride (US)*, the median age of the respondents was 15.7 years, Dave Mirra was their favourite Pro, and males made up 97.5 % of the readership (*Ride (US)*, Dec 2001, pg 50). Indeed, the assumed percentage for female readers of 2.5% may have been on the high side, as in an article entitled "BMX by the numbers" which appeared earlier in the year, the readers were told in a summary that the "(p)ercentage of Ride readers who are female" was 1.2 (*Ride (US)*, June 2001, pg 54).

Intentions

“From the outset, the idea behind *Ride* was nothing more than making a magazine that would stoke people who were into riding. There was no big concept other than to show lots of cool photos, have interesting stories, and not make you feel like a loser because you were into BMX.” (*Ride (US)*, July 2000, pg 74)

As with *Chase BMX Magazine*, the good intentions of the publishers of the magazine were at least stated. Furthermore, as also was the case within both *Chase* and *Ride (UK)*, there did appear over the course of the four-and-a-half years under analysis a collection of articles that could be seen to benefit the readers / riders without direct utility to the advertisers. For example, “how-to” advice articles (called “Steps” in *Ride (US)*), instructed the readers in the execution of maneuvers that their favourite Pros had mastered. Still, these articles often featured Pros performing the stunts, and as such they could be seen to have benefited the Pros themselves (in that they received further editorial coverage, were offered for emulation, and were put on a pedestal) and their respective sponsors.

A related recurring reader-serving item was that of the “How-To Scam Airlines” articles (for example, *Ride (US)*, July 1999: pg 118; and July 2002: pg 54). These articles offered solutions to the problem of airlines charging special fees for flying with bicycles, and perhaps would only benefit advertisers if a particular brand of flight bag was suggested, or if a particular Pro’s solution was presented. Skatepark directory columns provided the reader with a list of sites to practice their hobby (for example, *Ride (US)*, Oct. 1999: pg 118). A related article type appeared in June of 2002 that provided a sample letter to be copied by the reader and distributed to local authorities and councils

for the purpose of helping to get access for bikes to free public skateparks (many of which have banned bicycles) (*Ride (US)*, June 2000: pg 35). Such articles that seem to serve the reader's interests over that of the needs of the BMX industry (the Pros, the advertisers, the magazine) are of course merely the "free lunch" that is traded for the readers' attention (that ultimately serves the industry's interests in the end).

Analysis

As with the previous chapter concerning *Chase BMX Magazine*, this chapter looks at five recurring editorial column types (the Cover, News, Profiles, the Pro Interview, and the Pro Bike Check) as they appeared in *Ride (US)* over the specified period. Furthermore, the subsequent analysis of particular Pro image careers follows those of the same individuals focused upon in the previous chapter with regard to editorial coverage (namely, Dave Mirra, Jason Enns, Dustin Guenther, and Alistair Whitton).

Recurring Editorial Content: The Cover

"I vividly remember the first issue with Fuzzy Hall on the cover doing a one-footed seatgrab X-up. In fact, I promptly went out riding and tried to copy him."
(Pro Taj Mihelich, quoted in *Ride (US)*, Dec 2002, pg 87)

Indeed, "getting the cover" of *Ride (US)* is still (arguably) the most prestigious regular media coverage that a Pro can receive. The feeling throughout the culture is that this is an honour that is given to a Pro: one that has must be earned. However, there are other important factors with regard to the choice of the subject featured on the magazine's cover. Two such factors are the quality of the photos collected for an issue (as

in the absence of a designated subject, the best photo could be chosen) and the awesomeness of the maneuver being performed (the most progressive trick, or as in the case of the Mihelich quote above, the most inspiring).

As discussed above, one of the main ways in which Pros can cash-in on their editorial coverage in magazines is the strategic logoing of their bicycles and their bodies. These Pros often have photo contingency clauses in their sponsorship contracts that pay them rewards for the size and type (cover, photo section, poster, etc.) of photos that appear in magazines, provided that the brand names are clearly visible. As a result, Pros often locate such logos on their bicycles in areas that, while not visible in a standard profile-shot, are conspicuous when the bicycle is inverted or in an otherwise alternative position during the execution of particular maneuvers. An example of this could be seen on the first cover of *Ride (US)* under analysis. The April / May 1999 issue showed that Pro Ron Kimler's placement of a Schwinn sticker under the downtube of his frame had been rewarded, as the particular angle from which the photo was shot has made this logo plainly visible (*Ride (US)*, April / May 1999: pg 1). It is fair to assume that Kimler was monetarily compensated by his sponsors for not only his appearance on the cover of *Ride (US)*, but also for the plainly visible logo. Importantly, the logos on his gloves and shoes were also clearly visible.

A subsequent cover featuring Tim "Fuzzy" Hall showed that Hall had also been doing this part of his work as a Pro. Indeed, the whole length of the top tube of his frame was strategically covered with his sponsors' stickers, as was his helmet (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 2000: pg 1). The cover blurb, "Fuzzy Hall: Utah Represent" clarified any question as to who was appearing on the cover that month. Predating the Dustin Guenther cover of

Chase (in which he was seen with matching Etnies brand stickers on his bicycle and on the obstacle on which he is performing the maneuver) by two years, the October 2001 issue of *Ride (US)* featured Pro Van Homan riding a ramp logoed with Little Devil brand stickers. (IMAGE #6-1) Homan's sponsors (Little Devil, Schwinn, and Right Guard logos were conspicuous) can be seen to have received a further rub from the identifying cover blurb: "He Can't Be Human: Van Homan Interview" (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 2001: pg 1).

Although many BMX magazine cover photos have featured Pros performing maneuvers that could be described as "classics" (for example, the immortal "tabletop"), pictures of new, big and / or progressive maneuvers have also been featured on the cover of *Ride (US)*. An example of this phenomenon, wherein the trick performed seems to be the focus rather than the particular Pro, was the cover of the September 1999 issue. (IMAGE #6-2) Pro (and owner of both the Volume and Demolition brands) Brian Castillo was photographed performing an icepick grind⁹⁹ on an elevated steel bar (simulating a horizontal handrail) high-above and between two dirt mounds, thus combining the sub-disciplines of "dirt jumping" and "street" in one maneuver (*Ride (US)*, Sept. 1999: pg 1). This photo captured a moment of progression (or perhaps, PROgression), as this new maneuver can be seen to be taking dirt jumping to another level. The "big-ness" of the stunt is also important. Indeed, Dave Voelker was featured on the cover of the fiftieth issue performing an old street / ramp trick (an abubaca¹⁰⁰) on an enormous rock (*Ride (US)*, July 2000: pg 1). (IMAGE #6-3) This (truly ridiculous)

⁹⁹ An icepick grind is sliding on the rear axle peg on a hard surface (such as on a metal pipe or a marble ledge). Conversely, sliding on only the front peg is known as a toothpick grind.

¹⁰⁰ An abubaca is a trick whereby the rider mounts an object head-on, landing only on the rear wheel. After stalling briefly, the rider pulls back from the object, landing backwards (that is, rolling away "fakie").

maneuver showed that the veteran was still capable of Pro-level riding, and its documentation and appearance on the cover of this momentous issue of *Ride (US)* worked to sustain his Pro status. The large-ness of the trick featured on the cover of the December 2000 issue was quantified in a cover blurb: “Joe Rich: 5 Foot Ramp, 7 Foot Fufanu”¹⁰¹ (*Ride (US)*, Dec. 2000: pg 1). And the cover blurb of the February 2003 issue (another large fufanu) explained what is obvious to the savvy reader: “Justin Inman at Burnside. Ridiculous” (*Ride (US)*, Feb. 2003: pg 1). For both the Joe Rich and Justin Inman covers, the tricks were huge (indeed, Pro-huge), cover blurbs reinforced this while indicating who exactly was doing the maneuvers, and the companies that sponsored these riders (whose logos were prominently displayed on the riders and on their respective bicycles) got a direct rub from the association with these Pros. It is important to remember that whether the Pro himself was the focus of the cover, or the particular stunt was the star, the building and maintenance of Pro image careers was still taking place. That is, the Pro-ness of the trick (Pro-gression or Pro-sized) conferred Pro-ness on the rider, as does the appearance of the Pro performing the particular stunt on the cover of the magazine.

News

Of course, the recurring editorial content-type within BMX magazines that is most important to conveying a sense that the culture is progressive and vital is the news column. Throughout the time period covered in this study, the news section within *Ride (US)* was labeled “Up Front,” with most of the information falling under the subheading

¹⁰¹ A fufanu is similar to an abubaca, except that one turns the bike 180 degrees in the air on reentry, so that one rolls out facing forward.

of “Fine Print.”¹⁰² Like the news section in *Chase*, much of the Fine Print content concerns Pro sponsorship news, directly associating the advertisers with the stars of the culture.¹⁰³ Other news stories that appear in the Up Front section also concern the imitable Pro lifestyle. For example, an article from the June 1999 issue entitled “The Big Pay Day” ranked and listed Pro contest winnings for 1998 (Dave Mirra had brought the most prize money home, followed by Jay Miron) (*Ride (US)*, June 1999: pg 42).

With regard to sponsorships, Canadian Pro Andrew Faris was featured in a mini-interview within the Up Front section of the May 2001 issue of *Ride (US)* in which he discussed that he had left Schwinn to represent Volume (*Ride (US)*, May 2001: pg 52). Importantly, this news appeared two months after the appearance of Faris’ new Volume-branded signature frame in the magazine’s new product section (in which his name wasn’t mentioned), showing that the magazine is complicit with their advertisers’ need to control exactly when the news of a sponsor-change is exposed (*Ride (US)*, March 2001: pg 64). Indeed, the caption to the picture of this new model of BMX frame hinted cryptically to the identity of the associated Pro:

Info: The Mid is Volume’s latest creation and would be a great frame for smaller riders with its 19.5-inch top tube. It would also make a great all-purpose frame for those who like to ride flat, street, ramp etc. The Mid will be available by January 2001. (*Ride (US)*, March 2001: pg 64)

At the time of this earlier issue, Faris was known as being at the forefront of a movement that seemed to be merging the flatland and street disciplines (occupying a ‘Mid’-dle

¹⁰² Or, alternatively “Fineprint.”

¹⁰³ Starting with the August 2000 issue, a second, separate (if not ghetto-ized) news section entitled “Regional News” has been a regular feature (*Ride (US)*, Aug. 2000: pg 171). Although the names of Pros and corporations do appear in this section, it primarily serves to inform riders in particular scenes what is going on in their particular area.

ground, if you will). The relative shortness of the frame (19.5 inches versus the regular 20.5 inches) would have positioned this option as either a longer flatland frame or a shorter street frame. Indeed, if one was to hazard a guess as to which Pro this frame would be associated with, Faris would have been at the top of a very short list at the time. It was also telling that the release date for the frame was listed as January, as this was precisely when any new sponsorship contract would have begun.

With the introduction of John Heaton's signature MacNeil frame, no such secrecy was required. The readers were teased with regard to the existence of such a product in the June 2002 issue in a Fine Print combination story that also mentioned a recent injury: "**John Heaton** is back riding after recovering from a broken collarbone, and he's riding a prototype of his MacNeil signature frame" (*Ride (US)*, June 2002: pg 42). In the Up Front section of the July 2002 issue of *Ride (US)*, an article appeared entitled "MacNeil Makes One for the Little Guys" (*Ride (US)*, July 2002: pg 48). The article served much in the same way as a press release: "(i)n May, the new John Heaton signature frame from MacNeil should be available in stores." This article was accompanied by a small picture of Heaton sitting on his logoed bicycle (SoBe and MacNeil), wearing his strategically stickered helmet (MacNeil, SoBe and Etnies). This news item thus served Heaton in maintaining and elevating his Pro status (that he is worthy of a signature frame / Pro model), served his sponsors in both deeming the release of a new product as newsworthy and by promoting this product in association with a imitable Pro, and served the magazine itself in justifying its periodical publication (new products that weren't available last month) and helping to keep a sense of evolution, progression and vitality to the culture that it was concerned with.

As with *Chase*, *Ride (US)* also featured news items that did not directly benefit the magazine's advertisers. However, as these stories tended to work to maintain the status of the Pro riders, they can of course be seen to have benefited the brands that were intimately associated with the Pros through their sponsorships. In an Up Front article entitled "Streiby and the flip-whip," the successful execution of a new maneuver was deemed newsworthy, and the Pro status of Adam Striebby was elevated and affirmed (*Ride (US)*, Aug. 2001: pg 54).¹⁰⁴ Again, novelty and progression were highlighted, and the magazine, the Pro rider, and his sponsors all benefited. Another example of the elevation and maintenance of Pro status (and the positioning of the Pro lifestyle as desirable) appeared in the news section of the April 2003 issue: "**John Heaton** went to do shows in Saudi Arabia and China in December" (*Ride (US)*, Apr. 2003: pg 46).

Profiles: "Bio"

Whereas the one- to two-page profiles on emerging stars (i.e.; candidates for consideration) were labeled "Rookies" in *Chase*, such an introduction in *Ride (US)* was known as a "Bio." This recurring editorial column served the future Pros themselves by elevating their status, their co-sponsors via the legitimization of these riders by the magazine, and the magazine itself as part of the larger project of asserting the vitality of the culture through the introduction of new worship-worthy, imitable heroes. Importantly, not all profiles that appeared in *Ride (US)* over this period were called Bios. Indeed, the magazine regularly featured profiles of riders that strayed beyond the standard Bio format. For example, a special profile entitled "Flatland Life" profiled Gabe Kadmiri.

¹⁰⁴ A flip-whip is a backflip during which a tailwhip is also performed.

Although not labeled as such, the content of the article was very much like that of a Bio, however, and the article even featured a generic “real good, real fast” quote similar to those discussed with regard to *Chase* above: “(v)ery few people can develop the control that Gabe has in a two-year period” (*Ride (US)*, Jan. 2001: pg 117).

Another example of alternative profiles in *Ride (US)* was the “Leaders of the New School” article that appeared in the April / May 1999 issue. In this star-making / knighting article, mini-interviews with three emerging Pros were introduced by editor Mark Losey:

In every generation of riders there are always a few guys that stand out from the rest. They’re the kind of guys you watch ride and then think “that guy is going to be big time. (...) After watching the riding scene last year it became pretty obvious that these three guys are all going to go off in ’99. Let me introduce you to Chad Kagy, Martti Kuoppa, and Chris Duncan, also known as the leaders of the new school. (*Ride (US)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 100)

Each of the three riders profiled received two pages of coverage, including a listing of their sponsors (which benefited both their Pro image status and their respective sponsors). With regard to Kagy, Losey could be seen to have employed the strategy of asserting Pro-ness by association with other veteran Pros (i.e.; that he was Pro Bros with established, recognizable stars).

Chad Kagy is the product of his environment. Riding with Joey Garcia everyday has given him the ability to destroy anything in his way, while his sessions with Cameron Birdwell have taught him how to throw the bike completely away during jumps, but then get back on before landing. That’s a mixture you don’t see everyday. (*Ride (US)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 103)

Losey used another strategy with Kuoppa: that of introducing a Pro with a discourse of innovation (and, notably, listing his innovative tricks).

Martti Kuoppa does things on a bike that should not be possible. Instead of following trends, he is continually coming up with new ground tricks like one-footed hitchhikers, no-footed steamrollers, kickflips... the list goes on and on. (*Ride (US)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 104)

Chris Duncan's introduction, curiously, discussed how he had mastered other people's maneuvers.

Chris Duncan is the kid from Florida who is making big waves in dirt-jumping – whether the other dirt jumpers want to admit it or not. Duncan is the only rider besides Ryan Nyquist who has mastered the triple-barspin, and the triple-truck has been added to his bag of tricks as well. This kid is good. (*Ride (US)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 107)

In this instance, Duncan was not seen as an innovator, but rather as a rider that had mastered the tricks of others. That is, he was a Pro not because he was leading the pack, but rather because he was keeping up with the pack (that he was as good as Pro Ryan Nyquist). Thus, in a single article, three different ways of positioning a given rider's Pro-ness were employed by the same writer.

The generic, recurring profile in *Ride (US)* is the somewhat stable Bio column. Typically, this is a one- to two-page feature that consists of a head-shot / chill-shot, one or more action photos, a statistics list (age, hometown, sponsors), and a paragraph that constitutes an introduction by a more established rider who happens to be friends with the subject. Ryan Barrette was offered to the readers for their consideration in the August 2002 issue in a one-page bio put together by industry player Steve Buddendeck.

Chances are that you've heard of or may have even seen Hoffman Bikes' Ryan Barrette before. He travels often, has appeared in numerous videos, competes on occasion, and has gotten his fair share of photos in the BMX magazines. Despite of all the publicity Barrette remains underrated, but he doesn't really seem to care. Barrette is happy being able to push himself, see new places, meet new people,

and ride with his friends. This laid back attitude has enabled him to become a serious shredder on park, street, and dirt. (*Ride (US)*, Aug. 2002: pg 132)

(IMAGE #6-4)

In this interesting case, it seems that previous informal introductions to Barrette had not been noticed, and as such an appearance in the Bio column was warranted. Indeed, Barrette was already experiencing parts of the Pro lifestyle (video appearances, travel, etc.), but still remained “underrated.” It could be the case that Buddendeck, a former editor of *Snap BMX Magazine* (*Ride (US)*’s sister publication), wanted to give his acquaintance’s Pro image a “push” towards an elevated level of stardom. Other instances of riders with status profiling their friends in *Ride (US)* include Dave Friemuth’s introduction of Brian Kachinski (*Ride (US)*, April 2002: pg 130),¹⁰⁵ and current *Dig* editor Brian Tunney’s presentation of his (notably female) friend Erin Donato (*Ride (US)*, Aug. 2000: pg 168 - 169).¹⁰⁶

Pro Interviews

Although I have positioned the cover shot of *Ride (US)* as being the most prized form of recurring editorial content in the culture, one could make the argument that the Pro Interview is its rival. Whereas *Chase* Pro Interviews averaged about four pages in length, interviews in *Ride (US)* were often over twelve pages. Indeed, the riders that were featured in *Ride (US)* were often collaborating with the editor for many months to get

¹⁰⁵ As seen in the previous chapter, MacNeil Bikes sponsored veteran Pro Friemuth also introduced Alistair Whitton to *Chase* readers.

¹⁰⁶ It is quite unusual for female riders to be featured in such a way. Another female rider, Nina Buitrago, was featured in a Bio within a subsequent issue (*Ride (US)*, Jan. 2003: pg 120 - 122). Two issues later, a news item appeared in Fine Print which associated Buitrago with a Pro, albeit in a way that could be termed as unspecified admiration. “**John Heaton** hooked up **Nina Buitrago** with a frame because he thinks she’s dope” (*Ride (US)*, Mar. 2003: pg 44).

enough photographic content for the interview (that is, Pro-level or –quality tricks). As such, the reader might have noticed that the Pro was not only wearing different clothes in each shot (implying that shots were taken on different days), but that his bike might have been a different colour (perhaps implying that months had passed).

As an indication of the scope of such an interview, the example of Jay Miron's Pro Interview in the October 2000 issue is illuminating (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 2000: pg 74 – 86, 162, 165). In an article that spanned over fifteen pages, Miron was featured in ninety-eight pictures. This included eleven chill-shots, four action-shots, six sequences (consisting of a total of seventy-one individual shots), and one crash sequence (six shots). Furthermore, a set of six “classic” shots of Miron accompanied a sidebar-article entitled “Flashbacks” (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 2000: pg 83). The interview, which was also promoted on the cover (“Jay Miron Interview”), also contained a second sidebar entitled “Jay's Tricks” which listed the thirty-two maneuvers that Miron had pioneered along with the dates on which they were first “pulled” (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 2000: pg 79). If the sheer size of the interview was not enough to show Miron's SuperPro status, editor Mark Losey provided a bottom-line assessment of Miron's status in his introduction to the article: “Jay Miron is as badass as it gets in BMX” (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 2000: pg 74).

Interviews are expected to grant access to the interiority of their subjects. Indeed, the August 1999 issue featured a thirteen-page article entitled “The Real Taj Mihelich” interview (*Ride (US)*, Aug. 1999: pg 54 – 64, 125 – 126). This title could perhaps have been read as promising the unmasking of a Pro with regard to image, and that beneath the trappings of the Pro lifestyle (sponsors, media coverage, travel) something more pure exists. However, this is not to say that particular interviews did not benefit a Pro's

sponsor in more direct ways. An example of more blatant advertiser / sponsor association in *Ride (US)* could be seen in the title of a co-interview with Pros Van Homan and Garret Byrnes: “The Jersey Devils” (*Ride (US)*, Sept. 1999: pg 58). Not only did this reference the fabled cryptozoological creature that is reported to inhabit New Jersey (both riders called this state their home), but it also conveniently referred to the fact that they were both sponsored by Little Devil brand clothing (whose owner, Derek Adams, was credited for having conducted the interview). Indeed, the riders were both seen in the opening chill-shot wearing fresh Little Devil t-shirts. (IMAGE #6-5)

Curiously, there has been a consistent effort to introduce interview subjects as non-stars while asserting their Pro status in *Ride (US)*. Former editor Ike Taylor introduced Chris Stauffer in the January 2001 issue.

The bridge to becoming a Pro BMXer has some heavy tolls. Some riders take it in stride, some automate through like a robot, and others hack their way through any way they can. Chris Stauffer, or “Stauff” as he is called by his friends, adheres to none of this. Due to his skill he’s involuntarily been categorized as a Pro, but his ideals have never been effected by big money coverage, or anything like that. He just happens to be so good on a bike that sponsors will gladly play by his rules. His riding style is mimicked by many and reproduced by none. Stauff lives a simple life that consists of riding, riding, and more riding. (*Ride (US)*, Jan. 2001: pg 134)

As such, the reader was presented with a candidate for stardom that evidently was not interested in it. Of course, an anti-hero is still a hero (if not an even more attractive one). Still, it was most often the case that the interview subject was being positioned as an imitable hero, often via the association with more established Pros. In the July 2001 issue, Mark Losey introduced a young, versatile Pro whose recent strategic relocation effectively surrounded himself with a cadre of Pro Bros.

At only 19 years old, Allan Cooke is already a serious player on the contest scene. Before last year, people thought of him mainly as a jumper, but he's been going off on street and in parks just as hard. Allan moved to Greenville, North Carolina, last year, and his riding style fits right in with the rest of the local superheroes.

(*Ride (US)*, July 2001: pg 96)

The savvy reader knew that the "local superheroes" of Greenville, North Carolina included some of the biggest names on the organized-sport side of the culture, including Dave Mirra, Ryan Nyquist, and others. As such, Losey's introduction announced in no uncertain terms that Cooke was to be taken seriously as a top Pro. Another example of the association of an interview subject with other veteran Pros was seen in the November 2002 issue. In this instance, however, a sidebar entitled "Sources of Inspiration" had interviewee Mike Aitken posit and discuss the influence of five riders (three of whom were Pros) on his riding career (*Ride (US)*, Nov. 2002: pg 84). With this inversion, the Pro seemed to be associating himself with such Pro Bros. Of course, the reader is not privy to the truth with regard to whose idea such an exercise was, and it was the editorial staff that finally decided whether to and how to present such information to the readers.

The Pro Interview in *Ride (US) BMX Magazine* is a significant part of the Pro making and sustaining process. With regard to size, there is no greater opportunity for coverage and to cash-in on sponsors' photo contingency programs. Indeed, the magnitude of this recurring editorial column stresses and asserts the importance of its subject, significantly contributing to the accretion of a Pro's status over time. This ritual proposal of candidates for consideration with regard to imitable Pro status is different from that of the shorter one- to two-page profile in that it is at a much higher level. In the case of the Pro Interview, the Pro status is not in doubt: it is more that these candidates are competing for the status of a reader's *favourite* Pro. In *Ride (US)*, we can see discourses

of authenticity that claim to have access to the “real” Pro, that offer subjects as anti heroes, and that assert Pro-ness via the association with other veterans and the employment of Pro Bros.

Pro Bike Checks

As discussed above, the Pro Bike Check column could be found in BMX magazines published in the 1970s. However, this was not a regular feature of *Ride (US)* for the first decade of its publication. Today, it is not only a monthly column in *Ride (US)*, but also a regular column in all of the English-language magazines (including *Ride (UK)*, *BMX Plus!*, and *Dig*). Again, it is an opportunity for the Pro to receive coverage for himself (i.e.; his Pro image career) and his sponsors. This can be seen to serve the readers in that it provides a recipe and shopping list in their (assumed and prescribed) quest to emulate their favourite Pros. As this column type has been popular in recent years (to the point of it being copied by amateurs and subsequently proudly posted on internet message boards), its regular appearance can be seen to serve the magazines with regard to sales.

The first appearance of this type of column in *Ride (US)* was in the May 2001 issue featuring the BMX bike of Pro (and, at the time, Terrible One brand company owner) Taj Mihelich (*Ride (US)*, May 2001: pg 164). (IMAGE #6-6) The column, called “Set Ups” in *Ride (US)*, was initially introduced as a means to show the readers truly *unique* bicycles (as opposed to merely the bicycles of the Pros).

To give you a closer look at some of the Pro’s bikes, we’ve got a new column for you called Set-Ups. Whenever we find a bike that has a lot going on, we’ll get a photo of it and get the lowdown from the rider. To start things, we have Taj

Mihelich's Terrible One complete with two sprockets. Two sprockets? Keep reading. (*Ride (US)*, May 2001: pg 164)

The first version of this column was a one-page article that featured one action-shot, one photograph of Mihelich standing beside his bike (wearing a Fox Racing-branded shirt), and three close-up shots of particular components. A list consisting of each individual component was offered for the scrutiny of the reader, with longer explanations when required. The article concluded with a mini-interview within which Mihelich discussed particular component choices and modifications, and responded to the standard question as to his sponsors (*Ride (US)*, May 2001: pg 164).

Sticking to the commitment to only feature bicycles with "a lot going on," the second installment of this series did not appear for a full year. Jim Cielincki and his BMX were featured in the May 2002 issue in a Set Ups article that instructed the reader to "(p)ay close attention, because this rig is having a big impact on bike riding these days" (*Ride (US)*, May 2002: pg 128). Akin to the Mihelich article one year earlier, Cielincki's special modifications and sponsors were listed. Three issues later, another "special" Set Ups column examined Michael Steingraber's flatland BMX bike, which featured truly unique handlebars and many signature-model parts (*Ride (US)*, Aug. 2002: pg 136). Making the connection to the sponsor more explicit (and, indeed, asserting ownership), the title of the article seemed to be reversed: "Dragonfly's Michael Steingraber" appeared, rather than "Michael Steingraber's Dragonfly" (*Ride (US)*, Aug. 2002: pg 136).

After these three sporadic appearances of the Set Ups column, the magazine began to feature the column regularly, with much more mundane BMX bikes. That is, rather than an intermittent column introducing interesting bicycles and their Pro owners, this column became another recurring opportunity for Pros to receive coverage regardless

of how interestingly they had set their bicycles up. Indeed, a column that once highlighted innovation now only offers Pros' BMX bikes for emulation. As a result, a magazine, over time, becomes a menu that features (arguably bland) recipes which are composed of a shopping list and special instructions / modifications.

Pro Image Careers

As with the preceding chapter on *Chase BMX Magazine*, the remainder of this chapter focuses on particular individuals and the editorial coverage that they received during the specified period of analysis¹⁰⁷ in *Ride (US) BMX Magazine*. This editorial content is examined with regard to how it can be seen to be working to create, elevate, and / or sustain an individual's Pro status (which works to serve the Pros themselves, their respective sponsors, and the magazine itself). Although presented in a different order, the Pros in question are the same: Dave Mirra, Jason Enns, Dustin Guenther and Alistair Whitton.

Dave Mirra

"Thanks to ESPN, Dave Mirra has probably become *the* most influential rider in the sport as far as the general public is concerned. Seeing Dave on TV may not make every sports-addict trade in their jock straps for BMX bikes, but because of his professionalism and consistent contest placings, freestyle has become known as a sport with true professional athletes, instead of just a bunch of kooks with a death wish." (*Ride (US)*, June 1999: pg 67)

¹⁰⁷ Again, this is defined by the length of *Chase*'s publication.

Dave Mirra is the biggest star in the history of BMX freestyle. In fact, only Mat Hoffman (who while at least as important with regard to influence, perhaps peaked too early) can come close to challenging his status as the greatest of all time. Of the elite group of SuperPros, Mirra has had the most Hollywood star-like success. Indeed, if one gauges success in relation to how many X Games medals have been won, Mirra can be seen as the most successful action sports athlete of all time (challenging even claims made for skateboarding's greatest, Tony Hawk). It is significant that Mirra's rise parallels that of not only the reemergence of sport side of the culture since the pivotal 1995 ESPN X Games, but of *Ride (US)* itself. As such, it can be said that what follows below is an analysis of the most significant Pro image career as mediated-in and sustained-by the most significant BMX freestyle publication during the peak years of the culture.

Of the fifty-two issues of *Ride (US)* under analysis, Dave Mirra was featured in the editorial content of all but two issues (March 2002 and August 2003). Furthermore, even within these particular anomalous issues he was visible in his sponsors' advertisements (indeed, in the latter issue, he appears in no fewer than nine pages of advertisements). As such, for the purposes of this project only the most illuminating examples of appearances in editorial content are discussed with regard to the maintenance of the Pro image career of an athlete who was already an established superstar by the beginning of the period in question.

In fact, a cover blurb on the first issue of *Ride (US)* under analysis promised a "Dave Mirra Interview" within. This ten-page article featured six photos with visible sponsor logos, two photo sequences documenting the performance of Pro-level maneuvers, and three chill-shots (including one which showed his new house which the

reader could assume was purchased with the spoils of stardom) (*Ride (US)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 60 – 68, 137). Editor Mark Losey introduced the interview.

At 14-years-old, Dave Mirra was a flatlander who was just starting to ride ramps. One year later he was doing ten feet on vert, riding for GT, and winning national contests. By the time Dave was 17 he was riding for Hoffman Bikes and was considered to be one of the top ramp riders in the world. Now, at the ripe old age of 24, Dave has his own signature bike from Haro and is at a level most will never reach.

As much as you see Dave Mirra on TV and in the magazines, you probably think you've got him figured out. I thought the same thing, but after spending a week with him in North Carolina I saw that there's a lot more to Dave Mirra than what shows up in the media every month. Dave had a lot to say while I was in town and I kept the tape recorder rolling, so without any further hype, welcome to ... The Dave Mirra Interview. (*Ride (US)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 61)

Interestingly, the first paragraph of the introduction associates him with three different sponsors while outlining his prodigal rise. We also are informed of his signature bike, and his appearances on TV and in magazines, affirming his Pro status. And after establishing that he was worthy of an interview, Losey then promised a look behind the image.

Again, corporate sponsor photo contingency programs provide BMX freestyle Pros with direct financial remuneration in exchange for their professional work of the strategic logoing of their bodies and their bicycles in the event that they are featured in BMX magazine photographic editorial content. As such, Pro coverage in the form of editorial photographs benefits the Pros, their sponsors, and the magazines (who both confer and maintain Pro status and exploit it by featuring the stars prominently with the hope of affecting sales). Dave Mirra appeared on the cover of *Ride (US)* two times during the period under analysis. On the first of these, he is wearing a Fox-branded t-shirt, and

has also strategically logoed his bicycle (under the downtube of the frame) and helmet with Haro and Slim Jim stickers¹⁰⁸. (IMAGE #6-7) The cover shot was described (as per usual) on the table of contents page: “Dave Mirra *is* superman. Two gold medals at this year’s X Games... He can’t be stopped” (*Ride (US)*, Nov. 1999: pg 5). Mirra was also featured on the June 2002 issue’s cover, again with visible Fox logos on his t-shirt and helmet and Haro stickers on his helmet (*Ride (US)*, June 2002: pg 1). This issue was indeed a windfall for Mirra and his sponsors with regard to significant editorial coverage, as he also appeared in the issue’s DC-brand (shoes) sponsored¹⁰⁹ poster that was promised on the cover (“Free DC Poster: Dave Mirra”). In fact, Mirra was featured in a total of three such posters over the fifty-two issues under analysis, including another sponsored by DC (*Ride (US)*, June 2001) and one for Fox Racing (*Ride (US)*, November 2003).

Mirra has also been featured in pictures within other recurring editorial content types. In a two-page table of contents spread in the July 1999 issue, Mirra’s strategic logoing could be seen in the placement of Slim Jim stickers on his bicycle’s frame and on the beak of his helmet, and in his decision to wear Fox-branded gloves and socks (*Ride (US)*, July 1999: pg 4 - 5). Within the same issue, Mirra could be seen in the Focus

¹⁰⁸ Again, most famous is Mirra’s conspicuous placement of a Slim Jim sticker on the beak of his full-face motorcycle helmet, which is thus always prominently displayed in head-shots.

¹⁰⁹ In *Ride (US)*, the poster is not a purely editorial phenomenon. Although it is constructed and laid out by the editorial staff and has the feel of an editorial feature, it is actually an opportunity that is bought by advertisers. These posters are removable, folded, eight-page items that consist (generically) of a four-page poster on one side, and a two-page mini-poster, a one-page action-shot, and a one-page mini-interview on the other. Although the nature of the poster as advertising was not hidden from the reader, this could be seen as an instance of advertising having been legitimated as editorial copy (akin to an advertorial).

section of the magazine performing a Pro-sized fufanu in a large shot (with conspicuous Haro and Fox logos) accompanied by a nine-shot sequence (perhaps to prove that the maneuver was properly executed) (*Ride (US)*, July 1999: pg 107). Mirra made another big-trick appearance in the Focus section of the August 2000 issue, receiving full-page colour coverage of a fakie¹¹⁰ air while heavily logoed: his helmet displayed logos from Slim Jim, Haro, Fox, and Arnette (sunglasses), a strategic Fox logo could be seen under the downtube of his frame, and his Fox socks and Adidas shoes were clearly identifiable (*Ride (US)*, Aug 2000: pg 156). Importantly, not all photos function in the same way with regard to maintaining Pro-level status. Indeed, a quarter-page sized photo in the April / May 2000 issue riding dirt trails worked to assert an interdisciplinary versatility that added to his SuperPro status in a novel way (*Ride (US)*, Apr. / May 2000: pg 121).

At times, the photographic capture of a new maneuver and its appearance in the magazine was so important that it was advertised on the cover. Indeed, the cover blurb announcing “Dave Mirra’s Double Flip” conveyed the importance of this maneuver and its documentation (*Ride (US)*, Sept. 2000: pg 1). Inside this issue, the opening two-page spread of an article reporting on a contest that took place in Raleigh, North Carolina showed Mirra pulling the first double-backflip performed in competition in eleven sepia-coloured photos (logos were only visible in the last four frames) (*Ride (US)*, Sept. 2000: pg 102 - 103). Indeed, the maneuver was too big for a generic contest story, and editor Mark Losey prepared a special sidebar just for the one trick entitled “Dave Mirra and the Double-Backflip:”

¹¹⁰ Landing “fakie” out of a maneuver means to land rolling out backwards: that is, you left a transitioned quarterpipe ramp as if you would turn around 180 degrees to land forwards, but then you “faked everyone out.”

in his second run he pulled it so perfectly that it looked like he's been doing them for years. After he landed, he even went for a flair on an eight foot quarter while the entire park went nuts. Two of the judges gave Dave perfect scores, but he didn't even care. Mirra just wanted to double-flip the box, and with that accomplished there was nothing left to prove, so he didn't even ride in the finals. (*Ride (US)*, Sept. 2000: pg 107)

In the next issue of the magazine, the momentousness of the event was conveyed in a news item: "...the six-foot-tall box jump that **Dave Mirra** pulled the double-backflip over is going to be auctioned off on e-Bay" (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 2000: pg 54). Of course, one might suppose that all of this hype within editorial content would have worked to further elevate Dave Mirra's Pro image career's status.

Perhaps the most direct opportunity that an editor has to put forth his or her opinion in a magazine is the Editorial column. The June 2001 issue's "Start" editorial by Mark Losey featured a two-page photo of Mirra riding the DC "super-ramp" (*Ride (US)*, June 2001: pg 22 - 23). In the caption that accompanied the photo, Losey posited Mirra as a "Super-hero."

Dave Mirra is the biggest name in BMX, but everyone who's known him for years will tell you he hasn't changed a bit. While some people see Dave as the Super-hero who can blast 19 feet out of an 18-foot tall ramp, I see the guy who just wants to ride his bike every day, just like when he started. (*Ride (US)*, June 2001: pg 22)

Through this caption, it can be seen that Losey contributed to the maintenance and elevation of Mirra's Pro status while also trying to convey that Mirra's success hasn't altered him. That is, Losey was both building up his Pro status and grounding it at the same time. Later in the same issue, he was also featured in the Focus section riding the

same ramp: “Dave Mirra, bunnyhop-barspin into the DC super-ramp. This is no joke” (*Ride (US)*, June 2001: pg 161).

Indeed, photo captions work to contextualize the maneuver for the reader, often educating the readers as to the further importance of the shot that may not be apparent in the photo itself. The caption of a photo of Mirra at a “Beach Bash” contest in the October 1999 issue of *Ride (US)* read “(e)ven if you hit Dave Mirra with a camera, he still wins the contest. Suicide barspin”¹¹¹ (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 1999: pg 94). A caption accompanying a photo of Mirra at a CFB contest explained why he was on a strange bicycle:

Dave Mirra crashed a tailwhip over the sub box gap and slammed directly on his head. His bike got a little wrecked in the process so he walked over to Mike Laird, grabbed his bike and said, “Does this thing fufanu?” Apparently it does. (*Ride (US)*, Nov. 2000: pg 120 - 121)

This caption also implied to the reader that Mirra’s skill level was so high (i.e.; so Pro) that he was able to perform Pro-level maneuvers on another rider’s bike. A caption can also explain the Pro-level action that came directly before the shot in question. The caption of a photo showing Mirra performing a trick on the top of a ladder placed on the top of a ramp explained that “Dave Mirra is probably the only person to do an eight-foot air just to get speed for a tailtap”¹¹² (*Ride (US)*, Mar. 2001: pg 94). (IMAGE #6-8) What was conveyed to the reader here was that Mirra was taking a beginner’s trick to a Pro level, and that it required a Pro-level (“eight-foot”) set up aerial.¹¹³

¹¹¹ The “suicide” component of a suicide barspin consists of throwing one’s arms straight out to the side (and sometimes backward) while the handlebars are rotating.

¹¹² A tailtap is performed by stalling on the rear wheel (only) of the bicycle on the top of the ramp before dropping back in (forwards).

¹¹³ Set-up aerials or “airs” are simple trick-free 180-degree turns on transitioned quarterpipes that come immediately before the execution of a move that requires more effort and concentration.

Dave Mirra was regularly featured in the Up Front news section of *Ride (US)* over the fifty-two issues under analysis. Similar to the news column in *Chase*, stories in *Ride (US)* focused on the sponsorship deals and the rockstar lifestyles of the Pros. As Mirra was the highest profile athlete in the culture throughout this period, one would expect that information concerning his sponsorship situation would be presented as significant news. Indeed, news of Mirra leaving Adidas for DC shoes in the April 2001 issue warranted a one-third-page photo and a mini interview (*Ride (US)*, Apr. 2001: pg 48). A few months later, a story within the Fine Print column could be seen to have further served the needs of this advertiser: “**Dave Mirra’s** signature **DC** shoes are in the works. We saw a prototype the other day and they looked pretty dope” (*Ride (US)*, Aug. 2001: pg 58). In a subsequent story that could be seen to serve many of the magazines advertisers, Mirra’s loyalty to his sponsors was stressed in a Fine Print news item featured in the July 2002 issue: “**Dave Mirra** and **Allan Cooke** have both re-signed with Fox for three years. Dave once said that when he finds a sponsor he’s happy with he wants to stay with them throughout his career, and it looks like he’s pretty happy with Fox” (*Ride (US)*, June 2002: pg 44). The importance of the immediacy of getting Dave Mirra sponsorship news to the readers was apparent in another Fine Print column in the next issue: “Dave Mirra will be sporting Dragon sunglasses from now on. He hooked that sponsorship up just before our deadline” (*Ride (US)*, July 2002: pg 44).

Indeed, over the particular period of time under analysis, the news section can be seen to have been used to report on the increasing “rockstar” status of Dave Mirra. Showing that the popularity of BMX freestyle and Mirra himself had grown beyond subcultural boundaries, the July 1999 issue informed the readers that “***Rolling Stone***

Magazine is coming up with its own Athletes Hall of Fame, and they decided to include **Dave Mirra**" (*Ride (US)*, July 1999: pg 30 - 32).¹¹⁴ One month later, it was reported that a "...WCW wrestling match was held in Raleigh, North Carolina recently, and **Randy "Macho Man" Savage** requested that his **Slim Jim** teammate **Dave Mirra** be at the event. Dave showed up and got to sit right next to the ring, and even scored a couple of mug shots on TV" (*Ride (US)*, Aug. 1999: pg 32). In the November issue of that year, *Ride (US)* reported the news that Mirra had appeared on the Late Show with David Letterman (*Ride (US)*, Nov. 1999: pg 38).

A recurring news item over this period was Mirra's involvement with a self-titled video game. In an article entitled "I Wanna Be Dave Mirra," it was explained that "(i)f you've ever wanted to ride like Dave Mirra, you'll soon have your chance. Dave and Ryan Nyquist came to Woodward recently to do motion captures for an upcoming Sony Playstation video game called "Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX" (*Ride (US)*, Feb. / Mar. 2000: pg 36). A few issues later, it was reported that "**Dave Mirra** got to play an early version of his video game this month and said it was pretty rad" (*Ride (US)*, June 2000: pg 34). The hype for Mirra's game was continued over the months: "(s)ome people from Acclaim stopped by with a demo version of Dave Mirra's video game, and one of the games producers proceeded to do every trick you've ever dreamt of" (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 2000: pg 50). Perhaps engaging in a bit of proactive spin-control for Mirra's image career and a potential advertiser, the caption that accompanied a picture of a screen shot of the

¹¹⁴ With regard to other mainstream awards, it was reported that "Dave Mirra won BMX Rider of the Year at the 2001 ESPN Action Sports & Music Awards. Will he repeat in 2002?" (*Ride (US)*, Feb. 2002: pg 40). Indeed, he did receive an award the next year: "...Dave Mirra took the Mountain Dew People's Choice Award..." (*Ride (US)*, Aug. 2002: pg 50).

game asserted “(t)his game is not selling out, cashing-in, or anything like that. It’s just fun” (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 2000: pg 50). Indeed, *Ride (US)* continued to help build momentum for the advertiser’s / Pro’s product in the December 2000 issue: “**Acclaim** sent us a preview version of **Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX** for the **Sony Playstation**, and now half of the office is completely addicted to it” (*Ride (US)*, Dec. 2000: pg 50).

In a form of coverage that was almost exclusively afforded to Mirra (perhaps because he was the only one whose wealth provided him with the opportunity), the Fine Print news column also reported on his philanthropic and charity work.

The **Make a Wish** foundation recently called **Dave Mirra** and said that a young kid with a terminal disease made a wish to hang out with him for a day. The kid could have picked anyone in the world, from Michael Jordan to the Beastie Boys, and he picked Mirra. That’s pretty awesome. Mirra was injured at the time, but he went to the B.S. contest in Nashville just to hang out with the kid for two days.

(*Ride (US)*, Oct. 2000: pg 54)

This news item associated Mirra with other superstars, and secondarily could be seen to have elevated the BMX freestyle subculture toward the level of professional basketball and popular music fields. A second similar story two years later showed how much his star had risen.

Dave Mirra got his golf on at the 13th annual American Century Celebrity Golf Championship in Lake Tahoe, Nevada. Mirra played alongside professional athletes Michael Jordan, John Elway, Charles Barclay and others, including three New York City firefighters. The event raised \$150, 000 for the Uniformed Firefighter’s Association Scholarship Fund. (*Ride (US)*, Dec. 2002: pg 46)

The recurring employment of the figure of Michael Jordan showed that the writers at *Ride (US)* were consistently positioning Mirra as the Michael Jordan of BMX freestyle.

Mirra was also portrayed as someone who gave back to his own community. In a Fine Print news item that was accompanied by a small picture with a caption which read “(t)his could be the only Pro rider to ever donate a vert ramp,” it was explained that “**Dave Mirra** is moving into a new house, and instead of taking his vert ramp (with resi) with him, he’s donating it to the local Jaycee skatepark” (*Ride (US)*, July 2001: pg 54).¹¹⁵ This item not only confirmed that Mirra was large enough to donate a ramp worth many thousands of dollars, but also that he was large enough to be moving into another home paid for by his BMX freestyle successes.

As the most successful competitive Pro during the period of analysis, Mirra was often featured in contest coverage in *Ride (US)*. This coverage primarily consisted of photographs, mentions within the contest stories, and being listed (and thus ranked) with others at the end of such articles within the results. With regard to photographs, Mirra may have received more logo-displaying coverage than any other Pro. Similar to the other types of photographic coverage, a black and white photo of Mirra that appeared in the January 2001 issue documented a big trick (caption: “Dave Mirra, one-handed tailwhip over the channel”) and clearly showed that he had strategically placed Fox and Club Med stickers on his helmet (*Ride (US)*, Jan. 2001: pg 96).

It is within the contest stories themselves that a Pro’s image career can be elevated and maintained without the direct benefit to his sponsors that results from the logoing of the rider’s equipment that is visible in photographs. Mark Losey described Mirra’s winning performance in the Park competition at the 2000 X Games:

¹¹⁵ A “resi” ramp is a training tool that is designed to give way when the rider falls. It often consists of several layers of foam under a harder surface so that a rider can ride away from the successful execution of a maneuver, or fall with less trauma if something goes wrong.

First Place was all Dave Mirra, and if you ask me it wasn't even close. No one was going as high over the box as Dave, and he was doing amazing stuff everywhere else on the course as well. X-up flips over the spine, a fufanu on the giant sub wall – the works. Oh yeah, he pulled a double-flip, too, but he probably would have won without it anyway. (*Ride (US)*, Jan. 2001: pg 94)

In this instance, not only did the reporter document the win, but also provided his (privileged and authoritative) opinion that the victory was earned and indisputable.

Evidently a booster and a fan, Losey also can be seen to have come to Mirra's defense in response to the backlash that has dogged the Pro over the last decade that he has been on top. In coverage of the 1999 X Games, he wrote

I think that when a lot of people saw the new street course in San Francisco they were expecting (or hoping) Dave Mirra was going to choke, but it wasn't happening. After the way Dave rode during this comp, maybe people will finally stop talking crap and give him the credit he deserves. (...) To all of you Mirra haters out there, all I can say is that Dave is really, really good. Deal with it. (*Ride (US)*, Nov. 1999: pg 99)

Indeed, as if serving a Mirra-image-career-maintenance agenda, it seems that for Losey and *Ride (US)* coverage of this particular Pro within contest stories was mandatory (regardless of placing). Under the subtitle of "Dave Mirra Didn't Win Anything," Losey self-consciously explained why this fact was newsworthy. "It seems pretty lame to write a paragraph about the fact that Mirra didn't win street or vert, but after last year's results, it's pretty surprising when he isn't in first place" (*Ride (US)*, Aug. 1999: pg 76). This coverage worked to maintain Mirra's Pro status by reminding the reader that despite the fact that he had not performed well at this particular contest (Round 1 of the ESPN 1999 series in Kentucky), he was still the best.

Dave Mirra was also featured in other recurring editorial columns. In the regular Sound Check music column (which works to help establish that BMX is a lifestyle rather than merely a recreational activity), Mirra was one of twelve Pros asked to list their favourite music acts if they were deaf (relying on eyes only) (*Ride (US)*, July 1999: pg 48).¹¹⁶ Each of the twelve riders that supplied this personal information was also featured in a head-shot. Three months later, Mirra nominated a Social Distortion concert as the best he had ever attended (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 1999: pg 42). This time, whereas the other Pros were pictured in a small action-shot, Mirra was seen doing a pushup. One year later, Mirra and other Pros were asked what they would call their band and what the genre would be (Mirra's answer: "Melted Eye": "It'd be me and my brother. It'll be really f***ing hard" (*Ride (US)*, Sept. 2001: pg 62)). Seventeen Pros were asked for the December 2001 issue to list music that unmotivates them. Mirra, who was pictured doing the professional work of signing autographs, referenced one of his Pro Bros: "Laird music. He understands it and I can't. It motivates him, but I can't get into it. It doesn't do it for me" (*Ride (US)*, Dec. 2001: pg 58). Through the Sound Check column, then, the reader was offered insights into Mirra's musical taste and therefore more access to the Pro with regard to imitability (i.e.; shopping and anti-shopping lists concerning music consumption were implied).

Another recurring editorial column within which Dave Mirra was regularly featured in *Ride (US)* over this period was the new "Products" section. Mirra was directly associated with signature model Haro-branded BMX seats, DC shoes, and Maxxis-branded tires in this column. In a different type of recurring content, a complete Haro

¹¹⁶ Mirra listed G.G. Allen, Van Halen, and Janet Jackson.

BMX freestyle bike with Mirra's name on it was featured in the regular "Bike Check" column in the September 1999 issue. According to editor Mark Losey, "Dave Mirra's signature Haro has been selling like crazy for two reasons. First, it's a good bike. Second, Mirra is an unreal rider who goes off at will, and kids everywhere would like to be able to do the exact same thing" (*Ride (US)*, Sept. 1999: pg 70 - 71). Beyond merely offering the signature bike as an easy way to emulate Mirra (to extend the recipe metaphor, a signature Bike Check can be seen as a ready-made meal akin to a TV dinner), Losey reported that "kids everywhere" had already been doing just that. Conveniently, the bike served as a subscription prize in the same issue: "Subscribe to Ride and win a free Haro Dave Mirra Signature bike" (*Ride (US)*, Sept. 1999: pg 26). Indeed, perhaps the best example of a Pro's image, his sponsors, and *Ride (US)* working together was the December 2000 subscription contest that commanded the reader to "Subscribe to Ride BMX and Win the Ultimate Dave Mirra Prize Package!" (*Ride (US)*, Dec. 2000: pg 170). The Grand Prize package in question consisted of a selection of Mirra endorsed items, including a "Mirra Pro complete bike from Haro," a copy of the "Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX video game from Acclaim Max Sports," a "Custom Adidas / Haro gear bag," an "Autographed Fox T-shirt," and an "Autographed copy of "Miracle Boy and Nyquist" movie" (*Ride (US)*, Dec. 2000: pg 170). In this case, the magazine can be seen to have been cashing-in on the image that they had helped to create and sustain by using it to sell more subscriptions; Mirra's sponsors benefited from increased exposure of both their products and the further association of Mirra with them; and, Mirra's Pro image career received a further boost, with additional editorial exposure maintaining (if not increasing) his Pro status: "Dave Mirra is one of the best BMX riders on the planet, and when you

subscribe to Ride BMX through this special offer you will have a chance to win some amazing Dave Mirra prizes!” (*Ride (US)*, Dec. 2000: pg 170).

It is fair to conclude with regard to the editorial coverage of Dave Mirra in *Ride (US)* during this particular period that his Pro image career was both continually (and, indeed, periodically and ritually) elevated and maintained. Mirra was amongst an elite group of the very top riders in the culture at the start of this period, and was still at this level (if not slightly higher) at its end. In fact, we can see that the magazine (and not just ESPN) played an active role in keeping Mirra at the very top as the “...*the* most influential rider in the sport as far as the general public is concerned” (*Ride (US)*, June 1999: pg 67).

Jason Enns

Although he was not a SuperPro like Dave Mirra, Jason Enns had already established somewhat of a name for himself within the culture by the start of the period in question. In fact, Enns was featured in an advertisement for the Kink Bikes Company that appears on the back cover of the first issue under analysis (*Ride (US)*, April / May 1999: pg 146). By the Spring of 1999, Enns had appeared sporadically in *Ride (US)*, and with the magazine’s help had started to build some Pro-status momentum. However, although his Pro-status in Canada warranted his appearance on the cover of *Chase*’s first issue (April / May 1999), at the time he would have been seen as merely a rising star to the readers of *Ride (US)*. As such, the editorial coverage of Enns over the fifty-two issues in question can be seen to have incrementally (and ritually) elevated and maintained his international Pro image career.

Enns' first editorial coverage during this period appeared in the July 1999 issue. The remarkable article entitled "The Jason Enns Story" was neither a "Bio" profile nor a Pro Interview, but rather an exercise in knighting and mythbuilding not seen since a similar important article on legendary Pro Mike Dominguez thirteen years earlier (*Freestylin'*, Aug. 1986: pg 83). This extended four-page profile featured praise from four other Pros, two company owners (who happened to be his sponsors) and the producer of the *Props Video Magazine* series (*Ride (US)*, July 1999: pg 94 – 97). Editor Mark Losey introduced the article.

You probably haven't seen too much of Jason Enns before – maybe a little contest footage here and there, but that's probably about it. Those guys whose last names start with a "M" usually score all of the TV coverage, but all the while, Jason has been going off almost completely unnoticed. (*Ride (US)*, July 1999: pg 94) Acknowledging that Enns had up until this time not been the recipient of consistent coverage (unlike SuperPros Dave Mirra, Jay Miron, and Dennis McCoy¹¹⁷), it was implied that he was both worthy of such coverage and that something was being done to correct that. Serving not only his Pro image career but also his sponsors, the opening two-page action-shot of Enns clearly displayed Kink, Little Devil, Etnies and Primo logos (*Ride (US)*, July 1999: pg 94 - 95). The article also featured a head-shot (which showed Enns wearing a Little Devil t-shirt), a two-thirds-page well-logoed photo of him locked in a fufanu, and an eleven-shot sequence displaying Enns' (Pro-level) technical skills (*Ride (US)*, July 1999: pg 96 - 97). Losey justified his choice with regard to the construction and presentation of the article.

¹¹⁷ Although the letter appears in his first name and not his last, Mat Hoffman should also be included in this list.

I only hung out with Jason for one day to shoot photos for this story, so to help you get to know him a little better, I asked some other people about their experiences with him. There is a lot of hype in this article, but believe me, Jason has the ability to back it up. (*Ride (US)*, July 1999: pg 96)

What was interesting here was that Losey let the seams show slightly to make his point. That is, he acknowledged that there seemed to be some star-building hype in the article, but punctuated this by asserting that Enns was worthy of such praise.

Eventually, Enns was featured in a proper Pro Interview in *Ride (US)*.

Importantly, however, this would not appear until the event in question was further “hyped” a few issues earlier. In the special “10th Anniversary Issue,” a myth-making historical article entitled “10 Years of Ride BMX” situated Pros in a timeline and associated them with particular progressive tricks (*Ride (US)*, Dec. 2002: pg 70). Enns was featured within this article in a small picture (with visible Etnies logos on his handlebars and helmet) that was accompanied by a caption that promised further coverage.

Thanks to a few photos from ESPN comps, *Ride* readers originally got the impression that Jason Enns was a contest rider, but that was only part of the picture. Along with super-tech ramp tricks (like this 360 toothpick over a spine with a half-barspin out in 1999), Jason has street skills out the butt. And be warned, a Jason Enns interview is coming soon. (*Ride (US)*, Dec. 2002: pg 72)

True to the magazine’s pledge, “The Jason Enns Interview” was advertised on the cover of the February 2003 issue. The eleven-page interview featured four action-shots, four sequences consisting of forty individual pictures, and one non-riding shot in which Enns was photographed dressed as a Mountie handing out tickets to skateboarders at a public park (*Ride (US)*, Feb. 2003: pg 92 – 102). Throughout the article, it can be seen that Enns had done the professional work of strategically logoing his bicycle: in addition to a bold

Etnies sticker and an Aversion Bike Shop logo that appeared on the downtube of his BMX frame, there was also a Demolition sticker visible on the top tube, Volume and Etnies stickers on the outside of the fork legs, Little Devil stickers *behind* the fork legs (hidden in profile, but visible during particular maneuvers from particular angles), Demolition logos on the *inside* of the fork legs, an Etnies sticker under the lower wishbone of the frame, Little Devil stickers on the rear rim of the wheel which were visible between the spokes, Little Devil and Aversion stickers under the downtube of the frame, a Dragon logo on the seat tube of the frame, and Little Devil stickers on the sides of his handlebars. (IMAGE #6-9) In short, Enns had strategically stickered his bicycle in such a way that he would be able to cash-in on photo contingencies offered by his sponsors for visible logos in pictures shot from almost any angle (especially when shot from underneath and with the bicycle inverted). Furthermore, in a noteworthy instance of advertising / editorial coordination, Enns was featured in two-page colour advertisements for both Etnies Footwear (*Ride (US)*, Feb. 2003: pg 6 - 7) and Volume Bikes (*Ride (US)*, Feb. 2003: pg 14 - 15) in the same issue.

Again, perhaps no other Pro has taken the professional work of logging one's bike and body more seriously than Jason Enns. Almost two years after he appeared on the cover of *Chase*, and two years before he was featured in a Pro Interview, Enns appeared on the cover of *Ride (US)*, Feb. 2001: pg 1). (IMAGE #6-10) Indeed, the February 2001 appearance can be seen as documentation of strategic stickering at its finest. Enns was pictured performing an invert (most simply described as a tabletop that goes beyond flat

to upside-down¹¹⁸). One might have suspected that the choice of this maneuver to appear on the cover was predetermined (or indeed, a professional collaboration between Enns and photographer / editor Mark Losey), as much of the logoing of the bicycle seems to have been done with this particular trick and this particular photo angle in mind. Etnies and Dragon stickers were visible under the downtube of the frame, a Demolition sticker was visible on the frame's top tube, Little Devil and Etnies stickers were visible behind the fork legs, and Volume logos were seen on the sides of the forks. Not clearly visible but apparent to those readers familiar with logos that may have been searching for them are an obstructed Etnies sticker under the lower wishbone of the frame, a Little Devil sticker under the downtube, Little Devil and Etnies stickers on the handlebars, and a Demolition sticker on the inside of the fork leg. Playing up the Canadian angle on his Pro image that would later find him in the aforementioned Mountie uniform, the cover also displayed in small print the blurb "Jason Enns, Eh?" (*Ride (US)*, Feb. 2001: pg 1). Enns' appearance on the cover of the February 2001 issue two years after the special profile article and two years before his Pro Interview shows that there was a slow but steady elevation and maintenance of his Pro image career over time within the pages of the magazine.

During this four-year period, Enns frequently appeared in photos in other recurring editorial columns within *Ride (US)*. These pictures, which appeared in contest stories and within the Focus photo section, were usually captioned in a documentary

¹¹⁸ An invert is the result of rotating the bicycle sideways about the top tube of the frame until it is upside-down, while the rider remains right-side-up.

manner: “Jason Enns, 360 foot-jam over the street spine”¹¹⁹ (*Ride (US)*, Jan. 2001: pg 144), “Jason Enns, ditch-to-fence-toothpick in Woodland Hills, CA” (*Ride (US)*, Jan. 2001: pg 160). In these instances, the tricks themselves conferred the Pro-status on Enns, and it was in merely presenting the maneuvers and attributing them to him that the magazine was doing the work of maintaining Enns’ Pro image career. This was also accomplished more explicitly in a caption that accompanied an eleven shot two-page sequence in the October 1999 issue: “(t)his is as tech as it gets on street these days. Jason Enns, 180 on-to-180 off” (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 1999: pg 116 - 117). Importantly, both Enns’ sponsors and the magazine also benefit from their association with these progressive maneuvers.

Jason Enns was also often discussed in the Up Front news section of *Ride (US)* within the Fine Print column. Again, this coverage tended to fit into the categories of sponsorship information and news of him enjoying the Pro lifestyle. In fact, a news item that appeared in the June 2001 issue combined these two types by associating a sponsor’s team with a trip: “**Demolition** is working on a new video, and **Brian Castillo, Garrett Byrnes, and Jason Enns** took a trip to Hawaii to get some different footage” (*Ride (US)*, June 2001: pg 54).

Enns was also featured in other recurring columns that worked to maintain his Pro image career. With regard to new products columns, Enns’ signature frame (the Volume Destroyer “Designed by Jason Enns”) was featured in the Products column of the December 1999 / January 2000 issue (*Ride (US)*, Dec. 1999 / Jan. 2000: pg 46).

¹¹⁹ A foot-jam is a brakeless front wheel stall that is executed by jamming one’s foot behind the forks on top of the wheel so as to stop suddenly. As such, a 360 foot jam over a street spine ramp is doing this while spinning 360 degrees on the front wheel on a ramp that features two back-to-back transitions with a small platform connecting them.

Curiously, this article was comprised of quotes from Enns himself. Also curious is the fact that the same frame was also featured in the Frame Check column of the October 2000 column: “The Destroyer was designed by Jason Enns, and its geometry is very suitable for all-around riding” (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 2000: pg 122 – 123). Again, the phenomenon of signature frames and components (and more specifically, editorial coverage of signature items) works to directly associate the product of an advertising sponsor with particular imitable Pros, serving the interests of the Pros, the advertisers, and the magazine.

As with Dave Mirra, the music editor of *Ride (US)* (Leigh Ramsdell) called on Enns with regard to his musical tastes for the Sound Check column. In the September 1999 issue, Enns was one of three Pros to make the case for his favourite genre of music (Metal, versus Punk and Country) (*Ride (US)*, Sept. 1999: pg 40). Appropriate to a lifestyle column, chill-shots of each Pro were featured. In response to the aforementioned October 1999 column’s question as to what was the Pro’s favourite live music experience, Metal fan Enns’ offered Punk band Rancid (*Ride (US)*, Oct. 1999: pg 42). Again, such coverage worked to give more dimension to the Pros beyond that of their riding activities, and offered more ways to emulate the stars (and, importantly, permitted the advertising sales force to seek out music-related advertisers).

Again, it can be seen that the editorial coverage of Jason Enns over the fifty-two issues of *Ride (US)* between April / May of 1999 and November of 2003 worked to both build and maintain his Pro image career status through accretion over time. Appropriately, he was profiled in a significant way at the start of this period, was featured on the cover at the midpoint, and was granted a Pro Interview during the last year. These

significant instances, coupled with regular appearances in contest stories, in news items, in new product columns, and in the music column worked to establish and sustain Enns' Pro image career, benefited his sponsors by association, and perhaps benefited the magazine itself through its association with a rising star (that it had helped to create and maintain).

Dustin Guenther

As outlined in the previous chapter, Dustin Guenther's Pro image career was one that was created and built in a large part by and throughout the publication of *Chase BMX Magazine*. Indeed, over the nineteen issues published, Guenther's coverage grew from "watch out for this guy" -status to his appearance on the cover of the last issue. However, it would appear that Guenther's image career was a local (Canadian) phenomenon, as he did not appear in *Ride (US)* until the March 2003 issue. Significantly, this appearance was within a local "Vancouver Scene Report" which was co-constructed by *Chase* publisher and mentor Jay Miron (with editor Jeff Zielinski) and could be seen to have been largely self-serving with regard to Miron's own corporate needs (*Ride (US)*, Mar. 2003: pg 77 - 88). Guenther was featured in a two-page black and white spread that opened the article (IMAGE #6-11), and was featured in a mini-interview that implied, again, that he was someone to watch out for (*Ride (US)*, Mar. 2003: pg 76 – 77, 85). Guenther's next appearance was within the story describing the activities that took place at the aforementioned (Ten Pack / Jay Miron run) Toronto Metro Jam (*Ride (US)*, July 2003: pg 72 – 78). It was at this event that Guenther made a name for himself internationally (with the help of the BMX media, of course) with the performance of a

maneuver that was progressive in that it was both large and technical. A photographic sequence of the trick – the aforementioned tailwhip jump over the driveway ramp to a feeble grind on the ledge as a landing– appeared in the magazine (*Ride (US)*, July 2003: pg 75). By the September 2003 issue, showing that he was now getting noticed by American companies, Guenther was featured in a sponsorship article within the Up Front news section. Along with a small head-shot that displayed no logos, the reader was told that “Dustin Guenther is now riding for Square One” (*Ride (US)*, Sept. 2003: pg 44). Also within this issue, Guenther’s name was listed amongst the competitors at the FISE 2003 contest, which could be seen to have been promoting the growth of his international Pro status via the association with other world-traveling Pros (*Ride (US)*, Sept. 2003: pg 64).

For Dustin Guenther, then, the difference between his Pro image career’s construction within *Chase* and *Ride (US)* is striking. Whereas he was groomed and handled for stardom by the producers of *Chase* throughout its publication, Guenther was largely ignored by the more international-in-scope *Ride (US)* over the same period. Indeed, it is perhaps significant that Guenther’s first two appearances in *Ride (US)* could be seen as connected to (mentor) Jay Miron’s interests and activities. This fact should not deride (no pun intended) Guenther’s abilities and Pro-worthiness as much as point to the power of particular cultural intermediaries within the culture. As such, the editorial content appearances of Guenther during the last year of the period under analysis can be seen to have been laying the earliest foundation for future Pro image career building that would follow.

Alistair Whitton

As discussed in the previous chapter, Alistair Whitton first appeared to *Chase* readers as an already established, internationally renowned Pro that merely required a Pro Bro / MacNeil teammate introduction from Dave Friemuth. That is, a slow, incremental convincing of the readership was not in order. Whitton's first coverage within *Ride (US)* was a photographic sequence that appeared in the July 2001 issue. The caption to this sequence both associated him with an internationally established Pro's infamous maneuver and, in noting his nationality, explained why such a talent had not been previously featured in the pages of the magazine: "England's Alistair Whitton was the only person to even attempt jumping the gap that Van Homan tailwhipped on Road Fools. Fortunately, he walked away uninjured. Wowzers" (*Ride (US)*, July 2001: pg 82). Thus, as within *Chase* magazine, Whitton can be seen to have arrived in the pages of *Ride (US)* as a somewhat already established Pro that was biting at the heels of the very top riders.

Whitton was clearly pictured riding a MacNeil bicycle within the Start column of the next issue of the magazine (*Ride (US)*, Aug. 2001: pg 22 – 23). His next appearance was in the Focus section of the December 2001 issue in an action-shot sequence of eight pictures with a promise of further significant coverage: "Just so you know, an Alistair Whitton interview is in the works. Here's something to hold you over until it's done. Icepick-over-and-back at Section 8 in Youngstown, Ohio" (*Ride (US)*, Dec. 2001: pg 148 - 149). Containing another bit of coverage to hold the reader over, the subsequent issue featured a two-page spread of Whitton that prominently displayed MacNeil, SoBe, and Little Devil logos (*Ride (US)*, Jan. 2002: pg 4 - 5). "Blowing up" quickly, two issues later

(and only eight issues after his very first appearance in *Ride (US)*), Whitton was featured on the cover *and* in the issue's Pro Interview (*Ride (US)*, Mar. 2002: pg 68 - 78). Indeed, from reading the cover blurb advertising his Pro Interview within this issue, one may have gotten the impression that the editors could not wait to welcome this young Pro to the international stage: "Just What Freestyle Needed: Alistair Whitton Interview." The interview (entitled "The Future Is Here: Alistair Whitton Interview") was introduced by Mark Losey.

Freestyle needed a rider like Alistair Whitton. The usual suspects had been dominating contests for years, so it was only a matter of time before a new, amazing rider would show up and surprise everyone. And while many people were looking around North America for the next big thing, Alistair was on his way up across the pond in Chester, England. (*Ride (US)*, Mar. 2002: pg 69) As Whitton had made "his way up" in the UK, *Ride (US)* readers had not been privy to his rise to the top. Therefore, Whitton could be parachuted in to save BMX freestyle as a Pro already worthy of emulation, despite the fact that he had not been vetted slowly over time (although he was still being offered as an imitable candidate). The twelve-page interview featured two chill-shots, nine action-shots, and three sequences (composed of thirty individual pictures). Throughout these pictures, the most conspicuous logos were those promoting Whitton's clothing sponsor at the time, Little Devil.

Remarkably, Whitton was featured on the cover of *Ride (US)* for a second time only sixteen months later (*Ride (US)*, July 2003: pg 1). (IMAGE #6-12) Now a professional when it came to logoing his body and his bicycle, he was seen with strategically placed stickers behind his forks (Little Devil) and under the downtube of his frame (Profile and SoBe), and with MacNeil and SoBe stickers visible on the side of his frame, and Vans logos on the sole of his shoe.

Alistair Whitton arrived in the pages of *Ride (US)* as a ready-to-use Pro. Whereas with Jason Enns the Pro-building process took many years (his first appearance in the magazine was in an advertisement in 1995), the time between Whitton's earliest coverage to his being featured on the cover and in a Pro Interview was only eight months. In short, and as was the case in *Chase*, he "blew up" quickly. It is interesting that the magazine was almost desperate to mediate his rise to stardom, as if there had been a drought with regard to new Pro riders for some time. Or rather, the industry was perhaps in need of fresh Pros to associate their goods with.

Conclusions

Ride (US) BMX Magazine enjoyed its greatest period of growth between the April / May 1999 and November 2003 issues, as did the BMX freestyle industry. The magazine began releasing monthly issues during this time, and published the thickest issues of its run (thanks to a glut of advertising which was trying to reach a market that was at its most demographically desirable). This was also the period within which the magazine was bought by Time / Warner (and thus, was worthy of acquisition). As with *Chase*, the magazine's periodic publication and the recurring editorial content within these issues worked to maintain the image careers of established Pros, build the careers of young emerging stars, and quickly introduce international stars to its readership that did not require a long developmental process. These Pros could be seen as having been complicit with their exploitation by the magazine and the industry through the ritual, serious, strategic work of logoing their bodies and bicycles with the intention of cashing-in on photo contingencies. In the specific case of Dave Mirra, it can be seen that editorial

coverage of this particular Pro benefited Mirra himself (through the elevation and maintenance of his Pro image career and through photo contingencies that he could collect), his sponsors / the magazine's advertisers (through the continued association of Mirra and their goods / brands), and the magazine itself. Editorial coverage of Jason Enns worked to continue to build his Pro image career and then maintain it over time. The minimal coverage of Dustin Guenther during this period worked to instigate his international Pro image career (an image that is now maintained by the publication years later). Finally, *Ride (US)* seemed to be as excited to be able to feature a new Pro as one would suppose Alistair Whitton was with regard to receiving coverage when the magazine began to regularly feature this pre-built, ready-to-use Pro. In the cases of Whitton (with regard to *Ride (UK)*) and Guenther (as featured / constructed by *Chase*), could it be that these peripheral, national magazines have served as a farm team to the big leagues of the international *Ride (US) BMX Magazine*?

CHAPTER SEVEN

Ride (UK) BMX Magazine

As discussed in Chapter Four, *Ride (UK) BMX Magazine* can trace its lineage back to the 1970s and one of the earliest BMX periodical publications to appear in the UK, *BMX News* (which begat *BMX Weekly*, *BMX Bi Weekly*, *Freestyle BMX* and *Invert* before *Ride (UK)*). Although significantly fewer issues have been released over this period of time by the British magazine, both *Ride (UK)* and its American namesake have been published continuously since October of 1992.¹²⁰ Corresponding to the period of publication of *Chase BMX Magazine*, the thirty-three issues of *Ride (UK)* under analysis here were published between April / May 1999 and November 2003. Again, this period also represents the peak years within the culture, reflected in the fact that *Ride (UK)* increased the frequency of its publication from six to nine issues per year during this time.

As was the case with *Chase* and *Ride (US)*, *Ride (UK)* was founded by BMX riders. Like *Chase* magazine, *Ride (UK)* can be seen to have been serving its own (relatively) local, national market during this period, creating and maintaining the images of local stars to be exploited by local BMX companies / advertisers (consisting of both home grown companies and the UK distributors of international brands). Also like *Chase*, then, *Ride (UK)* can be seen as a peripheral publication with respect to the more centrally located *Ride (US)*. Indeed, BMX freestyle culture's geographical centre has always been in Southern California, where historically much of its industry and the major

¹²⁰ A superficial difference between the two magazines is their comparative size. Whereas *Ride (US)* is of the standard size (20 cm by 26.5 cm), *Ride (UK)* is somewhat oversized (23 cm by 30 cm).

internationally distributed BMX magazines have been located. UK-to-California transplant John Povah recounted what it was like to be looking in from the margins during the market / cultural participation lull of the late 1980s.

For a BMXer from the UK during this era, the US was the place to be! For those of us who still rode, the magazines and the videos became our bibles, so to speak. If you were a rider in a dead scene like England, you wanted to experience first hand what seemed like the “promised land,” where there were sponsors, money, and spots to ride. I’d study magazines cover to cover, time and time again. My mom used to say, “I’d wear the print out.” I’m sure all of this sounds weird to a kid from the US. I think it’s just something that you had to experience firsthand to understand. (*Ride US*, March 2006, pg 73)

Marginal magazines such as *Ride (UK)* and *Chase*, then, work to both serve a peripheral national scene and supplement the more central (American) magazines. That is, concerning the latter, secondary magazines have historically drawn-on and have produced their own editorial content covering the Pros and events of the centre. This coverage both legitimates the marginal publications as connected to the centre of the culture and can be seen as an enticement in respect of magazine sales. With regard to BMX freestyle Pros, these magazines must both create national Pros for their own national star system (i.e.; they are served to the magazine’s advertisers for the endorsement of products and whose appearance may stimulate magazine sales) and use the Pros of the international star system (as it is in the interest of national distributors to employ these Pros in advertisements to sell their products nationally).

With reference to audience address, it is perhaps interesting that the editorial content in *Ride UK* seems to aim a bit higher: that is, I believe that it assumes a (relatively) elevated level of education or maturity in its audience. More specifically, if

Ride (US) and *Chase* were addressing an assumed reader of sixteen years during this period, *Ride (UK)* understood its average reader to be in his early twenties. Although at its worst this has manifested as a “Maxim style” with regard to its representation of women, in general this has meant that there has more often been an appeal to logic than to style, or function before fashion.¹²¹ As such, one might imagine that an analysis of *Ride (UK)*’s recurring editorial columns with regard to the creation and maintenance of Pros to serve the needs of the UK BMX freestyle industry might produce different results than the preceding analyses of the Canadian and American examples.

Intentions

Again, the stated intentions of editors are sporadically made available to the reader in Editorial columns. In a particular edition of the regular Editorial column entitled “Dirtbox” that was subtitled “Next Generation,” editor and founder Mark Noble discussed his intentions for *Ride (UK)* after the departure of Paul “Grotbags” Roberts from the editorial staff.

We’ve got plans and ideas for fresh articles way in advance, a hit-list of interviewees who are going to blow up riding in the future, new destinations for roadtrips, and new scenes to cover. The new photographers and writers here at the magazine are all going to be giving you wider coverage all over the UK, with harder-to-find scenes, new places, new spots, and riders who deserve footage in the magazine because their riding is so good we wouldn’t have it any other way. The magazine you hold in your hand right now is the most positive issue of *Ride* to date – this is BMX – and this is just the start.

¹²¹ Of course, this difference between the North American magazines and this UK example could be cultural, akin to the difference in attitudes toward alcohol consumption by teens.

This is the new beginning. Welcome to the Next Generation...

Mark Noble

(*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 2001: pg 14)

Although this Editorial reads as a visionary mission statement and a promise to the readers reflecting the best of intentions, it is not dissimilar to the commitments made to the readers of other magazines in their respective Editorials.

Also akin to other magazines, *Ride (UK)* featured recurring column types that could be seen to serve the interests of the readers over that of their advertisers. As with *Ride (US)*'s "Steps," *Ride (UK)* featured its regular "Textbook" how-to column that presented Pros performing maneuvers and imparting their tips as to the tricks' successful execution. Unique to the magazine were regular columns including a "Tech" column written by G-SPOrT company owner (and advertiser) George French that explains to the reader (from an engineer's point-of-view) how the technology used in BMX freestyle works, a regular listing of skateparks and other sites of practice entitled "Transitions," and the free classified ads page which allowed riders to buy, sell, trade, and find particular components or merely leave a message for another rider or group of riders. Although how-to articles could be seen to contribute to the Pro-status of featured individuals (which benefits the Pro and his sponsors), and one could imagine that the goodwill generated by the Tech column could rub off on French and his company, in general these articles can be seen to be the "free lunch" that special-interest magazines offer to their readers in exchange for their loyal attention. That is, to recall Dallas Smythe, such articles work to curry the favour of the readers, cultivating "...a mood conducive to favourable reaction to the explicit and implicit advertisers' messages" (Smythe, 1994 (1977): pg 271).

Analysis

Following the pattern employed within the previous two chapters focusing on *Chase* and *Ride (US)*, respectively, the remainder of this chapter first examines five recurring editorial column types (the Cover, News, Profiles, the Pro Interview, and the Pro Bike Check) before focusing on the editorial coverage afforded to four particular Pros with regard to how this coverage could be seen to have worked to have created, elevated, and sustained their Pro image careers over time within *Ride (UK)*. Altering the order slightly again, the featured Pros are Alistair Whitton, Dave Mirra, Jason Enns, and Dustin Guenther.

Recurring Editorial Content: The Cover

Akin to *Chase*, the cover-shot of *Ride (UK)* often featured local / national riders as opposed to international superstars. Indeed, twenty-five of the thirty-three covers under analysis featured UK riders.¹²² The remaining eight cover subjects could be classified as internationally renowned Pros, whose employment may have benefited the magazine via legitimization (from the centre) and / or increasing sales.

By no means did *Ride (UK)* only feature Pros on its cover. Indeed, according to the table of contents in the April / May 2003 issue, the editors did not know who was on that particular issue. More often was the case that the editors only knew (or only supplied) the first name of the rider: “Ernie” appeared on the cover of the April / May 2001 issue, “Allen from Mexborough” was featured on the September 2003 issue, and

¹²² Importantly, at least five of the twenty-five UK Pros featured on the cover during this period could have been seen by the readers as being of international-Pro caliber and status at the time that they appeared on the cover of *Ride (UK)*.

“Brownie” was seen on the October 2002 cover. Even when a national star was featured on the cover, there was no guarantee that he had engaged in the professional work of logoing his bicycle and / or body. Indeed, in a photo wherein conspicuous brand logos were absent, UK celebrity Northern John could be seen on the cover of the August / September 2001 issue. Notably, and perhaps ironically, this particular issue of the magazine was one that had an easily removable sticker sheet featuring logos of some of the magazine’s advertisers affixed to the cover (*Ride (UK)*, Aug. / Sept. 2001).

More traditionally professional, UK Pro Ben Manuel appeared on the cover of the August 2002 issue that also contained his Pro Interview (*Ride (UK)*, Aug. 2002: pg 1, 58 – 67). (IMAGE #7-1) In addition to international brands that he was likely representing for local distributors (Jansport, Odyssey, DC and Fox), Manuel could also be seen sporting stickers from national brands such as Hard Dad, The North, and *Ride (UK)* itself via the logoing of his bicycle and helmet (*Ride (UK)*, Aug. 2002: pg 1). Scottish transplant to the USA Sandy Carson could be seen on the cover of the October 2003 issue representing his sponsors through the strategic logoing of his helmet (Federal and Primo) and his bike (Federal on handlebars and frame, Etnies and Primo on fork legs) (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. 2003: pg 1). (IMAGE #7-2) Again, such purposeful, serious, ritual work would have benefited the riders themselves (as their Pro-status would have been increased and as they likely got to cash-in on their respective photo contingency programs), and their sponsors (through increased brand exposure and the association with cover-worthy athletes).

An example of an American Pro appearing on the cover can be seen on the June / July 2000 issue. Terrible One sponsored Pro and cult-hero Robbie Morales appeared on

the cover performing a “toboggan”¹²³ at dusk. Morales was wearing a Terrible One shirt with a clearly visible logo, and his strategic stickering of his bicycle had made logos from DC Shoes (under both the top and down tubes of his frame), Fox (under his frame’s bottom bracket hanger and on the fork leg), and Primo (under the frame’s downtube) visible from the angle that the photo was shot from (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2000: pg 1).

(IMAGE #7-3) A second example of an international Pro’s appearance on the cover was the September 2002 issue featuring Canadian Dave Osato (*Ride (UK)*, Sept. 2002: pg 1).

(IMAGE #7-4) In this instance, the maneuver being performed was clearly the focus.¹²⁴

Still, the text on the cover both informed the reader of the importance of this progressive and big trick and linked it (with an arrow) to Osato: “dave osato, tailwhip to fufanu →.” In relatively very large letters, the point was hit home: “stupid, stupid, stupid.” Perhaps to offer proof that this incredible trick had actually been performed, the cover also featured a fourteen-shot sequence of the maneuver. Osato’s Pro image career would have benefited from the appearance on the cover of *Ride (UK)* and the rub from the hyped presentation of such a progressive, large (and “stupid”) maneuver. He also would have been able to cash-in on the clearly visible Osiris shoes and wethepeople logos on his bicycle and helmet. His sponsors received the exposure that they had hoped for when they had agreed to sponsor Osato. And of course the magazine would have benefited from the aura of progression and the stardom of Osato. It should be noted that a rival shoe company, Etnies, most likely also benefited from having the obstacle that Osato was

¹²³ A toboggan involves removing one hand, grabbing the seat with it, crossing the handlebars ninety degrees so that the hand that remains on the handlebars is close to the seat, and leaning back behind the bicycle while jumping.

¹²⁴ In fact, Osato was also featured on the cover of *Faction* magazine with a picture of the exact same trick, shot from a slightly different angle (*Faction*, 2002, No. 15).

riding on the cover covered in its own logos (having sponsored the event at which the stunt took place).

Again, photo sections within BMX magazines provide another means for the Pro to cash-in on his strategic logoing. The recurring “Emulsion” photo section of *Ride (UK)* first appeared within the period under analysis in the December 1999 / January 2000 issue (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 1999 / Jan. 2000: pg 94 – 98). Also as discussed in the preceding chapters, contest stories also feature photographs that document the important tricks that were performed at events and provide another opportunity for Pros and their image careers. The coverage of the 2001 X Games event in the October / November 2001 issue of *Ride (UK)* provided an example of the magazine proudly providing evidence of a moment of progression by a UK star. In coverage that documented Stephen Murray pulling the first double back flip during a dirt jumping contest, a two-page spread featured two sequences of photos capturing the two successful attempts (one in practice, and one during the event) (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2001: pg 136 - 137). A twelve-shot sepia sequence showed the practice jump, and a twenty-two-shot colour sequence of photographs captured the contest-winning moment. One frame of the latter sequence showed SuperPro Ryan Nyquist visibly in shock, holding his head in disbelief. The trick was a star, Murray was a star, and the magazine was proud to be able to document this moment for its readers.

Two issues earlier, another sequence of a big progressive maneuver was punctuated by its caption. In a sixteen-shot sequence that proved the maneuver had been

properly executed, John Heaton was shown pulling a back flip to peg stall on a sub box¹²⁵ at the Bike 2001 event in the UK (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2001: pg 58 – 59). The caption to the sequence stressed to the reader the ridiculousness of the maneuver:

It looks like a lot of riders are working out trick combinations by playing computer games – John Heaton, flair to axle on a sub-box. He pulled this so clean it was disgusting. No wonder he got third in street.... (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2001: pg 58 – 59)

The sixteenth shot of the sequence showed Heaton being hugged by his sponsor and SuperPro Jay Miron. Beyond this sequence, Heaton received a further Pro-status rub by being featured in a top-three-finishers photo with Pro Bros and MacNeil teammates Jay Miron and Ruben Alacantara (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2001: pg 59). Notably, the subjects in this photo had all professionally changed into (MacNeil team sponsor) SoBe t-shirts for the staged shot, and the magazine showed itself to be complicit with the desires of their advertiser in their captioning of the picture: “MacNeil one, two, three.”

News

There were both similarities and differences between the news columns in *Ride (UK)* and those within *Chase* and *Ride (US)* during the period of time under analysis. The news section in *Ride (UK)*, entitled “Word,” covered the news of Pro sponsorship changes, Pro injuries, Pro lifestyle activities, and industry news much in the same way as did *Chase* and *Ride (US)* during this period. However, both news of new products becoming available or in the prototype stage and the new product section itself were also

¹²⁵ To execute this maneuver properly, the rider does a back flip with a ninety degree horizontal rotation, landing on his axle pegs on the edge of a box that is about one metre high and half-a metre back from the top edge of a quarter-pipe (that is, on the sub box).

integrated into this section. This implied that such products are newsworthy, which could be seen to have benefited the magazine's advertisers.

Starting with the February / March 2003 issue, the news within the Word section was split into columns covering specific regions within the UK and the world (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2003: pg 32). In addition to separate sections on the USA and Australia (often printed upside-down), a Canadian section ("Canadian News, Eh?") first appeared in the October 2003 issue (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. 2003: pg 38). Notably, this occurred just as *Chase* was ceasing publication, and the column was written by David Hawthorne (old friend of *Chase* editor Ken Paul, former contributor to *Chase*, and publisher of the Canadian BMX magazine *RED*) (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. 2003: pg 38).

Serving its advertisers' needs, *Ride (UK)*'s editorial content was often well integrated with the timing of the release of new products by the advertisers and the appearance of advertisements promoting the specific products. Indeed, three pages subsequent to a MacNeil advertisement featuring the new John Heaton signature frame, the frame's release was announced in the Word column: "(s)peaking of frames designed by smaller people, **MacNeil** will have a smaller frame coming out as well, the **John Heaton** signature model..." (*Ride (UK)*, Aug. 2002: pg 29, 32). Later in the issue, coverage of a contest in Palavas, France featured a thirteen-shot sequence of Heaton accompanied by a caption that mentions his new frame again, associating it with going "big" and performing "tech" maneuvers: "John Heaton corks his small frame through a combo which this street course was built for – big and tech: flip to manual to grind" (*Ride*

(UK), Aug. 2002: pg 98 – 99).¹²⁶ Maintaining the hype for the advertiser (and also serving Heaton's Pro image career), Heaton's MacNeil frame was reviewed in the "Framework" column within the Word section two issues later (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. 2002: pg 50).

Profiles: "Rated," "20 Questions," and "WTF?"

Again, there were similarities and differences between profiles within *Chase*, *Ride (US)* and *Ride (UK)*. Like the two North American examples, profiles in *Ride (UK)* were significantly shorter than articles that were identified as Pro Interviews.¹²⁷ Also akin to *Chase* and *Ride (US)*, the profiles in *Ride (UK)* could be read as the ritual proposal of candidates for stardom. Furthermore, as in the other magazines, the subjects of the profiles in *Ride (UK)* were often introduced by another rider with Pro-status or an industry player (in both cases, then, people possessing subcultural capital and thus the power to influence). Unlike the other magazines, however, *Ride (UK)* introduced various styles of recurring profiles over this period.

In the first issue under analysis, four riders were featured in similar one- to two-page profiles that were composed of mini-interviews and photographs. Lacking a clever title such as *Chase*'s "Rookies" or *Ride (US)*'s "Bio," Alex Jumelin, Alexis Desolneux, "MonkeyBoy," and Pascal Mintout were featured in profiles within which their names were used as titles (*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 66, 98 – 99, 100, 102).

¹²⁶ The performance of a "flip to manual to grind" entails landing a backflip in a wheelie (the manual), and holding in this position until reaching an object on which the rider will slide (grind) on her or his axle pegs.

¹²⁷ Notably, as profiles often take the form of mini-interviews, the longer (four-page) profiles that appeared in *Ride (UK)* during this period could have been categorized as Pro Interviews if they had appeared in *Chase*.

As if searching for the right name for the recurring column, *Ride (UK)* tried various titles for this type of editorial content over the period. Mark Holroyd and Sebastian “Baz” Keep were featured in a dual-subject profile in the October / November issue entitled “Young Gunners” (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 1999: pg 92 – 93). The two-page article contained mini-interviews with the up-and-coming stars, and featured a full-page colour photo of Keep. Two years later, the column’s name was fixed for a time as “Rated” (as in “Rated: Keith King”). In the first issue within which this name was used, three riders were profiled in one- to two-page articles consisting of mini-interviews and photos (Keith King, Paul Tout, and Eric Soto) (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 114, 116, 128 – 129). In the next issue, a second profile type was introduced to coexist with the Rated column. Functioning as both a means to introduce candidates for stardom to the readers and to offer the readers even more information on veteran Pros, the new column has posed the same “20 Questions” to both future and established Pros. In the April / May 2001 issue, eleven riders were asked the generic questions and were shown in action-photos (*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 2001: pg 76 - 92). In a one-time anomalous breaking of the rules, American Pro Chris Doyle was featured in “21 Different Questions: Chris Doyle” (*Ride (UK)*, Nov. 2002: pg 168 – 169).

The “Rated” column was discontinued and replaced by a new column for the June / July 2002 issue. Under the heading of “WTF?” (i.e.; “Who The Fuck?”), Andy Barton was introduced to the readers in a paragraph written by riding buddy Matt Warren (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2002: pg 182). In an instance of a rider being introduced by an established Pro, the August 2003 issue contained a WTF? column featuring Luke Shudlick as introduced by American Pro Brian “Wiz” Wizmerski. This reworking of the

profile for the magazine has tended to follow the pattern of a candidate being introduced by another player (a Pro Bro or someone else of elevated status within the culture), but it has employed the mini-interview format as well.

Two other notable alternative profile types appeared within the thirty-three issues under study. The first was a nine-page article similar to the one in *Ride (US)* discussed above with regard to Jason Enns (which was similar to the one concerning Mike Dominguez in *Freestylin'*). In the longest profile featured in any of the magazines during the period of analysis, other significant UK riders participated in an article entitled "Rumours: Steve Bancroft" within which the rider was hailed by his peers rather than by the magazine or via an interview (*Ride (UK)*, Nov. 2002: pg 82 - 89). In such articles, this special treatment elevates the subjects and creates much hype with regard to their Pro image career (which also rubs off on any sponsors). A second alternative article entitled "Origins: Larry Bull" retroactively profiled a rider who had peaked over a decade earlier (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. 2003: pg 48 - 49). This two-page article combined the profile column with a historical column to inform the reader of a forgotten UK Pro. As Bull was no longer involved in the industry, and he was not sponsored by a company that was still in business at the time of the article's publication, the article would not have allowed him to cash-in on any elevation of Pro-status (subcultural capital) and would not have generated any positive retro energy for a *Ride (UK)* advertiser. Indeed, the historical article could have only benefited Bull's ego, the readers and the magazine itself (mythmaking and receiving any goodwill from having given such an article to the readers).

The profiles in *Ride (UK)* differed from those found within *Chase* and *Ride (US)* during the prescribed period in that they were split into two different recurring types

(Rated / WTF? and 20 Questions), and as they were not limited to future Pros (i.e.; the magazine also featured established Pros in 20 Questions). Like *Chase*, *Ride (UK)* focused on the riders from their own region, while not being averse to featuring international riders.

Pro Interviews

Again, we would expect that *Chase* and *Ride (UK)* would have proceeded in similar ways with regard to their employment of the Pro Interview. That is, if a central goal and / or function of these regional magazines was to create and maintain national stars which could be used by its advertisers for the endorsement of their products, we would not be surprised to find that the preponderance of the Pro Interviews in the publications focused on relatively local riders. Furthermore, we would assume that international Pros would be featured to both show that the magazine is connected to the centre of the culture and with the hope of this increasing sales. However, while *Ride (UK)* did indeed take care of its own during this period, the magazine featured proportionally many more international Pro Interviews than did *Chase*.

An example of each appeared in the first issue under analysis (and both names are featured on the cover of the magazine). A relatively short six-page interview with UK Pro Anthony Pill was (formally) introduced by contributing editor Paul Roberts (*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 22 - 37).

Some riders tend to get a lot of coverage. Photos, video footage and lots of press. On the other hand there are some riders who inexplicably don't. There's a chance you may not have heard too much about this issue's interviewee which is surprising when you look at his results at contests last year. There is no

conspiracy within the media to hide this talent but it cannot be denied that some of his accomplishments last year were only touched upon or mainly overlooked. In the media's defense can I just state that he got so good, so quick. In an attempt to address the balance may I introduce – should you not have already met –

Anthony Pill. King of Concrete. (*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 23)

Interestingly, the introduction contained both a justification for his interview and an apology for it not having appeared sooner. Importantly, he was listed as the winner of the prestigious King Of Concrete title (a major annual UK event). Roberts also introduced a six-page Jay Miron Pro Interview entitled “The Canadian Beast” (drawing on the Pro's nickname) with the bold statement “**(y)ou can't believe how good Jay Miron is**” (*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 32 – 37). Employing an “imminent comeback” discourse, the caption to a photo discussed Miron's chances for the upcoming contest season: “(p)ast X-Games events have all been pretty much dominated by Dave Mirra – but will this year be Jay Miron's time? He's fit, dialed, and more psyched than ever” (*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 35). Combining aspects of the profile with that of the Pro Interview, the article also featured quotes attributed to other big named pros (notably the legendary Ron Wilkerson and UK Pro Simon Tabron).

Although there was also the rare example of a Pro Interview with a UK Pro living in the USA (Jason Davies (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 1999 / Jan. 2000: pg 32 - 38)), most of the interviews that appeared in *Ride (UK)* during this period focused on Pros living in the UK. In an introduction to an interview that asserted that no hype was required, Scott Malyon was sold to the readers.

I could tell you that he won the Urban Games, or that he won the jump box comp at Southsea three years in a row. I could tell you that, after watching him ride just once, both Joe Rich and Mike Rooftop Escamilla asked him to ride for their

companies. I could even tell you that he is probably the most naturally talented rider this country has seen in the last ten years. But I don't really need to tell you any of this, you just have to watch him ride and you'll understand. In a long overdue interview, I give you Scott Malyon – no hype required. (*Ride (UK)*, Aug. / Sept. 2001: pg 115)

Of course, this puffery could be precisely characterized as hype. Indeed, this could be seen as propaganda for a candidate who is being offered for the consideration of the readers. In addition to the nine-page interview, Malyon's name also appeared on the cover (*Ride (UK)*, Aug. / Sept. 2001: pg 114 - 122).

Another rider who received a big push from and within the magazine during this period was UK Pro Kye Forte. In addition to appearing on the cover of the December 2002 / January 2003 issue, Forte was also featured in a twelve-page interview introduced by Pro Graeme Hardie (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 2002 / Jan. 2003: pg 1, 72 – 83).

There are a few people in BMX, who just have a level of ability several notches greater than everybody else. I don't know how whether it's something in their genetic makeup or whether it's simply a visualization or focus thing, but it definitely exists. It's pretty hard to explain how it works, or how you can tell someone has it, but it makes a real difference to someone's riding ability. (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 2002 / Jan. 2003: pg 72)

In featuring Forte on the cover and in a Pro Interview which positioned him as at “a level of ability several notches greater than everybody else,” the magazine could be seen to have been making a considerable effort to build his Pro image career.

The Pro Interview, then, was employed by and within *Ride (UK)* as a means of building and maintaining the Pro image careers. Akin to *Chase*, the magazine focused its efforts on relatively local riders, which worked to help create and support their respective national BMX industries.

Pro Bike Checks

Of the three magazines under analysis *Ride (UK)* published the most Pro Bike Check columns during this period.¹²⁸ Indeed, whereas the Pro Bike check was not a regular feature throughout the short run of *Chase*, and the column became a monthly feature of *Ride (US)* only after this period, this column has appeared regularly in (*Ride (UK)*) since its December 2002 / January 2003 issue.

Although the first proper (and regular) Pro Bike Check column did not appear until the aforementioned December 2002 / January 2003 issue, a few similar examples preceded this. In a company profile with Spooky Bicycles' UK Pro rider Steve Geall that appeared in the first issue of *Ride (UK)* under analysis, the similarities to a Pro Bike check included a listing (within the interview) of the particular components that would appear on the company's complete bicycles, an action-shot of Geall riding the bike, and five pictures focusing on the bike in question (*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 58). A mini-interview with Alex Leech in the next issue featured close-up photos of his custom components (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 1999: pg 62 - 63). And in a special contest to give away UK Pro Simon Tabron's bicycle, its components were listed in the same manner that they would be for a Pro Bike Check: that is, a shopping list was provided to anyone that might want to emulate this particular hero (*Ride (UK)*, Nov. 2002: pg 160 - 161). As the bike was primarily made up of Mongoose- and Snafu-branded components, and the bike itself had been logoed with stickers from Tabron's other sponsors (Hyundai, Speed Stick, Plug and Ogio logos appeared on his BMX frame), these companies were served

¹²⁸ Although this column appears in every issue of the BMX magazines currently being published, during this period the column appeared only three times in both *Chase* and *Ride (US)*, and ten times in (*Ride (UK)*) (appearing regularly since the December 2002 / January 2003 issue).

by the giveaway / bike check through exposure of their brands and components and via the association with a coverage-worthy Pro. Of course, Tabron and the magazine also would have received a rub from their pledge to give away such a prize.

Although *Ride (UK)* was late with regard to introducing their recurring “Pro Bike Check”-entitled column in relation to *Chase* (Summer, 2000) and *Ride (US)* (May 2001), it was the first of these three magazines to present the column regularly. Again, the first such column appeared *Ride (UK)* in the December 2002 / January 2003 issue, featuring UK Pro “Graeme Hardie’s Fit Series One” (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 2002 / Jan. 2003: pg 162 – 163). Importantly, the subtitle of this column both asserted the Pro’s ownership of the bike (Hardie’s), and directly associated the Pro with his BMX frame sponsor (Fit). The two-page article featured a full-page colour action-shot (with visible Etnies logos), a two-thirds-page black and white picture of the bike, and a list of the components that Hardie used. As this first instance did not include special modifications, it could be seen to have provided a shopping list but not a recipe.

The next issue contained a Pro Bike Check that featured Pro “Will Jackson’s Wethepeople Omen.” This two-page article included a twelve-shot colour sequence of the Pro and his bike performing a Pro-worthy trick on a hand rail, a half-page colour shot of the bike, a list of the components used, and a short introduction by Jackson about his bike within which he thanked his sponsors (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2003: pg 144 - 145). His final statement further worked to praise his BMX frame sponsor, in that he implies that he would have used the wethepeople components even if he had not received them for free: “(t)he lack of some muppet in a suit trying to dupe kids out of their pocket money allows the WTP and most of the other stuff on my bike to work well and be stuff I

genuinely would buy” (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2003: pg 145). In the next issues’ examination of “Craig Steven’s Country Bike,” Steven also took the opportunity to assert that his allegiance to his sponsors’ components was independent of his sponsorship arrangement: “...I’m really stoked on all the parts and the frame that I ride; if Country and Profile didn’t help me out I would still go out and buy the stuff – it rules. Big thanks to Gulsa and Torsten at Country Bikes, and Steve at Profile” (*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 2003: pg 156 – 157). In both of these cases, the fact that the Pros went out of their way to praise their sponsors’ products and assert that this was independent of their sponsorship situation could be seen as an acknowledgement that the audience for such Pro Bike Checks are savvy with regard to the sponsorship process, and could be seen as an attempt to convey to the readers that the Pros were not merely using the products that they had agreed to use. That is, that the Pros were not puppets, that their sponsors were not puppetmasters, and that their endorsement of such products was meaningful.

The Pro Bike Check within the next issue of the magazine could be seen to have benefited two Pros at the same time. In an examination of “Martin Murray’s S&M Neal Wood Signature,” the reader was shown precisely how one UK Pro had set up his bike around the frame of another UK Pro’s signature model BMX frame (*Ride (UK)*, June 2003: pg 146 - 147). (IMAGE #7-5) Providing a recipe rather than merely a shopping list, this bike check also listed custom modifications that further personalized the bike and the column. Indeed, the longest Pro Bike Check article during this period was afforded to a bike that was heavily modified. In the examination of Pro “Rob Ridge’s Volume Compton,” four pages were required to do the bike justice (*Ride (UK)*, July 2003: pg 148 - 151). This allocation of space was explained in the caption to the main half-page colour

photo of the bicycle: “(f)rom a distance, this looks just like any other green Volume Compton. Up close, you’ll realize that every single part of it has been modified or customized in some way to Rob’s personal taste. And it’s light, too...” (*Ride (UK)*, July 2003: pg 149). Further personalizing the article and showing the complexity of his particular recipe, the listing of the components resembled an interview, as each component required a detailed story. That is, the custom modifications that would normally be at the end of the shopping list were included within the listing of each component. In addition to three action-sequences, there were also six close-ups of the bicycle included in the article.

The Pro Bike Check was employed in *Ride (UK)* during the period under analysis to give the readers shopping lists and recipes for the emulation of particular (mostly UK-based, already established) Pros. This column could also have been seen to function to have elevated and / or maintained the Pro-status of the riders featured (contributing to their respective Pro image careers). This coverage also directly benefited the Pros’ respective sponsors (who advertised in the magazine) via the association of their products with Pros that were Pro Bike Check-worthy, and more directly through the listing of the companies’ components as part of the tools of the Pro’s trade. We might also suppose that the magazine could have benefited from the gratitude of the readers for the column, through increased sales that may have been instigated by the column, through the rub of being able to feature top Pros in the column, and through the appreciation of the advertisers with regard to the magazine having worked in the interests of those who ultimately paid the bulk of the cost of publication.

Pro Image Careers

As within the previous chapters concerning *Chase* and *Ride (US)*, the remainder of this chapter focuses on particular individuals and the editorial coverage that they received during the specified period of analysis in *Ride (UK) BMX Magazine*. This editorial content is again examined with regard to how it can be seen to be working to create, elevate, and / or sustain an individual's Pro-status (which works to serve the Pros themselves, their respective sponsors, and the magazine itself). Again presented in a different order, the Pros in question remain the same: Alistair Whitton, Dave Mirra, Jason Enns, Dustin Guenther.

Alistair Whitton

Alistair Whitton was to *Ride (UK)* as Dustin Guenther was to *Chase* during this period. That is, as with the case of Guenther in *Chase*, *Ride (UK)* can be seen to have served as a "farm team" for Whitton until he was ready for the big leagues. Akin to Guenther's Pro image career in *Chase*, Whitton's was incubated within the pages of *Ride (UK)* for a significant period of time before this national hero was ready for the international stage. Indeed, Whitton was initially yet another rising UK star who fit into *Ride (UK)*'s mandate to create and sustain local Pros that could be employed by the national BMX industry. As he appeared first in *Ride (UK)* on his way toward international prominence, his editorial coverage in the magazine is presented in chronological order so as to track the process and progress of his Pro image career from its (mediated) creation, elevation, and maintenance.

Preceding his first *Ride (US)* and *Chase* editorial coverage by some time (July 2001 and Summer 2002 respectively), Whitton's first coverage within *Ride (UK)* during the period of analysis was in the April / May 2000 issue, within which he could be seen to have "blown up" all at once. Getting himself noticed as a result of a standout performance at "The Ape Skatepark Jam Fifth Elements Series," Whitton was featured in a two-page black and white photo (caption: "Alistair Whitten, an invert, a midi ramp, and an AC/DC t-shirt. That's all you need to know") and in a five-shot colour sequence ("Alistair Whitten again – this time out of the course and onto the balcony of the APE Café") (*Ride (UK)*, April / May 2000: pg 106 – 107, 108). Although the writer consistently spelled his name wrong, Whitton was further praised (although through an outlaw discourse) within the text of the story ("...Alistair Whitten, who got more air time than a hijacker..." and "Alistair Whitten stole second with some huge tricks..." (*Ride (UK)*, April / May 2000: pg 106, 108)). This (increasingly pirate-esque) discourse continued throughout the article.

Alistair Whitten took another bag of goodies home with him after taking second in A Group dirt, but at least he deserved it – with tricks like 360s, tabletops, and he even went for a flip over the second set, much to the disappointment of his front wheel (ie. It was a bend worse than Brighton sea front). (*Ride (UK)*, April / May 2000: pg 108)

This thief / pirate / outlaw discourse may have reflected the out-of-nowhere appearance and the dominance by a heretofore unknown rider. This, of course, could also be seen as the earliest stage of building his Pro image career. Additionally helpful in this regard was his being listed within the results as having placed second in "A Group" Mini, Street, and Dirt (*Ride (UK)*, April / May 2000: pg 108).

Whitton's next coverage could be found in coverage of the annual King Of Concrete contest in the October / November 2000 issue. Building on his coverage within the previous contest story, a full-page colour photo of Whitton appeared with him clearly sporting logos from Terrible One on his BMX frame and helmet. Now spelling his name correctly, the caption to this photo both hailed him as the star from "almost nowhere" and, via his association with the Woodward summer camp in Pennsylvania, asserted that he was already starting to live the Pro lifestyle:

Each year at KOC one rider comes from almost nowhere and ends up owning the place. This year it was this guy, Alistair Whitton – spine, street, jumpbox, he owned it. Spending most of the summer at Woodward is definitely a good thing.... (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2000: pg 34)

The arrival of Whitton was further expounded upon within the text of the contest story:

"Alistair Whitton made a huge impression by forcing a 360 wallride on the street wall that happened to be next to the spine" (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2000: pg 40). Importantly, to the savvy reader, the listing of tricks performed (i.e.; "360 wallride on the street wall") works to associate Pro-level maneuvers with particular riders. Indeed, within a sidebar by "Ross" entitled "All That Jazzmatazz," Whitton was amongst the few highlighted as having performed the best: "ALISTAIR WHITTON: Shit, he rules. It seems like some foreign wood has done him good (although he ruled already) and aley oop wallrides over the spine and turndown backflips made him my personal king of concrete" (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2000: pg 42). Whitton's tricks also gave the opportunity to the writers to associate him with established Pros that are renown for particular maneuvers: "(i)f you thought turndown flips were the exclusive preserve of Jamie Bestwick think again – Alistair's was super clicked and smoother than peanut butter" (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov.

2000: pg 42). Whitton was also featured in a nine-shot black and white sequence within this article that again showed him to be representing the Terrible One brand: “Pro spine was amazing...Alistair pulled this bananas alley oop wallride. It was going on” (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2000: pg 44). Again, one gets the impression that this rookie had come out of nowhere and had demanded that he be noticed (which of course does not credit the magazine itself for the role it was playing in the creation and rapid elevation of Whitton’s Pro image career).

A few issues later, within the Word news section, Whitton could be seen to have been worthy of both sponsorship and of being featured within the news section with regard to such sponsorships. A three-by-five centimetre colour chill-shot photo was captioned: “Alistair and Owen are now on Loophole. Look for these guys in the next issue of *Ride*” (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 2000 / Jan. 2001: pg 20). Delivered as promised, Whitton both appeared on the cover of and in a Pro Interview within the next issue (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 1, 68 - 72). With regard to the cover (on which his name appears), Whitton was again seen sporting Terrible One stickers on his helmet and BMX frame. Additionally, Whitton could be seen to have strategically logoed his bike with Loophole and Woodward stickers under the downtube of his frame. (IMAGE #7-6) The progressive maneuver he was captured performing was explained on the Table Of Contents page: “ON THE COVER: Ali Whitton takes the downside tyretap to the next level, with a one footer” (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 5). As such, the new star was featured performing a new trick, which worked to benefit Whitton’s Pro image career, his sponsors, and the magazine itself. In the co-interview with riding buddy Owen Clegg, Whitton was featured in two action-shots and in one head-shot in which Terrible One,

Loophole, and Woodward stickers were visible (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 68 – 72). The caption accompanying the full-page colour action-shot, however, explained that his allegiances were changing: “(t)he next time you’ll see this guy ride, he’ll be aboard the bike Jay Miron designed” (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 69).

Along with a summary stating the obvious with regard to his rapid rise to stardom, his change of sponsors was reiterated in the same issue within the caption to yet another photo of Whitton: “(t)his guy is blowing up, and for a damn good reason – he can tear up any place. Fluid style too. Ali Whitton with a downside tyretap in Northampton, shortly before being hooked up with MacNeil Bikes” (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 54). In this photo, presumably taken after the cover shot and the pictures within his interview, the Terrible One stickers have been strategically *removed* from his frame.

Remarkably, Whitton received even more coverage in this issue. Within the report on the Rampworx Jam contest, his placing was justified in a listing of his Pro-worthy maneuvers:

Coming in third overall was local boy Ali Whitten, his trick list went like this: iced the big sub, downside tyretap the big quarter, tailwhip the big transfer, tyretapped and icepicked the big back board on the big quarter (are we seeing a pattern here?), and next up went to the mini to do a pedal slide to finish to show that BMX is a fun sport. Jolly good show, Alistair. (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 56)

For the third time in the issue, his new sponsorship with Miron’s MacNeil team was mentioned in the caption to yet another photo: “Ali Whitton was all over the course like a rash. Downside tailwhip over the hip, straight into third place and onto a MacNeil deal.” (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 57). And, in another instance of editorial / advertising coordination, Whitton could be seen in a MacNeil ad for the first time twenty-eight pages

later (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 85). Indeed, although Whitton's coverage in the February / March 2001 issue could be seen to have been beneficial to his new sponsor, I believe that it is fair to say that the editors of the magazine were more proud than complicit (although their pride in a "local-boy-done-good" may have had the same effect as complicity with the needs of an advertiser).

Throughout the next two-and-a-half years of *Ride (UK)*'s publication, and after this initial phase wherein his Pro image career was established, Whitton's editorial coverage worked to elevate and maintain his Pro-status. As he shifted in status from a UK star to an international SuperPro during this period, the magazine diligently reported on his international activities and increasingly Pro lifestyle from a national, proud perspective. In the June / July 2001 issue, his success at contests in Toronto and Anaheim were reported (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2001: pg 134, 148). With regard to the latter, ownership over the young star was asserted: "UK's very own Alistair Whitton did Jay at MacNeil proud with dope turndown corkscrews over the hip and a huge downside tailwhips from mini over the handrail to flatbank" (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2001: pg 150). Still evidently traveling, Whitton's appearance at a contest in Spain was documented in *Ride (UK)* via a two-page colour photo and its caption two issues later.

Give this man a big park course with lines, transfers and big ramps, and he will be all over it like a cheap suit / rash / bees around a honeypot / flies round shit. Ali Whitton has most definitely arrived. He's blowing up. First place here in Spain in Park, and he knows it. Justified first place. He owns it right now. The rights and everything. (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2001: pg 88 - 89)

Later in the same issue, Whitton was seen in coverage of events in North America again, both at an event in Louisville Kentucky and at his first X Games (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2001: pg 100, 132 - 144). By the end of the year, Whitton was reported to have been the

seventh most popular UK Rider in the annual “Reader Vote Awards 2001” poll (*Ride (UK)*, Dec. 2001 / Jan. 2002: pg 32).

Throughout 2002, Whitton received a disproportionate amount of international contest coverage within the pages of *Ride (UK)*. Additionally, he was featured in the magazine’s regular Textbook how-to column, instructing the readers on the proper method of performing the ubiquitous fufanu (*Ride (UK)*, July 2003: pg 158 - 159). Within the two-page article, Whitton was featured in two photo sequences for a total of thirty-six individual pictures (many of which containing visible MacNeil, Vans and Shadow Conspiracy logos) (*Ride (UK)*, July 2003: pg 158 - 159). Indeed, after so much SuperPro coverage, such coverage may have worked to bring Whitton a bit closer to the readers and give a little back.

In an instance that shows the magazine to be contributing a rebel or bad-ass element to his Pro image career, Whitton was featured in a two-page Table of Contents shot: “(o)n this page: Ali Whitton gives a third-hand middle-finger salute to the fashion police while doing a downside footplant bar tap, at the Boneyard Skatepark, Chester” (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2003: pg 4 – 5). (IMAGE #7-7) In the photo, the reader saw that Whitton had a glove in his rear pants pocket that has all but the middle finger folded down. This cheeky collaboration was featured in the same issue within which it was announced that Whitton had placed second in the UK Rider category in *Ride (UK)*’s annual readers poll (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2003: pg 32). Further working to elevate his Pro-status, it was also announced in this issue within the news section that Whitton had been invited to participate in the eleventh (prestigious) *Road Fools* tour (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2003: pg 32).

The caption to a photo of Whitton riding in Malaga, Spain could be seen to have further contributed to his international-traveling Pro image: “(w)hen Malaga is but a couple hours’ flight away, why not jump on a plane and get down there for a few days riding with your team-mate as a local guide? Ali Whitton makes use of Ruben’s hospitality and sprocket 180s this backrail” (*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 2003: pg 69). This editorial coverage would have worked to maintain Whitton’s Pro-status, given him a chance to cash-in on visible logos from MacNeil / SoBe and Little Devil, pleased and benefited his sponsors, and contributed to the sense that the magazine itself was a vital, international publication.

Eventually, Whitton would be referenced in the building of a new star. Within the introduction to the Ben Hennon Pro Interview, Pro Anthony Pill asserts his opinion in the form of a question: “The Next Ali Whitton?” (*Ride (UK)*, Aug. 2003: pg 65). Whitton, it would seem, had become a type of shorthand within the culture for a UK rider that blows up quickly and has the potential to be an international star. Indeed, only three years after his first appearance in the magazine, he was considered to be amongst the very best not only the UK but in the world. Within the regional “SW (Kind of) News” section of Word, Graeme Hardie proudly poses a question to his readers: “(i)s it just me, or has anyone noticed how what was previously an American-dominated sport is becoming more and more dominated by the English? **Jamie Bestwick, Steve Murray and Ali Whitton** are all more that capable of winning gold medals in Vert, Dirt and Street...” (*Ride (UK)*, Sept. 2003: pg 34).

Whitton appeared on the cover of the last issue of *Ride (UK)* under analysis here (*Ride (UK)*, Nov. 2003: pg 1). (IMAGE # 7-8) As one would expect from a top Pro, his

bicycle (obscured MacNeil and SoBe stickers on the top tube of his frame, a Vans sticker on the downtube, and a Shadow Conspiracy sticker on the forks) and his body (MacNeil t-shirt) are properly logoed. The picture was shot in North Vancouver, British Columbia during the week of the first Vancouver Metro Jam event (run by his sponsor Jay Miron, who had just published the last issue of *Chase*). Whitton was also photographed at this event (with visible SoBe and Vans stickers on his helmet), and at the Gravity Games (MacNeil, SoBe and Shadow Conspiracy stickers on the frame, Little Devil sticker on the forks, Vans sticker under the bottom bracket) for this issue (*Ride (UK)*, Nov. 2003: pg 102 – 103, 120). Cheekily referencing a popular television program and asserting MacNeil's stake in his career, the caption to the latter photo described the documented maneuver: "Ali Macneil, easy enough front wheel manual carve across the sub box" (*Ride (UK)*, Nov. 2003: pg 120).

Alistair Whitton's editorial coverage within the thirty-three issues of *Ride (UK)* under analysis here traced his ascendance from local hero to international SuperPro. Indeed, I believe that it is safe to say that the magazine played a significant role in not only the mediation of this ascent for its UK-based readership, but in the ascent itself. As such, Whitton is an example of a UK rider who was initially presented by *Ride (UK)* as a local Pro for the national market. As Whitton broke through this boundary and became a Pro worthy of international BMX media coverage, the magazine's coverage shifted away from creating and / or maintaining a local hero to proudly cheerleading for the local-boy-done-good. That is, once he was on the international stage, this star was given even more coverage than would be afforded to an American international SuperPro, as he was a SuperPro that belonged to the UK. With regard to serving the interests of the BMX

industry and its advertisers through its editorial content, *Ride (UK)* showed itself to be complicit with the desire of Whitton's main sponsor, Jay Miron's MacNeil Bikes, with the company's goal to be closely associated with the Pro ("Whitton did Jay at MacNeil proud," "Ali Macneil"). Of course, the magazine itself benefited from its own coverage of Whitton in that it had helped to create a star that in turn rubbed off on itself: that is, *Ride (UK)* may have been seen as a better magazine in the minds of the readers because it featured Alistair Whitton, whose Pro image was impressive because the magazine had helped to make him a star.

Dave Mirra

As arguably the biggest star in the history of the BMX freestyle culture, and as a rider who was an established SuperPro by April of 1999, editorial coverage of Dave Mirra within the pages of *Ride (UK)* during the period under analysis could be seen to have worked to maintain his Pro image career. Indeed, as was the case with *Chase*, this peripheral, UK-serving national magazine probably benefited more from Mirra's appearances than the Pro did himself. That is, whereas Mirra did not need editorial coverage in the magazine, *Ride (UK)* needed to cover the activities of Mirra in order to be considered a connected, legitimate authority within the culture. The UK distributors of products associated with Mirra would have also benefited from his appearances in the magazine, as his image was being used by these companies to move goods in the UK. As such, it would have also been beneficial to *Ride (UK)* to feature Mirra prominently and frequently within its editorial content, as it would have curried favour with its advertisers.

Indeed, Mirra's participation in a European event was presented as enough to legitimate it (or at least, raise its stature). With regard to the then upcoming "Festival des Sports Extremes '99" event, it was confirmed in the Word news section within the first issue under analysis that "...Dave Mirra and Jay Miron will be competing along with Stephan Prantl etc." (*Ride (UK)*, April / May 1999: pg 12). Mirra would later be confirmed as a participant in an event in Innsbruck, Austria, serving the same purpose (*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 2000: pg 16).

In the June / July 1999 issue, Mirra received a disproportionately large amount of editorial coverage within a nine-page contest report concerning an event in Palavas, France. The caption to a half-page colour photo of Mirra downplayed his "disappointing" finish in the street discipline: "(h)e may have got fourth place in street, but that's not to stay he got toasted: Dave Mirra busted out everywhere in one of the toughest contests of '99. Busdriver hop over the roof gap" (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 1999: pg 43).¹²⁹ Mirra was also featured in a six-shot colour sequence of him back flipping a spine ramp, in a head-shot (sporting logos from Fox, Slim Jim, and Haro) which showed him taking a break while riding with UK Pro Simon Tabron, in a twelve-shot colour sequence performing "...a technical dork trick: double barspin to one-hander lander," and in a quarter-page colour photo of him riding the vert ramp on a Haro frame, with logos from Fox (on the frame, forks and on his helmet) Arnette (on frame), and Slim Jim (under the downtube of his frame and on the beak of his full-face helmet) (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 1999: pg 44,

¹²⁹ A busdriver is a maneuver usually done in the air (via a jump or a transitioned ramp) wherein the handlebars are spun a full 360 degrees while keeping one hand in contact with a handlebar grip (as opposed to a barspin, in which the rider lets go while the handlebars spin). A busdriver hop is a busdriver done without the aid of a ramp (i.e.; a busdriver bunnyhop.)

46, 48). According to the caption of the latter, “Dave won vert, no doubt it won’t be the last time in 1999. Palavas was the big season opener, in terms of major comps for 1999. 4th in street, 1st in vert, this could well be Dave’s year [again]. Tailwhip” (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 1999: pg 46). The parenthetical “[again]” let any readers new to the sport side of the culture know that not only was Mirra currently a top Pro, but also that he had been at the top previously. As such, it was clear that the magazine’s role in Dave Mirra’s Pro image career during the summer of 1999 was to assist with the maintenance of his already established Pro-status.

Over the course of the thirty-three issues of *Ride (UK)* in question, the Word news column continually kept the readers apprised of the activities of Dave Mirra. Announcing the 1999 X Games results one month before the contest report would appear, Mirra’s position was maintained: “(h)e did it again – Dave Mirra won pro street and pro vert at the X-Games, re-inforcing his status as the best pro rider in the World right this very minute” (*Ride (UK)*, Aug. / Sept. 1999: pg 10). News of Mirra’s infamous first double back flip in a competition at the Crazy Freakin’ Biker contest in Raleigh, North Carolina was also too important to wait for a contest report: “(a)t the most recent **CFB** contest in the States, **Dave Mirra** pulled a **clean double backflip** over the big box in Pro Street qualifiers, went for a flair on the next quarter, and was instantly mobbed by everyone there...” (*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 2000: pg 16). The immediacy with which these news items are presented (and the fact that they are presented as news items) stresses the importance of these events and thus of Mirra’s exploits.

The “Bits” news column within the Word section of the February / March 2001 issue featured two paragraphs of Mirra news:

Right now, **Dave Mirra** is blowing up: if you think that vert couldn't get any better, you had better bite your tongue right now. Mirra's just pushing the envelope – the tyretap on an 8ft ladder on his vert ramp as seen in *Ride US*'s new video **Industry** is just the tip of the iceberg. Dave's got a new vert ramp surfaced in **Skatelite** with part of it being a resi-ramp (like the one at **Woodward**). Clean double tailwhips, tailwhip to barspins, 9ft flairs... Dave is definitely on a roll, while some vert riders may be taking winter easy...

Also, in a shoe move that surprised all of us here in the office, **Dave Mirra** recently signed for a three-year deal on **DC Shoe Company**. DC have had a very strong pro team since they started getting into BMX a couple years ago, and now they've just signed the biggest rider in the sport. This will also result in the first BMX signature shoe from DC, designed by Dave... (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 18)

In the first paragraph, the assertion that Mirra was “blowing up” told the reader that he had a lot going on that was keeping him at the top of the sport. Interestingly, *Ride (UK)* referenced other media coverage to back up this assertion (*Ride (US)* coverage and Mirra's appearance in that magazine's *Industry* video). Further proof of this timely explosion included the fact that he now owned (and he was so large that he could afford) a private, Skatelite (-branded wood) covered vert ramp with a resi section similar to the one at the Woodward training camp. His ramp's existence not only confirmed Mirra's Pro-status, but it also meant that he now had the resources necessary to further improve his skills (as the listing of his new tricks attested). News of this new facility combined with the shot taken at riders who take the winter off from training worked to distinguish Mirra as more professional than other Pros. The second paragraph, containing the surprising news that Mirra had changed shoe sponsors from adidas to DC, lets the reader know that the latter is to be taken seriously with regard to their commitment to BMX freestyle, as “they've just signed the biggest rider in the sport.” These news items served

the interests of Mirra's Pro image career (blowing up, new ramp, new tricks, new sponsor), and thus served both his sponsors (via their association with "the biggest"), and the magazine (through both its association with Mirra and the appreciation of the advertisers for its complicity with their needs).

Interestingly, Mirra's Pro image career and status was also employed by the magazine to elevate a UK Pro. In a moment of pride, and at Mirra's expense, it was reported in news section of the November 2002 issue that UK-based SuperPro Simon Tabron had beaten Mirra at the 2002 Gravity Games (*Ride (UK)*, Sept. 2002: pg 32). Mirra's comeback gold-medal performance one year later was used by the magazine to endorse the 25th Anniversary Haro bicycle introduced in the news section of the last issue of *Ride (UK)* under analysis: "Mirra liked it so much, he rode one to gold during the **Gravity Games...**" (*Ride (UK)*, Nov. 2003: pg 34).

In an issue that also featured Mirra's name on its cover, a Pro Interview entitled "Dave Mirra: Miracle Worker" appeared in the November 2000 issue. The seven-page article contained two chill-shots, three action-shots, and one photo sequence, within which logos from all of Mirra's sponsors at the time (Haro, Fox, adidas, Club Med, Slim Jim) were clearly visible (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2000: pg 82 – 88). The caption of one full-page colour photo explained why Mirra could perform at a level beyond his peers.

These are just enormous. Dave practically carves the entire width of the ramp doing these tabled, no-foot, superman seatgrabs. Having one of the best vert pumps in the business enables Mirra to go pretty much higher and farther than anyone else. (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2000: pg 84)

Continuing to employ a discourse concerning impressive size, the caption that accompanied a sequence of Mirra performing a double back flip at the 2000 X Games

communicated the state of awe that was instigated within the writer: “(t)he more I look at this, the more insane it gets. Huge, huge, huge” (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2000: pg 86 - 87). For a bit of nostalgia and to show that Mirra had roots (and had put in his time to become the best), a quarter-page black and white picture of Mirra at fifteen years old in 1989 was included within the interview (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2000: pg 85).

Even when Mirra did not do well at a given contest, he was still afforded significant coverage. According to Pro Effraim Catlow in his story on an even held in Arizona, “(t)he biggest news was that Dave Mirra didn’t make the cut – he got 11th place...” (*Ride (UK)*, Aug. / Sept. 2000: pg 54). In an instance of the coverage of coverage, Catlow also noted that “(i)t was interesting also that Mirra got more TV time for when he didn’t make the cut than when he wins...” (*Ride (UK)*, Aug. / Sept. 2000: pg 54). At the Richmond, Virginia X Trials contest in 1999, Mirra failed to qualify for the finals in vert, and only placed fourth in the street discipline. Despite this, Mirra still received coverage in the form of a half-page photo with visible Haro and Fox logos. The caption to this photo seemed to imply that he was worthy of coverage in spite of his performance.

This guy all but owns ESPN vert and street contests at the moment. With a new signature USA-made frame out, a new house with a brand new vert ramp, a nice salary from Haro and almost no worries in the World, all that Dave Mirra needs to concern himself with is his riding. And it shows – Dave’s on fire. Big no foot step thru in Richmond. Try to catch the X-Games on TV [screening on satellite right about now] to see Dave in action, or catch the new Props. Unreal... (*Ride (UK)*, Aug. / Sept. 1999: pg58)

Interestingly, in this caption, the writer hails Mirra (and his rockstar / Pro lifestyle), the Haro-branded frame he endorsed, the forthcoming X Games event, and *Props* video

magazine. In the next issue's coverage of the X Games contest, Catlow both contributed to Mirra's Pro image career as a rockstar and opined that he was worthy of his position and the readers' respect.

The morning of qualifiers, Mirra was up at 4am to do a spot on *Good Morning America* going out on Eastern Time. After hanging out with him and listening to what he has to say about the position he is in, I can say that he handles the pressure that two-times gold medalist in street and vert brings with a totally relaxed attitude. He is a brilliant ambassador for the sport and deserves everything coming his way. (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 1999: pg 80)

As part of this move to defend Mirra from the backlash that came with his fame and position at the top, he was shown one year later in a Gravity Games article in a topless chill-shot: "Dave Mirra. If you think this guy hasn't paid his dues in BMX, just check the scar collection..." (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2000: pg 56). A longer defense and show of admiration appeared in the July 2003 issue.

I have this to say about Dave Mirra; Mirra is a rich man, so wealthy indeed that he could do whatever his heart desires. He need never work again. He could be in the Caribbean snorting cocaine off the bellybuttons of the world's most beautiful women if he wanted. He could be attending film premiers and fashion shows and hobnobbing with the rich and famous. The world is his oyster, yet he chooses to perform stunts on his bicycle for a bunch of bitter little f—ks like you. I'd have been out years ago with my middle finger held aloft. Mirra continues to ride his bike. In my mind that makes Mirra twice as hardcore as some dirtball in a mesh cap with nothing much else to do in life. Even if he does spend too much time in the foam pit. (*Ride (UK)*, July 2003: pg 99 - 100)

Although writer Jamie Cameron did take a shot at Mirra's expense (i.e.; utilizing a foam pit for training purposes as taking the pursuit too seriously), he did rise to defend Mirra and posit him as worthy of respect.

More often the case within contest coverage, however, was a discourse of awe and amazement in response to Mirra's performance. In coverage of the 2001 X Games, the caption of a two-thirds-page colour photo of Mirra (seen with Haro, Slim Jim, and Fox stickers on the top tube of his frame and Fox logos on his elbowpads, kneepads and socks) reflected this admiration: "(t)his angle of Dave's flair (over the canyon) always looks like someone has just dropped him upside down out of a plane. Enormous. Nobody does them any better. Is it any wonder he won? (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 2001: pg 144)¹³⁰

(IMAGE #7-9) The caption of a half-page colour picture of Mirra that was taken at the 2003 FISE event relayed to the reader an insider communication between magazine staff (photographer / writer Jamie Cameron and editor Mark Noble) concerning the awesomeness of the maneuver in question:

Jamie wrote 'Dave Mirra – WTF?' on the slide mount for this photo, and I'm sure in this context he means 'what the f—k?' as opposed to 'who...' because we all know this is Dave Mirra. Barspin to casual late catch one-hander bio re-entry in front of stage lighting. (*Ride (UK)*, July 2003: pg 98)

Importantly, the acronym "WTF?" was not employed by Cameron with the hope that the identity of the maneuver could be determined by Noble. Rather, cognizant of the trick being performed, Cameron was conveying his genuine reaction of awe to his editor. In relaying this behind the scenes moment to the readers, Noble conveyed the astonishment of the insiders, and implied that the same reaction should be elicited in the reader.

In both coming to Dave Mirra's defense and continually positioning him as an awe-inspiring SuperPro, *Ride (UK)* could be seen to have worked to both elevate and

¹³⁰ The "canyon" is a feature of vert ramps that results from there being a gap in the riding surface, usually due to the placement of the roll-in (an easier way to drop into the ramp from the platform).

sustain Mirra's Pro image career. Although this would have benefited Mirra to some extent, it may have been the case that this work best helped his sponsors (and, notably, their UK distributors) and the magazine itself.

Jason Enns

By the Spring of 1999, Jason Enns had already made somewhat of a name for himself internationally. Still, as he did not enjoy the SuperPro-level of status that Dave Mirra had attained prior to this period, editorial coverage of Enns within *Ride (UK)* significantly benefited his Pro image career. Also benefiting from his appearances in the publication were his sponsors (and, more specifically, their UK distributors) and the magazine itself (in that by featuring an international Pro, they could be seen as plugged-in to the international scene). Unlike in the case of Dave Mirra, who appeared in almost every issue during this period in some capacity, Enns appeared only sporadically within the pages of *Ride (UK)*, and often only after large gaps of time. This reflected the infrequency of Enns' trips to Europe, and his general disinterest in the contest scene (the two best ways of getting coverage in *Ride (UK)* for an international Pro).

Enns' first appearance within the thirty-three issues in question occurred in the June / July 1999 issue's Word news section within a report concerning an emerging company: "Volume have also just picked up another team rider, in the shape of none other than Jason Enns, formerly of Kink" (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 1999: pg 8). Later in the same issue, Enns was connected with his former sponsor one last time within the "Riding Highlights" of a contest story.

Jason Enns. Kink. What a treat. Tailwhip the spine. Truckdriver the spine.

Tailwhip to pegs on the sub box. 360 wall rides. 180 over the spine to tooth pick

in. Nuff techno. Best Rest of the World award. Tricks to Order award. (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 1999: pg 98 – 99)

If listing his Pro-level tricks was not enough, awarding Enns the equivalent of the best international rider and most-consistent awards punctuated the assessment that he had made quite an impression. And, of course, directly connecting his sponsor (Kink) with the impressive trick list and “awards” could be seen as having been complicit with an advertiser’s needs. Finally, the magazine gets a rub from having had access to such a star.

As Enns infrequently inhabited the same space as *Ride (UK)* writers and / or photographers, he was most likely to appear in the Word news section of the magazine. In further sponsorship news, Enns was listed as part of the Duffs Shoes team (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. / Nov. 1999: pg 8). Four years later, Enns was mentioned in the Word section twice within one issue. Serving perhaps to increase sales for a local distributor, it was reported within the Bits section that a new Volume video was coming and that Enns would be in it (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. 2003: pg 34). Within the first “Canadian News, Eh?” section written by his old friend David Hawthorne, it was reported that “**Jason Enns is on the Road Fools 12**” (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. 2003: pg 38). One month later, Hawthorne reported within the Canadian news column that Enns and his girlfriend had bought a house (*Ride (UK)*, Nov. 2003: pg 38). These last two stories confirmed that Enns was Pro enough to be invited on the Road Fools tour, large enough from his Pro activities to buy a house, and desirable enough to have a girlfriend (all of which were to be admired).

Enns did make it over to the 2000 World Championships in Koln Germany. A seven-shot black and white sequence featuring Enns performing a 360 wallride was accompanied by a chill-shot: “Jason Enns, big wallride to 180 in, to sit on the grass chilling between runs. All in a day’s work for the Kink pro” (*Ride (UK)*, Aug. / Sept.

2000: pg 92). Notably, although the magazine had made the effort to associate Enns with a sponsor, he had left that team a year earlier. In the same issue, within coverage of The Alp Challenge contest in Innsbruck, Austria, Enns was featured in a colour photograph in which he was shown sleeping beside his upturned bicycle (which made the strategic Etnies and Dragon logos under his frame visible) (*Ride (UK)*, Aug. / Sept. 2000: pg 103).

Three issues later, within coverage of The Rampworx Jam, Enns' contest run was presented in a play-by-play fashion:

Next up, Jason Enns rolled in to have a pedal to pedal downside tailwhip over the big hip, he took the wallride with both pegs and made his mark, the hip was next and out came the biggest 540 Liverpool had ever seen. America has some good riders, but he's not one of them. He's amazing. (*Ride (UK)*, Feb. / Mar. 2001: pg 57)

This listing of Enns' Pro-level maneuvers also occurred in a "Special Moves" sidebar within the report of the 2001 La Revolution contest in Toronto contest.

Jason Enns:

360 wallride

Truck driver wallride¹³¹

Long icepick grinds

Wallride to table (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2001: pg 134).

Consistently, then, Enns' editorial coverage within *Ride (UK)* used the listing of the Pro-level tricks that he performed at events to assert his Pro-ness, thus elevating and maintaining his Pro-status. This can be seen to have benefited Enns' Pro image career, his sponsors / *Ride (UK)*'s advertisers, and the magazine itself.

¹³¹ A truck driver is a jump wherein the rider does a horizontal three hundred and sixty degree revolution with the bike while spinning the handlebars one rotation. As such, a truck driver wallride is a 360 wallride (i.e.; the rider lands fakie or rolling backwards) with a barspin.

Dustin Guenther

Dustin Guenther received very little editorial coverage within the pages of *Ride (UK)* during this four-and-a-half year period. During this time, Guenther was being constructed as a Canadian star by *Chase*, but he was not on *Ride (UK)*'s radar. Although there were similarities between Guenther's relationship with *Chase* and Alistair Whitton's relationship with *Ride (UK)* (as outlined above), Whitton became an international star during this period and was thus featured within the pages of *Chase*, whereas Guenther was merely a Canadian / national phenomenon and was as such not as important to *Ride (UK)*. By the end of this period, Guenther had started to make waves internationally and thus started to receive coverage within both *Ride (US)* and *Ride (UK)* in a similar vein to that afforded by *Ride (UK)* to Jason Enns at the beginning of this period. In the years since the Fall of 2003, Guenther has emerged (with the help of the BMX media) as an international star.

The first mention of Guenther within the editorial content of *Ride (UK)* was within the aforementioned Jay Miron interview in the April / May 1999 issue. Receiving an important rub from a SuperPro, Guenther's name was dropped by Miron Pro Bro style.

Speaking of originality, do you know someone right now who you could call a follower of you, Dave or Matt?

There's one – his name is Dustin Guenther, he rides for We The People now. I can see him on the top soon. He comes and rides at our place all the time and he's got the drive. (*Ride (UK)*, Apr. / May 1999: pg 35)

Although perhaps this knighting (by a king, no less) should have elicited a more timely response on the part of the magazine, Guenther's next brief mention was over a year later in the Bits section within the Word news column, within which he was listed as part of the wethepeople team (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2000: pg 16). Another twelve months

would pass before Guenther received his first substantial editorial coverage within the report of the aforementioned 2001 La Revolution contest in Toronto. In a move that positioned Guenther as at the same level as Jason Enns, he was also amongst those featured in the “Special Moves” sidebar.

Dustin Guenther:

Tailwhip long wedge to wedge

Barspin wedge to wedge (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2001: pg 134)

In listing these Pro-level tricks, the magazine could be seen to have been offering a candidate for stardom for the consideration of the readers *with justification*. Guenther also received his first photographic coverage within this report, a full-page-sized black and white photo with a caption that reflected Miron’s words two years previous: “Dustin Guenther – look out for this guy...” (*Ride (UK)*, June / July 2001: pg 134 - 135).

It would be another two years before Guenther would begin to receive editorial coverage again. Within the “Newshound” section of Word, a combo news story posited Guenther’s life as (mostly) enviable: “**Dustin Guenther** got second at the **Metro Jam** and demolished his knee on the first day of **Wethepeople’s Spanish Road Trip**” (*Ride (UK)*, June 2003: pg 32). This news communicated to the reader that Guenther’s Pro lifestyle included contest success, sponsorship, and sponsored world travel. In the next issue’s Newshound section, news of an additional sponsorship deal (with clothing company Square One) worked to further elevate Guenther’s Pro-status (*Ride (UK)*, July 2003: pg 32). Of course, the following issue’s first appearance of the aforementioned Canadian news column provided an even better chance for Guenther to be regularly featured in *Ride (UK)*. Interestingly, a photo of the cover of the last issue of *Chase* appears in the column, which distinguishes Guenther as one of the only riders to be

featured on the cover of a BMX magazine within another BMX magazine (*Ride (UK)*, Oct. 2003: pg 38).

Four-and-a-half years after being hailed by Miron in his Pro Interview in the first issue of *Ride (UK)* under analysis, Paul Roberts confirmed in the last issue published during this period (within his report concerning the 2003 Vancouver Metro Jam) that Guenther belonged amongst the SuperPros: “(t)ruth, Dustin Guenther is as good as anyone you’ve ever seen ride...” (*Ride (UK)*, Nov. 2003: pg 106). Perhaps the embodiment of a slow boil, it seemed as if Guenther was finally on the verge of “blowing up.”

As Dustin Guenther was not a UK-based rider, and he was not a Pro of international reputation during this period, he did not receive the editorial coverage that Pros such as Alistair Whitton (national hero cum international SuperPro), Dave Mirra (established SuperPro), or Jason Enns (internationally renowned Pro) did. Toward the end of this period, the magazine seemed to be responding to his Pro-level performance and growing status (rather than having created it), and began to feature Guenther more in their editorial coverage of events. Importantly, for Guenther’s Pro image career within *Ride (UK)*, Jay Miron’s Canadian events and his sponsorship of Guenther (through Ten Pack and as the Canadian distributor of *wethepeople*) with regard to his being able to attend these events made him more accessible to the international BMX media. As such, it should be noted that in addition to Miron’s *Chase* magazine playing an important role in Guenther’s Pro-status within Canada, his international-caliber events in Toronto and Vancouver can be seen to have had a significant role in the expansion of Guenther’s Pro image career beyond national boundaries.

Conclusions

Ride (UK) BMX Magazine can be seen to have operated in a vein similar to that of *Chase BMX Magazine* between the Spring of 1999 and the Fall of 2003. Both magazines can be seen to have operated as peripheral publications in relation to the more centrally located *Ride (US) BMX Magazine*, in that they both served their respective national scenes / industries, while covering and drawing upon the activities of the centre. With regard to Pro BMX freestylers, this meant building, elevating and maintaining the Pro image careers of (relatively) local riders for both the national BMX industry (home grown companies) and the magazine's own needs (which were necessarily connected to its advertisers' needs), while also drawing on and sustaining the Pro image careers of internationally renowned Pros to facilitate the employment of these images by both their advertisers (UK-based distributors of international brands) and the magazine itself (to legitimate the publication as connected to both the centre and to the SuperPros). Recurring editorial content columns could be seen as playing an important, ritualistic role in this process. Importantly, *Ride (UK)* employed these columns in unique ways. With regard to the cover, the magazine featured mostly homegrown talent (as did *Chase*), but was not averse to featuring unknowns. Actually operating quite internationally for a national publication, *Ride (UK's)* news section was divided into both local UK regions and international (Australian, Canadian, etc.) sections. Unlike *Chase* and *Ride (US)*, *Ride (UK)* had employed two significantly different profile column types (Rated / WTF? and 20 Questions), and featured both emerging stars and established Pros within them. And as with the subjects of such profiles, the Pro Interviews were also split between UK Pro riders and international SuperPros. *Ride (UK)* was also the first of these three titles to

make the Pro Bike Check a regular column, using it mostly for to spotlight UK riders (and therefore their sponsors' goods).

Editorial coverage of particular Pros was examined in order to understand the mediating role played by *Ride (UK)*. Alistair Whitton's *Ride (UK)*-mediated Pro image career transformed over time from a UK star to an international SuperPro. Dave Mirra's Pro image career was employed by the magazine and its advertisers for legitimacy and positive Pro-association respectively. Although Jason Enns' Pro image career was somewhat established at the beginning of the period under analysis, his Pro-status benefited from the slow accretion over time of infrequent but enthusiastic editorial coverage. Finally, although *Ride (UK)* did not play an active role in Dustin Guenther's Pro image career construction, it did begin to employ his Pro image when he began to emerge as an international star (that is, when it became useful to the UK BMX freestyle industry).

CONCLUSIONS

“It may seem cold comfort, but now that we know advertising is an extreme sport and CEOs are the new rock stars, its worth remembering that extreme sports are not political movements and rock, despite its historic claims to be the contrary, is not revolution.” (Klein, 1999: pg 85)

BMX magazines, then, are both something unique and nothing particularly special. That is to say, I suspect that what I have found evidence of within the editorial content of these particular magazines might also be found in other special-interest magazines. As such, this concluding section of the project is split into two distinct parts. The first of these is a brief summary of my analysis of the culture of BMX freestyle and its magazines. The subsequent section revisits and summarizes the content of Chapter One, which I believe suggests a theory of the special-interest magazine. These dual summaries represent what I feel is my contribution to scholarship: a cultural history of BMX and its magazines, and a more general theory of what special-interest magazines do.

As I have stated above, I believe that a central function (one that both serves- and is-only-secondary-to- the commercial imperative) of BMX freestyle magazines is the creation, elevation and maintenance of imitable “Pros.” These mediated Pro images are subsequently employed by the BMX industry (those who advertise in the magazines and the magazines themselves) so as to increase the sale of particular commodities. This work of Pro-creation and -maintenance is accomplished over time within recurring editorial content such as the cover, the news section, profiles, Pro Interviews and Pro Bike Checks. Indeed, as these forms either explicitly or implicitly associate the individuals with

particular products, such content can be seen to be functioning as a sort of supplemental advertising for particular brands. Furthermore, we should not be surprised that such editorial content might have been influenced or shaped in part by the conscious service of those who advertise regularly in the magazine. Indeed, it can be seen that the decision to advertise in a given magazine not only buys the company particular advertisement space, but perhaps also positive (or at least, non-negative) editorial spin. As such, the BMX magazines can be seen as a medium that serves as a site of legitimation and credibility not only for Pros, but for advertisers and their respective products as well.

Although it may be understandable that BMX magazines would make efforts to placate those who pay for the cost of publication, it is important that a magazine's complicity with the commercial needs and desires of their advertisers does not alienate their readers. As such, this appeasement must be done subtly and strategically. One strategy that can be seen to be employed is that of offering to the readers editorial content that (seemingly) serves the cultural participants and not the advertisers. Such articles are offered as entertainment (Smythe's "free lunch") to ensure that the readers are also present for both the advertising and the editorial content that could be seen to serve as advertising. Indeed, the BMX freestyle Pro himself may be seen as an embodiment of such a strategy. For example, if a reader is seduced by a Pro Interview with her or his favourite BMX freestyler, she or he is also exposed to (if nothing else) the extra commercial baggage of that Pro's sponsors.

Likely comparable to other cultures, it can be seen that the history of BMX freestyle culture runs parallel to the history of its mediation, as it was through the dissemination of the activities of a few participants that a local phenomenon's

geographical expansion was enabled. Importantly, this broadcast was made possible by the emergence of a fledgling BMX industry that was ready to support such publications via the advertising of their goods. In 1974, *Bicycle Motocross News* was released at the same time that Yamaha was making a big push with their Moto Bike (reviewed in the first issue) and Yamaha Gold Cup race series. With regard to BMX freestyle, *Freestylin'* was first published in 1984 only after there was a serious commitment to the sub-discipline from the BMX industry (reminiscent of BMX racing, four to five years after the activity began). Again, the mediation of such nascent activities was key to their widespread adoption or consumption, and this mediation only occurred when an industry was in place to service and exploit it.

Indeed, as outlined in Chapter Three, the lowest point in BMX freestyle's history was the seven months during which it was served by only one magazine. The release of the first issue of *Ride (US) BMX Magazine* in the fall of 1992 by rider Brad MacDonald marked the beginning of the slow comeback of the culture that would be eventually turbo-charged by the inclusion of BMX freestyle in the inaugural ESPN Extreme Games in 1995. Importantly, in the ambivalent years following the intervention of television, it was within the magazines that tensions with regard to authenticity and selling out were worked out within the culture, with the editors struggling to keep the peace between their advertisers, the readers and the Pros. Of course, the BMX star system operates best when the Pros are imitable, associable with branded products, and still "one of the boys." Indeed, if the Pros are the currency within the system, the magazines' role might be seen as akin to money launderers.

In the fourth chapter, a history of English-language BMX freestyle magazines was outlined. Mirroring the cultures that they covered, the freestyle magazines emerged from and after the establishment of the BMX racing magazines. In fact, each of the publishers of major BMX racing magazines also released freestyle magazines (starting with Wizard Publications' *Freestylin'* in 1984).¹³² It is also significant that over the past three decades a relatively small group of editorial players (or cultural intermediaries) can be seen to have jumped from publication to publication, implying a somewhat exclusive, insular milieu (Brad McDonald worked at *GO: The Rider's Manual* and founded *Ride (US)*, Mark Losey worked at *BMX Plus!*, *Ride (US)* and *BMX Business News*, Kevin McAvoy at *Transworld BMX* and *Twenty*, Mark Noble worked at *Freestyle BMX*, *Invert* and *Ride (UK)*, etc.). In the case of *Chase BMX Magazine*, this situation of a few powerful players piloting the media within a regional BMX industry was extended to a distribution company, a bicycle company, a mail-order business, and an events company.

I have shown that there were similarities and differences between the three magazines focused upon for this study with pertaining to both the markets they served and how BMX freestyle Pros' image careers were created and sustained through recurring editorial columns. Concerning the former, I have positioned *Ride (US)* as having served a global market from the centre, while both *Chase* and *Ride (UK)* can be seen to have served their respective local (national) markets from peripheral or marginal positions. As such, Pro construction and maintenance was seen to operate in both similar and different ways within these magazines. All three periodicals employed the recurring editorial content of the cover, news, the profile, the Pro Interview, and Pro Bike Checks

¹³² Again, Ride Publications' release of their BMX racing magazine, *Snap*, two years after their freestyle magazine (*Ride (US) BMX Magazine*) is a notable exception.

in a manner that can be seen to have been working towards the creation, elevation and maintenance of Pro image careers. *Chase* was unique in that it was actively creating and sustaining Pro image careers that served the interests of other Jay Miron-owned companies. That is, its integration with other levels of the BMX industry and the resulting need for exploitable (i.e.; product associable) Pros helped shape its editorial content. Interestingly, one of the companies that was served in this manner, MacNeil Bikes, released a catalogue (the 2003 *MacNeil Bikes Annual*) that was presented as a yearly magazine that utilized the same column types employed by magazines (and in fact, was constructed by some of *Chase*'s staff) to promote the image careers of particular Pro BMX freestylers, further blurring the lines between the media.

Ride (UK) can be seen to have operated in a similar manner to *Chase* in respect of their shared imperative to serve a (relatively) peripheral, national scene. As such, much of the Pro-creation and -maintenance that took place within the recurring editorial columns worked to serve the image careers of local Pros that would be employed by national companies in the promotion of their goods. Both magazines also drew from the centre, receiving an air of legitimacy and authority from their coverage of significant events that took place in the United States. These magazines' coverage of the happenings of internationally renowned Pros also served the publications and gave them a sense of vitality and connectedness to the centre. This served the interests of the magazines' respective advertisers, those Pros' image careers, and thus the magazines themselves.

Ride (UK)'s use of the recurring column types was unique when compared to the other two publications. Although, like *Chase*, *Ride (UK)* mostly featured homegrown talent on its cover, the latter publication did also present local unknowns on its cover. The

news section of *Ride (UK)* also could be read as more international in scope than even *Ride (US)*, as this section was divided into both multiple local UK regions and international sub-columns (including those for Australia and Canada). Unlike the other two publications, there were two different profile columns regularly featured in *Ride (UK)*. Furthermore, these columns were evidently not reserved solely for up-and-coming riders, as established stars were also featured. Like *Chase*, *Ride (UK)* split its Pro Interviews between local heroes and international SuperPros. The magazine also was the first to employ the Pro Bike Check in each issue, using the column to promote local riders (and thus their local sponsors).

The four Pros focused upon in this study were promoted differently in each magazine. Indeed, these figures were employed by the magazines in the manner that best suited the needs of the particular magazine. Importantly, these Pros can be seen to have been complicit with their exploitation by their sponsors and the magazines. In order to cash-in on photo contingency programs offered by their sponsors for editorial coverage within BMX freestyle magazines, Pros strategically logo their bicycles and bodies so as to maximize the likelihood of the conspicuousness of these logos. Such ritual behavior can be seen as communicative, serious and professional.

Dave Mirra is the biggest international star in BMX freestyle. As such, he did not benefit from his limited appearances in *Chase* as much as the magazine did from featuring him. Indeed, he was featured on the cover of the magazine at precisely the time when its producers were making concerted efforts to reach a wider, more international audience (notably, the first free issue of the magazine). Conversely, Mirra's Pro image career benefited greatly from consistent promotion within *Ride (US)*'s recurring editorial

columns, which reached a much wider audience and thus was more valued by his sponsors (who rewarded him through photo contingencies). Similar to *Chase, Ride (UK)* can be seen to have benefited more than Mirra from his appearances in the magazine. Such appearances connect the peripheral magazines to the centre, giving the publications an air of legitimacy. Importantly, it is perhaps the national distributors of the BMX freestyle components and other Mirra-related goods that benefit the most from his appearances in marginal magazines, and as such, it further serves the magazines to appease these advertisers.

The cover of the first issue of *Chase* featured emerging Canadian star Jason Enns. Importantly, Enns had also by this time begun to become an internationally renowned Pro. As such, recurring editorial coverage of Enns can be seen to have benefited the publishers with regard to legitimacy, in that coverage of a local star was also coverage of an international star. The elevation and maintenance of Enns' Pro image career over *Chase's* nineteen-issue run also served the interests of the Canadian distributors of his sponsors' goods, which for most of this period was the magazine's sister company (Ten Pack Distribution). During the same period, appearances within recurring editorial columns in *Ride (US)* worked to slowly build Enns' Pro image career over time toward his present status as an international star. Of the three magazines, coverage within *Ride (US)* was the most personally beneficial for Enns. Of course, his sponsors also preferred editorial coverage in this more widely distributed and higher regarded magazine than the others (as it was the most lucrative for them), and the magazine benefited from being associated with an emerging (and later, established) star. To *Ride (UK)*, Enns was (like Mirra, although not to the same extent) an international star whose status rubbed off on

the magazine and local distributors. Enns' Pro image career also benefited from his appearances in *Ride (UK)* as part of the slow accretion of international status over time.

All three magazines had a different stake in UK Pro Alistair Whitton. *Chase* can be seen to have benefited from having featured an international star as he was "blowing up." At the same time, Whitton's main sponsor, MacNeil Bikes, was another sister company to the publication. As such, the magazine and his Canadian sponsor's interests were served by his appearances in *Chase*. While Whitton didn't really need local Canadian coverage for the elevation of his Pro image career, being featured in *Ride (US)* could be seen as an essential part of his rise to eventual international star status. *Ride (US)* seemed quite pleased to be able to feature a new but already top level Pro (implying that they were bored with the usual suspects). Whitton can be seen to have arrived as a pre-built (in part by *Ride (UK)*), ready-to-use Pro. Indeed, it can be seen in the cases of Whitton and Dustin Guenther that the peripheral magazines have operated as a sort of farm team for the big league that is the central-yet-global *Ride (US)*. Over the course of a three-year period within *Ride (UK)*, Whitton's Pro image career was built up from that of a local star to that of a national hero. In fact, he was eventually proudly presented as an exportable Pro who was worthy of international acclaim.

Dustin Guenther's Pro image career was created and built almost from scratch by *Chase*. This talented but unknown Canadian rider was seemingly quite pliable and amenable when it came to the mentoring (and commercial interests) of the magazine and Ten Pack Distribution. During the magazine's tenure, his rise can be traced from an initial "watch out for this guy" mention to an appearance on the cover. Conversely, *Ride (US)* had just barely started to notice Guenther during this time. Looking back years later,

we can see that editorial coverage of Guenther in *Ride (US)* previous to the November 2003 issue could be seen as the standard, earliest stages of building him into the international star that he is today. *Ride (UK)* also only presented minimal editorial coverage of Guenther, and did not have much to contribute with regard to his Pro image career during this period. Indeed, both *Ride (UK)* and *Ride (US)* can be seen to have only featured him when it was useful to them. That is, when he was a viable international star.

It seems that the editorial coverage of a given Pro depends on particular factors. The first of these, the location of the magazine within the field, is exemplified in differences between the peripheral (*Chase* and *Ride (UK)*) publications versus that of the more centrally located magazine (*Ride (US)*). This has much to do with which advertisers and markets the particular periodicals serve. A second factor is the status of the Pro himself, as internationally renowned Pros can be seen to serve all three magazines, whereas local heroes are most usefully employed in regional magazines (serving the regional industry and consumers). In the case of *Chase*, which was well integrated with the national market that it served, the efforts were doubly focused upon creating stars that served not only the market for their magazine, but also that of their distributorship, bicycle company, and events company.

Although this project's primary and superficial focus has been on the figure of the BMX freestyle Pro and the BMX freestyle magazines' role in his creation, elevation and maintenance, a secondary and perhaps more substantial contribution is that of a theory of the special-interest magazine. I believe that this is suggested in the literature review that has informed my analysis, and it is my hope that a summary of this might serve as the foundation of such a theory.

Summary: A Theory of the Special-Interest Magazine

Magazines construct and sell audiences to advertisers, Advertising-funded periodical publications are vulnerable with respect to power in that they must please those paying the costs of publication. Conspicuous complicity with the interests of the advertisers could produce tensions with the readership, and as such a magazine must balance its “prime directive” to serve its advertisers by creating and maintaining an environment that is friendly to their products and brand-message with the imperative to serve its readership. One of the ways this might be seen to be accomplished is when particular editorial content in special-interest magazines seems to serve the interests of the readers over those of the advertisers (for example, product-free how-to articles). With regard to their role in the star-making process, magazines function as part of a system within a greater field of cultural production. The Hollywood star system and the notion of retail space as a system that functions as a whole to move goods are relevant models for comparison.

A subsequent issue of a magazine builds on the previous, and will inform the following one. Each new issue will appear punctually, and ritualistically. Thus, the content of a given issue is not as important as the fact that it followed the previous one, which legitimates, validates and reinvigorates (via the assertion that the periodic, punctual, and ritualistic appearance of the publication proclaims vibrancy) the culture it serves. The advertisers benefit in at least two ways from a magazines’ imperative and constant pursuit of novel editorial content. Perpetual novel subject matter provides a sense of vitality to the given culture (or lifestyle), and a concomitant discourse reflecting progression and evolution can be seen to “rub off” on the latest products that advertisers

are offering (especially in the case of a new product spotlight column). Furthermore, the need for a consistent flow of novel content and / or news leads to the creation of novel content.

We want things, and we want assistance in justifying our wanting of things. We seem to want help in the choosing of our stars as well. Of course, not all people can be stars, but many have the opportunity to emulate their heroes via the consumption of products. Indeed, the star-making system does not truly want this process to trickle-down as a how-to or a guide to becoming a star for its audience. The ultimate goal of producing stars is actually to create and maintain consumers. Star images are constructed by and mediated within texts such as special-interest magazines, and these images are employed by industry in the endorsement process. Reciprocally, but not equally, this process also works to elevate the status of the given star. The endorsement of the star is meaningful within a particular field because its value materialized from within the field.

With regard to power, the editors of magazines can be seen as producers of stardom and as having a disproportionate amount of power to consecrate those featured within the magazines as stars, in that, from their position they have a "...certain amount of cultural authority as shapers of taste and the inculcators of new consumerist dispositions" (Nixon and du Gay, 2002: pg 497). The "cultural intermediary" is often directly involved in the employment of celebrities to move product via endorsements.

Special-interest sport publications emerge precisely at the moment that a new sporting pastime emerges, which is only possible when an industry is ready. The three must come together in a "perfect storm" of sorts for a full-fledged "sport" to emerge. This might also be the case in non-sport cultures.

The synthetic image (media imagining) of the professional athlete, while perhaps not “real” or “authentic”, is viable, profitable and efficient because it reads as closer to the individual athlete than does the image of the film or television star, who is known for playing fictional roles. In non-sport cultures, this might manifest itself through the images of skilled practitioners of the given activity reading closer than those of non-practicing celebrity endorsers. The professional athlete (and perhaps, the generic subcultural star) can be seen to be complicit with their exploitation by corporate interests, in that they do benefit to some degree from this process. Indeed, some forms of this complicity (such as Pro BMX freestylers’ strategic logoing of their bicycles and bodies with the hope of cashing-in on photo contingencies) can be seen as ritualistic, serious, professional behavior.

In special-interest, subcultural magazines (such as those serving the culture of BMX freestyle), the continual creation and maintenance of stars or “Pros” serves to provide a currency or cultural capital within a field to be employed in the proffering of commodities. In the case of an imitable star or Pro, information published in magazines about the equipment she or he uses can be seen to function as a shopping list for the reader / consumer. A special-interest magazine that lists the products used by a star can thus be seen to be functioning as a menu, providing recipes (for emulation via consumption) that contain such shopping lists. Importantly, once purchased, these goods communicate to others the owner’s allegiance to the particular star. As such, the editorial content of special-interest magazines supplements the advertising in the training of the reader as a consumer.

In the case of particular special-interest magazines (such as those serving “action sports” cultures), the employment of corporate logos on the stars’ clothing complicates the distinction between editorial content and advertising. As such, the editorial content can be seen as serving the same function as advertising. Ultimately, the problem with such editorial content can be seen as ideological, as this “edvertising” serves the interests of the companies that advertise in the special-interest magazines despite the fact that the magazine claims to be serving as a guide for its readers to the given culture.

Special-interest magazines are a part of a larger system within which the ultimate goal is the sale of commodities. At the same time, they function as a site of credibility within a larger field, both conferring star status on particular individuals and approving particular commodities that are being offered to the readers. As we have seen in the case of BMX freestyle periodicals, special-interest magazines construct and sell audiences to advertisers. They create and manage star systems through the proposal of candidates for stardom, and through their assistance in building stars’ image careers. As such, special-interest magazines contribute substantially to the “star currency” within particular fields. Importantly, such publications are also charged with negotiating (i.e.; mediating) tensions between the advertisers, the stars, and the readers (that is, they try to “keep the peace,” ensuring the commercial status quo). Special-interest magazines help organize the time of a culture and work to infuse it with a sense of vitality through the punctual and ritualistic appearance of novel content. These periodicals assist the consumer with their desires for commodities and stars by standing as catalogues of commodities (serving to educate newcomers in the protocol of the culture). Special-interest magazines also provide new financial opportunities (such as the commodity form of the photo contingency). And

finally, in their complicity with the needs of those that provide their primary source of revenue, these publications provide greater value to the advertising dollar through the construction of editorial content that could be seen as advertising.

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