



get out

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STORY AND PHOTO BY MIKE MCQUAIDE

Cyclocrazed

Not for the faint of heart

You know how it is. You do pretty well in one race and suddenly you get it in your head that everyone in the world is looking at you differently. Your friends, your rivals, people you see at the grocery store, that blondish bearded guy who's always running around downtown—you think they're all eyeing you like you're the biggest mega-stud who ever lived.

But then the next time you line up to race, you're dropped right at the start. Dropped like a forgotten piece of luggage left sitting on the trunk of a car when it pulls away from the curb.

Such is what happened to me a few weeks ago at Viking 'Cross, a cyclocross bike race that took place at Western Washington University. (It was part of Cyclocrazed, a three-race series put on by local bike racer Ryan Rickerts.) Cyclocross racing has the pell-mell, mad-dash feel of a cross-country running race, only it's done on bicycles, usually cyclocross bikes, which look like road bikes, but have wider, knobbier tires.

At Western, we raced across grassy fields and gravel parking lots, through a mini-tunnel and that "Rock Rings" sculpture that looks like something you'd see on a '70s prog-rock album cover, down a slippery ravine and over mini barriers where we had to hop off and carry our bikes. The fun, curvy-swervy course was about 1.6-miles long, and we kept riding it over and over and over again for about an hour.

I don't actually have a cyclocross bike and so, like several riders, I used my mountain bike. My recent third-place finish in the Mount Baker Hill Climb (Rec Division) race gave me a false sense of my own cycling prowess, such as it is. I thought I'd be fine, able to keep up with the skinny, long-femured Lance Armstrong-types on much lighter cyclocross bikes.

Not a chance. From the start, the other 30-some riders bolted away from me as if they feared I were infected with bird flu, or taking up a collection to add a little something extra



to Donald Rumsfeld's severance package.

At one part of the course we had to carry our bikes seemingly straight up a 50-foot embankment—six times!—once for each lap. Those with cyclocross bikes seemed to fly up the hill, hoisting their bikes upon their shoulders as if they were mere backpacks full of cotton balls. My 30-plus-pound mountain bike, on the other hand, turned me into Sisyphus, struggling mightily to roll my boulder to the top.

But it didn't matter. It was a rollicking blast in that kinda out-of-control, "Wuhoo, we have a substitute teacher today!" way, and I highly recommend it to any and all.

Cyclocrazed has one more race in the series. Belly 'Cross happens Nov. 25 at Lake Padden. Races start early, and offerings exist for riders of all skill levels. One of the cool things about cyclocross racing is that they always have a race for little kids. At Viking 'Cross, a four-year-old girl finished a shortened version of the course. How cool is that? ☺

Mike McQuaide is a Bellingham writer and author of five books including Insiders' Guide to Bellingham and Mount Baker (Globe-Pequot). Contact him at mikemcquaide@comcast.net; check out his blog <http://mcqview.blogspot.com>.

Ride It

WHAT: Belly 'Cross
WHEN: 9am, Sat. Nov. 25
WHERE: Lake Padden
COST: \$15 general, free for WWU students
INFO: cyclocrazed.com



LISTINGS

FRI., NOV. 24

TULIP TREKKERS: The NW Tulip Trekkers will hold a seven-mile Volkswagen dubbed "Fun, Fitness and Friendship" beginning at 2pm in Anacortes at Island Hospital, 1211 24th St. Entry is free, but you must register. For more info: (360) 392-0101 or nwtrekkers.org.

SUN., NOV. 26

WEEKLY RUNS: Drop-in runs and walks for both experienced and beginning athletes happen daily starting at various times at Fairhaven Runners, 1209 11th St. For a full listing of these free events, contact the store. For more info: 676-4955 or fairhavenrunners.com.

TUES., NOV. 28

BANFF FESTIVAL: See some of the world's last wild places on the big screen when the 31st annual Banff Mountain Film Festival shows at 8pm at the Performing Arts Center Mainstage at Western Washington University. Tickets are \$6-\$9. For more info: 650-6146 or banffcentre.ca.

AUDUBON MEETING: The public is invited to join the North Cascades Audubon Society for a meeting and presentation by Nina Carter (executive director of Audubon Washington) at 7:30pm at the Bellingham Public Library, 210 Central Ave. Entry is free. For more info: 380-3356.

TRAVEL TALK: "World Travel With Analese Vople" is the title of a free talk at 6pm at REI, 400 36th St. Vople will share stories and give tips on how to travel the world on your own. For more info: 647-8955.

MOUNTAIN FITNESS: Sign up for "Mountain Fitness for Skiers and Riders" starting at 7pm today and continuing Tuesdays and Thursdays through Dec. 21 at the Whatcom Family YMCA, 1256 N. State St. Cost is \$20, and you don't have to be a member. For more info: 733-8630.



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