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High above the Crowd

Cathy Dausman



Steve Meagher and his bike Photo Cathy Dausman

Steve Meagher was recently seen in Lamorinda with his latest love. Steve is an athlete, with serious street cred to his name (triathlons, marathons, Ironman competitions, multiple Alcatraz swims, etc.), and his love is tall and thin, but with curves in all the right places. Steve's wife April doesn't even mind that they spend so much time together. In fact, she encourages him. "He keeps me laughing," she says. Meagher's love is a Penny Farthing bike.

A Penny Farthing is an old-fashioned bicycle with a large front wheel and a tiny back wheel. The disparate wheel sizes reminded people of the British penny and farthing coins. In U.S. terms, Meagher jokes, it might be labeled a "60 cent bike," with a fifty cent piece and dime replacing penny and farthing.

Meagher bought his bike in February to train for a personal birthday challenge: riding from Lake Tahoe to the Bay Area. In addition to the Penny Farthing, his garage houses a road bike, mountain bike and triathlon bike. He keeps a unicycle in his car trunk-the same one he rode up Mt. Diablo for his 47th birthday last year (see: <http://tiny.cc/fqfc5>). But a bike this unique required a name, so Meagher recalled a character from his favorite childhood book, Jan Wahl's *The Furious Flycycle*. And thus was born the Emma Dodd.

Meagher's 45 pound Standard high wheel bike (\$949 plus tax) is a "fixie." Says Meagher: "it has no brakes, no gears and no air." Its tires are solid rubber. A metal bracket above the small rear wheel helps the rider mount and dismount. To stop, the rider drags a shoe across the back wheel.

Replicas (www.hiwheel.com). Owner Greg Barron said RBR is "the only commercial manufacturer of Hiwheel bikes in the world." Each takes four to ten weeks to build. Barron ships to customers in Norway, Australia, Brazil, and the United Arab Emirates. Disney parks own Penny Farthings, as do casinos, hotels, clothing stores and history buffs.

The Emma Dodd is unique in Lamorinda. It's hard to miss it as Meagher cycles a stately 12 mph perched four feet above the ground wearing a pith helmet. One spandex clad biker slowed enough to shout "awesome!" as he passed by. As for seeing others on different human powered transportation forms (for example, Greg Thomas on his Velomobile), Meagher figures both think the same thing: "what is that [other guy] riding?!"

Meagher has shared his biking enthusiasm by participating in Napa's Cycle for Sight and Diabetes Tour de Cure charity rides. He also visited his daughter's 2nd grade class. Teacher Jenny Dodd (no relation, but flattered nonetheless) at Orinda's Del Ray Elementary reports tying the bike into their math curriculum: "We looked for all of the 3-D shapes that we could see [on the bike]. Next we measured the wheel diameter. We also measured the diameter of a tricycle wheel and compared the two."

The bike looked magical, according to Dodd's students who each got a chance to ride it with Meagher steering.

Meagher turns 48 this August, so it's only natural to look ahead. How about a landmark birthday challenge, say, at age 50 or 60? Meagher says he'd like to swim the English Channel in a relay. Or maybe complete a 100 mile run in the western United States. Or build a DH-4 airplane replica and duplicate Major Crissy's (of San Francisco's Crissy Field) flight plan. Look out for Meagher; he's going places.

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