

PORC By riders 4 riders race, 6th November 2005

# C i l l i t   B a n g ?

In true Penshurst tradition, the first winter race of 2005/2006, organised by the riders themselves, proved to be a thoroughly wet and muddy experience; on arrival, a glance through the windscreen wipers set on hyper provided a panoramic view of a monotone sky and relentless drizzle. Perfect conditions for the true downhillers to put those bike handling skills to the test.

For those of you who have never experienced PORC in the wet, the ground up near the top isn't too bad, but the further down the hill you go, the clay/mud mix just get's thick, sticky and abrasive, sometimes reducing brake pads to the metal within a day. Oh, and with grip akin to that of an ice rink, huge slides are guaranteed!. Even the spectators were making regular trips to terra firma.

So, down to the riding. It takes a lot of commitment to get out of bed in the Winter, navigate through deepest Kent to the ghost village that is Penshurst with the prospect of getting soaked to the bone, caked in mud and having to clean it all up afterwards. The same goes for spectators of which there were a fair few, perhaps partners or parents bribed into taxi service, they certainly added to the friendly atmosphere. And lets not forget, some of the guys racing were also responsible for organising the race - true commitment. The turnout was good and the course builders did not disappoint, with a tough track to ride fast. Off camber corners, the popular road gap and a series of trenches near the bottom that did their best to shake bikes and riders apart; making for some spectacular riding, the speed and skill some of the hardtail riders carried into the trenches was unreal. However, a full bouncer was the rig to be on for the fastest times.

Come race time and the riders were treated to yells of 'Cillit Bang' (why? you ask) as they passed, leaving behind a roost of mud that had an uncanny ability to target camera lenses. The crowd of riders at the start tower diminished as each took their run and soon enough, all had launched their attack on the course. Times were posted and food was devoured, a few adjustments later and it was back to the start tower for second runs. Each rider took their second descent to noticeably louder cheers of Cillit Bang (do we know the reason yet?) and did their best to conquer the treacherous track despite the continuing rain. Many riders were putting in slower times than the first runs but Andy Wakefield stood out from the rest by reaching the finish line in just over 50 seconds taking fastest time of the day and the top spot in seniors.

The majority of riders appeared at the top of the hill after an equally challenging ascent - no uplifts here, with a smile on their face, so the organisers can congratulate themselves for a successful days riding in the most depressing conditions England has to offer!

If you weren't present or out riding on Sunday, then next time you wake up on a day that can be described in the three words: cold, wet, grey, prepare for the worst and head out to the local race or hill and make the most of the slippery conditions, there's more of it to come...



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# This is for the lovers [The art of trail building]

Words and picture by Mat Wilson

OK, so this fact won't necessarily make me many friends, but when it comes to trails, I'm not exactly what you would call a builder. In fact, I don't even have a local spot to build at. Not a single jump exists that I could call my own. I build nothing. My hands are clean and spade-handle splinter free. Christ, I don't even own a spade.

Yes, I confess my sins: I am one of those that just turns up, rides, and goes home happy.\*

I think the technical term for this amongst most builders is 'a cunt'.

But, and to continue my apparent suicidal honesty, I don't actually think this is the worst thing in the world, and I doubt I'll ever change my ways.

You see, it takes all sorts in this world: Thinkers, Doers, Planners, Actors, Philosophers etc. They're all necessary personality types that exist for a reason. They influence and feed each other and to a great extent couldn't exist without one another. Without problems, there can

be no solutions. It's the circle of life. Like in that Lion King song by that fat bald gay bloke.

I digress. What I'm getting at is that we can't all be builders. And not just because 20 blokes with spades in a secret sheltered wood sounds a bit weird and dangerous, but because the vision and craft it takes to create a good set of flowing trails requires the unique thought, passion, and belief of an individual - An artist.

In all seriousness - I believe the craft of creating a serious set of trails requires the skill of an artist, and that anyone not possessing such a mindset will only produce lame or at best mediocre jumps, akin to the dabbling's of a 50 year old divorcee that has taken up water coloring classes in an attempt to 'get out there and meet people'. True art requires true skill and a drive that verges on obsession.

Proof of this allegation then - that these mostly dirty and grumpy 20 something men, slaving away in the mud and rain are in fact emotional, expressive and sensitive souls - exists in the same place as it does for art: in the risk of point-less failure vs. the unanimous approval of undisputed success.

The failures, like paintings and sculptures no one will buy, are those spots that no one bothers to visit or the transitions and landings that people critique as not quite right, or just plain shit. Those builders try and fail. They suck but get full marks for trying.

The success though are those spots that are just inexplicably right.

Where that feeling in the base of your spine as you pump the first lip continues right through the set, from hip to landing to corner to roller to rhythm to chasm to end.

Where the sound of tyre on mud is joined only by a congratulatory 'yeeeeeeaaaahhhh'.

Where a straight run through with all limbs attached is more fulfilling than even the most crowd pleasing flip-variation attempt.

Beyond the theorising and emotive spiel though, the main similarity between art and successful trails is obviously visual - as the sight of a freshly patched and carefully swept set is outstanding and I think inarguably beautiful. If you're familiar with the work of Andy Goldsworthy or Anthony Gormley you might know what I mean. It's the earthy craft and the relationship between material and environment. It's form and function. It's beauty with purpose. It's the natural becoming

man made. It's the ups and the downs.

Anyway, that's how I see it, and that's my excuse. I'm no painter, so I don't paint. I'm no poet, so I don't compose. And I'm no trail boss, so I don't build. What I am though, and what justifies my existence and gives me the right to visit both galleries and trails, is a fan, an appreciator, a spectator, a lover. And without me and the many out there like me, a day at the trails would be a lonely one, with just a genius bloke, a bike, a spade and some dirt.

At the very least, trails would be a lot less fun.

\*Note. 'Not building' doesn't mean 'not patching'. I should everyone. Any individual that leaves a set of trails in such a state that others can't ride after them should be put down. Not patching is a true offense that neither I nor Paradox Bicycle Magazine condone. Remember: It's the Circle of Life, And it moves us all, Through despair and hope, Through faith and love, Till we find our place, On the path unwinding, In the Circle, The Circle of Life.



Artist Eliot Evesson crafting on the last at Woburn early in 2006.