

# GOTHAM'S DYNAMIC DUO

New York is a city  
of five boroughs  
and two cycling czars.

In the battle of nerves that is Big Apple  
bicycle racing,  
Lou Maltese and Al Toefield  
never blink. *By Sydney Schuster*

**L**ou Maltese and Al Toefield each have respected racing clubs in New York City. Both were track racing fiends in their youth, and both love to organize big-time racing events. Before there was ever a Coors, before the Colorado World's Championship was even a gleam in the USCF's eye, Maltese and Toefield were showing Americans what a real race is all about. There the resemblance ends and the fireworks begin.

Depending on whom you ask, the reputation of Lou Maltese's Century Road Club (CRC) Association ranges from Olympic cadet school to a marauding band of rowdies. You can't be the oldest and perhaps the largest racing club in the country without developing a certain cachet. The CRC has been raising dust and more since it was incorporated in 1898.

Central Park is the domain of Lou Maltese and the CRC, as it has been since 1963. Before that, he ruled Grand Course in the Bronx, and then Harlem Speedway. In the early sixties, Robert Moses was chairman of State Council Parks, president of the Long Island State Parks Commission, chairman of the Power Authority of New York State, president of—well, you get the picture. Moses championed a lot of causes, but bicycle racing wasn't among them. Says Maltese about Moses' Central Park welcome wagon, "I used to run like an outlaw. Every

once in awhile the officials would catch up to us and chase us out of the park." With time came shifts in city politics. He now holds court every Saturday at the Central Park Boathouse, the de facto CRC headquarters.

In his halcyon days, Maltese was a record-breaker in 25-mile time trials, century runs and three-mile races. He first joined a club himself in 1922, qualified for the Olympics but missed selection by a hair, and turned pro in 1928. His specialty was pedaling 55 mph behind motorcycles on a board track. The Depression and the war caused the tracks to fold and many pros to return to the amateur ranks. Maltese, however, took up race promotion, developing a talent that served him as well as his racing skills had. "I never went back to being an amateur," he says, and never needed to.

He has a reputation for delivering what he promises. For 27 years he was the Director of National Championships for the Amateur Bicycle League (the USCF before 1975) and organized races all over the country. He was responsible for the 1955 National Championships and Olympic qualification trials in 1960, 1964, 1968 and 1972, all held in New York. He ran the monthly races at Astoria Park for years, and now runs the weekly CRC races in Central Park where he also handles the annual Memorial Races. He is putting the finishing touches on a New York City Freedom Cup series



At a CRC training race in Central Park, Lou Maltese is the undisputed leader. "Move up a class," he tells a winner.

and planning this year's annual Mengoni races.

There are easier things than running a sane event in Central Park. Educating the general public is never more futile than when informing a wide assortment of zombies that the approach of a rabid pack of bombers is imminent. "They run down the middle of the road," says Maltese in despair, "even with baby carriages! You learn how to ride your bike like a cat walks." Public use hours of the park are posted on signs all over. But problems exist despite a raft of precautions that in-



clude advance cars with loudspeakers, marshals, road restrictions and suspension of riders who drift out of the designated race path. And that's just for training races.

To make things more lively, the southernmost end of the 6¼-mile race circuit is carpeted with emissions from police horses, hansom cabs and the riding academy. The racers call it Marlboro Country. And yet, a CRC card is still the hot ticket in town. Maltese expects to log over 400 members this year. Most of them are male. Female riders are especial-

ly difficult to attract to a club, and thus the CRC's few are a point of pride for him. He has but one complaint. "Our women get better, then the other clubs steal them away."

By "other clubs," he could mean the Nassau Wheelmen way out on Long Island, or maybe the Westchester Cycling Club up north, or perhaps the Century Road Club of America over in Jersey (which, he is quick to add, is no relation). But all of them are virtually inaccessible to anyone who spends all his money on bikes instead of cars. What he *probably*

means is the only other club whose races you can get to by bike: Kissena.

The monarch of that Queens domain is, of course, Al Toefield, who has a reputation for never forgetting a name, and for dispensing the same quality of advice to geeks as to stars. In a town where talk is cheap and poseurs are the rule, Toefield has become something of an icon to kids with a dream.

The Kissena Bicycle Shop is the size of a postage stamp, in direct contrast to its content. It's about the only store around where a serious racer of modest means



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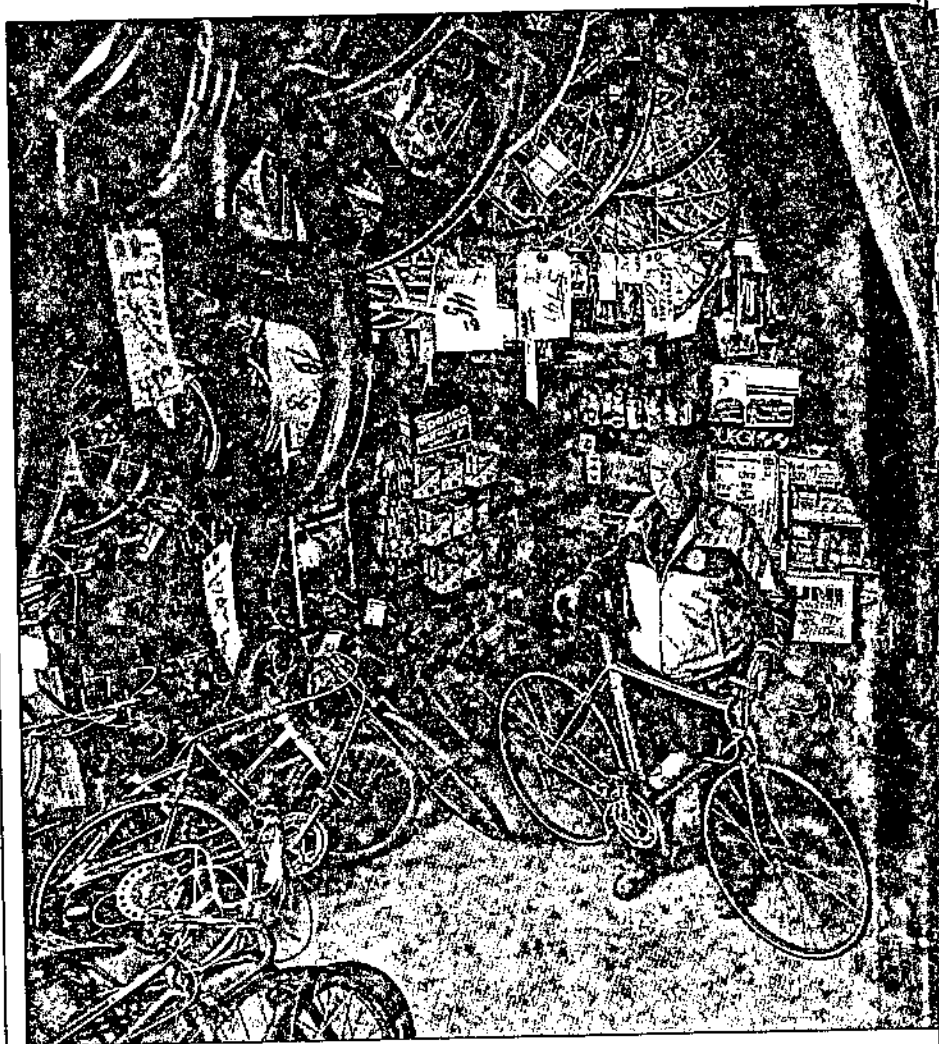
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can get a competitive bike. The shop is a jungle of racing equipment. In a corner hangs one of his old wood-rimmed tires with "Toefield 1972" painted on it in script. It was embellished as a good-luck gift the year he went to Munich as chairman of the Olympic Committee and manager of the Olympic team.

Two years before that he was the Federation president, and now is its first vice president. For the last 12 years he has been state and New York City regional chairman of the cycling events for the Empire State Games. He also ran the Pepsi-Cola Marathon for 12 years, the 1985 Tour of Long Island and the Lowenbrau Series.

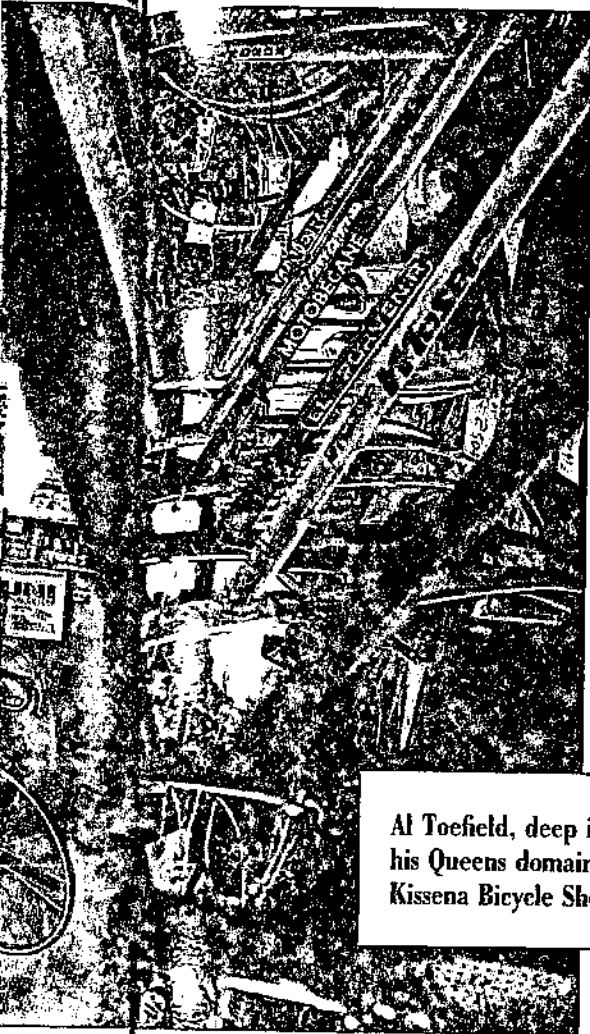
As a high school student during the Depression he worked as a bicycle messenger for 15 cents an hour. He learned fund-raising early by playing as many school sports as possible. Each coach dispensed 25 cents for car fare and lunch on practice days, which Toefield squirreled away for bicycle equipment purchases. It was a brilliant plan except when different teams practiced on the same day.

Before the war, he burned up the board

tracks at the Coney Island Velodrome, the old Madison Square Garden, and the velodrome in Nutley, New Jersey. His last sprint was in the 1953 Race of Champions at the now-defunct Flushing Meadow track, a six-tenths-mile flat oval in Queens.

A night person, he can be found most evenings at his store fielding phone calls from mentees and the curious. The shop also serves as executive offices for the 200-member Kissena Cycle Club. Prospect Park in Brooklyn, where he runs his races, is suburban in a Kafkaesque sort of way. It is a scaled-down Central Park complete with museums, botanical gardens, zoo, skating rink, stables and a racing circuit that measures three miles and change. It has its squatters, too, but fewer of them, and its share of airheads cutting a swath across a breakaway group's path. Vehicles are prohibited from the park on weekends and from 10 AM to 3 PM daily during the summer. But that doesn't stop some folks.

In the battle of nerves, Toefield is a front-liner. Once someone parked a car in the middle of a path while a race was in



Al Toefield, deep in his Queens domain: the Kissena Bicycle Shop.

track, which rests but three blocks away from the Kissena Bicycle Shop.

One of the few things on which the two kingpins agree is the circus surrounding the track's construction. It was intended to replace an existing flat track at Flushing Meadow. In 1955, Parks Commissioner Robert Moses announced he was razing the Flushing flat oval as part of his Slum Clearance Program. The World's Fair and Shea Stadium were in; the cyclists were out. While the city was still feeling guilty about depriving the racers of their only facility, a deal was struck. The clubs would raise funds to build the new track and the city would donate the land. If Toefield and Maltese came back with the money.

Raise cash they did—\$10,000, with the help of clubs and private interests. And the Parks Department, after a lot of arm-twisting, granted \$90,000 and a site for the project. None of the Parks people had ever seen a banked track before, much less built one; Maltese had to design it himself. Groundbreaking was delayed by bureaucratic red tape; construction prices rose, and with them the cost projections for the track. By 1963, according to Toefield, Maltese, and Peter Senia Sr., a Federation board director

who figures prominently in the local scene, the city was fed up with the spiraling costs, and refused to allocate additional funds to meet rising estimates.

After years of sidestepping, the asphalt arena finally got built in 1963—over a swamp, thanks to the choice parcel donated by the city. Every year, because of poor drainage, the track sinks a bit, requiring extensive repairs. When the racing representatives wanted to install lights around the track at their own expense, the city refused their proposal. It also forbade them to privately negotiate the services of the union contractors who had originally bid for the track job. In turn, those contractors applied pressure to other contractors to scare them away. Just business as usual in the Big Apple. Despite the city's best efforts, though, Kissena's season creaks to life every May, with the faithful arriving on Wednesday nights for racing at dusk.

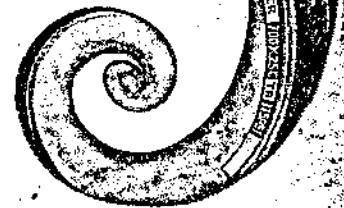
**C**lub membership in New York City is a microcosm of the general cycling population: balding, affluent bikers scrounging around for lost youth, banshees on gaspipe bikes, kids who are "serious," at least until they acquire mortgages. The common fabric is

progress. That they wormed past a police barricade in the first place was galling enough; they then proceeded to ignore warnings from club marshals to remove their hardware. Toefield, a retired police sergeant with 38 years on the force, approached the party poopers himself. Failure to persuade them by conventional means, he then produced a revolver. The poopers moved the car.

From where Toefield stands, Maltese's Central Park organization is more flash than substance, and the CRC serves but one useful purpose. "We turn down an awful lot of people," he says, referring to CRC defectors. "We've found through experience that if they're frustrated in that direction it means they're looking for something unrealistic. Eventually they'll be frustrated with us. We don't want them."

Maltese has a symbiotic relationship with New York cycling's wealthy patron Fred Mengoni, which is an assurance of continued racing in Manhattan. Toefield has no such guardian angel, and no guarantees for the survival of any of his stewardships. Of major concern is one he originally shared with Maltese: the Kissena

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a racing bug and the unilateral resentment of jogging babyboomers who think that \$150 shoes make them athletes.

The mere mention of the New York Roadrunner Club is enough to ignite many cyclists. The advantage of over 25,000 members and considerably more successful publicity has, not surprisingly, inflated the running club's influence as well as its sense of property rights. Its members, too, have races in Central Park on Saturday mornings, and that's not all. The rift between the runners and the riders is the biggest undeclared war since Vietnam.

In the late sixties, Toefield, Maltese and Senia lobbied the city into closing the parks on weekends. What they had in mind was more cycling races. What they got was quite different. The Roadrunners have since not only overrun the park, but also the major events calendar. Says Senia, "They're allowed to use the park as much as they want. We're not allowed a permit except once a year."

Ask Toefield, and he'll tell you a combat story to set your feet tapping. A certain corporate mogul and major political contributor likes to run off his hangovers in Central Park. "He gets the finger from cyclists," claims Toefield. "He gets four-letter words shouted at him. They run

him off the path—aim at him! And he calls up Eddie [Koch, the mayor]. He calls up Henry [Stern, the Parks Commissioner]. How are you going to fight that?"

Maltese, who must sleep in the same bed with the runners and answer to a city office ludicrously titled Special Events, says, "It's not the Roadrunner Club that gives us any problem. It's the general public. The runners have one inside lane, and the riders have two outside lanes." The discipline problem, he feels, lies elsewhere. "The [rest of the] public thinks they own the park." Bill Noël, Executive Director of the Roadrunners, will tell you exactly the same thing.

When push comes to shove, however, it's clear that this is merely tactical diplomacy. During one particular CRC race, an errant yuppie was plodding in the bicycle lane instead of the runners'. The pack saw him and parted like the Red Sea, all except for one novice at the back. Unable to avoid the oblivious waddler, he did the unthinkable. He creamed what turned out to be a lawyer. The case went to court. The CRC won.

Maltese was approached by the runners' club about a coalition with six other civic groups to draft ceasefire guidelines. He declined to participate, apparently because he felt they were all flakeballs. Two

and a half years later that pot is still simmering, but only barely. Says Noël resignedly, "It's extremely slow going. It's very complex. Things that are not very practical are being tossed out on the table." Although little has been done to quell the Central Park free-for-all, Maltese's vindication must be a sweet reward.

A common ground shared by Maltese and Toefield is an ambivalence about certain necessary evils, particularly publicity. Corporations have never been known for doing the right things for the right reasons, if at all, and publicity is always conditional to acts of largesse.

Even under the best of circumstances, it isn't easy to part someone from tens of thousands of dollars. Unlike heads of other non-profit organizations, Maltese and Toefield don't do doggie tricks for big-shots who charge their batteries by making others crawl. Until the press comes to cycling, New York racing will always be in that financial Twilight Zone between municipal and corporate dependency.

How can the town that hosted outrageously successful Olympic qualification trials, national championships, citywide marathons and the country's first pro team treat the sport's resident royalty so cavalierly? Chalk it up to chutzpah. The 1978 Apple Lap was an ambitious plan

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by Maltese and Toefield, a 75-mile race that called for 300 riders to cut through all five boroughs. Heady on the success of the recent Citibank Marathon, the city insisted on not 300 riders, but thousands. The police department started clucking about allocating 600 uniforms for only half as many protectees. Toefield finally convinced city fathers that there would be a massacre with 10,000 riders racing. By 1992, the point was moot; the Apple Lap race had fallen prey to Citibank's better financed and promoted marathon events.

The city displayed a similar coyness when it needed to be convinced the 1960 Olympic trials would be good business. It took the combined efforts of Maltese, Toefield, Senia, and six months to get consent to close off Central Park for four hours on a weekday.

Private business is in the same misguided boat, committing time and money to lesser events in remote places. Toefield believes that big cities like his have unlimited talent reserves, and fails to understand why companies hustle to promote inferior products. "You could sell horse-shit in New York City if you package it right," he says, quoting a friend on Madison Avenue. "Why should they create markets when they're already here?"

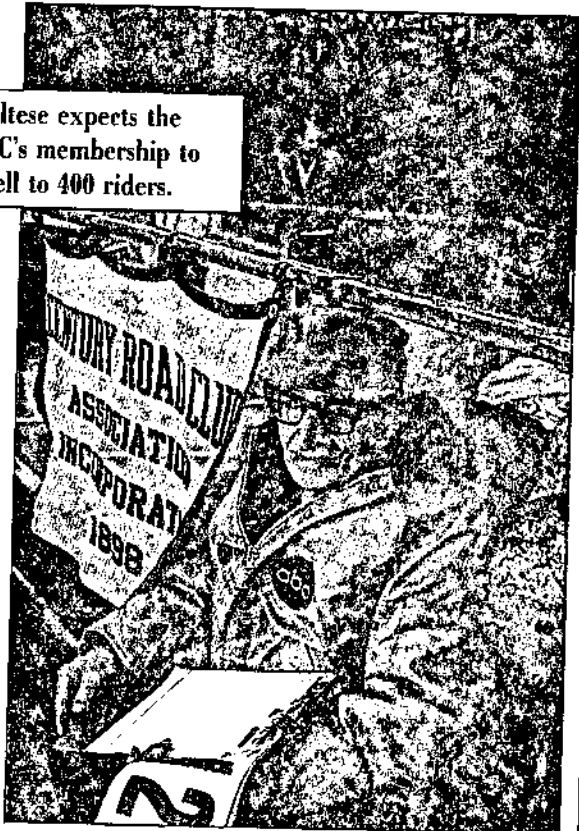
At home, the sponsorship problem's re-

percussions hit below the belt. Brooklyn suffers from a lack of recognition as a commercial race site for much the same reasons that cycling itself is slow to be recognized as national sport—both have a reputation of being dull, dangerous, and small-time. Prospect Park, with its convenient location and well-maintained grounds, has yet to live up to its potential as a racing scene. Sponsors always demand Central Park because they feel it's the chic place to be seen. Prospect abuts Park Slope, one of the most beautiful neighborhoods in this, or any, city. Nevertheless, Toefield forfeited a blank check from Cinzano because he couldn't deliver Central Park for a Sunday afternoon race.

The problem of access to Central Park is more than a simple matter of territorialism. Certainly because of the Roadrun-

ners' pre-eminence there, but also because of city hall's conviction that cycling is a dangerous sport, most of the time and space allotted to "special events" bypasses

Maltese expects the CRC's membership to swell to 400 riders.



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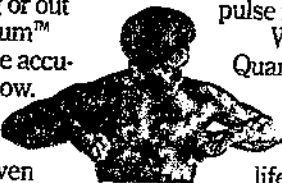
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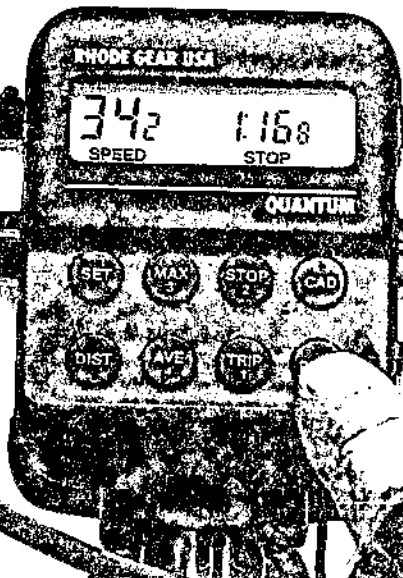


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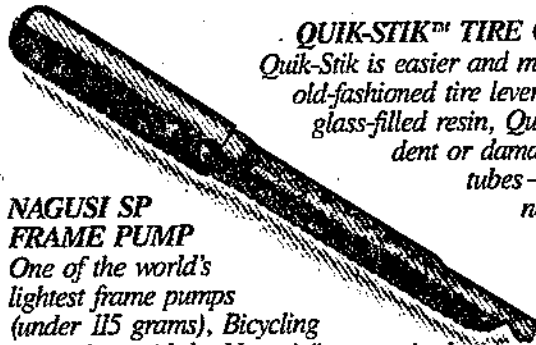
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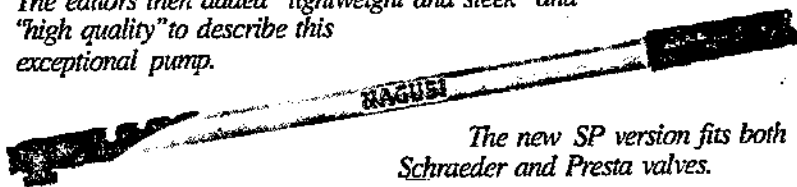
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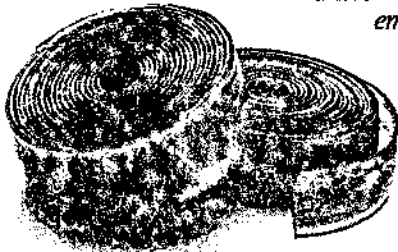


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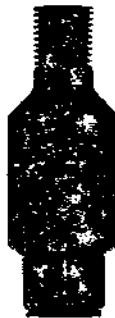
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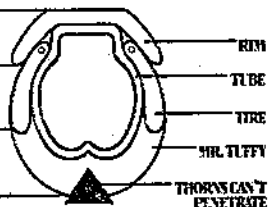


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cycling. What little of it there is goes mostly to Maltese a n d

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ing nine-tenths of the law, with the occasional bone tossed to Toefield.

Legally, of course, any promoter is allowed to arrange practically anything in Central Park. But the reality is a nightmare of permit applications, insurance hassles, scheduling and payoffs. According to Toefield, Bloomingdales agreed to sponsor a race four years ago. The bill from the Parks Department was \$25,000 for use of Central Park. That's in addition to, you understand, salaries, security, equipment, insurance and prize money—the race itself. The University of Conspicuous Consumption recoiled at the figures. They coughed it up that time, but backed off from the race sponsorship for the next three years. "Anybody comes up with \$100,000 for me to run a race, I'd gladly give Central Park \$10,000," maintains Toefield. "But if Central Park knew I had a \$100,000 budget, they'd want \$50,000."

A few years back, Toefield provided cyclists and technical advice for the filming of "Key Exchange," which features footage of racers in Central Park. The producer agreed as payment to sponsor another, real race in Central Park. When Toefield filed the permit applications for use of the park, the Parks Department discovered the film's backer was Manufacturer Hanover's Trust. Before they would even consider starting the paperwork, they had a question. Just how generous a contribution to the Central Park Cultural Foundation were Kissena Cycle Club and the fourth largest bank in the country prepared to make? MHT threatened to back out, but the movie did get made. And eventually Toefield had his real race, but in Prospect rather than Central Park. And MHT never sponsored a cycling event again.

Of course, the fact that coverage of MHT's race didn't get much farther than the local papers didn't help any. Something that the Roadrunners, Sylvester Stallone and the Cabbage Patch Kids have in common is a respect for the value of the press. But Toefield especially has

Toefield leaves the Kissena track, built in 1963 after bitter negotiations.





been reluctant in the past to court TV. His underestimation of the small screen's educational value may be because, unlike the young racers he promotes, he grew up without the tube dominating his living room. Aside from the fact that the Roadrunners are big campaign contributors and have attracted solid corporate backing and media attention, they also have something crucial that has been completely overlooked by CRC and Kissena: a listed phone number. With the escalating insurance crisis threatening to close down local racing, it's no time for dilettantism.

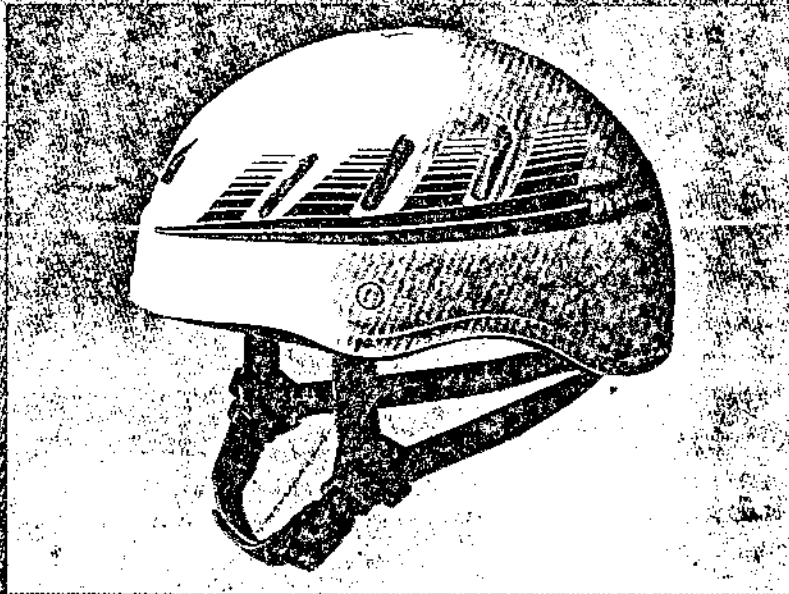
It's easy to argue that until cycling is considered mainstream in the U.S., getting support will be difficult. But getting support requires a tradeoff in publicity, and getting publicity requires the guarantee of sponsorship. Cycling will never become mainstream without them. Schmoozing the three-piece suits is a nasty job, but somebody's got to do it. This is the Catch-22 of the sport's future.

The focus of cycle racing in the United States has only recently shifted from the northeast to the west. New York is still the spiritual, if not commercial, hub of racing. Until the Europeans showed up in Colorado last year for the Coors Classic, the national press gave cycling the cold shoulder. Not anymore. And with LeMond, Bauer and Hampsten proving to the world that North Americans intend to be fierce contenders, the international focus may shift as well. But whenever this country is shaken by a new fever, the ground that shakes first is New York.

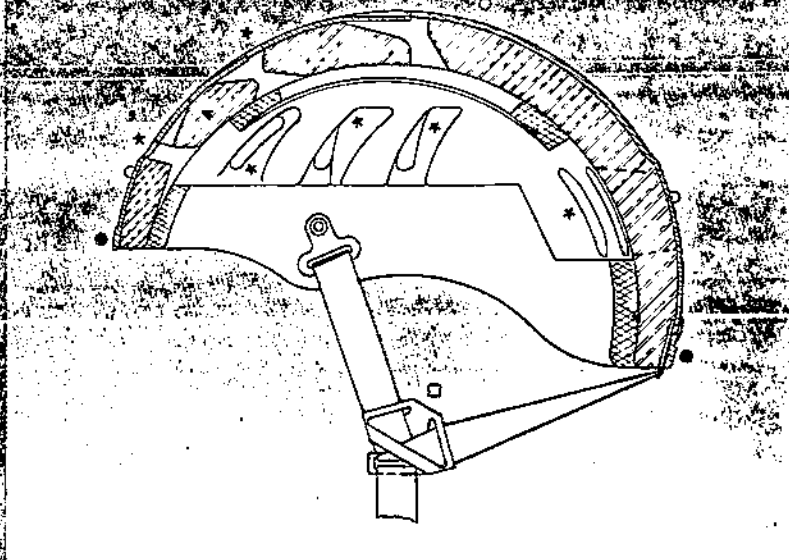
It would be a fitting criterium finish, poetically speaking. When Maltese was organizing the 1986 Freedom Cup, the first thing he arranged after sponsorship and police support was 1 1/2 hours of television coverage on ESPN. Catch-22 just slipped a toestrapp. □

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