



COVER HEAD (?): Rally's Reigning Cinema King and other tales of utter urban depravity

TAG: City riding is the axe-wielding, head-banging stepsister of mountain biking, a fusion of a dozen different cycling disciplines. And Lucas Brunelle is its mascot.

Matthew Shaer

There is a Tao to traffic in Boston, a sleepy code of the expressways and sidestreets that run out of Copley Square, south to the ocean, north to Cambridge; a thready heartbeat to the whole hurtling, reeling mess. Since 1982, the Big Dig—essentially a massively overpriced, underfunded urban makeover—has been under way in one form or another, and although the end is ostensibly in sight, the city still labors under the burden of constant construction. Traffic stalls regularly at every turn. Parking is, typically, nonexistent. One long and usually crowded lane swings off the southbound expressway into the downtown area.



Unlike New York, Boston was not constructed on a grid system. To an outsider—of which there are plenty since the Red Sox won the World Series—the hundredfold unmarked streets, the avenues that begin in nothingness and end only at the water, and the teeming, laneless squares are inscrutable; impassable and endless.

But this is the Tao of “In Town” traffic—an organically created and sustained way of life; a wired maze of cabs and commuters; gravel trucks and bikes. In many ways, the city is not unlike the ocean appears in old sailor’s yarns, which was there whether or not you knew it; whether or not you decided you cared; and, mostly importantly, regardless of what you had to say or do about it. After all the construction, the roads are still the packed-tight-like-sardines heart of Boston.

And if Boston had tried, it could not have elected a more unlikely hero of traffic than Lucas Brunelle.

In the seventh video on DigAve.com/movies, Brunelle’s website and showcase to his most well-known films—to date a million users have checked in—Lucas sits on a park bench with the Boston skyline behind him. “Some things,” he explains to the camera, “are so outrageous, so funny, that [they] have to be done.”

Seconds later, “The Couch” rolls on to the screen.

Think 600 pounds, give a take a few dozen pounds. It is an invention only a bike-maniac could love, constructed from an unconfirable number of wheels and a giant wooden platform. Bands have performed on the thing. A wedding once played out on its chassis.

In the video you can see it—from the back, from the side, a giant, ugly monstrosity, a **pedal-powered beetle—getting hauled around Boston, chased by police, driven on to the freeway for godsakes**, and there’s Lucas, grinning like an idiot, while his two huge race-winning legs crank away like a freshly flushed Ford engine.

If there’s a central irony to Lucas’s story, it’s this: He is far more well known as a filmmaker in New York, where he has reached cult-celebrity status, than he is in his home-state of Massachusetts.

“Everyone in New York knows him. People approach me and say ‘You know Lucas?’,” Brendt Barbur, the director of the Bicycle Film Festival and a friend and collaborator of Brunelle’s told me. “But Boston may yet catch on to what it has.”

So far it has not. Lucas, who grew up on the cape and in Nantucket—where he

stole a couple of cars and went to jail, thus ruining his future on Wall Street—is for all purposes unknown in the Bay State. This may be because, during the day, he is one of the city’s most respectable citizens.

He owns a profitable and successful business, Computer Geeks, on Boston’s tiny Beacon Hill, which is expanding to several other cities and which plays home to dozens of mobile, computer-fixing employees (Brunelle started the venture himself several years ago by riding his bike to apartments in the city and fixing old or virus-ridden desktops). On the side, he makes bike movies. Or, depending on who you are asking, he owns Computer Geeks so he can make bike movies, which is what he does with every moment of his increasingly unavailable free time.

Brunelle graduated from UMass Amherst in 1996, after a short stint racing BMX and then CAT 2 road. Initially, he moved to New York to be a broker, because, as he describes it to me, “I met this girl that severely—that was the first love—that severely limited my judgment. I was doing stupid things. I was looking for jobs in all the wrong places.”

As it turned out, his criminal record kept him out of the boardroom and on the streets; he spent some time as a courier for several firms because he could speak the financial tech-talk, and then he rode. A lot. Won some races. Raced cyclocross, downhill, cross-country, road, BMX, you name it. Lucas, as many of his friends have told me, is about as good as they come on two wheels. When he enters a race, he rarely loses.

About three months ago, I meet Lucas at his downtown office. He arrives late or I arrive late—this much is unclear—but there he is, coming out of the rain and looking every inch not a superstar and vaguely uncomfortable. I had first heard about Lucas and his movies earlier in the winter, when I was riding for a courier company in Chinatown. Most bike jockeys spoke about him like he was a Jimi Hendrix of the wheeled set, a rider lifted past the ranks of ordinary bike messengers and into the realm of transcendence; a faster, more graceful Lance Armstrong of the Boston streets. His movies, when I finally tracked them down, seemed like a revelation in themselves: This was the fastest city riding I had ever seen, and certainly the craziest, and it was all being expertly filmed for mass consumption.

As former-courier and race organizer Alex Whitmore—himself a talented rider—put it to me, “You think you’ve done some crazy shit? This is past crazy. This is far past crazy.”

Lucas, in the end, looks a little like a fit Hunter S. Thompson, post-Hell’s Angels, pre-campaign trail, but mostly crazy and



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conscious of it to a fault.

"I'd like to go to Afghanistan and film a bike movie in a war zone," he tells me once, with what appears to be utter seriousness. "Machine guns in the distance, lots of noise. Insane stuff."

There are also several levels to Brunelle's appearance, the first being that he is most definitely a rider, from the jersey to the Sidi shoes, from the veined calves to the cycling cap. But then there are the scars, the alternating bursts of twitchiness and utter calm, and the mental bearing of a man who has ridden at 40 miles an hour between two buses with a gap of inches on either side and not only lived to tell about it but has also made a movie about the experience.

We talk for over an hour but rarely about the technical aspect of filming—he shows me the two cameras he uses briefly, both Sonys, and then replaces them on the shelf—and mostly about the things that seem to spontaneously interest him; a lifetime of junk-drawer cycling notes.

"I actually did a ride from downtown Monterey up to the mountains and I couldn't really exert myself until I got above the smog line, and it's very interesting because Monterey used to be like L.A. was in the fifties, car headlights beaming through the smog, and you'd have to climb all these mountains to get above the smog line, ride real fast, do an aerobic workout and you kill yourself up there, and when you're done you descend back into the city and sweat on your body and smog'd stick to you and it'd be O.K.," he tells me, quickly, in one breath, near the end of our first interview.

From there, it's on to the geek factor on helmets. "Most people don't bother, because it's a pain to get the bag over your head, and it's clunky and it's the nerdish appearance of it if you're certain places, and different things and there's an appearance a rider has in the context of the general public and you can perceived better or worse depending on how you look"—before finally settling on Seattle: "Oh, Jesus. Those hills."

We agree to ride the next week, preferably, Lucas suggests, in traffic. And he'll try not to kill me.

A word, quickly, about the rest of the videos: They are scary. Fast and scary. Set to everything from Guns N' Roses to Judas Priest, the clips typically feature the most extreme kind of city riding, practiced by a select few couriers or hardened veterans and dubbed, for short, by Lucas, "rally." Cars fly across the screen, but so do buses, pedestrians and bikes. Crowds at the crosswalks scatter. Horns sound. Middle fingers are raised. Some guy with a cape rides at a disgusting

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