

Knock-Off Knock-Out

By Leon Scott Baxter

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In fourth grade I wanted a Mongoose BMX racing bike for Christmas. We didn't have much money. So, instead of the elite two-wheeler, Mom got me the K-Mart version. I really didn't mind. It looked pretty much the same as it's expensive cousin. It seemed to work as well as a Mongoose. But, I had to admit, I was concerned with what my keeping-up-with-the-Jones friends would say when they found out my bike came from a discount store.

“When they ask you what kind of bike it is,” Mom advised, “why not tell them it's a Winning Bike?”

Nice sentiment, but unreasonable. Yet, there was something about the idea that I liked. So, when asked, I'd hold my head high and announce the bike was a “Dubya Bee” (WB, you know... Winning Bike). I guess the confidence paid off. No one wanted to admit they'd never heard of one, so I was praised for my new vehicle.

Then I told Mom I wanted to race it. That first race I sat on my Dubya Bee alongside all the Mongeese. This was the time before helmets were mandatory for street riding. But, for racing, helmets were necessary. I was the only ten year old wearing his mother's motorcycle helmet sitting atop a Blue Light Special.

In a flash I was left in a cloud of dust. As I struggled to catch the mob, the leader rode into a turn with a high wall, like a wave just about to crest. With speed and the right lean, one could take a turn like this. He had the speed, but he leaned too much. He went down, as did the rest of the mob.

Suddenly I was closing the gap. But, I had no experience racing. No speed. No lean. But, no expectation, either. To avoid the carnage my Dubya Bee and I went where no racer had gone before (I was later told). I rode the crest of the wave, a five-inch rim, and strolled by the other racers like a ride at the park.

The trophy was gaudy, big, red and green (great Christmas decoration). I never won another. A month later I retired from the sport. But, I look back at

those days when a boy could find pride in a cheap bike and his mother's helmet.