




**Mangled body parts:  
A bloody good photo essay, p.60**

# bike

M A G A Z I N E

SPECIAL ISSUE



## SPLATTER

# SEWAGE

*Take a slimy ride through L.A.'s underbelly*

It was Mr. J's idea. He and a former frat brother were looking for some collegiate-type trouble to cause, and thus was created The Great L.A. Sewer Ride.

The 10-mile ride through one of Los Angeles' nicer sewers takes place at night. Why at night? Besides the fact it's illegal, it's just more exciting. And beer. Beer is an integral part of the ride. Panniers are filled with no less than 12 cans of Miller Lite. Cans, not bottles, are essential because you're sure to wipe out at least once. Rain gear is also a good idea, as you're

guaranteed to get wet from the lining of your helmet down to the soles of your bike shoes. Dive booties and goggles are recommended. And one should be prepared for side effects such as a hangover and pruned hands.

We started out as a group of six—two former bike racers, two female journalists, and King Safety (so dubbed for his lack of regard for safety)—led by Mr. J. We rode north on the bike path to Entrada Street at the bottom of Santa Monica Canyon and there, under Pacific Coast Highway, lies a concrete tube with a river of water dumping into the ocean. A sign reads "No Swimming." The start of an unlikely bike ride.

Before entering the mouth of the tunnel, Mr. J. checked the water level. He looked up with a raised eyebrow and confirmed, "Yep,

it's kind of deep."

We lowered our bikes down an embankment where a homeless woman was warming herself next to a toxic campfire. Sinking thigh-deep into quicksand, we waded over to the mouth of a very dark tunnel.

Our gang, novice to the ways of sewer riding, chatted excitedly as we worked our way upstream. "Keep your voices down," Mr. J. reminded us. "There are houses up there." And police.

Mr. J. and a buddy sought refuge in this very tunnel during the L.A. riots. "We stayed in here until we ran out of beer," he said.

After the first mile-long tunnel section, we were thoroughly soaked. Six inches of water, knobby tires constantly kicking it up into our eyes. But water, darkness, and danger is not for everyone. We lost three of our riders at an intersection—or escape route—which we christened "Wimp-out Point," a dry drainage leading up to Sunset Boulevard.

The rest of us continued on. No rats in sight. No beer cans except for the ones in the panniers. No graffiti. No stench of urine. Only the occasional whiff of horse manure. This was good, clean L.A. sewer riding.

Cruising through a second mile-long tunnel, this one burrowing beneath the swanky Riviera Country Club, we turned off our head lamps for the thrill—or stupidity—of riding in utter blackness.

"He's down!" yelled King Safety, turning on his light. We laughed at Mr. J.

lying on his side, water rushing over him and his bike, and gave each other a high-five. Keeping score of each other's falls is part of the ride. "You've got two now. Must have hit a patch of algae, bro."

At the turnaround point of Sullivan Canyon catch basin, we listened to the frogs croaking, piled our halogen lights for a photo with Mr. J.'s disposable camera, watched King Safety speed guzzle one last beer, wrung out our socks, and then turned our bikes around for the wild ride downhill.

Our howls echoing off the concrete, we surfed our way back to the beach, dragging a foot now and then for better braking. "Those wimps missed the best part!" I yelled to Mr. J. above the noise of the water. We turned off our lights, eluding police and rats, and coasted into the liquid blackness.—Beth Howard



DAVID FRANCK

In L.A., the sewers appear cleaner than the air.