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The Humor of Bicycling

Too frequently, the public's image of bicycling is based on the fierce expressions of the Tour de France riders, or the rugged tours of Dervla Murphy in war torn Yugoslavia, or David Duncan pedaling around the world, through poverty-stricken areas that most Americans cannot comprehend. Despite the image of pedaling a bicycle as hard work, most cyclists find their avocation relaxing and enjoyable as well as a good means of maintaining cardiovascular health. Moreover, at least some people see humor rather than toil in bicycling. In both text and illustration, bicyclists have taken a lighthearted look at their sport. It appears the English see the humor in cycling more than Americans, as most of the material for this paper is drawn from the pages of Punch for the illustrations, and the books of English cycling journalist Rex Coley for the text references. Well-known English authors H. G. Wells and Jerome K. Jerome also wrote of cycling in a lighthearted vein. The first and best known is Wells, The Wheels of Chance, in which he chronicles the humorous antics of Mr. Hoopdriver, a draper's assistant. Jerome edited a collection of short stories entitled The Humours of Cycling. Taken together, these books show the funny side of cycling, as seen by both the rider and the spectator.
