

## **Mr. Mom Rides Again – Sidesaddle**

**by Lee Holden**

Normally I enjoy a brisk bike ride in the morning. There is something about the feeling of converting the power in your body into motion that is therapeutic. Sometimes the hills in Colorado are a challenge, but each provides its own reward as you reach the crest and feel the exhilaration as the breeze in your face signals the descent down the other side.

However, this morning the “breeze” hurled snow flakes in my face with the force of BB gun pellets. Icicles forming on my eyebrows were making it difficult to see, which could have been a good thing. Had I been able to see better as I labored over the top of the hill, I would have been able to panic much more quickly. I was now headed downhill through six inches of snow made more treacherous by the chunks of grimy ice that had broken loose from the cars as they bounced over the ruts left by earlier risers.

The exertion was keeping my body warm, but out on the extremities, my gloveless hands, wet feet and muff-less ears had lost all feeling. Of course fenders had long since gone the way of dinosaurs as these spindly-wheeled road bikes replaced the chubby-tired mono-speed bikes of my youth. Normally this isn't a big deal. However, when you are riding through snow and slop the rear wheel can churn up a spray on your back that makes you look like some kind of giant dirty skunk. I was saved this ignominy because I was shielded by the ninety pound ten year-old clinging to my back for dear life.

At 5:30 that morning, Freeman and Butch, “The Morning Guys,” rudely shattered a great dream that, as near as I can recall, involved Anna Kournikova and the seven dwarfs.

“Rise and shine!” said Freeman—or Butch. Their voices gave no clue as to which one was the girl. I really didn’t care, but there had been times when I wondered how she came to be one of the “Guys.” Of course, none of those occurred at this time of day. I pulled the pillow over my head and went back to Anna.

“Hi Ho—Time to get up and shovel the white stuff before you head off to work.” The piercing androgynous voice seemed to be siding with the dwarfs.

Beside me, Mindy was obviously snoring away. Later I would hear about how she had not slept a wink all night. She was convinced she suffered from insomnia and yet always seemed to be asleep when I woke up during the night to heed the call of nature. I read that insomniacs have the best dreams—Technicolor, three-D—which they can remember in great detail. My theory is that they don’t really stay awake all night. They just dream they are not sleeping.

I slapped at the OFF button pretending it was Butch and knocked over the half-empty glass of water on the night stand. No, I take that back. I am pretty sure that when you are spilling stuff, the glass is half-full. Apparently, the radio wasn’t waterproof because it sparked and began smoking. I lunged and yanked the plug from the socket, knocking the lamp to the floor. I quickly eyed Mindy. I was supposed to let her sleep as long as possible but she was apparently in a coma and didn’t stir. I stumbled toward the bathroom.

“Aarrgh!” How did that chair get there? I doubled over grabbing for my wounded toe and promptly smacked my head on the dresser. “#@\$%^&\$”

Mindy sat bolt upright, mumbled, “Who put the vacuum in the freezer?” and dove back under the covers. Freud would have to wonder about that dream.

Since I worked from a home office our ritual when it snowed had become for me to get up early and shovel the driveway before Mindy had to leave for work. I also had

been awarded duties as breakfast chef and managing to get our son Bucko up, dressed, fed and to school.

I struggled into my clothes, forgetting momentarily that I wasn't a stork, and banged my head on the dresser again. Woozily I pulled on my parka, gloves, wool cap and sneakers and headed out to do my manly duty. I would like to have had boots, but they had apparently attacked our dog, Snooby, during the night because he had killed one of them.

I impaled the snow drift in front of the garage door and strained to lift the first load aside.

*Crack!* Fortunately, that was the handle breaking on the shovel, not my back. Unfortunately, without the weight on the shovel, I slipped on the ice, lost my balance and tumbled backwards into the snow bank. Now, covered with snow and minus the wool cap, I struggled to my feet and slammed the worthless snow shovel handle to the ground.

In the split second before the ricochet reached my crotch, I remembered my mom telling me that getting mad never made anything better. Doubling over in agony once again I slipped and headed down—this time missing the snow that was cleverly protected by the severed head of the snow shovel.

Mom's "I told you so" rang in my ears as I spit snow and blood at nobody in particular.

I finally uncrossed my eyes—and legs—and managed to get upright, noticing the trickle of blood coloring the front of my jacket. Grabbing the only shovel I had left, a garden spade, I turned back to the twenty minute job of clearing the drive way. An hour and a half later I passed Mindy as she backed out on her way to work.

"What happened to the radio and lamp?" she asked.

"Probably vandals," I responded and trudged back into the house bone-tired, shivering and probably smelling like a wet dog.

"Seven-fifteen!" I screamed at the clock.

Bucko had to be at school by eight. It normally took more than forty-five minutes just to get him fully awake. I raced to his room and shook him awake—more or

less—and sped back to the kitchen to make breakfast. As my still wet shoes hit the linoleum I did my best Chevy Chase imitation and went ass over tea kettle—literally—slid into the stove. The jolt knocked the tea kettle from the stove. Fortunately, it wasn't hot. Unfortunately, it was full and for the second time that morning, I was singing soprano.

I managed to slop some milk on a bowl full of Frosted Sugar Balls or something like that and headed off in search of Bucko who was, of course, still in bed. Wishing for a handful of snow, I settled for rousting him again and managed to get him clothed and fed.

You would think three cars in a two driver family would be enough. My stomach churned as the starter's *RRRRRRRrrrrrrrrrr* turned to *click-click-click-click*. In frustration I banged my head against the steering wheel which reopened the cut from the snow shovel.

Of course, I thought, all was not lost. My car wouldn't start and Mindy had taken the van to work on the other side of town. But there was my trusty MG—not exactly a great snow car, but I was a beggar without a choice.

Now, I love sports cars, but the MGBs are notorious for their poor electrical systems. However, after parading through a new battery every year, I had learned to disconnect it during the winter. I scrambled into the tiny back seat—banging my head again on the top—and connected the battery.

Not even a clickity-click-click! Ah, the marvel of British engineering when a car can suck the life out of a battery that isn't even connected.

Bucko, of course, was less than dismayed contemplating a morning off from school. I was sorely tempted, but he never could keep his mouth shut.

“Can I go watch cartoons while you're calling a mechanic?”

Resisting the urge to plant him head first in the snow, my eyes fell on the bike.

I had Bucko get on me piggy-back while I mounted the bike wet, hatless and glove free, and we headed off for the school four miles away.

Now, as we headed down the treacherous final hill to the school, I was having a hard time remembering many things—like how to ride a bike in snow for one or why it

had seemed so important to get Bucko to school in the first place. More importantly I didn't remember that there was a huge speed bump (now covered by snow) at the bottom of the hill at the entry to the school.

Fortunately, Bucko wasn't hurt as my body cushioned his fall. My body, on the other hand, was cushioned by the cross bar on the bicycle. The next time I take my kid to school, I am wearing a cup.