



LET THE END TIMES ROLL -



STORY & PHOTOS
BY KYLE BOGGS

RIDING THROUGH THE COLLAPSE OF CIVILIZATION

I was alone, navigating my hard tail along the legendary **Porcupine Rim Trail** just east of **Moab**, when I began to think about the end of the world. I imagined traversing the rough landscape in an unfortunate, yet realistically speaking, not-too-distant future — a reality engulfed in desperation, aesthetic uncertainty, and a renewed sense of ingenuity. It was a reality certainly not characterized by automobiles, which had surly become obsolete almost immediately upon the collapse of civilization.

Unless we figure out a way for cars to run on loving kindness, it should be clear that they won't see us through the pending endgame of civilization. Given bicycles were around before the automobile, it's not a stretch to say they will be around long after. **If we can't drive our way through the apocalypse, perhaps we can ride through it.**

But let's be real; someday, all of this may come crashing down. Never before have we faced, all at once, so many different scenarios upon which the demise of industrial civilization may play out. Imagining living through such a collapse, as many of us do from time to time, it is clear our transition to a sane and truly sustainable world will be neither voluntary, nor easy.

But when the car dies — and it will — what sort of bike will you ride out into this uncertain future?

Before I got too ahead of myself in preparing for end-times (or new beginnings — depending upon your perspective), I headed over to **Revolution Bicycles** to try their new coffee and talk apocalypse bikes.

It was clear the mechanics there had already thought of this.

When I asked mechanic and co-manager **Adam Cornette** what his ideal apocalypse bike would look like, he had an answer for me immediately: "A rigid steel frame single-speed mountain bike with 26-inch wheels."

"Twenty-six-inch wheels?" I asked him of the standard mountain bike size wheel. I told him when I imagined my perfect bike it would look more like a single-speed cyclo-cross bike, which has skinnier yet much taller wheels suitable for paved and off-road riding.

"You shouldn't be riding anything too specific," he said. "Twenty-six-inch wheels are the most common. When looking at any aspect of your bike after production of parts stops, everything should be as serviceable and replaceable as possible."

"In a lot of ways," Mr. Cornette elaborated, "this is exactly the mindset folks go through in bike touring. I mean, apocalypse or not, the question can be: 'What can you fix in a small auto shop in Bolivia?'"

In terms of suspension, I didn't even have to ask, as I saw a mechanic overhauling a fork behind Mr. Cornette as we spoke. He poured out at least 100 milliliters of used oil out of the fork and into a tub. And here I thought bikes would never need an oil change! It takes up to two liters of oil to do a complete overhaul of your forks. A rigid fork would certainly be the way to go.

Mechanic and barista **Jon Benson** got an idea from someone in town who built their ideal apocalypse bike. "Surly makes a wide fork; he used that and actually built the bike with two rear wheels."

"Why would you want to do that?" I asked,

sipping an iced latte from a martini glass.

"If you have two rear wheels, that means you have two rear cassettes; one to replace the other when it wears out. You can make your gears last longer that way."

Before I spoke to Mr. Benson, the consensus was an apocalypse bike would be a single-speed. "Eventually, that would have to be the case." **CJ Constantopoulos**, the proprietor of the shop, piped in next to us. "But cables will last for a while, as long as you keep them lubed."

It was then I realized the ideal apocalypse bike would be one that evolved as existing parts became less and less available. Mr. Constantopoulos is a big fan of his **Surly Big Dummy**, fitted with a three-speed internal hub. "The internal gears are ideal because of how low maintenance they are." The Big Dummy frame includes the built-in "xtracycle," allowing the bike to carry up to 200 pounds of cargo, a feature no doubt crucial in a post-apocalypse world.

I finished my coffee and rolled on over to **BiciMundo** to talk to **Elson Miles**, who operates the bike shop out of his house. Mr. Miles, as folks know, is the godfather of bicycles in Flagstaff. Walking into his bike yard, you'd think the world had already ended. Walkways lined with frames of all varieties, some complete bikes, some not; spare chainrings and wheels hung on the back fence, large tubs here and there, full of used forks, seats, handlebars, and other miscellaneous parts.

"All you have to do is look at third-world countries to see the future," he said, commenting on a style of bike known as the

"AfricaBike." Kona currently produces a version of this bike and actually donates them to communities in need. **WorldBicycleRelief.org** is an organization that "provides access to independence and livelihood through the Power of Bicycles" and has distributed over 75,000 of these bikes throughout Africa. These bikes are sturdy city cruisers with steel belted tires — making them virtually puncture resistant — coaster brakes, and internal three-speed hubs. They are also work bikes, usually accompanied by heavy-duty racks on the front and the back.

"But low-tech will be what survives," said Mr. Miles. "No doubt tires can be made out of anything rubber," he said looking around, "Like maybe a garden hose or something. And when your brakes fail, you can always use the back of your shoe in an emergency," he said smiling, demonstrating on some old cruiser. "We used to call that one the 'Skuffy Skidmore Memorial Brake.'"

Back on the Porcupine Rim Trail, many folks I passed were having trouble: a bent disc brake rotor, a broken derailleur, a snapped chain, and another broken derailleur. If any of these folks were going to ride through the pending crash of civilization, they'd likely have to get rid of those gears, and eventually those brakes too. 🚲

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