

Why is my bike such a mess if it's not raining?



At the shop, it's pretty much a constant thing, several times a week, sometimes a few times a day. "Why does my bike creak?" "Why do you say my chain has to be replaced after so few miles?" "Why are my crank bearings going out so frequently?"

Answer: Because you live on the SF Peninsula and ride on Skyline Blvd, where the fog during the night, and possibly while you were riding, made such a mess of the road that your tires picked up all manner of nasty stuff and threw it against your cranks, your chain, your frame... everything. In fact, had it actually been raining, your bike might have fared better because a lot of the slop would have been washed off.

This morning's ride was one of the worst in this regard. If it had been your bike and we'd just done a general check to it and added a drivetrain clean (about \$50 extra), every bit of work you paid to get that drivetrain clean would have been undone in just this one ride. It just can't be helped. Actually, that's not entirely true. A "rain" bike with fenders and maybe disc brakes would have reduced the damage, and made it a lot nicer for those riding behind you (no spray coming off your rear wheel). But you start the ride with the sun overhead, and you hope that the fog you see up on Skyline is going to burn off before you get there. And your rain bike... it's heavier and just not as much fun to ride.

"Not as fun to ride" isn't really the case though. When descending on wet pavement, there's no substitute for slightly wider tires, slightly lower air pressure, fenders and disc brakes. Descending is one thing that actually *is* fun on a rain bike.

So we have a bit of a conundrum. I think everybody should have a "rain" bike, a bike that is modified (or created) for wet weather (and remember, "wet" weather doesn't just mean water falling from the sky; the greater damage is water coming up at you from the road). But if it's not actually raining, you find excuses to take your "nice" bike out. And get it thoroughly trashed.

Of course, neither Todd nor JR nor younger Kevin were on their "rain" bikes this morning, and had I been, I would have been even further behind than I already was. The flip side? I would have had an excuse (for being slower). Score one more point for the rain bike.