



No doubt about it, Lance Armstrong could ride circles around most of us even if he were sitting atop a 1970s Schwinn Varsity, and that's because the most important factor in making a bicycle go fast is the rider riding it. Still, the more involved you get in the sport of cycling, even at a recreational level, the more important your machine becomes, which is why the quest to own the perfect bike, like the quest to own the perfect watch, has always had a Holy Grail quality to it.

The bicycle industry is a big business and that means lots of marketing talk and the need to always push new "product." And, just as most of the wristwatches that you see out there rely on quartz or ETA mechanical movements, most of the racing bikes you see today use mass-produced frames made out of carbon fiber (light, but extremely delicate), aluminum (light, but delicate and brittle to ride) and titanium (light and durable, but aesthetically crude). Because of economic reasons, the handmade lugged steel bicycle frame has become practically extinct. In the long run it's much less labor intensive to create molded carbon fiber frames or TIG welded aluminum frames than it is to join steel tubes together with a 56% silver braz-



Richard Sachs creates 80 frames a year in his one-man shop.

! A game of chance and wit: Match the human face with the correct watch face and you automatically enter a lottery contest. The winner will be announced in the December 2004 issue of *WatchTime*.

Brazed Alchemy

At the heart of a great wristwatch is a handcrafted mechanical caliber and at the heart of a great bicycle is a handmade frame. Richard Sachs is on the cognoscenti's short list as the best framebuilder in the history of the craft.

BY MATTHEW MORSE



Patek Philippe Calatrava ref. 3919
Patek Philippe is Patek Philippe and although they make many different Calatravas, the 33.45 mm 3919 with the hobnail bezel is their most traditional.



Philippe Dufour Simplicity
The Simplicity is an austere hand-wound wristwatch. Mr. Dufour is considered a watchmaker's watchmaker because he creates all of the pieces that go into his movements with his own two hands.



F.P. Journe Chronomètre à Résonance
F.P. Journe had been a member of the AHCI since 1985, and went large in 1999 with his ingenious Chronomètre à Résonance. The watch follows the principle that two pendulums placed side by side will eventually synchronize.

ing compound and a set of lugs (the metal fittings that link the tubes together).

In other words, the cycling world is currently going through what the watch industry went through during the Quartz Crisis of the 1970s. Prior to the Mechanical Renaissance of the 1980s, the mechanical watch was all but dead and one has to hope that Richard Sachs and the 10 or so other accomplished American framebuilders out there are at the cutting edge of what might someday be called the Lugged Steel Renaissance.

The *manufacture* frame (to use the watch parallel) is still made by hand out of lugged steel. It might weigh as much as a pound more than the lighter nonferrous materials, but steel will offer a much more fluid ride...one that's both lively and forgiving while lasting for decades of hard use. What's more, a steel frame is simply more beautiful, and for most of us the aesthetics of a ride (fresh air, rolling hills, a mind and body boosted by adrenaline and

endorphins, the flawless performance of a machine that pleases the eye and ear) are a huge part of the sport's appeal.

Connecticut-based Richard Sachs (51) began building frames in the early 1970s. A defining moment for him came later in the decade when he tuned in to a television series produced by National Geographic called *Living Treasures of Japan*. In it, nine of Japan's most revered craftsmen are portrayed including a sword maker who designs according to a secret ritual and a bronze bell maker.

Another defining moment was when a customer pointed out the similarities between what he does and what the English shotgun manufacturer James Purdey & Sons has been doing since 1814. Since then, as the Links page on his Website www.richardsachs.com would suggest, he takes less inspiration from the bicycle industry than he does from the world of other high-craft objects such as Longmire cufflinks; Patek Philippe and Roger W. Smith wristwatch-

Try to guess Richard Sachs' horological twin. Simply fill in the postcard found within the magazine and mail it to us. Everyone who guesses the correct watch automatically enters a lottery. The winner will be announced in the December 2004 issue of *WatchTime*. The prize is a St. Christopher watch valued at \$2,800.

Watches to Choose From:

Patek Philippe
Calatrava ref. 3919

Philippe Dufour
Simplicity

F.P. Journe
Chronomètre à Résonance

es; Marinella neckties; C.H. Becksvoort furniture and Monteleone guitars.

Like most Americans, Sachs had always looked to Europe for inspiration and the English builder W.B. Hurlow was his earliest influence. From there he moved on to the Italian framebuilders, because Sachs, a racer himself, was passionate about the functional geometry



St. Christopher Watch

When Terry Betteridge (52) of Betteridge jewelers in Greenwich, CT got his driver's license his father gave him a Rolex that had a customized image of St. Christopher, the patron saint of travellers, attached to the caseback. About 10 years ago, Terry approached Cartier with the idea of making a St. Christopher watch, but they felt that it was a little too niche. The result was that

he went ahead and designed the watch himself. A passionate outdoorsman (and self-confessed insomniac), Terry built a 40-mm timepiece that you can easily read in the dark and can withstand an immense amount of abuse. The super-thick screwed-down crown is well protected and the sapphire crystal is extra thick. The \$2,800 steel-timepiece uses a highly-finished ETA movement.

FACE TO FACE

found in a great frame and didn't want to embellish his work with the froufrou lugs that the English tended to use.

By the mid 1980s, after five or six trips to Italy, he came to realize that he had projected an ideal of framebuilding onto their craftsmen that didn't really exist. With a few exceptions, most Italian work was out-sourced or done in an assembly line atmosphere. The American framebuilders of the 1970s...through an act of creative misunderstanding...had invented artisanal framebuilding done in a one-man shop.

Like anything that's truly worth doing there's a romance to the process of brazing. You're taking metal and heating it up with a hand-held torch to the point that it changes color...and then you have about 10 minutes to feed the brazing material in order to give the joint its integrity. A poorly-brazed joint that's been cleaned-up after the fact is second rate.

There's a delicate balancing act involving heat, time and the texture of the metals involved. You have to get it perfect in one pass. "I never clean up lug edges," Sachs puts it, "when I get the temperature up and the heat is reflecting off of the joints into my face and the smell of hot metal is in the air, especially in the winter...to me that's what it's all about. That's heaven. It's just immensely satisfying when you turn off the torch and everything cools and you see what you did."

Sachs can only create 80 frames a year and is admirably supportive of young framebuilders who are just starting out. When he began, it was accepted that the best bikes were made by hand, and his main challenge was in overcoming the reverence for things European. Today's young craftsmen are facing a much more hostile environment, but perhaps the fact that Richard Sachs has a 28-month waiting list for his \$3,000 frames (a Campagnolo build kit adds another \$2,500 to the total cost) and is happy to refer customers who can't wait that long to other framebuilders is a sign that the Lugged Steel Renaissance has already begun.

Congratulations to the winner of our April 2004 Face to Face contest: Karl Vetter of Brighton, CO. He guessed Joseph Abboud's favorite sports watch as a TAG Heuer Link and won a Think the Earth Watch valued at \$675.00.

PREVIEW

In the next issue of WatchTime

Frederique Constant

With the success of its own *manufacture* movement, Geneva-based Frederique Constant has entered the big leagues. A behind the scenes look at the present and future of the growing brand.



Svend Andersen

Danish-born Svend Andersen was one of the founders of the AHCI in 1985, and is considered to be one of the world's premier watchmakers. An interview with the man who left the Complications Atelier at Patek Philippe to do it his way.

Rolex Datejust

The new Rolex Datejust in yellow gold with a leather band encapsulates the entire history of Rolex. An in-depth article that surveys the story of the brand from its founding by Hans Wilsdorf up to the present day.



And More:

Vintage watches, collector profiles, industry trends, Watch Tests and interviews..

Stories subject to change.