

Interview with

STEVE REA

author of

“Hollywood Rides a Bike”

How did your Tumblr blog, Rides A Bike, get started, and what was the impetus behind it?

Two of my big passions in life are movies and cycling, and so a few years ago I started to collect photographs of movie stars on bikes, just because, well, movie stars plus bikes - a happy convergence! On Thanksgiving Day, 2010, I launched the Tumblr blog, Rides a Bike, as a way to share some of these photos with a wider audience.

Were you surprised by the response, and its popularity?

Before that first holiday weekend was over, there were well over 2,000 Facebook “Likes” and hundreds of Tumblr followers. I was stunned.

Have you been collecting these images for a long time

I’ve had a modest collection for awhile, and there’s a photo of Shirley Temple on a bike that’s been in my family’s photo album for decades (it was taken by my great, great uncle). But I became really serious about it after Rides a Bike was up and running.

Where do you find the photographs?

From movie memorabilia dealers online and in a few shops in New York and Los Angeles. Some of the photos have come from collectors in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Chile, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. There are collectors looking out for images for me now, and fans of the site have sent photos, too.

Which of the photos are among your favorites?

There’s one of Rita Hayworth and Glenn Ford astride an absolutely gorgeous French-built tandem, from the film *The Lady in Question*. They’re dressed like they’re off on a tweed ride, and the fenders of the Gryphon tandem are glinting in the sun. I love the photograph of Jeanne Moreau, smiling, the wind blowing her hair, as she rides her bike down a country lane in the company of the two men in her life, from Truffaut’s classic *Jules and Jim*.

I also love the Susan Peters photograph. She’s stopped on her bike on the Palisades in Santa Monica. It’s this heart-stopping image; Peters is lovely, and so is the setting, and she’s looking off to sea as if to suggest a rich future ahead of her. But this is a sad photo, too: Peters was Oscar-nominated for *Random Harvest*, and being groomed by MGM for stardom, but then had a terrible accident. She was shot on a hunting trip with her husband, paralyzed from the waist down, tried to continue her career in a wheelchair, but ended up severely depressed and anorexic, dead at 31. So this exquisite photo has a patina of tragedy about it.

Which are some of your more prized and rare finds?

I have a candid of Lauren Bacall, from January, 1945, that’s very rare, and very beautiful. Olivia de Havilland, from the time she was making *Captain Blood* with Errol Flynn, is a super-rare and beautiful one. There’s a terrific still of Alan Ladd, from the time he was making *The Blue Dahlia*, comparing his bike tire with the tire of a limousine parked alongside him that is humorous and cool. And there’s a publicity still from *I Wake Up Screaming* (1941), considered the very first film noir, with Victor Mature and Betty Grable hiding out in a bike shop, surrounded by wheels and frames and various parts. Call it bike noir.

What are your favorite bike movies, or bike riding scenes in movies

Breaking Away, certainly, with Dennis Christopher as the Italian cycling-obsessed Midwestern kid. Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, the British New Wave classic with Albert Finney, has some beautiful 1950s and 1960s club bikes. Finney's character works at the Raleigh factory in Nottingham - it was the largest bicycle factory in the world back then - and you see both the interior and exterior of the plant in the film. And Carefree, the Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers musical, has an extended sequence in which they go off for a long bike ride in a park, crisscrossing other cyclists, and end up on a sloping path where Astaire loses control and crashes into a bush!

What kind of bike riding do you do, and on what kind of bike?

I ride to and from work, and to movie screenings, just about every day, on a mid-1970s Raleigh DL-1 rod brake bike (a British "postman's bike"). I also do longer rides early in the morning and on weekends on either my 1950s Bates, my 1970s Mercian, or one of two Raleigh Lenton Grand Prix models from the 1950s.

Why was the bike such a fixture in the Hollywood world?

The bike was - and still is - a fixture in the world, period. And so its ubiquity in Hollywood, where the weather is accommodating most of the year, wasn't, and isn't, surprising. And there were fleets of bicycles on the studios' backlots for stars and crews to use to get around. Schwinn also had an aggressive marketing campaign in the 1940s and 1950s in which celebrities and stars appeared in ads for the company's bikes. And like US Weekly says, stars - they're just like us! Riding a bicycle is an easy, mood-elevating, and eco-friendly activity. So, why shouldn't Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn and Brigitte Bardot be able to join in on the fun?

Most of your images are from the 30s, 40s and 50s. Why?

Well, I have a good many from the 1960s, too, but I think the bicycle was used even more so to get around backlots and to and from soundstages in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. After that, you start to see more golf carts and cars and motorized vehicles. Just as the bicycle started to cede to cars in the real world, it did in Hollywood as well.

What is similar about today's culture and the culture of the 40s and 50s that makes the bike a significant part of it?

A desire for freedom, an emphasis on health and fitness, and a return to simpler times. I think those were prevalent attitudes back then, and again in our lives today.

What is the bike culture trend today?

I think we're seeing a return to practical city bikes - with fenders and chain cases - that reflect the rise in popularity of bike-commuting and the "citizen cyclist" movement, with people riding around in the suits, dresses, jeans and skirts they wear for work and for hanging out. It's not like Amsterdam or Copenhagen here yet, but look at cities like Portland and Toronto, Montreal and Philadelphia, Santa Monica and San Francisco - we're getting there!

