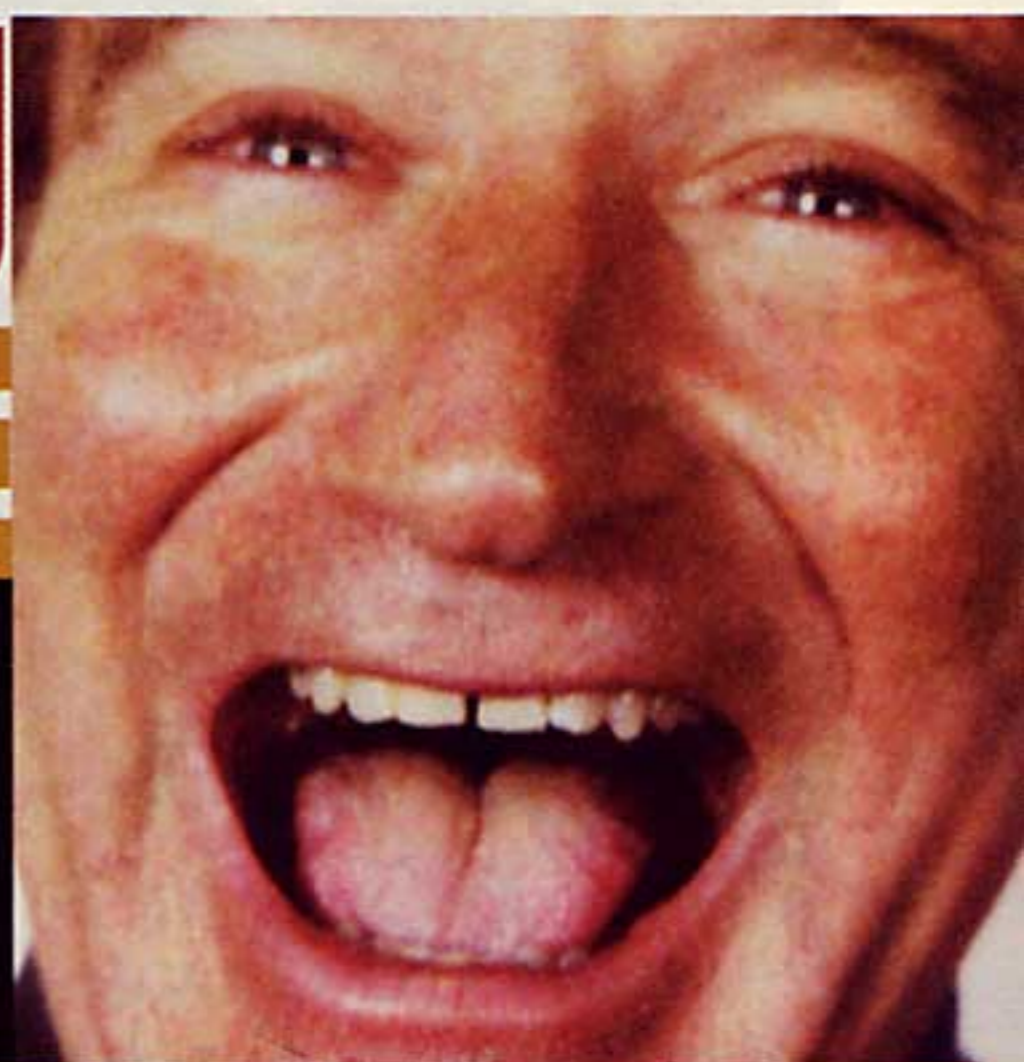


WHY YOU SHOULD BE ROBIN WILLIAMS



THE MULTIMILLIONAIRE OSCAR WINNER—AND BIKING FANATIC—MIGHT JUST HAVE THE WORLD'S MOST IDEAL CYCLING LIFE.

By Dan Koepfel

WHITE HELMET-BILL REITZEL; BARE-HEADED-STEFANO C. MONTESI/RETNA, LTD.

Williams (umm...front) rides with Armstrong on the rest day before Stage 15 in the 2002 Tour de France.



IT'S SUNDAY MORNING. YOU'RE STARTING THE DAY WITH A RIDE.

If you're in San Francisco, you probably head toward the Golden Gate Bridge, passing dozens of other cyclists spinning up to the landmark span. You notice one guy whose getup—full U.S. Postal, geeked from head to toe—doesn't match his body, which is so thick it appears more suited for wrestling than for cycling.

The bike he's riding appears to outmatch him as well, one of those beyond-expensive toys glistening with exotic parts. Nothing old, nothing cheap. Some stuff you've never seen. You try to hang with the guy to check out his gear, but he keeps pulling away. You're surprised: He's got power. But you keep your wheel near enough to his to finally notice that he looks familiar underneath the glasses and helmet.

"How's it going?" he asks you.

Then you realize: You know this guy. You've seen him riding before—once dressed as a woman, another time fooling around on an overgrown BMX bike. Hey! It's Robin Williams. Those other times you saw him pedaling were in movies—1993's *Mrs. Doubtfire*, and *Jack*, 1996's kid-in-a-grownup-body flick. But you're not only starstruck, you're dropped. This Academy Award-winner in a bulky, anti-biker's body has spun away.

“THEY CAN PEE WHILE RIDING. I TAKE MY HAT OFF TO THEM—TO THEM, BUT NOT NEAR THEM.”

—Robin Williams, on pro riders' handling skills

Celebrities and bikes. Yuck. Madonna crows about her Cannondale. Italian Stallion Sylvester Stallone claims a custom DeRosa. Those stars, and plenty of others, own some of the best bikes in the world. They probably even ride them. But they're not, you know, like us: cyclists.

Robin Williams is. At last year's Tour de France, he was greeted skeptically by the French press, which peppered him with questions. Answer by answer—in fractured French—the comic convinced. The next day, one headline raved: “The star takes a back seat to the fanatic.”

Well, maybe not quite a back seat. More like the stoker on a tandem. Williams is a star, and his fame and the way he enjoys bikes are absolutely connected. There might be no other person on Earth with a more ideal cycling life. Williams enjoys the inside access of pro racers, yet never has to cater to sponsors or spend an entire day suffering lousy legs in miserable weather just to pick up his paycheck. Unlike bike fanatics drawn to work in the cycling industry, Williams' pure pursuit of his love never becomes mixed up with the stress of business. And unlike the rest of us, he never has to skimp on gear or great biking trips.

Williams loves bikes. The actor doesn't own one of the best bikes you can get—he owns them all, packed into a San Francisco mega-garage. He can, and does, without hesitation, indulge one of the most intense cases of gear lust in two-wheeled history. If the urge to pedal a favorite back road in Montana hits, no problem: He loads his bike into a private jet and is there in a flash. And while a spin with Lance Armstrong may be just a sweat-soaked chamois dream for most cyclists, the comic counts the Texan as a riding buddy. When Williams attends the Tour, he's a turbo-VIP, following the action from a U.S. Postal support vehicle.

“I STARTED RIDING WITH LEMOND YEARS AGO, AND BY THE TIME I BECAME FRIENDS WITH LANCE, IT WAS A FIXATION—SORT OF LIKE LAP DANCING.”

—Williams, on his status as the peloton's super-fan

Robin loves Lance. Lance loves Robin. The mutual admiration began 4 years ago, when Armstrong invited Williams to a ride benefiting the champion's cancer charity. For Williams, the friendship means passes to the team car and spins with Armstrong and the U.S. Postal squad. The Texan and his teammates get occasional timesaving shuttles from Europe in the actor's plane, so they can attend U.S. events without disrupting their training.

Before Armstrong, Williams had a similar relationship with Greg LeMond. “I was doing a celebrity auction,” Williams says, “and I met Greg.” The first American to win the Tour de France invited Williams on a ride, which—according to the actor—created an instant groupie.

Since 1999, when Armstrong won his first Tour de France, Williams has visited France each year for a different key stage. The best thing about his access, Williams says: “I don't think the folks at home really see how fast the riders are moving—it's like the theory of relativity when they're shooting alongside. There's no perspective, no idea how steep the mountains are, how long each day is.”

He also admires how the racers mirror his own go-for-broke style. “These guys spend everything they have, day after day,” he says. A typical Williams stand-up performance is nearly 2 hours long, and reviews of last summer's comedy tour universally marveled at the entertainer's exhaustive drive. Biking, Williams, says, helps sustain that drive. The sport became especially important to him as a substitute for a darker passion; in the 1980s, just before seriously taking up the sport, Williams struggled with a well-publicized drug habit.

There's also a more subtle thread in Williams' admiration for racers—especially Armstrong. Many critics say the actor's film performances are marred by sentimentality (“...a hysterical need not just for attention but for the kind of adoring attention a parent usually provides,” wrote John Lahr in *The New Yorker* last year). But recently—in films such as *Death to Smoochy*, *Insomnia* and *One-Hour Photo*—Williams has showed a darker persona. Not needing the love of the crowd is one of Armstrong's qualities.

“He's very tough,” Williams says, almost longingly. “So cool. So reserved. He doesn't show off. He doesn't have to.”

“THE DOPE TESTS CAME BACK. THEY FOUND TRACES OF VIAGRA. IT HELPS ME RIDE LONG AND HARD, AND I DON'T NEED A KICKSTAND.”

—Williams, at the start of the 2002 San Francisco Grand Prix bike race

Let's do the numbers: Williams, according to *Forbes* magazine, has earned an average of \$55 million annually for the past decade. Now, some guesswork: Maybe he buys 10 bikes a year.



Jack—and his custom BMX bike.

Just for fun, say they're worth \$5,000 each. Accessories? Hell, double the total—bringing the star's annual two-wheeled tab to \$100,000. Insane? Spoiled rotten!

But consider this: One national survey puts the average U.S. bike enthusiast's personal income at about \$62,000. In terms of percentage, Williams buying every lust object the bike industry can make each year is equal to you purchasing...two nice tires.

Pedaling by Williams' home in San Francisco's Seacliff neighborhood (the bike path to the Golden Gate Bridge is just a stone's throw away), you'd be hard-pressed to know that the oversize garage shelters what may be the world's most valuable collection of exotic bikes. Williams owns more than 50; one prominent new occupant is a titanium and carbon Serotta Ottrott—almost \$5,000 for the frame alone. Williams says he draws creative inspiration from all that gear: “When I see a beautiful bike, I know a guy worked really hard to make those welds, to make it not just functional. And I think it's the same [with acting.] It's the details, the sense of a craftsman at work, getting it right.”

“There's no question he's into really, really nice bikes,” says Clay Mankin, owner of San Francisco's City Cycles, where Williams is such a frequent customer that the shop keeps his measurements on file. “If he sees something he likes,” Mankin says, “he can call us and we order from the chart.” Mankin, who appraised the collection for the actor's insurance policy, describes the stable as “incredible. But Robin isn't just a collector,” he adds. “He's a dedicated user.”

Williams occasionally pops into local shops for repairs on parts whose provenance is beyond exotic. “He showed up here last year with a broken Cinelli Ram,” says Brad Woehl, owner



Mrs. Doubtfire and passenger.

of American Cyclery, another San Francisco shop the actor frequents. The \$600, one-piece handlebar/stem made of carbon fiber was at the time so exotic that Woehl had “never seen one before, not even in the magazines.”

Williams doesn't always pay for all that fancy stuff, either.

When City Cycles was building up his Serotta, an employee of a saddle manufacturer happened to visit. Noticing that the actor was getting only the company's ultralight \$200 leather seat, the employee immediately ordered the snakeskin version worth three times more. It arrived, FedEx from Italy, a few days later. No charge. And Williams never even asked for it.

He expresses embarrassment about the freebies. At last year's San Francisco Grand Prix, the event's car-company sponsor tried to give Williams a new bike rack—and the SUV attached to it. A lot of his schwag gets donated to charities. Occasionally the pipeline gets redirected to a lucky bystander. If you ever happen upon a movie crew on location in New York City, you'll likely see a cyclist in the crowd wearing an odd costume, complete with antennae poking from his Giro helmet. That's Craig Schwartz, aka “Radioman,” who haunts nearly every outdoor shoot in town. Williams gave him the headgear several years

ROBIN WILLIAMS

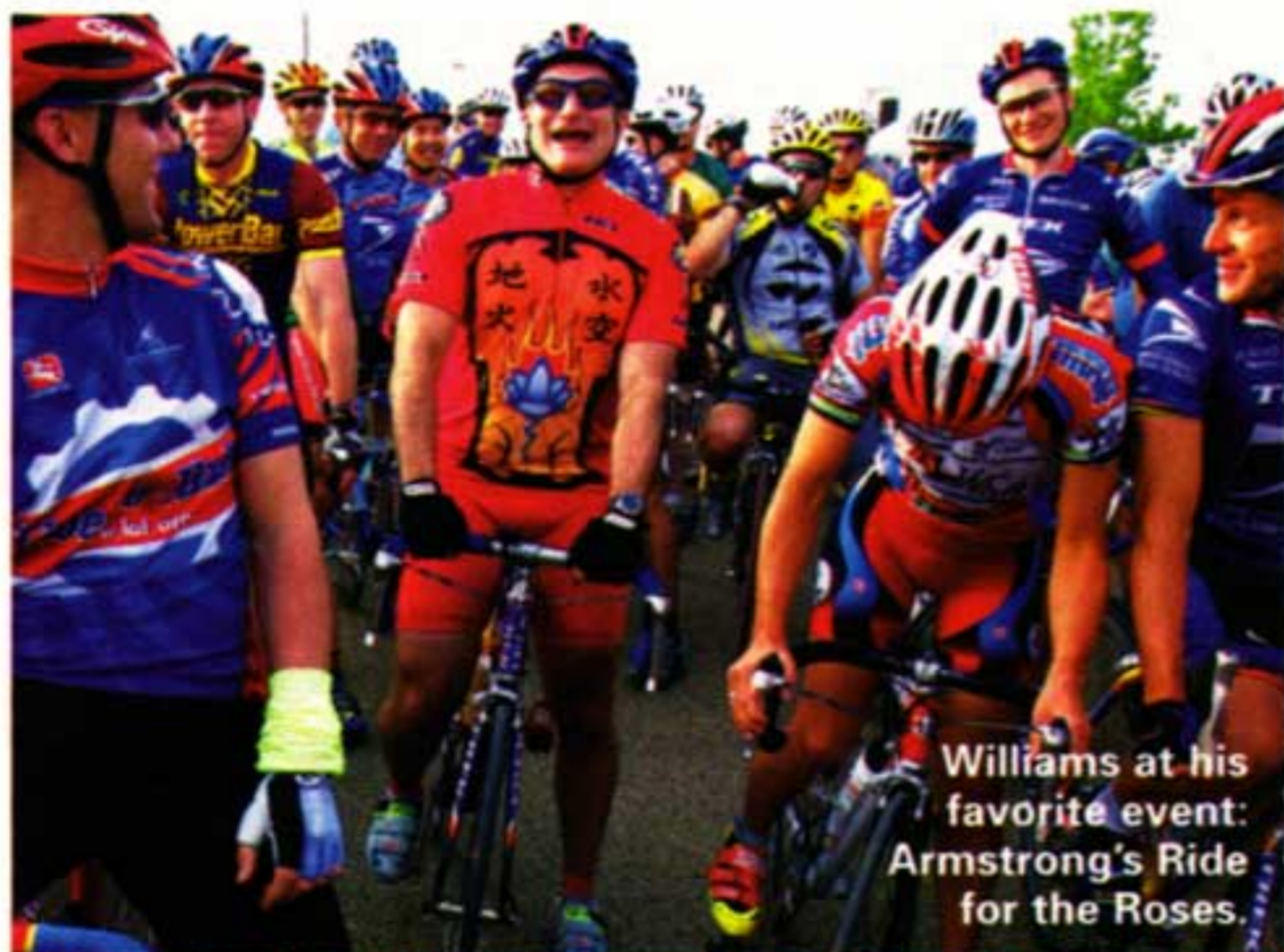
ago. "He's my friend," Radioman says, and—despite the outlandish getup—he really means it.

[[WITH THIGHS LIKE THESE, YOU'VE GOT TWO CHOICES—CYCLING, OR GO-GO DANCER.]]

—Williams, describing his less-than-classic cycling physique

The Robin Williams training plan is simple. Step one: Get some money. Step two: Get lots of bikes. The tough part is fitting rides into a hectic schedule.

"When I'm on tour," Williams says, "it can be hard." He sometimes takes a CompuTrainer on location, spinning the electronic bike simulator for an hour daily. In San Francisco, Williams



Williams at his favorite event: Armstrong's Ride for the Roses.

WANT TO RIDE WITH ROBIN?

Besides staking out the Golden Gate Bridge, your best bet is the annual Lance Armstrong Foundation charity event, Ride for the Roses (Oct. 24–26 this year in Austin, Texas; laf.org). Williams says the event, attended by many cyclists who've overcome life-threatening afflictions, is his favorite. "If you see these people who've gone on to do these amazing things—not just Lance Armstrong, but all of them—you get this energy, this life force, that just moves you."

4 MORE PLACES TO SPOT WILLIAMS:

■ **San Francisco Grand Prix** (Sept. 14): Williams is nearly a lock to enter the 1.4-mile celebrity race; last year, he rode for The Challenged Athletes Foundation.

■ **San Diego Triathlon Challenge** (Nov. 2): He's competed here for the past 3 years, as part of a celebrity relay team that raises money for disabled athletes.

■ **Tour de France mountain stages:** He's seen the finish in Paris, and watched Armstrong on Alpe d'Huez and Ventoux. "I try to watch a different classic spot every year," he says. Our guess for '03: The Pyrenees (Stages 13–16, July 19–23), the ascent of the legendary Col du Tourmalet (Stage 15, July 21) or Stage 7 (July 12), the day before Alpe d'Huez, with five climbs, including the infamous ascent of Les Gets.

■ **For mountain bikers:** He's not as dedicated to dirt, but has shown up several times for the annual Mt. Tam Thanksgiving Day ride.

—D.K.

tries to ride every morning, often with a personal trainer who's there more for motivation than to enforce a fitness regimen.

He's a strong sprinter, according to several San Francisco locals, but Williams admits he has problems on inclines: "I've never been a climber." Indeed, he's a classic endomorph, stocky and powerful, more suited to weight training than cycling. (Williams, one of Hollywood's most hirsute stars, also plays against cycling type by foregoing leg shaving.) But his passion for two-wheeled pursuits makes his training program essentially perfect: "If you find what you love and do it," says Los Angeles exercise physiologist Dr. Eric Sternlicht, "you're way ahead of the game."

When he's home in San Francisco, rumor has it that he raises a flag in front of his house; that's a virtual guarantee he'll be out on the Golden Gate Bridge most mornings. He doesn't often ride in large groups. Scenery, he says, is a big motivator: "I love riding in Sonoma County—the mountains and the vineyards are really beautiful and inspiring."

[[ME?]]

—Williams, finally at a loss for words, when French reporters asked, seriously, if he would consider playing Lance Armstrong in a motion-picture biography of the racer

Though Williams is never far from a bike, his cycling appearances on-screen have been limited to just two movies. In *Mrs. Doubtfire*, he pedals a three-speed while dressed in a Grandma frock, hauling a toddler in a child seat as the sound track plays "Dude Looks Like a Lady." In *Jack*, the actor portrays a boy inhabiting a man's body and has several scenes on a puffed-up BMX rig. When asked about bringing cycling to the screen, Williams is circumspect, though he readily talks about his favorite bike movie—*Vive Le Tour*, a documentary on the 1962 Tour by French director Louis Malle.

In France last summer, Williams seemed flabbergasted by the seriously proffered suggestion that he depict Armstrong, but he quickly warmed to the idea of a film about the Texan, suggesting for the lead role Barry Pepper (Jackson in *Saving Private Ryan*). "There's so much there," Williams mused, "Lance's struggle, the competition, the mental dimension, the scandals." The journalists murmured, once again impressed with the actor's seriousness.

Then the comic's manic mode reasserted, and Williams unleashed a bawdy impression of British commentator Phil Liggett (involving Italian racer/sex symbol Mario Cipollini, two supermodels and "the ultimate tandem").

Williams seems to instinctively understand that he needs to prove he's not a two-wheeled poseur, yet he's also utterly unashamed of his indulgences. Sure, it feels dizzying to know that Williams may well have spent more than \$1 million on bikes and biking in the past decade, that when he can't choose a brand of titanium bikes, he simply purchases one of each, and that he has Lance Armstrong on speed-dial. But when riders meet him on the bridge, or pedal beside him at charity events, the chatter quickly becomes a conversation between riders, not between a star and his public.

"I know I'm lucky to have bikes in my life this way," says Williams. Be jealous. That's okay. But imagine yourself rich, famous and velocified. Would you do it differently? ■

DROOL. DROOL. DROOL.

Robin Williams can't stop buying bikes. And he likes having the latest and the coolest. If a bike is or was hot, it's in his garage—or out on the road with him. But his lust isn't driven by price alone; he also has a strong taste for the eclectic. Here's a sampling:

SEVEN ALTA \$3,195 (frame)*
Ultra-buttressed Ti tubes and a compact frame produce a fast, high-performance race platform.



ARAYA STEEL ROAD BIKE \$500†
Classic Japanese-built 1970s tourer with Sugino/Sun Tour drivetrain.

CUSTOM OVERSIZED BMX BIKE
(PRICELESS)
From Jack, with 26-inch wheels and a chrome-plated steel frame.

SANTANA NOVENTA TANDEM \$5,495*
Not used often; purchased for rides with his wife or three children.

SEROTTA LEGEND TI \$2,995 (frame)*
Full-on Ti from Ben Serotta, the frame-builder for the legendary 7-Eleven racing team.



▲ KESTREL TALON SL \$5,100*
Swoopy carbon and Dura-Ace spec highlight this very light, very agile bike from one of the first companies to make carbon-fiber frames.

KESTREL 500 SCI \$1,700 (frame, fork)†
Monocoque carbon-fiber frame with failed Mavic Zap electronic shifters. An excellent example of Williams' gotta-have-it compulsion.

SOMA RUSH SINGLESPEED \$1,500*
Time-trial bike with a hub that's fixed on one side and freewheels on the

other, built out of San Francisco's American Cyclery shop.

MERLIN NEWSBOY \$5,500†
Ti version of the all-American bike.

CASATI SPHERA \$4,500*
Red-white-and-blue road bike is decked out with a Powertap rear hub mated to a Zipp carbon rim. Add the one-piece Cinelli RAM bar/stem and a Dura-Ace package for one of the craziest bikes on the road.

IBIS BOWTI \$5,500†
Instead of a pivot, this legendary mid-1990s suspension bike used flexing Ti chainstays. Only 250 were ever made.

► SEROTTA OTTROT
\$4,295 (frame)*
Custom-built Ti-and-carbon frame weighs less than 3 pounds.
—D.K.



*Suggested retail price †Estimated value