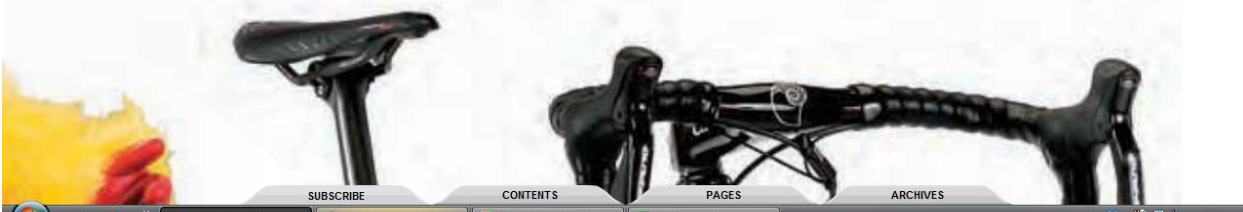


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BIKE OF THE YEAR: Look, no matter how much international travel, elbow-rubbing and pageantry that surrounds my day to day, at best I am little more than a Mexican conduit for cycling stories that you the reader, would not otherwise have access to. There are so many great stories out there, and so it is that bikes that continually rate highest for me more often than not are those that not only ride well but have a good story to tell too. The bike that told the best story and also rode magnificently was the Calfee Dragonfly, which is designed by carbon pioneer Craig Calfee and made in his small NorCal frame shop.



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WORST FINISH: Milano-San Remo. OK, I don't mind that the race became an instant marketing grand slam for Specialized when HTC rider Matt Goss took his brand-new Venge to a first-time win. No, it was the plethora of white shoes creating the line at the same time. People, there is such a thing as a color chart, you know!

BEST THING ABOUT BIKES I LIKE AND DON'T LIKE: OK, so as stiff as you need race bikes are supposed to be, why, then, did I find both the Fuji Ultralight and Cannondale SuperDi Evo so comfortable and fun to ride? The mystery behind what creates my flexibilities of certain carbon frames lies somewhere in their individual design and manufacturing details. Not that one bike is necessarily good or bad, but it does shape the ride. Incorporating opinion that all carbon bikes ride alike.

BEST ACCELERATION: With all the hip music and power of a 5-year-old computer geek, I'm the last person to talk game of having any aerodynamic benefit. And despite every person smart enough to know better assuming that it would be impossible for me to realize any benefit from an aero-tube frame at the level speeds I maintain, I can't help but tout the Specialized Venge as having the best blend of acceleration of any bike I rode this year. So, maybe it was just a case of mind over matter or a perfectly timed tailwind, but every time I rode the Specialized Venge, I consistently felt myself going faster on long straights. Funny thing: I loaned the bike to a strong rider, and he came back gleeful over on suddenly being able to stay on longer with the fast guys in his group ride and naming it the big dog much more of the time. Type versus fact?

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BEST EVIDENCE THAT PRINT MEDIA ISN'T DEAD: I say, those weren't Phobos you saw Jani Vigt and other riders grabbing and stuffing under their jerseys to stay warm on the cold descents of the Tour de France. Newspaper, baby!

BEST TWO-WHEELED VERSION OF MICHAEL VICK: After plenty of both self-inflicted and accidental bad luck, Alexander Vinokourov was calling it quits after the 2011 season. But then he broke his femur in a bad Tour de France crash. That was a really unfortunate, he said. Not. The France Kazakh rider recently said he was coming back for one more season, which is good news because there are few riders as passionate and consistently entertaining to watch.

BEST THREE QUOTES:
#1: "I think we just have to drink and ride on Sunday. He could care less about the product. It's an interesting approach." —Neil Shimley's observation of a fellow journo at a new bike roll-out.
#2: "Did you guys see the look on Mr. Calfee's face?" —A. Three contributor Roy Wallace after he mis-handled a first-time \$12,000 Calfee C20 for a test ride, which resulted in the bike falling flat on the ground with an expensive flat.
#3: "I was never so happy to hear someone tell me I could ride my bike in my garage!" —Ritchey Design's Sean Coffey after his doctor cleared him to ride his trainer as he continued to recuperate from getting smacked up in a bike crash.

BEST DISPLAY OF CORPORATE ENTUSIASM: Even at the most passionate bike companies, it's given that the expense and accolade of racing is something that usually grabs on the corporate-sponsorship types who question the sake of the endeavor since they have no form of real two-wheeled passion in that arena. And then there is Cannondale's Bob Bubbak, who dressed up as a chicken to run the Buddy stage at the Tour of California. However, an good as that story alone is, how he got a full-length chicken suit is an even better story. As it turns out, Bob was attending his first-ever Tour de France as his new general manager, and as he walked for the riders to come through a small town, he spotted upon a kid in a chicken suit doing PR work for a local poultry stand. A quick exchange of some Euro and Bob had his suit ready for the Tour of California, Avenches.

BEST BIKE THAT EXEMPLIFIES WHY I WOULDN'T WANT TO BE A PRO RIDER: In all my years in the industry, the most oft-quoted claim of what pro riders are looking for in their bikes is stiff, stiff and stiffer. I've ridden plenty of stiff bikes in my day, and then I rode the Cervelo R5. This bike was so stiff that, for the first time that I can remember, I actually came home from a test ride early. No thanks. Of course, Neil loved the bike, but then, what does he know?



VERSUS

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