



Five Characters

Assemble a group of people that race bicycles and you will find eccentrics in the mix. I've never been on a team that wasn't brimming with individuals. Characters you can't forget. I think it's the nature of the sport that lures these people in. The appeal of a racing a bicycle, seemingly so narrow, somehow pulls sharply driven people from such diverse backgrounds. Not all can be categorized. I formed some character groups here that could hold a lot of the riders I've known. Don't worry. There is plenty of room for individuality inside each group.

The Goody: This rider had many choices in life. Their parents may have wished they picked something besides racing. They scored well on the SAT. Over-achieving and self-motivated, cycling captured their imagination completely. They are always hydrating. They might even walk around wearing a Camelback®. They go to bed on time every night. Their lives are paintings of discipline and order. They don't stand on their feet for very long and they always wear sensible shoes. When they get to a hotel room, their belongings either stay in their suitcase or are neatly hung or placed in drawers. Their hygiene is kept at a high level. Saddle sores can be debilitating disorders for them. Getting sick is a constant fear. They keep their vitamins in a plastic case. Perfectly segmented, with the exact amount of pills for the length of the trip. If they do get a tickle in their throat, their performance is dramatically effected before they even get to breakfast. They pay a lot of attention to the consistency of their stool. Too loose or too hard, and it will weigh on them. They are generally quiet and keep to themselves. They don't read as much as it would seem they would. They simply do better when they focus on just one thing. Their performance is consistent even when there is strife within an organization. Team managers love Goodys like teacher's love their TA's. Their style of racing is usually quite bland. Some might say boring. They get the job done, though. They are generally good time trialists and climbers, therefore usually occupying the front third of the General Classification in a stage race (provided their stool stayed righteous enough).

The Criminal: This rider either spent time in Juvenile Hall, and/or is destined for prison or some other place of detention in their life (1 out of 32 Americans are either in prison or on parole). Their cycling career is merely a period of quiet in between. This doesn't mean they won't spend time in jail during their cycling career. For the most part, it's a tranquil time. They go through tremendous swings in both their physicality and emotion. This can be due to growing up without a solid parent or two, hormone or chemical imbalances in their body, poor diet, or any combination thereof. Their relationship with their girl or boyfriend has crazy, unpredictable swings, the waves of which are felt (and heard) by the whole team. Usually they have the hottest looking partner of anyone on the team. If the Criminal goes dark and inward on a road trip, problems with the partner back home can even cause a Goody to lose temper. The Criminal has a propensity to train either way too much or not

enough at all. Rarely do they get it right. When they go through a patch of severe over-training, followed by a short period of not enough, they can start going stupidly fast all of a sudden. Particularly if they steer clear of alcohol and tobacco for a while. When they go fast, they are exciting racers. They exhibit a slashing, attacking style. They corner way harder than most Goodys, and they really like night time criteriums. 98% of the time, they won't climb or time trial very well. The other 2% of the time they will annihilate the field into smithereens. When they go slow, they are still excitable riders, known to fight both during and after races. They like to hide behind cement pillars in parking garages after races to attack the riders that upset them before they can get their cycling shoes off. They are usually hired by teams for short stints, mercenary style. The times of famine sometimes force them back to their old, or future, ways. They can make excellent or horrible roommates, depending on how it goes with their lover. They're not always messy. They don't own much, so they travel light. They don't travel with books or laptops, usually reading things that they find laying around hotels or truck stops. They don't pay much attention to how they're feeling on any given morning. The nicotine withdrawals are worse than fatigue or illness. They don't tune into every little sniffle they might have. They can add valuable spice to an otherwise sedate team. Salute and enjoy the Criminal during this cycling part of their life. They will forever view these as their greatest, straightest days.

The Pasty: Usually on hiatus from a well-paying job dealing with something that requires electricity. Often appears studious and well kept. Wears corrective lenses. Sometimes confused as a Goody, Pastys are scrappier and less predictable. They can be cocky, too. They know they're smart. They are mechanical and material, but pay little attention to their body. Their bikes are impeccable. Perfectly tuned and always spec'd to the T. They need to eat sweet things for breakfast. Pancakes, cinnamon rolls, candy bars. Before bed, they hanker for tanker-size sodas from convenience stores. Bloodshot-eyed studying and gaming trained them to need little sleep. They are inspired by late nights, bad TV, and video games. They go nowhere without their laptop. They drive hot, soupy little cars to the races. Subarus, Hondas, Volkswagens and Minis with 4-point racing harness seat belts. They invest similarly in their bicycles. They have not figured out that you can't buy speed, mechanically, in cycling. This can make them dangerous, at times. Pastys are typically feisty. Especially at the beginning of races. If the massive blast of sugar and caffeine surges into them at the right time, they will lose what little restraint they had to begin with. Not many Pastys have ever made it to the professional ranks. Few Pastys, after all, make it to the end of races. Intelligence soon deciphers that it's easier to buy suspension and exhaust upgrades for their cars on a more softly-won salary. Team managers know that Pastys room well with Criminals.

The Gomer: Hailing from small-town USA or tiny villages in Europe, the Gomer is good, tough people. With their child facing a certain future as a farmer, construction worker or dock hand, the Gomers family saved and gave the gift of the bicycle. The Gomer plies into cycling work ethics ingrained in them from birth. Roads near a Gomers house are always windy, hilly, and free of traffic. These roads, along with the Gomer diet of wild game, whole grains, and fresh dairy, are staples for raising an Intercontinental warrior. The direct parent-Gomer-to-Gomer-child blood line means the genes stayed pure. There have been lots of Gomers in professional racing. Most of the field are Gomers, in fact. They are really happy to be able to spend some years cycling for a living instead of working the land. Danger doesn't factor much to the Gomer. They've seen far worse accidents where they came from. Scars on parents, grandparents and relatives. War stories, literally. To the Gomer, traveling around, staying at hotels, getting massaged and fed, well, that's heaven on Earth. Not only that, but they even get paid, sometimes. They get along with everyone, including Pastys. They are the workhorses of any cycling team.

The Grand Bastard: There are only a handful of them in cycling at any one time. They are

the rarest of breeds. They are like Criminal Gomers, sharp as Pastys, with just enough Goody in them to tie it all together and keep them clean. They have a killer instinct that common people are afraid to know exists. There is no mistaking the Grand Bastard when you fall under the scope of their wrath. They make world class Goodys and Gomers feel like their legs are being stuffed into a wood chipper. Like their hearts are being sent through a hand-crank sausage maker. Grand Bastards never come from well-heeled families. If they were in any other occupation, they would ascend to the deadliest seat. In crime, they'd be the mob boss. They wouldn't make it as a doctor. They'd figure out how to take command of a pharmaceutical company. Grand Bastards throw it down in grand fashion. They are not good to room with. They travel heavy and their suitcases explode like they had grenades stuffed in there. They pay such a price to reach the pinnacle that they have spectacular flame-outs, at times. They can borrow a Criminals' girlfriend and get away with it. Grand Bastards pay little attention to anyone except other Grand Bastards. If you don't get this concept, rent any edition of the 'Highlander' movies. Gomers, Goodys, and Criminals are like screwdrivers, hammers and power drills to the Grand Bastard. Pastys usually end up working on the Grands' sports cars and home theaters, making a better wage than most Gomers get for cycling.

Wherever you fit as a rider, it's your place. Make the best of it. Change can and does occur. Criminals have tried to become Goodies. Gomers start riding well and think that they are the worlds' next Grand Bastard. 18 months later the story is different. Their heart got turned to bratwurst. Grand Bastards are born that way. Fortunately, cycling makes room for everyone. It's not about becoming the next Grand Bastard, anyway. It's about finding out who you are. Cycling is about becoming better at being you.

Paul Willerton had enough Gomer in him to become a professional cyclist. He's learned from Goodys and Pastys how to function after cycling. He's known many of the Grand Bastards. Occasionally he receives correspondence from some former teammates that are now in detention centers. You can find more from him at www.defeet.com/blog