

STEVE WILSON

How one man rediscovered cycling

by Claire Rogers

The Same Old, Same Old Spandex Boys herd their coffee cups to the edge of the table for a refill as the waitress of Joe's Pancake House approaches. It's 6:00 a.m., and the troupe of commuters readies for work with some shared bike-to-work medicine.

The "boys" are so regular that waitress Jackie simply asks "Same old, same old?" around the table for each order. Steve Wilson, a lifetime member of Adventure Cycling Association since 2002, helped organize this pack and has a knack for keeping riders motivated by meeting over meals to share laughs and bike stories. It's no wonder that Wilson is at the hub of Tucson's cycling community.

From 2003 to 2006, he was president of the Tucson chapter of the Greater Arizona Bicycle Association. As president, Wilson included and supported other riding clubs, particularly El Grupo, a youth cycling team founded through Bicycle Inter-Community Action and Salvage, which recycles bicycles through bike repair, bike-building classes, and bike-art projects.

Wilson extended his love of biking to his employer, IBM, where he is a product manager. Thanks to him, the Tucson campus now sports decent bike racks and shower facilities. Wilson hasn't driven to work in years and has missed only one day due to illness over the 19 years he's been biking. With Wilson's encouragement, about 50 employees ride to work at IBM. Last year, he rode a total of 12,823 miles, most of which came from riding the 32-mile round trip to and from work.

It wasn't always this way — as a young adult, Wilson gave up bicycling as child's play. It wasn't until 1990 that he rediscovered cycling through friends.

"It's funny to be 50 and think of Mount Lemmon as no big deal when at 30 it was inconceivable," said Wilson, reflecting on how far he's come in his cycling career. Mount Lemmon, north east of Tucson, climbs from 2,500 feet to over 8,000 feet in 27 miles and has a grade of about six percent. His first attempt took him only to the first lookout at two and a half miles; he thought he might die. "Funny how things change," said Wilson.

His introduction to bicycle travel also came through a friend.



After doing the El Tour de Tucson and conquering Mount Lemmon, the two decided they could handle the 500-mile, weeklong Bicycle Tour of Colorado. "It was just great getting up every morning knowing we would be riding through beautiful country to a new destination that night," said Wilson.

Another friend shared Adventure Cycling Association's Atlantic Coast maps while touring in Virginia and North Carolina, and Wilson was hooked. He joined Adventure Cycling to get *Adventure Cyclist* magazine and in December of 2002 became a life member. The time seemed right to commit more to supporting the organization's mission: to create more touring maps and get more people riding.

This fall, Wilson will reach 100,000 miles of lifetime riding — something he'd never imagined before he started

riding in 1990. "I used to think that was superhuman," said Wilson.

The latest addition to Wilson's bicycle fleet came in preparation for a coast-to-coast, three-week tour of Costa Rica that involved lots of climbing, unpaved roads, and mercurial weather. He was pleased with the performance of the Surly Long Haul Trucker and looks forward to more saddle time with the sturdy tourer.

Most of Wilson's vacation time goes to adventurous international bike tours. His self-supported tours have included the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Argentina, Uruguay, France, and Italy. This year, Wilson and life partner Patricia Lebensohn will tour from Boston to Montreal and back.

Wilson is looking forward to having more time for cycling adventures after retiring in a year or so. He dreams of someday doing an extended, year-long tour following the seasons around North America. He also would like to spend more time touring Eastern Europe.

"I like the idea of getting up in the morning, having everything you need packed on the bike, and heading out down the road not knowing for sure what you will see or where you will be that night," said Wilson. "I haven't had a bad day doing that yet!" **AC**

More about Claire Rogers can be found at www.newbohemians.net.