

# Pining for

Give ZAK TEMPEST and NIGEL JACKSON a superbike each to test, and they just have to take them off somewhere exotic and sunny. So we sent them to Norway, which turned out to be at least exotic and to be riddled with great trails which are open for just a few months each summer, but don't forget to pack the Gore-Tex.

After thirty-two hours of travelling on bike, train and boat, punctuated only by quick stops for coffee and sandwiches, two intrepid members of the Wrecking Crew stumbled out of Voss Station with huge rucksacks and expensive bikes. Our task was to test two very different superbikes, a *Pace RC-100S* and a *Fat Chance Team Comp*, in what our editor called "some real terrain". With our sum knowledge of Norway being only the words for tadpole (*rumpetroll*), sour-cream-porridge (*rømmegrut*) and a poem by Adrian Mole (age 14¼), our luck had got us this far. Despite delays, bike-bans on trains and last minute arrivals, looking up at the snow capped peaks which surrounded Voss, we hoped it would get us a little further.

#### PLAN AHEAD

Our trip to Norway had been the masterplan of ferry company **Norway Line**, and they suggested Voss as an almost ideal situation for mountain biking. Unlike the usual Scandinavian stereotype, Voss is not precariously perched on the side of a steep fjord, but has grown on the *Vangsnet* lake shore, surrounded by high plateaux with gentle(ish) climbs to their summits. It has a population of 14,000 and is in the heart of Western Norway's fjord country between the *Hardangerfjord* to the south and *Sognfjord* to the north. *Bergen* is just one and a half hours away but to get to *Oslo*, the capital, takes six hours.





# the Fjords







### UP FROM UNDER

Bikes seemed to be everywhere, particularly fat-tyre machines, and cruising around town we found the local shop, where mountain bikes and pseudo-mountain bikes could be hired. Always keen to talk to the locals we stuck our heads round the door, and explained in simple English who we were, and if they knew any good routes we could try. It was then that we noticed the amount of "I love NZ" stickers, and we first met Sandy Matheison, a New Zealand sheep-shearer who had settled in *Voss* several years before. After setting up a small shop on the lake shore with Mini-Golf and the usual touristy bits and pieces, he decided to get into the hire business in a small way with his fleet of six bikes. He had heard we were coming, and gave us maps of the area, routes to try and pints of freshly made coffee. Only two hours after arriving we had found some superb singletrack riding in the pine forests and woods on the lake shore.





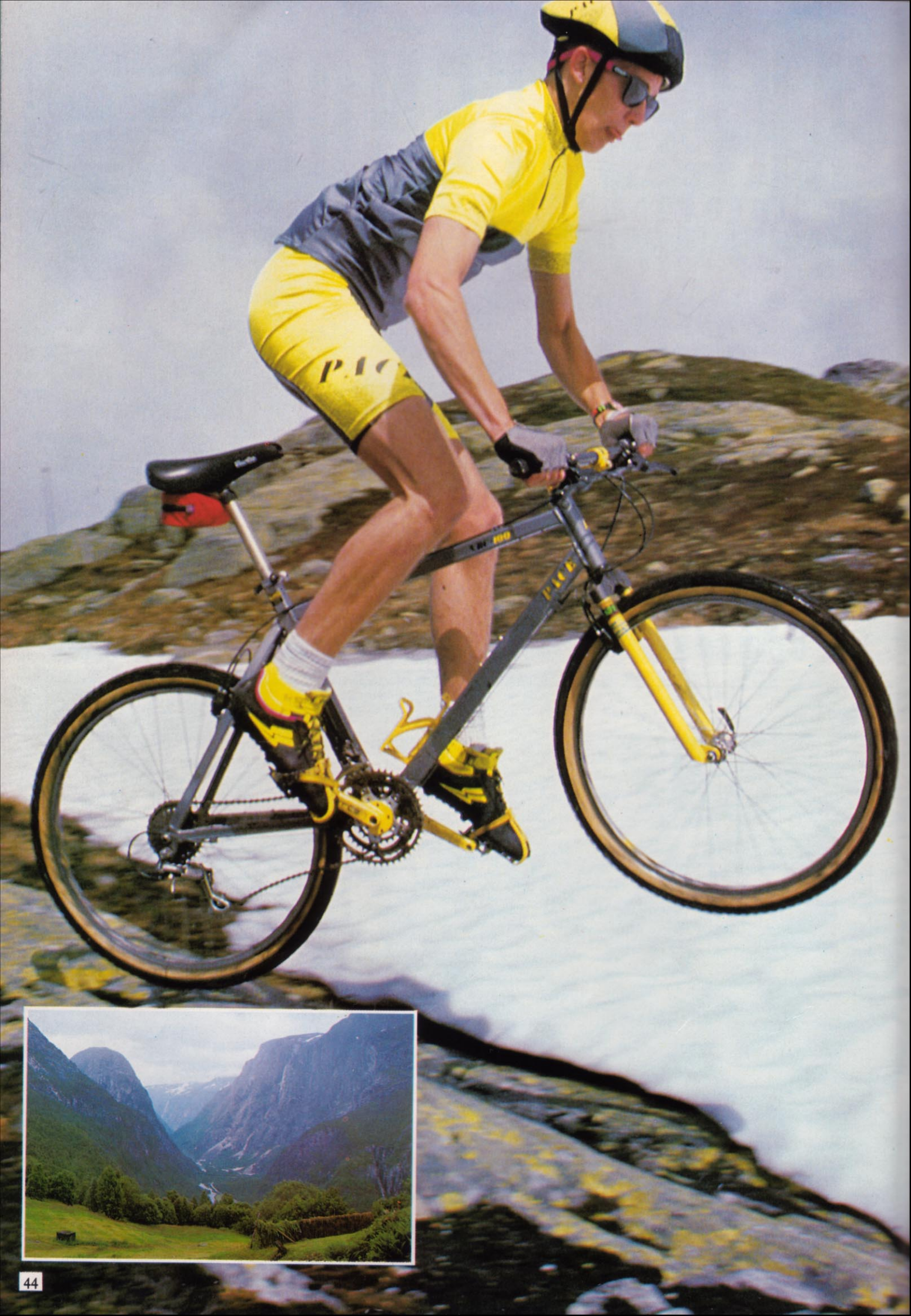
## GOING UP

Next morning found us loading our bikes into a cable-car to get a little higher in the surrounding mountains. The *Hangursbanen* cable-car climbs to the summit of *Hangur*, at 660m (2165 feet) and gives access to the various XC ski tracks and downhill runs in the area. In the summer it's possible to ride the walking

trails in the area, with the routes being clearly marked with large red painted T's on rocks. We climbed up to the plateau, and around many small lakes, but across the mountainside we could see a steep track zig-zagging up the side of *Lönahorgi*. Riding cross-country, through bogs, woods and snow banks we eventually reached the wide dirt road at the top of *Lönahorgi* next to a ski cafe unused in the summer months.









## IS THIS REAL TERRAIN?

Climbing up the mountainside, a strange moon like landscape unfolded itself above us. After one hour of sweating against grit and gravity we reached the top, and collapsed into a *hytte*, a small hut, at the top of the ski-lift service road at a height of 1300m, or 4100ft. Inside were three beds, a wood fired stove, pots and pans. This *hytte* was a mountain refuge for people caught out in bad weather, or could be used for overnight trips across the mountains. We sheltered there for half an hour, until the rain stopped rattling on the windows. Checking the map we saw to our delight that the track descended to the main road at *Bavallen*, a drop of nearly 3500 feet on dirt, further than the Kamikaze Downhill at Mammoth Mountain!

## TERMINAL DOWNHILL!

With a width of 3 metres, but narrower in places, the service road allowed some serious speed on the descents. With a loose surface made of anything up to fist sized rocks, cornering on the frequent switchbacks was tricky but fun. We were glad of the shallow river crossing half way down to cool off the rims, as we were both expecting the inner tubes to melt at any time. Thirty minutes after leaving the top we were sitting by the lake shore drinking coffee and chatting about the day's exploits. Was that the best downhill ever? Quite possibly. I even thought it was worth the sea-sickness I'd suffered with on the boat to *Bergen*.

## GREAT WEATHER

Peering out of the curtains in our room on Sunday morning, I couldn't even see the other side of the valley. At breakfast we got passed a note; "If you want some extreme riding, phone Dag on this number". Intrigued we called Dag up, and he came round to see us with photos and ideas for routes. He would have come riding with us but was off InterRailing the next day, looking for some better weather.

Outside it was still raining hard. No rest for the wicked though, we went out to play on some fun singletrack, cleaned up the bikes and dropped in to see Sandy at his "Troll Shop" on the lake shore. We planned a couple of rides for later in the week, drank some more of his coffee, then trudged back to the hotel in the rain to watch the French Grand Prix on Eurosport.

## BACK TO THE HILLS

Scanning the map for some more extreme riding we spotted another switchback road climbing the valley side, and the next morning we went off to see what we could find on the southern side of the lake. The switchback track we had seen was actually another dirt road, winding sharply up the valley side. The gradient wasn't too steep, and the fast blast uphill blew out some of the cobwebs from the previous day. We rode out of the trees up a short expanse of tarmac, and onto another dirt road traversing along the side of the valley, but the mountains lured us upwards, with the promise of snow and radical downhills.





## WRECKING COW

The good dirt track we were following up the mountain soon stopped, to be replaced with a grassy track, obviously fairly recently made by some big off-road vehicle. We were able to ride up in the tracks it had made, through forests and streams, pursued by a rapidly growing fan club of the cows which wander freely in the hills. We were quite worried about them to start with, but they seemed more interested in the bikes than us, in particular the **Bullseye** components (honest!). All of us, that is Nigel, the cows and me, climbed above the tree line, and the track ran out. After risking life and limb (that's me not the cows), leaping about on the slippery rocks for Nigel's camera, we descended back to the dirt road. With the weather looking distinctly dodgy we rode back to *Voss*, by way of the fast switchback dirt-track we had ridden up in the morning.

## WILDERNESS BIKING

Sandy said he fancied coming out for a ride with us, as long as we would wait for him at the top of the hills! He knew a route that started and finished on *hytte* access roads, but with the middle section on very indistinct tracks. Looking at the map, we thought we had to travel about 10 miles south out of *Voss* before we picked up anything like a dirt road, but Sandy said that there were countless forest tracks running up the valley to save us a long slog on tarmac. Soon we were traversing the hillsides, above the tarmac road on a bumpy logging trail, but this rejoined the road so we had to ride asphalt for about four miles. As we reached the village of *Rong* we picked up a dirt road running through some wooden apartments. Passing through a huge gate, which Sandy said was to keep out the bears, the track climbed about 600 feet, then levelled out and ran through another valley. After about five miles, the good dirt road just stopped, with the way ahead only marked by occasional cairns.

## WHERE NOW?

A small section of slippery slickrock soon gave way to a tricky trail, no more than eight inches wide. Passing through small streams, bogs and rocky steps this track was technical in the extreme, and getting fainter by the yard. We eventually lost it altogether, and after wading through several thigh deep rivers, clattering down one in three boulder fields and trudging through bog we eventually picked up a track running alongside a river. This track threw us out at another private *hytte* access road with a short steep climb before another insane downhill. Then it was a six mile blast down the road to Sandy's house for whisky and beefburgers.

## FAME AT LAST

At breakfast on our last day we got a call from the manager of the tourist office. He had heard we were in town, and wanted to know if we would like to appear in a local newspaper. The fanatical ego-maniacs that we are took over, and in full-lycra battle dress we chatted to the local journos and posed for photographs.



## GOAT TRAIL

Sandy had promised a really special ride for our last day. He drove us to the *Stalheim* Hotel, at the top of one of Norway's famous passes, where we rebuilt the bikes in front of the tourists and their video cameras, filming anything that moved. Then it was out of the car park and up the dirt road which climbed gradually up to 3500 feet, and then dropped into the next valley. When we reached the top of the climb we had to get off and push for half a mile, as snow was blocking the track.

With only the mountain goats for company, we pushed our bikes in the shadow of a huge snow cornice on the mountain face above. Dropping down into the next valley was a real buzz; hitting the snow patches which blocked the road at 30mph plus resulted in complete loss of control and spectacular but safe crashes. The dirt road back to the bottom of *Stalheim* passed through a mile long, unlit downhill tunnel, which really freaked us out. Helmets are a must when you can't see where you're going! All that was left was the hideous climb of the *Stalheim* Pass, weaving it's way up the valley side. We reached the top, and as a parting gesture, Sandy bought us a bottle of lager, at a price expensive even for Norway...cheers mate!

## GOING HOME

Packing our rucksacks for the journey home, we knew that we had only scratched the surface of a superb area for mountain biking. It was a shame that we couldn't have stayed for another week, or even a month, there was so much to choose from. If you want to have a real mountain biking holiday, try Norway, and in particular *Voss*.

## GETTING THERE

Many thanks to **Norway Line**, who arranged everything for us. During the summer (the only time when biking in Norway is really practical) they have sailings every two days from Newcastle; the crossing takes twenty two (long) hours. Trains from *Bergen* to *Voss* run eight times a day, and bikes can be accommodated easily. If you leave loading your bike on a train to the last minute, you don't have to pay the two pound reservation fee.

## STAYING THERE

Norway is expensive, there's no two ways about it. Expect to pay anything up to £4 for a pint of lager. The best advice is to stay off the beer, and take as much food as you can. Norwegian meals are often a buffet type set-up, so whilst it might be quite expensive, you can go back for more as often as you like. Norway has a huge network of Youth Hostels, which are far superior to anything in this country. They offer great accommodation at reasonable prices. Camping grounds can be found in most areas, but you can wild-camp in any spot (other than cultivated land) for two days.

## CONTACTS

**Voss Tourist Manager:** Cort Dreyer, Voss Turistkontor, Boks 57, 5701 VOSS, Norway. Phone 05-511716, Fax 05-511715. Details on *Voss* and accommodation.

**Norway Line:** Tyne Commission Quay, North Shields, NE29 6EA. Phone 091-296-1313. Ferry to *Bergen*.

**Troll Shop:** Sandy Matheison, Mønshaugen, 5700 VOSS, Norway. Phone 05-517772, for bike hire, maps, coffee, Mini-Golf and loads of good advice.





### PACE RC-100S

The bikes we took to test in Norway are as different as they can be. The **Pace Research RC-100S** is the latest development on the theme of **Pace's** original square-tubed superbike. We sat down with **Pace** director Adrian Carter the night before we left and chatted about the changes they'd made in the machine.

### OK, WHAT'S NEW?

The **Pace** design philosophy has stayed the same; the aim being to produce a machine which is very strong, very light and very efficient, yet needs a minimal amount of maintenance. Since the original **RC-100** was launched, CAD and race-based research had continued, creating an even more refined machine. Tube profiles had been tweaked, and with new reinforcing ribs on the headtube and a new section seat/chain stay now gracing the rear triangle, making **Pace** confident that their 1990 bike is better than ever. The cut-out profiles on the main tubes, which save weight in the less-stressed areas of the frame, have been altered slightly, which all helps reduce the frame weight to 3.5lbs. Grease nipples are fitted to the head tube and bottom bracket to allow post-ride lubrication without complicated disassembly.

### COMPONENTS

**Bullseye** box-section cro-mo cranks were still in place, giving a super solid feel in conjunction with **Pace's** new custom CNC machined aluminium alloy spider. **Bullseye** bearings have always self-destructed very quickly in British conditions, but on the **RC-100S** they have been replaced with **Pace's** own more durable units. **Magura Hydro-Stop** brakes, reworked for lighter weight were mounted at the rear on specially machined bosses, and up front on the awesome **RC-30** forks with the unique "upsidedown" stem configuration. The one piece fork

steerer and stem allows a big weight saving but gives greater headset security, and adjustment with one 5mm allen key and a 10mm spanner. The rest of the groupset consisted of **SunTour's** new **XC-Pro** hubs, mechs, shifters, pedals, seatpost and quick-release. **XC-Pro** was chosen over **XT STI**, because of its **Grease-Guard** feature, its low weight, and its availability in small quantities and individual parts. Saddle was a **Turbo**, grips **Grab-On II**. Rims were 32 hole **Mavic 231's**, shod with **Ground Control Extreme/S** tyres and schrader butyl tubes. **Pace** are developing their own hubs for launch soon.

### LET'S RIDE

The first thing you notice about the **Pace** is its incredibly sturdy feel, with great response and light weight. Hill climbing is solid, with the minimal flex from the frame and cranks contributing to its excellent uphill prowess. Crashing down rocky roads at high speeds, you only have to glance at the huge 1 1/2 inch fork blades to feel confident. The forks have a lot to do with the sure-footed handling of the bike, giving razor sharp steering response even in the roughest conditions.

The **Hydro-Stops** give superbly modulatable braking power in all conditions, giving you the confidence to push the bike further and further past your own limits. We feel that to get the most out of it you can't just sit back and pedal up hill and down dale. To reap the benefits of this super-sturdy frameset you have to thrash it, hammer it, push the bike to its limit and jump off everything in sight. If you're a hammer-headed rider with animal instincts in the market for the ultimate bike, then a **Pace RC-100S** must be a top contender.

Available from **Pace Research**, Denholme Road, Oxenhope, BD22 9NP. Phone: 0535 44798, Fax: 0535 44853.



### FAT CHANCE TEAM COMP

In complete contrast to the aluminium **Pace**, **Fat Chance's Team Comp** redefines the state of the art in steel mountain bikes.

### THE REVIEW

The **Fat Chance Team Comp** is the best steel bike any of us have ever ridden. Ever. Call Tom Sillis or John Gledhill at **Sugar City Cycles** on 0284 750004 if you want the best.

THE END.

### LET'S TRY AGAIN

Sorry about that, but we wanted to cut the crap, and say what we thought. However, we've got all this space left, so here's a proper review for those of you who aren't convinced, or want to know some more.

### FAT WHO??

Coming from Somerville, a sunny suburb of Boston, Massachusetts, Chris Chance started out making road frames, but diversified into proper bikes early on in their development. Three thousand miles away from the major mountain bike centre of Southern California, his **Fat Chance** bikes were free to develop as Chris saw fit. So that's the "Chance" bit, the next question is...

### WHY FAT??

When Gary Fisher was designing the tubesets for the **CR-7** and his other new bikes he made the discovery that the seat tube absorbs most of the pedalling stresses, so he put a big seat tube on his bikes. It's this kind of single purpose design that Chris Chance hates. By spec'ing his bikes with an oversize (fat) downtube he gains over a standard tubeset in several areas. Bottom bracket stiffness is improved because of the larger diameter tube supporting it, frame strength is increased because of the bigger, stronger downtube, and the frame handles better because the bigger downtube is stiffer in twisting. Three benefits for Chris, instead of just one for Gary!

### WHAT'S THE PIPEWORK?

Chris Chance could take a standard, off-the-shelf tubeset, with an oversize downtube for his bikes, combine them with his balanced geometry and produce a great bike. This would be too easy; Chris custom designs his tubesets, and gets **True Temper** to manufacture them for him. It's the tubing that makes the difference to the ride of this bike, compared to the thousands of clone-mobiles available with bog-standard mass-produced pipe. All the **Fat Chance** frames are TIG welded at their Boston workshop, with beautiful touches such as the perfectly aligned cable routing, and reinforcements on the headtube and the top of the seatstays.

### COOL BITS

Getting this bike was a bit of a rush job. **Sugar City** couldn't build us one up and deliver it in the twenty hours that we wanted, so Tom sent us his own personal bike. We had to put up with **Cook Bros Racing** cranks and bottom bracket, **Bullseye** hubs, **Ritchey** rims and tyres, **Tapelite** bars, **American Bicycles** aluminium stem, **Grafton** brakes, and **SunTour XC** pedals. The front wheel had radial spoking which we were initially very suspicious of. A week of hard-hammering failed to put it even slightly out of true, despite our best efforts. All the components worked beautifully despite constant abuse, and lead to an all-up (light)weight of under 25lbs.

### WOT NO HYPER-O-GLIB?

You can count the number of top racers using under-bar shifters on the finger of one finger. The **Team Comp** was set up with good ol' **Shimano** 6-speed shifters, **Shimano 600EX** block and a **SunTour 9010** rear mech. It worked brilliantly all the time we were in Norway, with only two squirts of oil and no adjustment.

### THE RIDE

At **MBUK** we don't just have one reviewer out in the sticks on his own, we have loads! Everyone who threw a leg over the **Team Comp** was ecstatic when they (eventually) returned. Whether it was the perfect reach, superb handling, incredible light weight, awesome climbing and descending or nice graphics everyone loved the **Fat Chance**. That's why Tomac used to race one, and not many people know that!

### WHAT DO WE THINK?

At £675 for just a frame, fork and bottom bracket, it's not cheap, but then again if there's a better steel bike available, I'll eat my shorts.