



FRESH WORDS FOR THIS MONTH'S GRIT: JIRO NAKAMURA WILL BE WRITING THIS MONTH'S GRIT COLUMN. WE HAVE BEEN FRIENDS SINCE THE MID-1990S WHEN WE USED TO BATTLE IT OUT IN THE EXPERT DOWNHILL. ALTHOUGH HE ALWAYS WOULD BEAT ME, I WAS ABLE TO OVERCOME MY LACK OF SKILL WITH A STRONG VOICE AND OPINION. BEING FRIENDS WITH HIM FOR ALMOST 15 YEARS, HIS VOICE HAS ALWAYS BEEN REPRESENTED IN THE STORIES I WRITE. NOW IT'S HIS TURN. HE HAS EXPERIENCED EVERY ASPECT OF RIDING THAT THE SPORT HAS TO OFFER AND HE HAS ALWAYS DONE IT ON HIS OWN TERMS. AFTER ATTENDING THE FIRST EVER NORBA NATIONAL AT MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN AT THE RIPE AGE OF 12, JIRO HAS EXPLORED EVERY FACET OF THE SPORT ON TWO WHEELS. NOW 20 YEARS LATER, HE STILL LOVES BIKES AND SHOWS NO SIGNS OF SLOWING; FROM BEING IN ONE OF THE FIRST EVER MOUNTAIN BIKE VIDEOS, *REAL SICK*, TO TRAVELING OVERSEAS TO RACE DH ENDURO-STYLE RACING. ENJOY HIS POINT OF VIEW. I KNOW I DO.

— Mark Weir

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Oliver Guincetre, Mark Weir and Jiro Nakamura at the Enduro Series in France, 2007.



FOR A WHILE, WE'VE HEARD ABOUT THE NEXT THING IN MOUNTAIN BIKING. FIRST IT WAS MOUNTAINCROSS THEN IT WAS URBAN DH, THEN SUPER D, THEN SLOPESTYLE AND NOW SPEED TRIALS. WHAT DO THESE EVENTS ALL HAVE IN COMMON, YOU MIGHT ASK? THEY WERE ALL CREATED BY EVENT PROMOTERS, WHO HYPED THE EVENTS UP AS THE NEXT BIG THING IN MOUNTAIN BIKING. THIS IS A TOP-DOWN STYLE OF ORGANIZATION THAT BENEFITS THE ELITE, AND ISN'T BASED ON A PRINCIPLE OF INCLUSIVITY. IF YOU'RE NOT AMONG THE TOP-30 SLOPESTYLERS IN THE WORLD — DON'T COUNT ON COMPETING AT CRANKWORX. NOT AMONG THE TOP DH RACERS IN THE WORLD? DON'T BOOK A TICKET TO THE LISBON DOWNTOWN RACE. DON'T HAVE A 22-POUND HARDTAIL AND THE FITNESS TO FINISH IN THE TOP TEN IN A NMBS CROSS-COUNTRY RACE? FORGET MAKING THE PODIUM AT AN NMBS SUPER D. IT IS VERY HARD TO GET EXCITED ABOUT AN EVENT THAT YOU AS A RIDER WILL NEVER GET TO PARTICIPATE IN.

Contrast the Next Big Thing-style with the bottom-up style of grassroots organization that is currently fueling the rise in popularity of enduro-style and all-mountain events. An event promoter comes up with an idea, holds an event that is open to the general public, people come, have fun and spread the word. The next year, more people come, the event grows, gets bigger and more popular and then the next year more people come. This is a sustaining virtuous cycle that does not depend on large outside sponsors, big media coverage or having big teams and top name pros support the event. These are events that you can ride with your friends and have a great time participating in.

Enduro-style racing is currently in a phase of widespread grassroots growth. More and more events are popping up on calendars around the globe and more mountain bike riders are discovering the joys of this style of racing. Existing events such as the 12-Mile Super D in Ashland, Oregon are gaining popularity with riders coming from further and further away each

year. The Downieville Downhill, which sold out 200 entries in four minutes a few weeks ago, can no longer be considered a local race as riders from around the country make the trek out to compete. Americans are crossing the Atlantic to race in the Megavalanche and the Enduro Series events. The 6-hour Super D in New Zealand saw its first American participants this past February. Endurance downhill events like Psychosis and the Garbanzo DH are growing. All of this is happening without a governing body declaring: "This is the next big thing."

What is fueling this growth? Why are hordes of mountain bikers clamoring to race their trail bikes all of a sudden? First of all, the capabilities of trail bikes these days is quite impressive. A good six-inch travel bike, in the hands of a capable rider, can negotiate 95-percent of the terrain that a downhill bike can. Speeds may be a bit slower, and of course large drops and jumps may be off limits, but you can't ride a downhill bike back uphill either. Secondly, lots of riders have these bikes now. Santa Cruz just redesigned their Blur LT, and revealed why it is the best selling bike in their entire lineup. All-mountain trail bikes also cater to a cycling lifestyle that more and more people find appealing. If you live in the right place, you can ride your trail bike from your house to your local riding area. You spend more time riding your bike, and less time loading bikes into the car, shuttling, or pushing uphill. As a bonus, you obtain fitness and the slow-speed riding skills that come with riding technical uphill sections. Lastly, lots of riders have embraced the simplicity of having one bike for everything. Fewer bikes to maintain, fewer bikes to store and transport and best of all: Enjoying the simplicity of riding everything with one bike. No more "I'd ride this if I were riding my downhill bike" or "I'd jump this if I were riding my jump

bike"...you either do it or you don't do it. Less is more.

Another reason that more racers are attending Enduro-style events is the excitement and exhilaration of longer race times, unfamiliar race formats and a greater sense of community that the different formats encourage. For racers tired of paying \$90 for a three-minute race with four hours of standing in line for practice (Example: The 2008 Sea Otter Classic Downhill), this can be quite refreshing. For your entry fee at the 12-Mile Super D or the Downieville DH, you get over forty-five minutes of racing. At the Megavalanche and the Enduro Series, you get over one- and two-hour race times, respectively. At the 6-hour Super D...well, you get the idea. There's even a new race format that is becoming popular in France that has four or five timed downhill sections, with untimed uphill sections in between. You get to ride a large 30-mile course with some 5,000 feet of climbing, but the climbs are not timed. It is like they take the lame parts out of a cross-country race and keep the fun parts!

As I mentioned earlier, this

style of racing creates a greater sense of community and bonding between racers than traditional, short downhill races. Recall how excited you get when you finish a DH run and describe to your buddies the nuances of your run. In a longer run, there are more instances to share! Remember how fun it is after a race run to share with your friends how excited you are about racing. In a multiple-run race, you get to race again and again and have even more fun!

To sum it all up, Enduro-style racing is getting more popular. Its growth is being fueled from the bottom-up

by enthusiasts who have a passion for trail riding and aren't just chasing the latest fad. This style of racing can be enjoyed by all different types of riders, and can be a lot more fun and rewarding than strict downhill racing. I encourage each and every one of you to try this style of racing... it might just be the next big thing. ■

— Jiro Nakamura

Have a question for Jiro Nakamura or Mark Weir? Email editor@h3publications.com



"WITH A GOOD SIX-INCH BIKE, YOU SPEND MORE TIME RIDING YOUR BIKE AND LESS TIME LOADING BIKES INTO THE CAR, SHUTTLEING, OR PUSHING UPHILL."