



#ISSUE86

#DEC2022

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#10years #mtbmagasia

#monduro #india

#downhill #race #china

#gritty #in #mexico #city

#against #gravity

#mtbmagasia #10years

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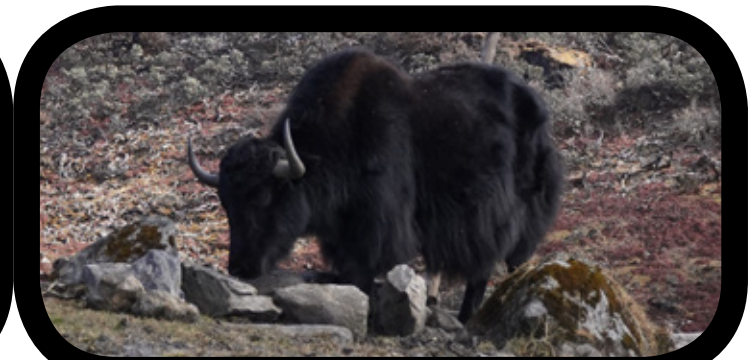
#RIDER #MEDAN
#COVER #LOSANGCHOPEL

#ISSUE86

#DEC2022



#10YEARS #MTBMAGASIA



#MONDURO #INDIA



#DOWNHILL #RACE #CHINA



#GRITTY #IN #MEXICO #CITY



#AGAINST #GRAVITY #SWITZERLAND



#MTBMAGASIA #10YEARS



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WORDS

MATTHEW MACDONALD



celebrating

Ten years????

When Mesum let me know that MTB Mag India (now mtbmagasia) was putting out its 10th anniversary issue, and asked me to write something for it, I had to catch myself because it was such a jolt.



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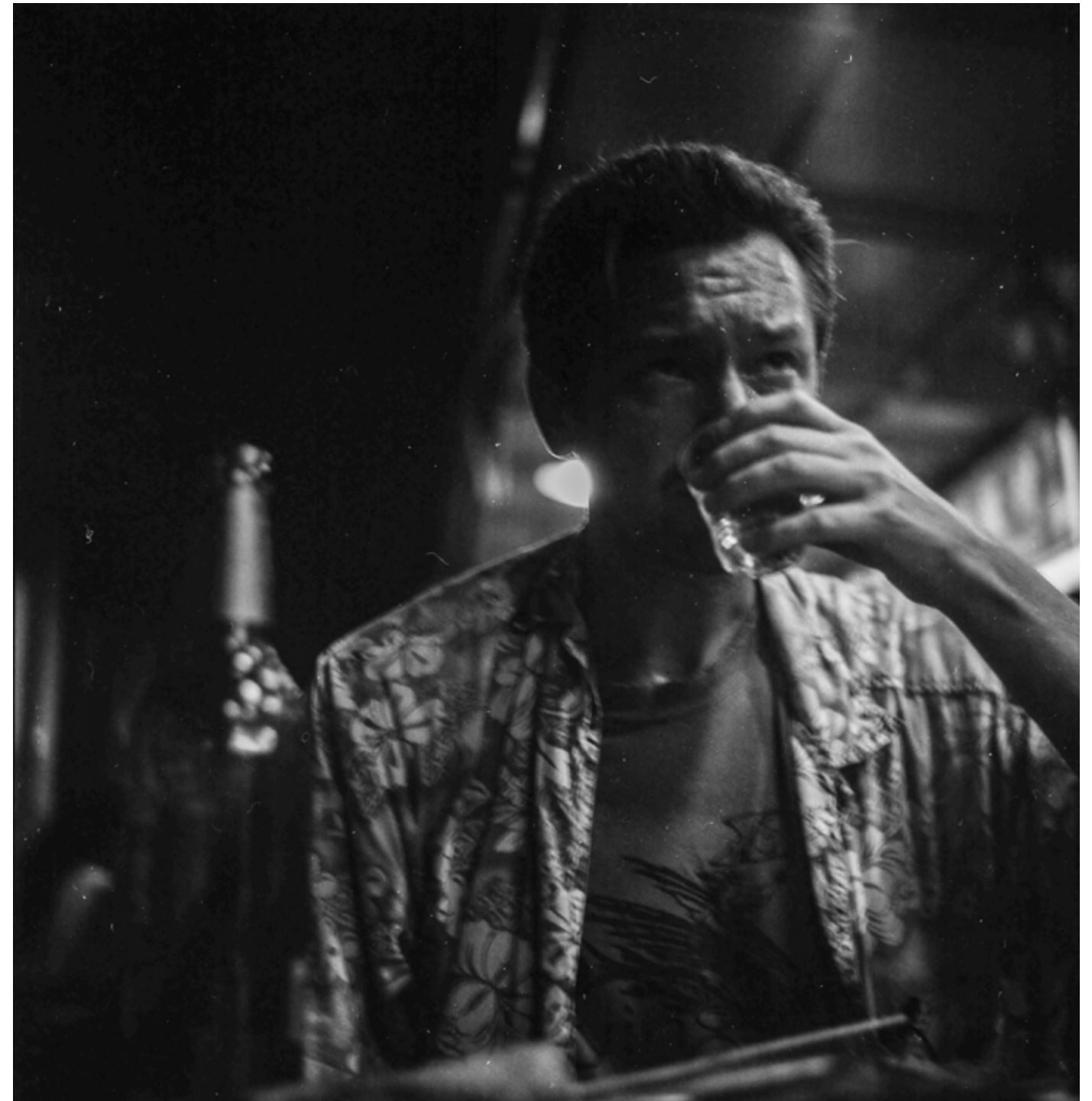
See, I've never done particularly well with the concept of time.

Mesum was always the man for that: making sure that we were on schedule and that connections were made whenever we'd load up to catch a taxi, a bus, a plane, a train... or, in one case, a truck ascending the steepest mountain I had ever been on as we both quieted down under the darkening skies of a typhoon that was bearing down on us.

All of that and more – long put in mental storage – immediately came rushing back, 10 years, half a world, and what feels like a whole lifetime away, as I reread his text.

Then, all at once, it hit me: I felt great.

That's the thing with Mesum. He could always get you up for the task at hand (and getting back down that mountain in that typhoon was one hell of a memorable task to pull off – for both of us – without ending up in the hospital) by setting an achievable goal for everyone that promised both a meaningful intangible reward (the satisfaction of meeting the set goal) along with some pleasantly tangible ones (a good meal, washed down with more than a few Chinese beers, cigarettes, and a bunch of entertaining stories and laughs).





Thinking back, I can't remember a single time – in any of Mesum's downhill adventures that I was lucky enough to be part of – that he didn't make good on those promises.

To refresh my memory a little more, I dug out the introduction that I had written for Mesum when the first issue of MTBMag India came out back in February, 2012. It brought me right back to that Zijin Shan trail on that hot Sunday morning in Nanjing, and to Mesum's patient explanations of how to photograph him making a jump (he needed someone to photograph him for the magazine, and he also wanted to help me with my photography) even after I kept on messing it up. It also brought back the fear that I felt as I ran to where he had flown off the trail, crashing down into some brambles, likely from exhaustion.

As I looked at that inaugural issue and those introductions for the first time in a decade, more came back to me: Mesum's tales of photographing Hans "No Way" Rey on a 2011 Adidas sponsored tour of northern India, and Prateek Singh's visit to Nanjing during the dangerously oppressive summer of 2013, during which he and Mesum would go out riding in the predawn hours to avoid almost certain suffocation and/or heat stroke.

I saw also that my introduction had been written with the immediacy and vividness of an event still fresh in my memory, but with an unawareness of what was yet to come.

The year Mesum started his magazine, he also formed a downhill racing team that spent part of that year competing on a regional Chinese tour. Thinking that it might make for a good story, I pitched the idea to a US-China cultural magazine in the States, it was accepted, and I began following Mesum and his teammates Gueno Dubost and Marco Jaggi – and the Chinese riders they competed against – through the course of the season.

During those months, I received a much longer and deeper exposure to competitive downhill racing and what went into it: the skill, the adrenaline, the danger, the discipline, the injuries, the bonhomie, the camaraderie, and something else: the panache.

Panache.

Mesum, Gueno, and Marco had so much of it that they made pink the new black.

I also had the opportunity to observe how Mesum held his group together, kept it moving in one direction, and





channeled everyone's love for what they were doing... even though none of them may have completely understood why, exactly, they were doing it.

That almost irrational love of it all is what got Mesum onto a plane – with his bike – and down to Chang Sha, Hunan that late summer, where he got a lift to the top of that aforementioned mountain to ride/skid down it underneath the angry edge of a typhoon, where there were crashes and gashes and broken bones, stretcher bearers and ambulances, rain and mud, and general misery and dismay for anyone up top, down low, or in between.

And that was only training day.

That optimistic dedication and goal oriented attitude that Mesum threw into his racing, managing his team, and even helping me to get his photos right are the exact same qualities that have kept MTBMag Asia in business and going strong all these years later.

The really beautiful thing is that Mesum has chosen to share with you some of what all of us – Hans, Gueno, Marco, Prateek, me, and so many others over so many years – have had the good fortune to experience with him in a rush of crazily focused enjoyment.

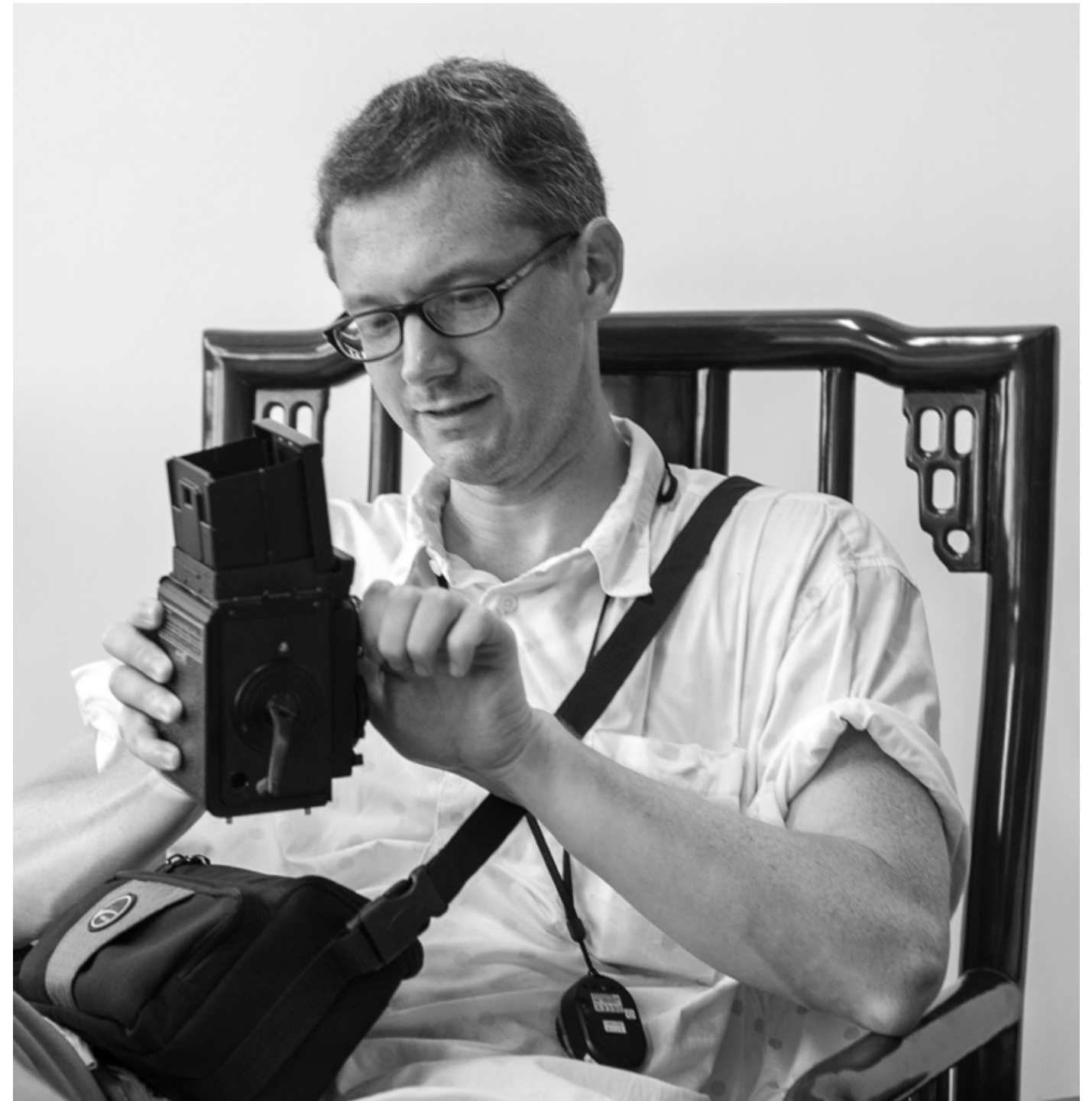
It doesn't matter if you've never been to India or China, or if you've never even been on a mountain bike before – all you have to do is click on an issue and see where it takes you.

Pretty soon, you'll be sending it, too.

TEN YEARS!!!!!!

RIDE ON!!!!!!

-Matthew MacDonald (AKA: Coach)





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MONDURO

In Tawang - Arunachal Pradesh, India (3048m.a.s.l)

Monduro Mon stands for Monpa and Duro is the last part of Enduro, so Monduro is Enduro race in the land of the Monpas. Enduro in its most basic definition is a type of Mountain Biking racing where the downhill are timed and the uphill are mandatory but not timed. Riders are timed in stages in that are primarily downhill with neutral “Transfer” stages in between.

The Monpa or Mönpa is a major tribe of Arunachal Pradesh in northeastern India. The Tawang Monpas have a migration history from Changrelung. The Monpa are believed to be the only nomadic tribe in Northeast India – they are totally dependent on animals like sheep, cow, yak, goats and horses.



PHOTOS MONDURO

WORDS MONDURO



Tawang Cycling Association was formed by a group of like minded MTB enthusiasts. The core members of the group had been riding long before the menace of Covid took at large. The Association has been inspiring the youth of the district to take up cycling and to take care of health and not to indulge into drugs etc. The organization plans on making Tawang a paradise for Mountain Biking and adventure tourism hotspot of the country. Further the organization also plans to throw some light on the possibility of a whole new form of Tourism i.e Mountain biking Tourism and it would open up a whole new range of opportunities for the Locals of the district and state as a whole.

It would be a great step ahead in opening up a sustainable and environmental friendly way of tourism in Arunachal Pradesh. The organization aims at making Tawang the new hotspot for MTB.

Tawang is perched at an altitude of 10000ft in the Himalayan range sharing its border with Tibet to its north and Bhutan to its west. It is one of the tourist hotspots in the beautiful state of Arunachal Pradesh, with perfect weather and terrain for mountain biking. The place also has a rich history with cultural background and is blessed with so many trails all around the district which was used in the days before the proper roads





were constructed. It is really fascinating to know that almost every route and trail has a story behind it, and we have been obsessed with exploring more of them and to develop them so that we can relive the history of these trails on our bikes. We are sure that the world would definitely want to take a ride on these historical trails. The trail also includes the very particular trail that was used by the 6th Dalai Lama to go to Tibet in the 17th Century. Tawang has one of the best network of Trails in the whole country. The trail stretches for many miles and it is an epic mixture of Gnarly rock section and technical sections. These trails present a great challenge to the riders as the



altitude of these trails ranges from 14000ft to 8000ft.

An Enduro Mountain Biking event took place at Tawang Arunachal Pradesh from the 9th to 13th of November 2022. The budding event has gained massive popularity among mountain biking enthusiasts in India and overseas. The 1st edition of the event boasted of participants like Rajesh Magar of Nepal, who was awarded the National Geographic Adventurer of the year 2018, and who also went on to win the title last year. Monduro began its journey when a group of mountain biking enthusiasts from Tawang decided to promote the town as a mountain biking paradise when they discovered





TAWANG CYCLING ASSOCIATION

MONDUIRO

TAWANG CYCLING ASSOCIATION
RIDE IT - LIVE IT

Dedicating the Monduiro in the fond Memory of
Late ...hi Ji
Monduiro extends its gratitude to the fans and members

MONDUIRO

MONDURO

FINAL STANDINGS **ENDURO**



POSITION	BIB #	STICKER CODE	CHIP CODE	RIDER NAME	DAY 1	DAY 2	TOTAL TIME
1	32	132	SR23745	CHRIS	0:18:06.984	0:11:55.161	0:30:02.145
2	21	121	LZ31852	ISMAMUL	0:18:09.666	0:11:57.369	0:30:07.035
3	13	113	TP00093	MEBAN	0:18:34.670	0:12:21.558	0:30:56.228
4	18	118	RW39488	APHSAI	0:19:35.188	0:13:05.858	0:32:41.046
5	25	125	RZ61598	GOALLER	0:19:55.739	0:13:45.163	0:33:40.902
6	16	116	PV00639	TITUS	0:20:44.936	0:13:05.564	0:33:50.500
7	15	115	KG47868	AARON	0:21:05.762	0:13:09.446	0:34:15.208
8	12	112	NN11498	REUBEN	0:20:58.724	0:13:32.200	0:34:30.924

38W
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TREK



spokehub
RACING


GT
ROUETTURES

whackytalky



the long lost trails with historic significance within the Tawang township. Later, they went on to form a group and named it The Tawang Cycling Association. This year's edition continued to mesmerize the participants with its gnarly trails and challenging environment. The champ of the event, British national Mr Christopher Ashok Keeling, took home the respectable title. The TCA also hosted a XCO event, with Mr Kamlesh Rana from The Indian Army emerging as the deserving winner. The organisers of the event are planning on improving the event in the years to come, and providing a bigger and larger than life experience for the riders in the long run. Wink!!* It is already one of





the highest Enduro race of the world at an altitude of 14400 ft (4390m.a.s.l.) and could go higher in future editions.

**CHECK OUT MORE ACTION
FROM THE RACE ON THE
YOUTUBE CHANNEL OF
MONDURO : [HERE](#)**

MONDURO

FINAL STANDINGS XCO



POSITION	NAME	BIB #	LAP 1	LAP 2	LAP 3	LAP 4	LAP 5	LAP 6	LAP 7
1	KAMLESH RANA	2	0:12:37.658	0:26:32.465	0:40:27.443	0:54:27.127	1:08:41.317	1:22:34.356	1:36:07.593
2	TSEWANG NORBOO	7	0:12:38.137	0:26:33.058	0:40:28.020	0:54:27.834	1:08:42.006	1:22:34.934	1:36:08.251
3	SHIVEN	1	0:12:59.850	0:27:18.480	0:42:34.441	0:58:46.776	1:14:20.376	1:29:59.499	1:46:51.226
4	MALAV DUTTA	8	0:14:23.760	0:30:06.080	0:46:39.222	1:03:30.188	1:20:50.095	1:41:16.065	1:59:48.998
5	SIMON KACHAP	5	0:16:16.991	0:34:59.226	0:53:51.600	1:15:01.038	1:37:42.323	2:02:06.095	2:26:18.849
6	DORJEE KHANDU	9	0:40:27.676	1:02:52.438	1:24:57.057	1:46:34.346	2:11:48.255	2:38:46.867	3:05:49.407

38W
Cases of Success

MILK IT
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ADVENTURES

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Racing in the Foggy Shangyu Mountains 上虞山

End of November on the east coast of China, rainy days and a grey cloudy sky held on for days already. I normally would put myself just on the couch at home, watching new episodes of some of my fav MTB youtube channels and waiting for the few sunny dry days for riding. But not when there is a race, this is one of the rare chances to finally meet up with other riders and basically ride together. AND: the race season here in China reaches till the end of November – despite the rain we have a quiet cozy 15 to 17 degrees Celsius.



PHOTOS AURELIUS SATLOW

WORDS AURELIUS SATLOW

上虞山



And last but not least: it's still "Corona-time" here, and the race organizers finally got green lights from the higher state boards and so they took the chance to still hold that race, although it had been planned much earlier.

I haven't had ridden my DH bike for a long time, and the mountain area where I was heading at 7 A.M. was totally new for me – I hoped the track wouldn't be too hard for my untrained legs and stagnating skills. Departing from Ningbo City after a 1.5 hour car drive, I reached the village beside the little mountain range. They had put up a reception desk directly in front of the entrance of a big respectable old, or at least old-looking, traditional Buddhist temple with its typical yellowish walls and bowed dragon-tail-like roofs.

This race is one of the races in the region that are often organized by HIBP (short for "Hangzhou International Bikepark"). Back in 2019, I reported here in the mag about an HIBP Enduro race on another venue near Ninghai. So, that time they called it Downhill race, though it seems the Chinese MTB scene goes the same way as the western scene does: using Enduro bikes to ride downhill. Arriving on the parking lot, one of the race organizer came along, greeted me, and told me that this year I'd be the only foreign rider – last year there



had been a couple of us. I asked around and found out that many of them live in Shanghai, and due to the strict Zero-Covid policy of the Chinese government, it is still complicated for them to leave the city and/or return.

Soon other riders arrived and I saw familiar faces, rider friends I haven't met for quite a while. One of them was "Arsee" from Hangzhou, 36 years old and riding since 2010. I met him the first time in 2019 in Ninghai and I often saw him actively participating in the chats in different mountain biking WeChat groups – local ones as well as countrywide. In China, if you stay longer in one area, you actually see the same pretty small group of riders coming to all the races. And this area, the Yangtse River Delta, is almost as big as the whole of Germany. This proved to me again how different a MTB scene can be: first and for comparison: in Germany one probably wouldn't drive 4 to 5 hours from Hamburg to Stadt Steinach in Thuringia to attend a race where only a bunch of 30 riders compete on an only 1.4 kilometers short track without getting any useful racing points. But here this is normal to see - for example, one Chinese rider made the 4 hour car drive from Nanjing to race here.

I talked a bit more with Arsee about his view on





上虞山

the meaning of MTB. The different scenes and cultures here in China and over in Europe definitely share the core ideas: having fun by riding, being outside, feeling the excitement and meeting good friends. After the little chat we started to push up our bikes, actually right on the path of the race track, because the mountain was too steep and narrow to have a kind of second way for cars or anything. So, it happened that we sometimes had to jump to the side to make way for riders that suddenly dashed down around the corner. It was common to hear these riders shouting in advance to warn people on the track that they were coming.

After about 25 minutes pushing we reached the top, and my Jersey was already soaked from sweat inside and outside from the ongoing slight rain or rain drops falling off the trees above. I enjoyed the greyish foggy silent mountainous scenery. Because I totally forgot that I'd released the air of my front suspension at the last time, and since I didn't bring my shock-pump, I actually couldn't do a proper ride down the track. It was more a rolling down. But I actually didn't mind that, because the low speed gave me the chance to do like a second track walk just downwards, and also to get used to the slippery-as-dogshit-ground. Before my second practice run, then, I borrowed a pump



from others of course. The track wasn't very difficult, but the wet conditions and the "need for speed" at the same time made it pretty tricky and slightly technical; no big jumps, but some rocks, roots, some steep and at the same time narrow sections, and a high speed gap jump into the goal area. The gap wasn't big, about 2m, but still too "impressive" for some of the riders, who preferred the chicken line.

Lunchtime! Every rider got a menu of a cheap but tasty Chinese food, fortunately inside of a little house. I had the chance to sit beside Zhou Xiaolong, one of the fastest guys off-road on two wheels, locally and nationally. He is a tall quite guy, every time I see him he reminds me a little bit of Emil Johansson, but with an Asian face. During that talk I realized again that MTB in some aspects is indeed universal and cross-cultural, because what Xiaolong says and likes about MTB is something most of my western MTB friends would definitely relate to: putting all one's concentration and focus on the riding and forgetting about everything else; second, the sport gets you to very different places and here, brings you to together with new different people and, now this seems important for Chinese riders: different food! That could perhaps be a special Chinese thing, since the food across China can be very



诗画曹娥江·2022年长三角单车山地速降赛暨第五届绍兴(上虞)祝家庄国际单车山地速降赛

比赛地点 上虞丰惠 祝家庄单车山地速降赛基地

2022年11月19日~20日

主办单位: 浙江省体育产业联合会 浙江省自驾车旅游协会 绍兴市体育总会
承办单位: 绍兴市自行车运动协会 绍兴市上虞区体育总会 浙江省上虞曹娥江旅游度假区管委会 绍兴市上虞区教育体育局 绍兴市上虞区丰惠镇人民政府
协办单位: 绍兴市上虞区社会体育指导员协会 绍兴市上虞区自行车体育协会 绍兴市上虞区户外运动协会 上虞骑行队
绍兴市上虞区红十字户外救援队 杭州骏启体育文化有限公司(HIBP)
赛事运营: 浙江五岳威体科技有限公司
赛事安保: 绍兴越盾特卫保安服务有限公司
赛事传媒: 中澳(北京)文化



different compared with, for one European example, somewhere like the UK.

After the lunch I felt that the two times pushing up the about 160 metres were already exhausting for my untrained legs, so I decided to rest and save energy for the next race day. So, switch to the next morning: me and 7 other riders constituting the "Elite-Group" had gathered in the morning at 8:45am on the top of the still-foggy little mountain ridge which is covered by the jungle-like green trees, standing dense everywhere except the trail, which thus looks like a channel to ride through. At 9:20 the first rider started and I was the second. They had even arranged a local TV broadcaster who put up several big cameras along the track for an online live-stream. I quickly forwarded the link for the live broadcast before I pedalled my bike into the green slippery wormhole.

Although I went off the track after one of the steep muddy downslopes, I managed to make up some time by getting my tires hopping over a bunch of wet rocks rising out of the middle of the track, and finally gapped into the finish-area. For me personally, my run wasn't too bad, but not good enough for a podium, and to be honest: I even came in last. The rest of the time after my race run, I first watched the Open group with 14 riders,

上虞山

the kids' group with 5 riders, the Electric bike group with 3 riders and the women's group, consisting of a 27 year-old and a 6 year-old rider – where the latter one beat the first one, who was racing for the first time. I asked her and she actually was just happy to make it safely down the track without major crashes, and even being a faster than in her practice run. The fast guy Zhou Xiaolong could not defend his dominance that time, and got beaten by Chen Lin by 3.5 secs. Ending up as the last one with a 45 sec gap to the first place didn't made me feel sad or anything; instead, all in all, I really just enjoyed being on the bike again, and being outside on the Chinese mountainside, breathing fresh air, finally having put my tires into the dirt after a long time of not riding, and seeing old friends whom I haven't met for a while.



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GRITTY In Mexico City

Urban Mountain Bike Adventure with Hans Rey & Rob Warner

"Hans, I have cancelled my flight!" read the message I received from Rob Warner the morning of the day he was supposed to arrive in Mexico City. I almost lost the plot, after planning this trip for over a year, I had arrived in Mexico one day ahead of Rob to get everything ready.

PHOTOS CARMEN REY

WORDS HANS REY



Upon arrival I realized that one ebike battery, that we shipped to Mexico ahead of us, was the wrong model. I thought I would ask Rob if there was a chance he could bring one, since he was still at his home in England. I also told him that we'd fine either way and that we likely should be able to borrow a battery locally from one of the 22 million inhabitants. He took it all wrong, thinking he wouldn't have a battery for his eBike and without even calling me, cancelled his flight. Gosh, it is difficult to explain how hard I had worked with Shimano and multiple other people for months to figure out a way to ship the batteries to Mexico, since they are considered hazardous goods, and can't be transported on planes it was very complicated to ship them.

After convincing him to rebook his flight and come on the next available plane, figuring he would just miss the first stage of our adventure, he finally made it to Mexico, but unfortunately his bike didn't. At this point I was ready to kill him – after all the planning and organizing and praying that things would fall into place – it was all about to fall apart or at least it looked like I wouldn't have the partner in crime I was counting on.

On Day 2 we were planning to ride a 15'000ft volcano, and it would have been a shame without Rob. After a few phone calls to his sponsors, to make sure they wouldn't mind him riding a loaner bike from a different brand; we managed to save the day. But more of this later, let me

take you back to the beginning.

After travelling to some of the most remote corners on the globe in my early adventure trips in the 90ties and thereafter, I have recently found pleasure in exploring some of the biggest cities that are often engulfed with incredible natural surroundings. Mexico City hit all the marks for a perfect destination for an ebike adventure; this high altitude metropolis with all its people, traffic, culture, history – but also volcanos, bike parks and mysterious pyramids. The contrasts couldn't be bigger between nature and urban jungle; and between the rich and the poor, over 4 million people live here in slums.

If one thinks it is easy to plan a 5 day traverse that includes all the highlights, locations, landmarks and the best trails – think again. It takes usually at least one year of planning even with the help of the internet and with local guides and riders support.

Mau de Avila was our local guide, fixer and was part of our team. He helped with the planning, logistics and locations. He and his brothers have a company called DABCO, they offer coaching, trail building and guided rides, as they are heavily involved in the Mexican mountain bike scene and also with its most popular bike park, Desiertos de los Leones.





Our team was rounded up by my long time cameraman Cedric Tassan and my wife Carmen Rey as the photographer, both, of course, equipped with Ebikes as well.

There were so many questions that needed figuring out leading up to this. For starters, where to ride and where not to ride – Mexico City can be a very dangerous place and riding around with expensive bikes and cameras is not everywhere wise or safe.

Ultimately we came up with a great mix of the best and coolest areas. Urban Stage I kicked off in a suburb named Santa Fe, starting in a very poor neighborhood we quickly submerged

between glittering skyscrapers and fancy houses. The contrasts are visible everywhere and often a brand new building or mansion is located literally next door to a run down shantytown. We also got a first taste of traffic as we hit the morning rush hour heading towards the center of Mexico City, with zones like Lomas, Chapultepec, Roma, Centro, Zocola or Polanco - which is the Beverly Hills of CDMX (Ciudad de Mexico). We covered quite some miles on this day and often found some bits of sweet single-track between the different neighborhoods. We thought about our tummies twice before we had street tacos for lunch, but we couldn't resist the smell from an improvised stand on a sidewalk run by a man and his wife. It looked clean enough for Mau's approval and turned out to be delicious burritos. Our final destination was Templo

Mayor – which used to be main temple of the Mexican people until the Spaniards replaced it by a Cathedral. Its hard to believe that Mexico City was once covered mostly by a lake, that was slowly drained to make space to expand the city's footprint. Many of these archeological sites, temples and pyramids existed long before the Aztec ruled the area between 1345 and 1521 or when consequently the Spanish invaded Mexico.

I had brought my GT eForce Ebike, with a Shimano Steps EP8 pedal assisted drive unit, it was the perfect toy to explore such a city. I carried my charger cable in my backpack in case I needed to top up my battery, should we be lured into a longer ride than we had anticipated.

We found some incredible urban riding challenges in parks and squares to test our skills. By the end of the day we definitely felt a bit gritty and were ready for some cervezas.

Rob Warner is a mountain biking legend, he is a former Downhill World Cup racer and has become the voice of mountain biking, commentating all the races on TV. He is a funny personality and is also a dam good rider. We both have trials riding backgrounds, therefore we were always on the lookout for obstacles and challenges along the way. Thankfully Rob was finally able to join us on the next day to ride Nevado de Toluca volcano, a giant volcano 2 hours West of the city, with a huge crater and two crater lakes at over 15,000 ft elevation. It was a





highlight of our trip and after circumnavigating the lakes we popped over the crater rim for a breathtaking descent towards the valley below. Breathtaking for several reasons, the views, the lack of air and the technical downhill that awaited us. I was glad we were all riding tubeless tires through the sharp rock fields, saving us from punctures. Rob felt a bit dizzy, caused by the altitude, nor did his jet lag help; he wasn't always sure if he could carry on. Mau was also on a ebike, he turned out to be a fantastic rider – it was good to have some local know-how and also somebody to help us communicate with the local people in the mountains who live very simple lives. Part of experiencing Mexico is experiencing Mexican food; the way it's cooked, served and presented. We got to sample some very authentic dishes, like chile rellenos, carne

asada, carnitas to name just a few.

Desierto de los Leones is a huge nature area at the edge of the city. It belongs to the native people who still hold the land deeds that the Spaniards issued them 500 years ago. It has become the most popular riding area in Mexico City with over 120 trails, according to Trailforks.

In an attempt to protect the land from developers, the local mountain bikers, incl. Mau, are working with the indigenous people to turn it into an official bike park with improved services and infrastructure for the hundreds of riders who come there already, but also to create job

opportunities and revenue for the locals. Some weekends have seen over 5000 riders enjoying the outdoors with views across the entire high valley of Mexico City. One can shuttle or ride all the way above 12,000 feet elevation. There is no shortage of options to work your way down the mountain side. We got to ride a black trail called 'Extincion', that was pretty technical, with some steep chutes and rocky drops and with a pretty good size road gap jump. We also got to test our climbing skills at on 'Hipermuro' trail, I really enjoy the technical rocky uphill trails that wouldn't be rideable on a regular mountain bike, but with the help from Shimano Steps we were able to climb some very challenging lines. Don't assume that it must be easy because it is an ebike, it takes a lot of skills to keep the momentum going and to pick

a clean line. Between the heat, the lack of oxygen and the long relentless rocky stretches of trail – I felt like hyperventilating more than once. I was blown away by the amount of riders and how many of them owned high-end mountain bikes. It just shows how our sport has exploded over the last 10 years. They always say, 'built trails and they will come', it couldn't be more true. There are about 6 proper bike shops in this neighborhood alone and there are constantly more and more riding areas with trails popping up everywhere around D.F.

At the base of the bike park in a tiny restaurant, where traditional Mexican folklore music was blasting from the speakers near one of the parking areas we discovered the taste of pulque.





Pulque is a traditional Mexican alcoholic beverage produced from the fermentation of the fresh sap known as aguamiel extracted from several species of Agave plants that grow in the Central Mexico plateau.

It was time to give Rob a taste of the city, since he missed the first urban stage. His bike had arrived the day before, and everybody was excited to experience the city on Sunday, which brings a different vibe and is definitely less busy.

We set off from the infamous Blue House in Coyoacán, where Mexico's most famous artist,

Frida Kahlo lived with her husband Diego Riviera who was also a prominent Mexican painter. His large frescoes helped establish the mural movement worldwide and can be seen all over the city. I couldn't resist getting a fresh coconut from a kid selling them and preparing them to eat, right there on the street. Love the coconut water and also the fresh white meat. While we were at it I also sampled some dried grasshoppers with some extra lime and chili - crunchy indeed. Rob couldn't be convinced to try any of it, in contrary. I don't get it, to me trying the local specialties when travelling to exotic places is always a highlight.

The Sunday morning atmosphere in this part of town was very pleasant, people sitting in

café's, local markets and parks were filled with residence, others would engage in football matches, running or even rock climbing right next to the Olympic Stadium in the University City area. The stadium was built for the 1968 Olympics; the country's huge investment was quite controversial leading to protests and riots at the time. There was lots of urban riding from artificial obstacles like walls and staircases to the natural lava rock formations this area was built on. We definitely got our wheelies dialed.

Mau had promised a colorful surprise at the end of our tour. Xochimilco was exactly that. Xochimilco is best known for its canals, which are left from what was an extensive lake and

canal system that connected most of the settlements of the Valley of Mexico. These canals, along with artificial islands called chinampas, attract tourists and other city residents to ride on colorful gondola-like boats called trajineras around the 170 km (110 mi) of canals. For an extra 100 Pesos we hired our own mariachi band for a few tunes of Mexican folklore to make our cruise even more romantic.

Teotihuacan has been on my bucket-list for a long time. I've been lucky to see many cool archeological sites around the world, but these mysterious ancient pyramids were something I always wanted to see. When the Aztec found the pyramids they had already been there about





1500 years, nobody knows who built them, why and how – just like with so many other sites around the world, we can only speculate of their origins and marvel at the knowledge and skills these ancient forgotten civilizations had thousands of years ago. Underground tunnel systems have been discovered in recent years below the pyramids, many of them were filled with artifacts. We couldn't resist stopping by this site on our last day and have look around, of course we couldn't bring our bikes inside, but that was ok. It was amazing seeing these structures up close and afterwards we did get to do a cool ride on the outside of the premises. We also wanted to explore some of the less glitzy neighborhoods, where poverty and crime rules the streets. Ecatepec is one these areas, with colorful houses and shady characters.

We were warned and we knew we shouldn't spend much time there with our foreign looks, fancy bikes and expensive cameras. This town has gondolas running above it, not to transport mountain bikers like we are used to in the ski resorts, but to serve as public transportation, instead of a subway or train system. It was a sobering experience to see this other side of the city. The injustice is very noticeable and we felt some sort of relieve after 'surviving' our descent through the streets, avoiding trouble.

This city is so big, the individual neighborhoods are like separate worlds. An endless sea of houses as far as the eye can see, polluted air and streets and highways clogged up with

traffic. Certain cars are only allowed to be driven on certain days as measures to ease traffic congestion. People are everywhere busy minding their lives whilst being a tiny part of this gigantic metropolis. We for once cherished this urban adventure, but we preferred the nature and culture that can be found on the outside of this concrete jungle.

On the last day we didn't have any more riding planned, but we had a mission to distribute some bikes through the charity my wife and I had started 17 years ago, 'Wheels 4 Life', a non-profit that gives bicycles to people in need of transportation in developing countries. We are planning to support multiple projects in Mexico in the future, and we set the ground stone for

them while we were here. We were fortunate to donate the first bikes in person, some went to the indigenous people who will run the Desierto Bike Park, these locals need bikes to get to the park from their homes to work on trails and make the bike park a legit enterprise. We also went back to see a man who we met on the first day, he lives in a very simple hut and we had seen him carry heavy water jugs to his place, a bike will not only help him with this daily task but it will also be used for many other errands and will help him potentially to find work.

Viva la Mexico

De Avila Biking Co. | Desierto Bike Park



YOUTUBE VIDEO HERE



FIFTY-FIFTY



AGAINST GRAVITY

This summer I was able to realise one of my lifelong dreams: combining mountain biking with paragliding. Professional paraglider pilot Patrick von Känel and I creatively overcame a bike ban in the magical mountains of the Bernese Alps in Switzerland. Thanks to a great film and photo crew, this premiere was captured in the media with unique and impressive pictures!

PHOTOS CHICSHOT

WORDS RENE WILDHABER



MY BACKGROUND

When I was 16 years old I started paragliding, climbing, and biking. At the age of 21 I decided to give my main attention to biking. For over 20 years I regularly stood at the starting lines of mountain bike races (XC, DH and Enduro) and travelled the world for adventure shoots. Patrick von Känel now brought me back to the glider. The experience of soaring through the air again after so many years and feeling the freedom was wonderful and called for more.



PATRICK VON KÄNEL

Patrick von Känel is a professional paraglider pilot and works as a test pilot for the paragliding company Advance, based in Thun. He took second place at the Red Bull X-Alps in 2022 and has gained fame beyond the scene as an athlete and adventurer. "It fulfils me to be able to live my passion for the sport in the great outdoors, and thus always experience new magic moments," says Patrick.



THE STORY

Mountain biker René Wildhaber worked hard his way up to the Blüemlisalphütte at 2800 m.a.s.l. with his own muscle power. Paraglider pilot Patrick von Känel uses the thermals for the ascent and flies to the hut, with his bike attached to his aircraft. Together they then enjoy the fabulous descent by bike in the breathtaking mountain scenery. The fun is abruptly stopped by a sign which shows riding a bike is forbidden. But this is no obstacle for the two professionals. They unfold the tandem paraglider and fly their bikes over the riding ban into the sunset together.

AGAINST GRAVITY

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CELEBRATING

10



WORDS

AURELIUS SATLOW

Cheers on the 10 years anniversary of mtbmagasia! I'm one of the authors for the mag, but I've only known it for 3 years, so I was curious about the magazine's beginnings, and had the chance to talk with Mesum Verma and Prateek Singh, the mag's founders. We will lead you visually through 10 years of the magazine by presenting selected awesome shots taken through the years! We will have a look at some of the highlights, and also a little discussion about the overall topic of the mag itself: MTB in Asia!



Hans Rey & Richie Schley at the Roopkund trek in India (in the back Trisul I 7120m and Trisul II 6690m.a.s.l.)
Photo: Mesum Verma

He is a wanderer between the countries and continents: Mesum Verma, one of the founders, and always chief editor of mtbmagasia. Mesum is a child of the Himalaya mountain range, his father came from Shimla, Mesum himself was born in Lucknow. After the early loss of both of his parents, Mesum then was sent to Switzerland, where he grew up. Later he traced his roots and spent years in India again, before he settled down in China for more than 10 years. Now he is living in Switzerland and Germany.

In the very beginning Mesum actually didn't even had a big plan to do a magazine about mountain biking in Asia, he told me with a laughter. It was more that two interesting persons found together. In first hand there was him, Mesum, not only a wanderer between the two continents India and Europa, but also a wanderer between cultures and languages. He is familiar with Hindi, Swiss German, German, English and Chinese, you might even still talk to him in French. And that is crucial for a magazine like mtbmagasia (first it was Freerider, then mtbmagindia and then finally mtbmagasia), where basically all the background work and every articles preparation is based on a crosscultural communication with the very different people and riders, as different as the different Asian countries are!



Prateek Singh is testing the Scott Bike in Mumbai, India
Photo: Rakesh Oswal

But then, Mesum isn't only a wanderer between countries and cultures, but also between sports. Back when he was a bit younger, he did Free Climbing, Flatland BMX riding and moreover, he was a professional Freestyle/Big Air snowboarder. And to finally become a snowboarder, first sponsored by Burton, then by Never Summer Snowboards, was a long difficult way full of work and obstacles, since he got zero support from his host family.

To document his and his friends snowboarding, he took up photography, and in the beginning it was analog way of getting good shots, where one burns 15 Swiss francs for a series-shot of just one jump, and that only for the film, not even including development! Later he bought himself one of the first digital cameras, where you could have almost bought a little new car for the same price. As a photographer Mesum travelled to Korea, Japan, Canada, and more countries to shoot, for example, for Nitro Snowboards Westbeach Clothing, Deluxe Shoes, Burton etc. His shot of Snowboard legend Eero Ettala found its way even on the cover of renowned snowboard magazine MBM (Monster Backside Magazine).

It was during that time, about 2001, when he coincidentally met another stripe of outdoor athlete in the region: downhill mountain bikers – and here Mesum instantly caught fire for that unmotorized off-road two-wheel discipline. In 2008, he did a project for Red Bull and Scott Bikes with Rene Wildhaber in Japan and India, where they rode through the Zaskar Valley by bike and then Ladakh, the so-called Kings' Trek. In 2009 he did the „Red Bull“ Tour in India again, but as a MTB Guide. In 2011 with Hans Rey, Richie Schley and Joshua Forstreuther, for Adidas and GT Bicycles, he returned to the Indian Himalaya as photographer.



Prateek Singh riding in Sikkim, India
Photo: Shivam Roy

Now to the second person of the beginning: Vineet from India. It was him, who asked Mesum for support at organizing MTB events. And from here on in 2009 the two finally came up with the idea of a magazine: Freerider, as Mesum had named it. But Mesum left this project in 2011 due to differences with the other co-founder. He wanted to open up the magazine for all kinds of riders, which was also why he named the magazine in that way, in the sense of a 'free rider' and 'riding free' no matter what bike you have. And as

Mesum tells the end of that story: "So the magazine got stolen, so also the money we made it, as my Indian Partner had the bank account on his name in India, and also, he was dealing with the Homepage and all Social Media, he simple changed the password, and I had no access to the magazine. Gone forever."

Then finally, the right two people came into contact. Mesum found about an eighteen-year-old Indian Mountain Bike rider, Prateek Singh, who was fascinated by Mesum's experience on the bike internationally and the ability to showcase to the masses what most don't see through his photography. He went on to refer to Mesum as his "mentor" as he wrote in one editorial.

Fascinated by the idea of sharing his thoughts on his passions with the masses and through curated content, inspiring a whole generation of cyclists, Prateek was ideating a magazine of his own and sought advice from Mesum learning that he recently parted ways with Freerider, and hoping to keep Mesum involved with the Indian Mountain Biking community.

Prateek added that mountain biking was a developing sport in the country at the time and losing someone who is so dedicated to the sport and with years of international experience as Mesum would be almost unfair.

Mesum recalls, "But, mtbmagasia was originally coming from Prateek, it was his idea. He asked me for help and guidance. I believe if he would have not asked, there would be no mtbmagasia today, as I was extremely displeased with what happened with Freerider Mountain Bike Magazine."



Mesum Verma & Guenole Dubost freeriding at Flaming Mountains, China
Photo: Alexander Gilli

Prateek's dream for the magazine can be felt if one re-reads the editorials of the first few issues.

“In a country like India, where mountains are worshipped as holy destinations, Mountain Biking should be more than just a sport, it should be a religion. (...) I will follow my dream of spreading biking in India with the help of Sir Mesum. I came up with this magazine to spread the word and impart awareness and knowledge to help new cyclists make well-informed decisions.”

For about two years Mesum was traveling and mountain biking on photography/recon assignments in Asia before he chose China as his “base camp.” As if the photography and different sports and languages weren't enough to prove his prowess in a multitude of fields, he began teaching German at the Goethe Institute. Mesum does admit that it was also the easiest way to obtain a visa at the time.

Mesum and Prateek worked on the magazine together until the summer of 2014. In 2015, mtbmagchina was born, and soon after, Prateek got taken over by the “dark side” (road cycling). He started “shaving his legs and donned lycra”. He also got himself a power meter and before we knew it, his mountain bike was gathering dust, as he self-sarcastically tells me.



Pangong Tso lake in India (at 4238m.a.s.l)
Photo: Mesum Verma

As Prateek opened up his mind to delve into different disciplines of cycling, he parted ways with mtbmagindia and Mesum realized he should encapsulate more of the South East Asian countries and rebrand the magazine, as MTBMAGASIA.

I had the opportunity to catch up with Prateek and get his thoughts on his time working with Mesum and the magazine. He says, “The magazine, from its inception until when I got excited by other disciplines of cycling, was a brilliant learning curve. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity and everything it taught me. It wasn’t easy to be preparing for the most important examinations for High School and be releasing an issue in the same week, but looking back, that gave me the work ethic that I have inculcated today. I would not have been doing what I do today if it was not for the lessons that the time with the magazine taught me. Also, being a road cyclist coming from mountain biking gives one a huge advantage in terms of bike handling capabilities.

I am nothing but grateful to have been a part of it and be in the brief tutelage of Mesum.”

Prateek now owns and runs ridebikes.cc, a bicycle shop/bike-fitting studio in Hanoi, Vietnam, catering to the needs of cyclists all over Vietnam. Road cycling in Hanoi’s vicinity is quite phenomenal from what he says. “There’s also some really nice mountain biking in North Vietnam, you guys should plan a visit”, he added. “If mtbmagasia would accept drop bar bikes, I’ll be happy to share some bits from my upcoming adventure in the Himalayas in the summer of 2024. Let’s just say I’ll be riding by a lake at 5,000m above sea level which is NOT in Ladakh.” Prateek also sent us these hashtags after our interview:

#keepingitreal
#dropbarsnotbombs
#ridebike



Mesum Verma rides in Mustang, Nepal (in the back Dhaulagiri 8167 m.a.s.l)
Photo: Suwas Maharjan

The overall purpose of the magazine for Mesum always was to show MTB in Asia to the world, and back at that time, foremost to prove that there IS mountain biking in Asia: “I wanted to show that there are riders in Asia and that there is something going on, and not only in one country, but all the Asian countries!” He always had a serious and professional attitude to his mag. He didn’t want to just treat it as a kind of side-project, but rather he managed it in a professional way similar to other big MTB mags - with high-quality photos, up to date layout, interesting stories and insights, sponsors in the background and punctual, regular publishing - but also distinct in its unique stories, people, riders and places covered by the articles.

In contrast to the professional approach and the high quality of the mag, the magazine itself stayed a bit small in accordance with the still smaller MTB scenes, in comparison to the much bigger and diverse landscape of MTB in Europe/US/Japan, where magazines have more fertile soil to grow on. You can take for example China, which is the size of all European countries together, but still has just one cycling magazine. Showing content not only about MTB but also road biking! A genuine mountain bike magazine had existed a while ago in China, but then stopped.



Ding Zai Gang & He Jun Yuan riding at the Brave Peak Bike Park near Hangzhou, China
Photo: Mesum Verma

Nevertheless, Mesum says that showcasing biking in Asian countries can enhance the MTB culture there. Also the mag constitutes a kind of counter to most of the other European MTB mags, where there is definitely stronger focus on bike parks, trail parks or/and genuine MTB trails. The articles in mtbmagasia, by contrast, show different kinds of MTB destinations, more characterized by Freeriding, and what MTB also can be - or perhaps even should be - in its original sense.

Mesum not only did the magazine to enhance biking in Asian countries, he traveled all over the countries to meet riders and ride with them; he took western riders to Asia, guided them and showed them the beauty of riding MTB in, for example, the Himalayas. Where he lived in China, in Nanjing, he took up a shovel and helped the locals build a trail around Purple Mountain, organized Downhill races there, and helped initiate and organize Downhill races in other parts of China. Here not to forget the “Ride Your Bike Festival” in 2020 and 2021 in the Dirtpark Ningbo, where Mesum helped me organizing and supported me in many ways, indirectly by sharing useful experiences, and directly by traveling all the 500 kilometers from Nanjing to help ready the spot for the event.

Mesum motivated many local Asian mountain bike riders to take pen, paper and the camera in hand, and write their own story about their local riding and experiences. With the magazine Mesum gave those Asian riders a platform where they could share their passion with readers all over Asia and the rest of the world, and by doing so enhance the awareness of a genuine Asian MTB culture, a community and culture that most western riders and bike companies are probably not very aware of. One of the authors and photographers, Matt MacDonald, shared his story with Mesum and the magazine and even deeper personal insights in his article in this issue – I highly recommend reading it!



Mick Hannah & Jacob Dickson enjoying Chinese food in Zhongshan, China
Photo: Mesum Verma

In our talk, Mesum and I dove a bit deeper into the topic of the status of mountain biking in Asia. First, Mesum sees the strong ambitions of some western bike and bikepark companies a bit sceptically: “What do they really do for the improvement of MTB there? Does it enhance the culture of riding if you copy a high-end pumptrack with extra-orbital entrance fees to a country where average riders would need to spend between 10 to 20% of their monthly salary to ride there every weekend?” The most urgent problem still is that most people still cannot afford a suitable bike, not to mention the necessary protection gear yet.

The way to a published article is a long one: it first needs a story, someone who is experiencing riding MTB (or doing something in relation to MTB) in Asia. Then it needs someone who describes it and writes it down; then it needs high-quality photos. Mesum could always do all of this, and he had and still has different authors, photographers and proofreaders in the team. But in the end it was and is always him who is doing the design and layout, photo editing, the final text editing, the cover, about, the technical side of uploading for publication, and not to forget keeping the contact with sponsors. And after or beside the published issue, Mesum is busy every day promoting on social media and other places.



Maximilian Jakubowski racing in Guide, China
Photo: Mesum Verma

Mesum remembers very well all the adventures he has experienced with good friends. One is the road-trip with his French friend Gueno, where they put their bikes on motorbikes and travelled through the Indian Himalayas seeking suitable places for Freeride adventures. They finally found this awesome place that you can see here in the photo. Can you spot Mesum in this photo? Mesum also remembers well the trip they both did in Sichuan: “It was also epic! We rented a car and drove over 2000km from Chengdu to Daocheng and back to Chengdu (Sichuan) and found some nice trials. All Freeride again!”

Another real Freeride adventure that Mesum loves to recall was when he went to Huoyanshan in Xinjiang, China. To foreigners the place is known as “Flaming Mountains,” and it was the area in which Darren Berrecloth filmed one of his “Where the trail ends” episodes. Although Mesum and his friends came by that place, they decided not to ride the same as Berrecloth, but rather to find their own new line. And it was just after Mesum found and went down a line there that the local riders also started to ride this line.

An Asian Freeride adventure that I experienced myself was back in August 2019, in the Qinghai province of China. It was shortly after I had moved to China from Germany, and had just started writing for the mag. Mesum helped me to get a special personal invitation to the “International Downhill Race” near the small town of GuiDe. When I arrived there I couldn’t help but feel as if I would be riding in the Red Bull Rampage area in Utah, USA. After we had participated and rode the official track of the race, a small group of 5, Mesum, Sulayman (a local rider from Xinjiang), two German friends and I, searched for a nameless mountain nearby. We pushed our bikes up for more than an hour, and enjoyed the stunning open landscape from the ridge on the top before we powdered down the super steep slope on the backside of that mountain, totally flashed by adrenaline. I never will forget that awesome experience.



Aurelius Satlow riding at the “Ride Your Bike Festival” at his own hand-build Dirt Park in Ningbo, China
Photo: Mesum Verma



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