



DTH/Julie Stovall

Heather Weideman rides her mountain bike to class from her apartment on Airport Road

Students conquer all terrains with the help of mountain bikes

By LEIGH PRESSLEY
Staff Writer

As many UNC students trudge through snow and slip over ice, some rely on their mountain bikes to get them where they need to go.

As the newest rage in bicycles, mountain bikes resemble conventional 10-speed bicycles but allow the rider to travel over a variety of challenging surfaces.

Chuck Briggs, a technician at Performance Bicycle Shop of Carrboro, said much of the mountain bike's allure is its adaptability.

"You can ride it to work or to school," Briggs said. "On the weekends you can go off-road riding where road bikes are inaccessible."

Mountain bikes originated in the hilly country along the West Coast, and their popularity has spread across the nation to the steep roads and trails around Chapel Hill.

Dave Witten, owner of Chapel Hill Cycle Shop, said the mountain bikes were custom-made for people who saw the need for "a good, rugged bike for commuting."

A smaller frame, wider tires and generally 18 gears, combined with stronger construction, make the mountain bike a better all-terrain bike than the traditional 10-speed.

The frame is angled so that the rider can ride sitting upright instead of leaning over in a sometimes uncomfortable position.

Tucker Stevens, a junior history major from Allentown, Pa., said he thought mountain bikes were much more comfortable to ride than regular road bikes.

"You have more ease and more balance with these bikes," Stevens said. "You have a low center of gravity when you lean over on a 10-speed."

Billy Thomas, a senior economics major from Charlotte, has had his mountain bike for almost four years.

"They're a lot easier to ride because the tires are bigger and they have hand brakes instead of pedal brakes," Thomas said.

The wheels of mountain bikes are generally 26 inches high, while regular road bikes sit 27 inches from the ground. Heavily treaded tires that

are 2.5 times wider than road bikes were designed to withstand the shock of rough surfaces.

John Jester, a sophomore English major from Greensboro, said he liked to challenge the rugged construction of his mountain bike.

"You can go around curves and across rough trails without popping the tires," he said. "We even go down the stairs."

Briggs said that the bike's durability made the mountain bike suitable for treks up steep hills and across rough terrains.

Most mountain bikes cost anywhere from \$300 to \$500.

Briggs said maintenance, including oiling and cleaning the bike, is relatively easy.

Spielberg's newest film offers empty entertainment

It should be stated from the outset that Steven Spielberg's latest film, "Empire of the Sun," is enjoyable. This does not, however, make it particularly good.

The film is based on J.G. Ballard's much-acclaimed autobiographical novel, but it contains little of the book's grit or bleak nature, which has never been Spielberg's forte. What is Spielberg's forte is the telling of a good story — something that is noticeably absent here.

The outbreak of World War II in Shanghai is the film's initial concern, in particular the out-stayed welcome of the city's British contingent of which the film's star is a part. Jamie Graham (Christian Bale) is the airplane-loving, precocious young son of a wealthy British family. He has never lived in Britain (not that one would tell from his accent) and has had a very protected childhood. It isn't until the Japanese launch a full-scale invasion that the Brits realize their time is up. Spielberg makes much of this realization and highlights the vast differences between the British country-club lifestyle and the real Shanghai that is about to be devastated.

Obviously the British have to leave, and in the chaos, Jamie gets separated from his parents and is left behind. Spielberg thrives on this and creates an atmosphere in which the audience expects a Young Boy's Adventure Tale to unfold — but, apart from a few pointless chases, it never does. Jamie eventually winds up at an internment camp where he becomes the savior of many who can no longer fend for themselves. He makes sure people get their rations, helps out in the hospital and exchanges scarce goods (such as cigarettes and shoes) for those daring enough to take the chance.

The camp is filled with characters, few of whom amount to anything. This is partly due to the fact that Jamie is on screen 95 percent of the time. Playwright Tom Stoppard is credited with the screenplay, in which people appear and disappear ineffectually. Their significance, one supposes, is the way in which they are able or unable to shape Jamie's life, and to emphasize the contrast between the ways adults and young, carefree boys respond to the threat of the Japanese.

Miranda Richardson plays the unreadable expressions on faces and flowery music. The direction of the film is often confusing and jumpy. Spielberg creates a sense of community life at the camp but does not give any insight into the horrors of such a place or the terror experienced when the attacking Americans actually strike. The real problem, though, is that little really seems to happen, and when it does, Spielberg leaves us in no doubt that something is happening. There is a sense of over-direction that rarely leaves the screen.

Richard Smith
Cinema

John Malkovich is the splendid Basie, an American sailor who always gets on the right side of the law so that he can take advantage of it, and he's the person who has the most influence on the boy. Jamie hero-worships him, and they develop a relationship akin to Fagin and the Artful Dodger; Jamie serves him largely by pilfering, though comes close to endangering his own life on occasion. Even so, the relationship is not strong enough for the audience to share in Jamie's grief when Basie lets him down.

The difficulty here is that these characters clearly do affect the boy, but the extent to which he's affected is mostly left to the interpretation of

unreadable expressions on faces and flowery music.

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Jamie's fascination with airplanes builds to an obsession of absurdly religious proportions at times, a feeling aided considerably by the music. The score is (of course) written and conducted by John Williams, and despite moments in which one fully expects angels to descend from heaven, it is rather fine and includes some beautiful themes, especially the opening hymn, "Suo Gan."

But when the war is winding down and the camp is all but destroyed, Spielberg really goes astray and the film stumbles to an not-unexpected but overdone conclusion.

Despite all the problems, "Empire of the Sun" is still enjoyable. Photography by Allen Daviau ("E.T.") ensures that the film is visually impressive, but much of the movie's appeal lies in the young English star-in-the-making, Christian Bale. He is directed superlatively, and that he more than carries off such a demanding role is very much to his, and Spielberg's, credit.

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