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78-Year-Old Man Pedals For Change

Bicyclist fights for rights of two-wheelers

[Chip Johnson](#)

Bikes on BART. Bike shuttles across the Bay Bridge. The first bicycle routes in Oakland.

You can thank Alex Zuckermann -- if you can catch him.

On Saturday, the 78-year-old Zuckermann's latest project will hit the road: A 30-mile bike race marking the Oakland Museum of California's 30th anniversary.

For more than 25 years, Zuckermann has been an indefatigable advocate for the rights of bicycle riders. He's still active in the movement and still riding.

He still chews up about 120 miles of roadway each week and puts almost as many miles on his bike (6,000) as in his car (8,000) every year.

And at a time when militant bicycle politics have spawned Critical Mass demonstrations and cyclists defiant about their rights to ride on bridges, Zuckermann has remained the movement's courteous, logical tactician of change.

"There are a bunch of different worlds and hemispheres in the movement, and you need handshakers and door bangers when you're trying to make social gains," said Jason Meggs, a co-founder of Bike the Bridge, a group fighting for access to ride across the Bay, Richmond and San Mateo bridges.

"Alex is a handshaker, and I'm a door banger," he said.

Indeed, Meggs has ridden across the Bay Bridge five times, but made it without incident only once. He was ticketed once and arrested three other times.

Tuesday, September 21, 1999

San Francisco Chronicle

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Chip Johnson
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Zuckermann will cry foul when he discovers wrongdoing or log-headed public bike policies, but it's his charming demeanor and logic that have helped him persuade reluctant Bay Area transportation officials.

“Alex has always had a quiet, reasonable strength in his presentations,” said Mike Healy, a BART spokesman who's known Zuckermann for many years.

“His strength was in the logic of his arguments and his persistence,” he added.

Despite the different approaches between Zuckermann and those who've come after him, no one in or out of the cycling community can match his record of effectiveness, his tenacity or his longevity.

Zuckermann was one of the founders of the East Bay Bridge Coalition, an association of 3,000 local bike riders. And since he began advocating for bicyclists in 1972, he has amassed an impressive list of accomplishments.

It was Zuckermann who persuaded BART officials to allow bikes on the new rail system when it opened in 1974.

It was Zuckermann who persuaded Caltrans officials to offer a bicycle shuttle van during peak BART hours when bikes weren't allowed on the cars.

And it was Zuckermann, in his role as an Oakland city planner, who drew the first bicycle lanes onto a city planning map.

He even started a program in the mid-1970s that made bicycles available to Oakland city officials who had meetings within a couple of miles of their offices.

“He is a founding father of the East Bay bicycle movement,” said Robert Rayburn, current chairman of the East Bay Bike Coalition.

Rayburn credits Zuckermann with helping bring him into the bike advocacy program.

“I was working on a dissertation at UC Berkeley and at Alex's urging I donated time helping getting a (bike) map completed,” he said.

“If everyone could contribute one-tenth as much,” Rayburn said. “He's a model of

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community service."

Zuckermann could also easily become a poster boy fill-in for Nike's Just Do It campaign.

In July, the senior cyclist completed two of the five climbs that make up the Markleeville Death Ride, a torturous 129-mile ride that includes 16,000 feet of vertical climbing over five steep Sierra passes.

Zuckermann rode 55 miles over two of the five - - Monitor and Ebbetts passes -- which represented a total of 6,800 feet of vertical climb, something that only accomplished cyclists can handle.

``There were a few men there over 60; I may have been the oldest rider, I don't know," he said.

His son, Ron, 37, says it's attitude and not physical prowess that has kept his father going, and going and going.

``He's amazing. He can still outride me and it's just not physical shape, it's attitude and having a mental focus," he said.

``He's able to really focus, he's very determined and he has such a strong will."

``They say I'm like the energizer bunny," the elder Zuckermann said recently, repeating what others have said about him.

These days, Zuckerman heads the Regional Bicycle Advisory Committee, an organization that represents bicyclists across the nine-county region, and he's looking forward to the opening of the proposed eastern span of the Bay Bridge, which is supposed to include bike lanes.

``It should be done in 2004 or 2005 and I hope to lead the way," Zuckermann said.

OAKLAND BICYCLE RACES

Two bicycle races will commemorate the Oakland Museum's 30th anniversary on Saturday. Both races will be on a 1.1-mile loop around the museum, located at 10th and Oak streets. The first race starts at 8:30 a.m. One of the races is 30 miles and the other is a 40-

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Chip Johnson's column appears in The Chronicle on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. He can be



reached at (510) 433-5984, by e-mail at johnsonch@sfgate.com, or by writing The Chronicle at 483 Ninth St., Suite 100, Oakland, CA 94607.

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