



## Need for the Bike

*Paul Fournel, Allan Stoekl (Introduction)*

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A book like no other, Paul Fournel's *Need for the Bike* conducts readers into a very personal world of communication and connection whose center is the bicycle, and where all people and things pass by way of the bike. In compact and suggestive prose, Fournel conveys the experience of cycling—from the initial charm of early outings to the dramas of the devoted cyclist. An extended meditation on cycling as a practice of life, the book recalls a country doctor who will not anesthetize the young Fournel after he impales himself on a downtube shifter, speculates about the difference between animals that would like to ride bikes (dogs, for instance) and those that would prefer to watch (cows, marmots), and reflects on the fundamental absurdity of turning over the pedals mile after excruciating mile. At the same time, Fournel captures the sound, smell, feel, and language of the reality and history of cycling, in the mountains, in the city, escaping the city, in groups, alone, suffering, exhausted, exhilarated. In his attention to the pleasures of cycling, to the specific "grain" of different cycling experiences, and to the inscription of these experiences in the body's cycling memory, Fournel portrays cycling as a descriptive universe, colorful, lyrical, inclusive, exclusive, complete.

## Need for the Bike Details

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## From Reader Review Need for the Bike for online ebook

### Abby says

What a fantastic little book! For cyclists, reading this book is the next best thing to being on a bicycle. Fournel captures the joys, frustrations, and pure exhilaration of bicycling in the charming droll way that only a Frenchman can. For example: "Every cyclist, even a beginner, knows that at any moment in his life he could have a rendezvous with a door. . . As an urban cyclist, I have a complete collection." What a funny and poetic way to write about getting doored (which is not at all a poetic experience, as those who have experienced it firsthand know)! And this: "The difference between bike and flight is that the bike is possible, and flight isn't, yet."

Overlook all the insider references to former French Tour de France champs and gear ratios, and I think anyone who's ever ridden a bicycle will find something to enjoy in this book -- something familiar and true about the essence of cycling that transcends your level of commitment to the sport. Each chapter is a few pages long, so this book is perfect bathroom reading material -- which is where I first found it, at a friend's house. I'm so glad I did, and I hope you check it out too.

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### Andrew Hecht says

I really love this little gem of a book by Paul Fournel. It's full of poetic insights into cycling that only someone who gets on the bike and fights gravity, the elements and everything can appreciate.

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### Ryan says

The first of two cycling "classics" that I've read in the last week, the other being "The Rider". It's interesting that both this book and "The Rider" were written from a first person perspective by devoted amateurs that have fascinating back stories. In the case of Fournel, he is better known as a member of the French cultural elite - a writer, a poet, publisher, scholar. Wrote his dissertation on Raymond Queneau and went on to join Oulipo.

The book has the velocity and smooth lines of the machine. Anyone who has ridden much knows that thoughts come as riddles, parables, definitive but fleeting insights. A logic of simple gearing and ratios rather than elaborate introspection or dialectic. Fournel captures those fleeting, somewhat ineffable moments of elation that are part of the bicycles phenomenology.

Of climbs in general and Ventoux in particular: "It's the greatest revelation of your-self. It simply feeds back your fatigue and fear. It has a total knowledge of the shape you're in, your capacity for cycling happiness, and for happiness in general. It's yourself you're climbing. If you don't want to know, stay at the bottom."

Of suffering: "Everyone can remember the leaden days when, suddenly, for no reason, the bike freezes, blocked on the asphalt. Those days of cold sweat, days when the fruit rots in your pockets and when, very quickly, a dull anguish seizes your heart."

On the class of certain riders: "they're so beautiful that they're a kind of living lie" or "you have to impress your adversary with your elegance. to look good is already to go fast."

On the point of cycling: "climbing to descend, going in circles, behind this mountain there's another, why hurry? ... Riding is absurd, like peeling vegetables, skiing, thinking deeply, or living."

And, finally, poignantly, on need and desire: "To create a desire for something one needs is to engage in a labor of human happiness. Need is a demanding and obscure thing that defines the dependence of one person on another. To identify it and want it is to define oneself as a person. That's the secret of culture, the secret of cuisine, the secret of kindness. It's also the secret of tiny Fournel on his bike in the vast countryside, miraculously in equilibrium on his two wheels, trying to catch his own shadow."

And that's it, finally - this is a book about a cipher ... it could as easily be the need for a pastry, the hundredth "final" cigarette, an orgasm, as for the bike. But few other needs have the same pure, nostalgic majesty or connect to the first realization of the limits and possibilities of inchoate freedom.

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### **Ross says**

This was a short book written by a somewhat older cyclist. It is a series of short essays. I loved the book because the author gives voice to many of my feelings about cycling. I felt like some of the essays expressed the precise reasons I am a cyclist but that I have never been able to articulate.

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### **Seward Park Branch Library, NYPL says**

Is this the most beautiful meditation on cycling ever written? An unanswerable question, but let it hang there like a irresistible challenge.

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### **Rob says**

"I'm sure I need the bike more than I need victories. I'd like to grow old as a cyclist. In ten, twenty years I'd like to go out for a spin with Jean-Noel, with Remy, with Sebastien.

Already I don't go as fast as before, but since I threw my speed to the four winds and never transformed it into bouquets or cheques, it still lurks in the air of the mountains, and I breath it in like an old perfume."

This book is a beautiful ode to that most sincere of loves: the bike. If you're a cyclist this book will produce knowing chuckles, paroxysms of pain from old injuries long- healed and, maybe, just maybe, a little stirring in your soul.

For anyone else, no one writes about cycling quite like Fournel.

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## **Carl Gladish says**

Sports books (and travel books too for similar reasons) are best when the author is a professional writer as well as an athlete. Athletes who happen to write books (or make films, or take pictures) of what amounts to tall-tales do not interest me. Only writers can communicate in an interesting way, and when they have something as their topic which is both multi-dimensional and non-subjective, as sports are, they can get at the thing which is most interesting of all: how the subjective self confronts something beyond the self.

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## **Alex says**

A must read for anyone who loves literature and cycling. I see myself re-reading this at the beginning of every season.

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## **Evan says**

A beautiful collection of vignettes, never more than three pages long, about life as seen from atop a bicycle. A true homage to passion, this book is a pleasant and extremely well-written read for anyone, cyclist or not. But for those who travel over two wheels, this book is a delightful reflection on a beautiful machine.

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## **Ryan Lincoln says**

This book beautifully captures the love of all things cycling. It's a series of essays that give a passionate voice to what the author loves about bicycles and bicycling. If you are bike-obsessed you will love it. If not, you'll probably think the author is crazy.

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## **Marty Nicholas says**

I've read Fournel's book three times. If you're a cyclist, READ THIS BOOK!. It's a great book that truly conveys the joy of cycling. My only regret is the author doesn't live nearby. I'd love to ride with Paul.

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## **Stephen Kirbach says**

This book serves the dual purpose of appealing to both writers and cyclists. As a member of Oulipo, Fournel philosophizes in tidy and reflective vignettes about the aesthetic intimacies of cycling and the random incidents associated with traveling across earth's human infested roadways, through an atmospheric mélange alone and with others while including, of course, the sporadic collision. To indulge in some hyperbole, this book approaches perfection.

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## **Mark Hiser says**

This short book is unlike any others I have read about bicycling. It is not about gears and brakes and frame. It is not about races won, or techniques for biking. Well, it is about these things but at a different level. The book is really a reflection, or meditation, on the need for the bike and on the beauty of language

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## **Christopher says**

Like the best of rides. Slim, regenerative prose. Fournel is rider, writer, and neither. The book manifests a sweet kernel of wisdom - that artwork is a tangent - a product of other aesthetic acts. Moments of lossness. Self-erasures. Vanishings. Also, it's funny like the writings of old French dudes tend to be.

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## **Thomas Fackler says**

The best part of this book is Paul Fournel's style. He puts the reader beside him, talking to him in all of his stories. Each vignette is no more than 4 pages long and crystallizes a piece of bicycling culture for the reader to savour. My only criticism of Fournel's work is that he focuses on recreational cycling to the detriment of the non-recreational variety. Regardless, if you're a commuter or a tourer you'll see your own cycling experiences in these pages.

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