

Bike repairman shuns ties to autos

Bike world offers refuge

By LORRAINE NELSON
Of the Emerald



Photo by Bob Baker
Bike repairman Larry Cotton operates a tune-up stand along the bike path near the University footbridge. Cotton enjoys the location because the spot is comfortable and he'd rather associate with bikers than put up with driver's ego.

He lives in a world carefully chosen to suit his own ideology.

Never too interested in driving, he's shunned all ties to the automobile.

He holds steadfastly to the belief that bikes will replace cars in the "next chapter" of life.

From his bicycle tune-up stand at the north edge of the University footbridge, Larry Cotton, Eugene's bikeman, has something many others don't.

"Here I don't have to deal with anyone in a car. The types of consciousness that come in here are more aware of the human shell. I don't have to deal with the driver's ego.

"It's harder to feel good in a shop... If there are any complaints, the customer saw what was done... Generally people don't complain."

Cotton's life and dreams while growing up in New Paltz, N.Y. centered on "all kinds of pedal things" and "manpowered machines."

Business at his bicycle shop back East was good, but it was discouraging to sell bikes and know they were being ridden on dangerous roads, Cotton remembers.

"I just couldn't believe all these trails," he recalls of his first trip to Eugene.

California also has trails, but they are trails without people or the people on them are always kids, he says.

"Even in the summer when college is out, there's lots of people on the paths here. There's less paranoia... less fear of parks.

"Fear would stop it (use of paths) in other cities... fear of being with other people. Out here, everyone is a lot friendlier. People are willing to get along with other people and they don't need a metal shield or a glass shield between them," he says.

"Even with the rapes on the paths, women are still out here. They aren't going to give up their freedom to these fools. In New York, they would. This (not giving up) will help stop the rapes eventually."

When Cotton moved to Eugene in 1976 he intended to become "Oregonized" and take the spirit back to New York. New York City defaulted about that time and all state funds for bike projects were cut off, Cotton says.

"I'm not in a rush to go back anymore."

Business was slow at the beginning of the summer but has gradually picked up. Cotton claims he can now pay his overhead — \$60 a month (insurance required by the county).

On his best day, he made \$50 in 6 hours. On his worst, he made only \$4 or \$5.

When the rainy season starts again, Cotton hopes to operate a bike rental, make "house calls" to repair flats and possibly move his business to 13th Avenue and Alder Street.

Bike traffic at Cotton's present location has been documented at 1,000 bikes a day, second only to 13th Avenue and Alder Street's 1,500 bikes a day.

It's also "one of the most comfortable spots I stood when I came to Eugene," Cotton says.

"There ought to be a bench here."

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