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Denver's Mile-High Magazine June/July 2005

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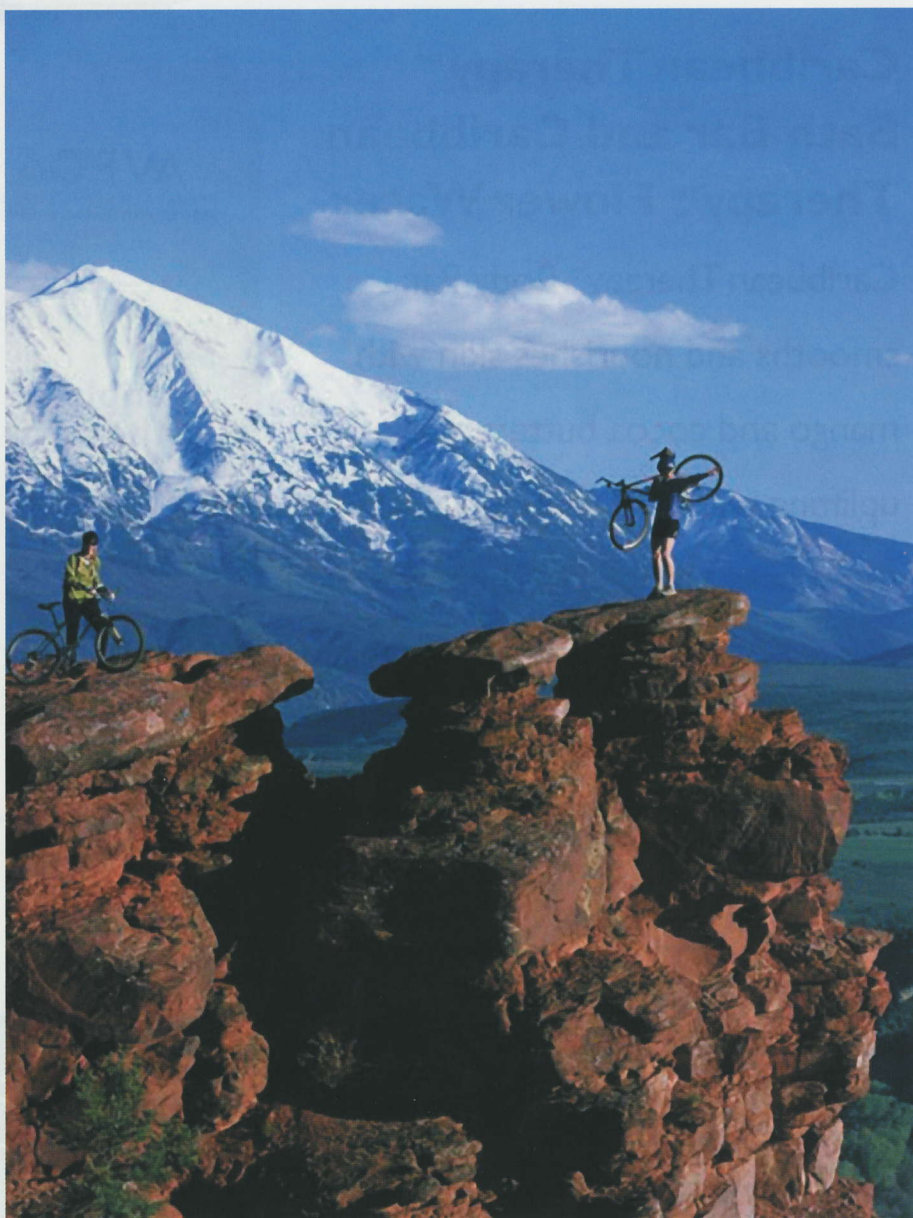
Three-foot drops and giant rocks are child's play once you've spent a weekend with mountain bike champion Alison Dunlap. **By Kelly Bastone**

Pro-ficient

YOU LIVE IN COLORADO, WHERE YOU'RE almost obligated to own a mountain bike. Yours is stashed in the recesses of your garage somewhere. And, let's be completely honest, you don't have it there for safe-keeping. Your dirty Colorado secret is that you ride precious little singletrack. It's not that you're completely inept at the sport, but you're definitely either walking those tough sections or wearing a little less skin than when you started. If you could just make that crossover to the next level—that place where giant roots and rocks don't catapult you into the bushes—you'd probably hop on those fat tires much more often. Mountain biking is supposed to be fun, right?

If you're Alison Dunlap, you have more fun than anyone else out there. After 17 years of winning national and world championships and competing in two Olympics, this Denver native and Colorado Springs resident has established herself as mountain biking's leading lady. And she's still the one to beat: As reigning national champion in both cross-country and short track, she'll be wearing the winner's jersey as she defends her titles this fall. But between races, the cycling superstar builds in time to impart her legendary skills to average Joes and Janes who want to glean a little magic from the master herself.

Each summer Dunlap offers adventure camps that allow up to 15 recreational riders the chance to explore spectacular singletrack in biking meccas such as Moab and Sun Valley, guided by a pro who can help rocket their biking skills to the next level. It's a proud moment when a rider learns how to bike up a two-foot ledge, and that's the reason Dunlap loves offering the camps. "Mountain biking is so much fun when you have the confidence and skills to really do it," she explains, "but you're not going to be



TAKE OFF THE TRAINING WHEELS The road to becoming a technical rider runs through an Alison Dunlap camp. Whether you try a five-day excursion or a two-day clinic, you'll come home ready for tough singletrack.

inclined to try things if the consequences are painful." That's why she structures the camps so riders can test their limits in situations designed for practice, not punishment. She's assisted by her husband (and semipro rider) Greg Frozley as well as a couple of guides from Western Spirit Cycling, the company that coordinates the camps. "We want to pass on the knowledge we've acquired over many years of racing," Dunlap says.

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CLOSER TO HOME

The Short Track

Maybe you want Dunlap's coaching, but you're short on time? Keep an eye out for her two-day skills clinics, offered four or five weekends a year in Colorado Springs and Denver. Dunlap hopes to expand the clinics in 2006. For more information on the short courses (\$300), call 719-439-9136.

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Marge Milne of Colorado Springs attended her first adventure camp back in 2003 as a way to celebrate her 60th birthday. She fell a lot (in fact, "to Marge" soon became camp slang for "to fall"), but she stuck with it long enough to prove that a 60-year-old could become a strong technical rider. "Alison gives personal instruction; she doesn't just put her name up on the marquee," Milne explains, noting that Dunlap's ability to customize the experience to fit her individual needs was a big plus. On steep, scary climbs, spotters assisted Milne through the hardest parts and boosted her confidence to go it alone. It also helped that she was never rushed through any challenge. "People like me who struggled to make it over a root weren't pressured by the extremists," she says. Milne had such a great time, she returned for another round in 2004. "I loved the people, and I developed courage, a better sense of what I can do."

Elizabeth and Stuart Kirk, who are from Chicago, attended a camp together, "but it was pretty much all Elizabeth's idea," Stuart says, admitting that, unlike his high-powered sweetheart, he wasn't much of a mountain biker. But the camp's challenges—and learning how to overcome them—got him hooked. "We'd come to these sections that were so cliffy they'd be hard to hike up," Stuart recalls, "and then you'd learn how to do it on a bike. I'd get to the top, totally exhausted, and say, 'Let's do it again!'" Now he's as excited as Elizabeth about upcoming bike trips to Colorado and Utah.

The transformation takes place over five demanding days, and part of the fun is keeping fueled. You'll wake up at 7 a.m. to start grazing from a carbo-loaded breakfast buffet of blueberry pancakes, fresh fruit, bagels, yogurt, and cereal. Then it's off to the testing ground—which, on Day 1, is a very tame city park. Seems easy, but you'll appreciate the soft, green grass as you max out your balance and coordination while jumping curbs, riding a 4-inch-wide plank, and biking off a wall. Your stunts are captured on videotape so you can see where you need to improve, and then, basics mastered, you take to the trails, riding 15 to 20 miles each day with plenty of rest breaks and opportunities to give the gnarly parts another go.

Of course, this isn't biking lite, and Dunlap admits the camps are challenging, with Moab being especially tough. "Moab kind of comes

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Denver Fun **Getaways**

at you all day long," she says. "It's great if you're ready for it, but the terrain can be a little overwhelming if you're not." That's why Dunlap also offers camps in Sun Valley, Idaho, and Bryce Canyon, Utah. "It's still tough terrain, but a little more rolling, less extreme than Moab," she says. All three locations boast stunningly beautiful trails, but if you choose the Moab or Sun Valley camps the scenery isn't your only reward: Participants get a massage at the end of each strenuous day, followed by gourmet appetizers and dinner.

Evening programs focus on topics such as bike maintenance and repair, nutrition and fitness, and life as a pro cyclist. And in sharing her experiences, Dunlap doesn't hold back. "Alison's very transparent," says Milne. "You feel like you're getting the inside scoop." Often, by the end of the camp, participants see Dunlap more as a friend than a coach. Stuart Kirk was amazed when Dunlap invited him and Elizabeth to join her for lunch once she heard they'd be passing through Colorado Springs. "She's the female Lance Armstrong, but she's the nicest person, really approachable," Kirk says.

With so few pro riders offering camps such as these, Coloradans should take advantage of the expertise in their own backyard—the same backyard they'll be screaming down, jumping from, and generally conquering on two fat wheels. ▲

Kelly Bastone is a Steamboat Springs-based freelance writer who loves to travel. She frequently contributes to 5280.

IF YOU GO:

Off to Camp

The Moab and Sun Valley camps, which include luxury condominium accommodations, cost \$2,195; Bryce Canyon offers tent camping for \$1,495. Visit www.alisondunlap.com for more information, or call Western Spirit Cycling at 1-800-845-2453.

2005 Camp Schedule:

- Moab, Utah (intermediate/advanced)
May 24–28
- Bryce Canyon, Utah (intermediate)
June 28–July 2
- Sun Valley, Idaho (intermediate)
September 20–24
- Moab, Utah (intermediate/advanced)
October 11–15