



## Just the Facts

### The sad case of Gary Gearfreak

by Kingsley Flett

**M**Y NAME'S SLOANE, I'm a private eye. In my business, you learn to spot a meal ticket a mile off. I was pretty sure that lady luck had sent me a winner when this swanky dude in Santini knicks and Castelli road shirt walked through the door. He smelled of money, trouble too. But that's always been my bag. It didn't faze me.

He walked up to my desk and asked, "Mr. Sloane?"

"That's what it says on the door," I countered. His tanned, shaved legs sported shiny Maressi's and pale socks with the Castelli scorpion on both sides. A new pair of Oakley Razors dangled casually from the unzipped front of a Gore-Tex windbreaker. But what really caught

my eye was a gold pendant hanging around his neck. It was shaped like a dollar sign. I liked that, it gave me a warm feeling in my wallet.

"Taking a chance sporting that hardware in this neighborhood, mister," I said, not letting him get too comfortable.

"My name is Gary Gearfreak, I need help and I'm willing to pay," he started in. I didn't mind the last part.

"I've never dealt with a private detective before, but I don't want this to get to the police," he stammered, a note of panic in his voice. "You see," his eyes fell, "I'm being blackmailed."

I'd heard his story a thousand times before, and to tell it straight, it didn't break my heart. But I'm not too proud to say that times were tough. I could use the dough. I reached under my table and got my notebook and pen.

"Tell me everything," I said in my most understanding tone. "Well," he began. "I met my wife at the Carlsbad Masters swim sessions. It was love at first sight. We started training together every

weekend. She rode in a T-shirt and old tennis shoes, but I loved her anyway. We'd take long rides together in the hills, swim together in the mornings and run together as the sun set. It was beautiful."

"Just the facts," I cut in. I didn't want him to break down on me.

"The problems started when I bought my first Pinarello."

**I**t's really satisfying to be able to talk to a woman about biopace chainrings, index shifting and internally routed brake cables.

"The one you rode in?" I guessed.

"Oh no, that's my Thursday bike," he quickly answered. "Anyway, she just wasn't interested. It was a beautiful red one with Columbus SLX and Campy Super Record. You know, the signature model with the spiral re-enforcing ribs in the seat tube."

"She didn't like you spending the money," I put in.

"Oh no," he said, "Money has never been a problem with us." I liked to hear him say that.

"That was only the beginning," he continued. "Before long I had disc wheels, three training bikes, two racing bikes, \$120 Barramundi swim goggles and 12 color-coordinated running outfits. The more magazines I read, the more I realized I had to have the right equipment. I began spending all my time at the local bike shop discussing the aerodynamic properties of different types of handlebar tape, you know, critical things like that." His voice lowered. "She just never took an interest in the equipment. All she wanted to do was train."

"Why?" I asked.

"She kept mumbling things about enjoying the outdoors and challenging herself physically. But I didn't have time to go out and get my bike dirty when there were important things to learn—like which pedals gave the most cornering clearance or if I should use 28- or 32-spoke wheels. I wanted to be competitive—the stuff I was using could have been obsolete for all she knew. Anyway, I met this girl who worked in a bike shop; she understood me. At first we just talked about simple stuff, like the merits of clinchers versus tubulars." He paused, embarrassed.

"Go on," I urged.

Kingsley Flett is a triathlete and Mickey Spillane fan from South Perth, Western Australia.

"Well, before I knew it, we were into really heavy stuff, like the new tension construction that Campy uses for its fluid-dynamic disc wheel."

"That's heavy," I whistled.

"Oh no, it's really light," he shot back. "Anyway, before I knew it I was seeing this girl a lot... it's really satisfying to be able to talk to a woman about biopace chainrings, index shifting and internally routed brake cables."

"Sounds great," I commented. "What's the problem?"

"Money. Before long she was asking for money. By that stage I was in over my head. I couldn't control myself anymore, I had to see her. I couldn't go out for a training ride without knowing whether my linear response brakes would be more responsive, and by how much."

"So..." I said, trying to sound sympathetic.

"Then I started getting these letters," he answers. "It seems like somebody's got a photo of me and her, and if I don't send them 50 grand, they'll send them to my wife. I mean something like this would shatter her, especially this close to the Ironman."

I was intrigued. I had heard that the boys on vice were tracking down some big-time racket involving triathletes, but I also knew that they weren't getting anywhere with the case. Maybe this was a lead.

"Tell me what you know about the operation," I hunched over the pad.

"But will you help me, will you take the case?"

"Let's talk money," I hit him with.

"How much?" he asked.

"Seventy five clams a day, plus expenses and no promises."

He looked convinced. I had a client. I also had some good hunches I wanted to play.

"OK, let me get to work," I said. "Don't call me here, I'll call you. And nobody is to know I'm working for you."

As he rode away, I picked up my hat and slid out into the street.

The bad side of town that I call home was quiet. Aside from a couple of bums on the street, nobody was about. I walked up to the nearest phone booth, checked to see that nobody had been following me, then dialed my best stoolie.

"Hello," answered a scratchy voice, sounding like it wanted to be back where it was just before it answered the phone.

"I need some facts, Scott," I said. Scott Tinman was my inside man in the triathlon underworld. Except that helping me was something he did only under my special brand of persuasion.

"Why should I help you?" he shot back.

"Because if you don't, I whisper in a couple of ears about that bungee chord around deadly Dave's seat post in the Ironman, and that illegal shipment of fake DH bars in your garage."

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## PERSPECTIVE

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"You're a bastard, Sloane," he whimpered. "What do you want to know?"

Doing business with people like Tinman gave me a bad taste, but I found out what I needed. He told me of a rumor that had been circulating the transition areas—a bike shop on the east side of town was running a scam on gearheads. I had a lead.

I nosed my Cadillac through the rush hour traffic and wound up 20 minutes later outside a suspiciously large bike barn. The name should have given me a clue. The neon sign said "Bicycle Embezzler." I walked through the door and picked my jaw off the carpet about 10 seconds later. The place was full of luscious dames peddling the latest in high-tech bike gear to lots of serious cyclists who were hanging on every word they said. These dames really knew what they were talking about and how to squeeze into a pair of ST tights. But something was suspicious.

About this time, a beauty who looked as if she could start wars in third-world countries slinks up to me and asks, "Can I help you, sir?"

"Where can a man get some action around here?" I shot back.

"I don't know what you're talking

about," she said, sounding flustered.

"A hundred clams says you do."

She couldn't resist. "Perhaps you'd like to follow me sir," Her smile was about as wide as the Grand Canyon as she led me through a back door and down a series of dark alleyways. We stepped in through the side door of a large warehouse and into a dark but luxurious room. Shag pile carpet covered the floor, Nike posters tastefully decorated the walls. She led me to a large couch and told me to wait, then disappeared into another room.

Just as I was about to split, this other dame comes in wearing the slinkiest, most revealing tri-suit I'd ever seen. Definitely not Tour de France standard issue. Just as I was getting my eyeballs back in their sockets, she whispers softly, "That's not all." And she slowly peeled the cover off the box of a brand new 50th anniversary Campagnolo group. I'm a strong-willed man, but I nearly lost it right there. Before she could go any further, I grabbed her and covered her mouth so she couldn't scream.

"Who's the man behind this little scam, sweetheart?" I whispered fiercely. She fainted and went limp in my arms. I sometimes do that to dames.

Just as I was deciding what comes next, somebody with a .45 decides for me. I feel the cold barrel press into the back of my neck and a voice says, "The gig's up, Sloane." I was in deep porridge, I

knew it. I had to think fast.

"Turn around slowly," the voice says. I turned around slowly and came face to face with an old friend.

"Tinman! I thought a scum like you might be behind something like this."

He didn't like what he heard.

"Thanks for falling into my trap Sloane. You've worked on your last case."

His grip tightened on the .45. I thought fast and acted faster. A quick swing and the .45 was on the floor. Tinman was in the grip of my best half-Nelson. The fat lady, she was singin'. So was Tinman.

"I didn't mean to do it," he cried. "I really tried to go straight. Then I'd be out on a training ride with some tri-geek who would ask me if I used high-density rubber compound brake pads, or if I thought that Reynolds tubing provided more lateral rigidity in the bottom bracket than Columbus. I mean, who cares? These guys were driving me nuts. I had to make some money out of them. It was the only way I could keep my sanity."

"Tell it to the cops," I said.

The case was solved. I could pay the rent for another couple of months. Gary Gearfreak? Well, he can be found nowadays riding an old touring bike in the hills. Wearing old cutoff jeans and a T-shirt. Telling everybody he's getting back to the basics. Tinman? He's riding a windtrainer on a 20-year stretch in San Quentin. △

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