

BICYCLE
COLLISION
INVESTIGATION

Roman F. Beck

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	iii
Author Biography	iv
1. Introduction	1
2. Documentation	9
Scene Measurements	9
Station Line	11
Coordinate	12
Triangulation	14
Sideshot	16
Vehicle Measurements	19
Photography	20
3. Environmental Factors	27
Roadway Surfaces and Geometry	27
Weather, Lighting and Obstructions	38
Potential Roadway Hazards	41
Roadway Evidence	42
4. Vehicle Factors	49
The Bicycle	49
Bicycle Size	53
Bicycle Types	54
Frame Materials	68
Components	73
Handlebars and Stems	74
Forks	77

	Hubs	82
	Rims	84
	Tires	84
	Brakes	89
	Crank Arms	92
	Chainrings and Chains	92
	Saddles and Seat Posts	95
	Pedals	99
	Reflectors and Lights	99
	Physical Evidence	101
	The Other Party	103
5.	Human Factors	113
	Rider Size and Bicycle Fit	113
	Clothing	115
	Helmets	116
	Alcohol and Drugs	118
	Mental and Physical Deficiencies	120
	Perception-Response Time	121
	Visibility of bicyclists	123
	Injuries	125
6.	Rider Kinematics	133
	Velocity	133
	Acceleration	142
	Braking	143
	Lean Angle	145
	End-Over	147

7. Case Study	155
At-scene Investigation	155
Follow-up Investigation	165
Investigation Results	166
8. Conclusions	177
9. References	181
10. Index	185

1 – INTRODUCTION

With proper training and good technique, cycling is one of the safest modes of transportation and one of the most rewarding forms of exercise. When recklessness and inattentiveness occur, death and serious injury are common for cyclists. Between 700 and 800 cyclists are killed each year in traffic collisions throughout the United States. Although fatalities of pedestrians and motorists outnumber those of cyclists each year, they occur often enough to warrant greater attention. This text is the only book solely about bicycle collision investigation and is geared specifically to law enforcement officers, risk managers, attorneys, and collision reconstructionists.

If the investigator has the right tools, the process of investigation a bicycle collision can be simplified and the results can be more thorough. One of the most important analytical tools is an organized framework. Perhaps one of the best frameworks available is the nine-cell matrix (Figure 1). The nine-cell matrix is an analytical tool to help the investigator quickly classify a large amount of information. This book is organized with the nine-cell matrix in mind, with the next three chapters of the book organized by environmental, vehicle, and human factors. These factors comprise one axis of the nine-cell matrix. The other axis of this three-by-three table is the time component, which

Unlike with the station line and coordinate techniques, the investigator does not have to contend with making perpendicular measurements (Figure 4). As long as obtuse angles generally are avoided, the investigator can take accurate measurements with a steel tape. This technique is recommended for serious injury and fatal collisions.

Sideshot

This technique requires the use of sophisticated instruments such as a total station or a transit with a stadia rod or an electronic distance measuring device (EDM). By setting up the instrument and backsight in known locations, evidence points can be collected by taking sideshots (or foresight). The instrument determines the horizontal and vertical angles, and the rod-person provides the location for the instrument to measure the distance. Given these three sources of data (two angles and one distance), the instrument or data collector then can calculate the three-dimensional coordinates for the evidence points (Figure 5).

This equipment is fairly simple to use once the operator has had sufficient formal training and experience in set-up and operation techniques. With the notable exception of high-end robotic total stations, two people are usually necessary for operating the device. As long as the device remains level throughout the evidence collection process, and the rod-person keeps vertical control,

Evidence

Feet (Point)

A: 24.7 (15)

27.5 (16)

B: 20.3 (17)

32.8 (18)

C: 39.6 (19)

15.6 (20)

D: 38.3 (20)

27.9 (6)

E: 40.3 (22)

14.9 (23)

F: 17.4 (23)

11.2 (0)

G: 27.3 (23)

16.6 (0)

H: 16.9 (0)

13.7 (3)

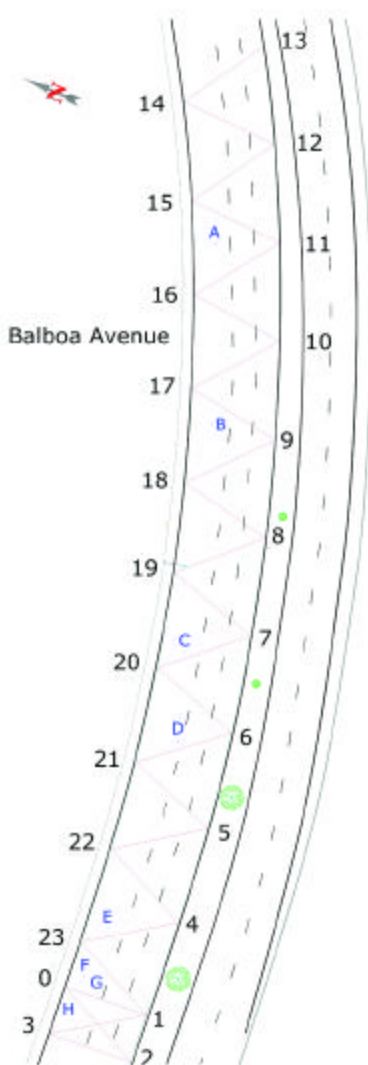


Figure 4. Documenting physical evidence with the triangulation technique and reference points (scale 1:1150).

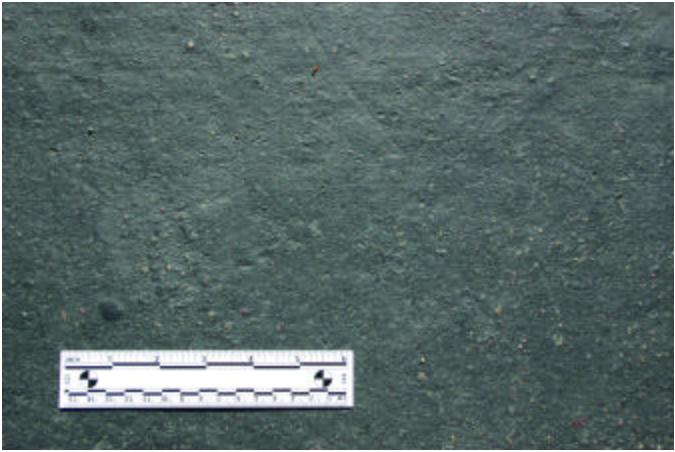


Figure 12. Slurry-seal asphaltic cement concrete.

“chip-seal”, which has a layer of asphaltic concrete underneath a rolled-in mixture of rock chips and a viscous asphaltic emulsion (Figure 13). Portland cement concrete roadways also vary in the size of the aggregate and the roughness of the finished surface (Figures 14 to 16). Until traffic removes them, the “fines” visible in Figure 15 may initially reduce the potential drag factor.

Although many bicycle collisions occur on Portland cement concrete sidewalks, the main type of roadway surface where bicycle-vehicle collisions occur is asphaltic cement concrete. Because roadway surfaces wear unevenly, the investigator should photograph the actual surface

<p>Pre-collision Environmental Factors: Dry sand-and-seal asphalt cement concrete roadway in good condition, cloudy visibility, possible view obstructions, dark-no street-lights, roadway striping</p>	<p>Collision Environmental Factors: No bicycle tire scrub marks, no motor vehicle skid marks, no bicycle rim and axle scrapes, no motor vehicle headlamp debris, but some cyclist's belongings</p>	<p>Post-collision Environmental Factors: No motor vehicle skid marks, cyclist's clothing and food debris, scrapes on bicycle from tumbling and sliding on roadway</p>
<p>Pre-collision Vehicle Factors</p>	<p>Collision Vehicle Factors</p>	<p>Post-collision Vehicle Factors</p>
<p>Pre-collision Human Factors</p>	<p>Collision Human Factors</p>	<p>Post-collision Human Factors</p>

Figure 25. A nine-cell matrix accounting for some of the environmental factors identified in a nighttime collision between a bicycle and a motor vehicle (see Chapter 7).



Figure 28. The *Cyclo-cross* usually is equipped with slightly-knobby and narrow 700mm wheels, multiple-speed gears, and drop handlebars. Cantilever brakes (lower right) are the most common, but some have disc brakes (lower left). Although similar in appearance to a *Road/Race* bicycle, the *Cyclo-cross* differs in that the fork is usually straight, rather than curved, and the frame is a size or two smaller to ease dismounting. The fork, brakes, and stays are usually designed for optimum mud clearance. The titanium model above was designed with 73-degree seat and head tubes, which are common angles for this bicycle type.



Figure 40. The fracture in this steel alloy tube is about 1/8" (3 mm) to the right of the weld, and is an acceptable fracture as a result of excessive force.

(see Figures 41 and 42). These weld and tube breaks can have catastrophic consequences to the rider, who is sometimes unaware of pre-existing stress fractures. If any type of weld or tube failure is suspected, the frame should be inspected by a reputable framebuilder.

Sometimes frame and component cracks are not immediately obvious, and are only discovered during regular maintenance or part replacement. Figure 43 depicts a crack in the chain stay of an aluminum road bicycle frame. Because high-end

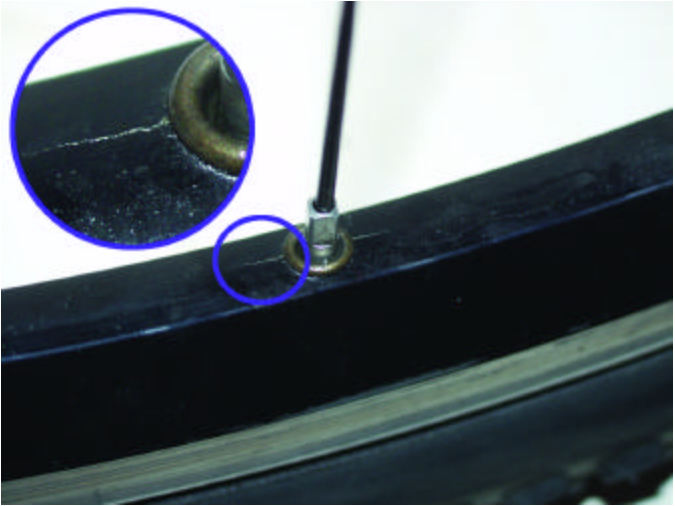


Figure 54. Cracked rim as a result of excessive spoke tension. Although not impossible to occur at the front wheel, this event is most common on the right (drive) side spokes of the rear wheel, because of the rear hub's rotational force transmitting from the spokes to the rim.



Figure 55. Blown out aluminum rim as a result of careless overinflation, and could have been catastrophic.



Figure 74. The upper image depicts a bicycle pedal imprint on the front bumper cover of a minivan involved in a right-angle collision, while the lower image depicts an head/shoulder imprint at the top of the windshield and leading edge of the roof. From the driver's view, the bicycle was traveling from left to right. The location of the damage in the lower image is further inboard from the driver's side than the location of the damage in the upper photo, indicating that the bicycle was moving at the time of impact.

especially to narrow ones. Because many collisions between cyclists and motorists occur at the right side of the vehicle, the right "A" pillar may obstruct the motorist's view of the cyclist. If the investigator suspects that such an obstruction, then he or she should position a camera at the motorist's eye height and take photographs of the "A" pillar from within the vehicle. Note the position of the driver's seat in the track. Also note any potential obstructions within the vehicle, such as a dirty windshield or fuzzy dice. This is also an appropriate time to inspect potential distractions as cell phones, food, maps or paperwork.

Injuries

Cyclist injury patterns are often similar to those of pedestrians. Because the cyclist has little or no crash protection from the bicycle, the type and severity of injuries is usually a function of momentum. This positive correlation simply suggests that the greater the momentum, the more severe the injury. Perhaps the most serious injuries to cyclists occur at the head, usually a result of direct contact with the windshield, hood, or roadway. A head and shoulder strike to the windshield of a motor vehicle traveling with a closing velocity in excess of 40 miles per hour (64 kilometers per hour) often results in fatal injury, even if the rider was wearing a helmet. However, even in low speed collisions a helmet-wearing cyclist can sustain fatal injury from ground contact.



Figure 82. Side mirror view of bicyclist. Distances from right mirror: 100 feet (30.5 meters), 75 feet (22.9 meters), 50 feet (15.2 meters), and 25 feet (7.6 meters). Images courtesy of Harris Visibility Studies.

When the lateral acceleration factor and path radius are known, the formula for determining velocity is:

$$V = \frac{15\sqrt{Ra}}{22} = \frac{15\sqrt{Rf_L 32.174}}{22}$$

(where "a" is acceleration in feet per second per second, "f_L" is lateral acceleration factor, "R" is radius of the path in feet, and "V" is velocity in miles per hour).

For example, a cyclist turns right at an intersection that has a raised Portland cement concrete sidewalk with a radius of 25 feet (7.6 meters). At this curve the minimum turning radius is about 27 feet (8.2 meters). Using the above equations, the bicycle's speed is 10.4 miles per hour (16.7 kilometers per hour) at a lean angle of 15 degrees. At a lean angle of 20 degrees, the speed is 12.1 miles per hour (19.5 miles per hour) (Figure 89).

End-Over

Because of the potential severity of the end-over or pitch-over collision, and because it can occur in both solo and motor vehicle collisions, further discussion is warranted. The end-over is usually the result of one of more of the following four reasons: (1) hard front braking, (2) a frontal impact with an object that is more rigid than the front wheel, (3) a fallen front wheel (often from not securing the

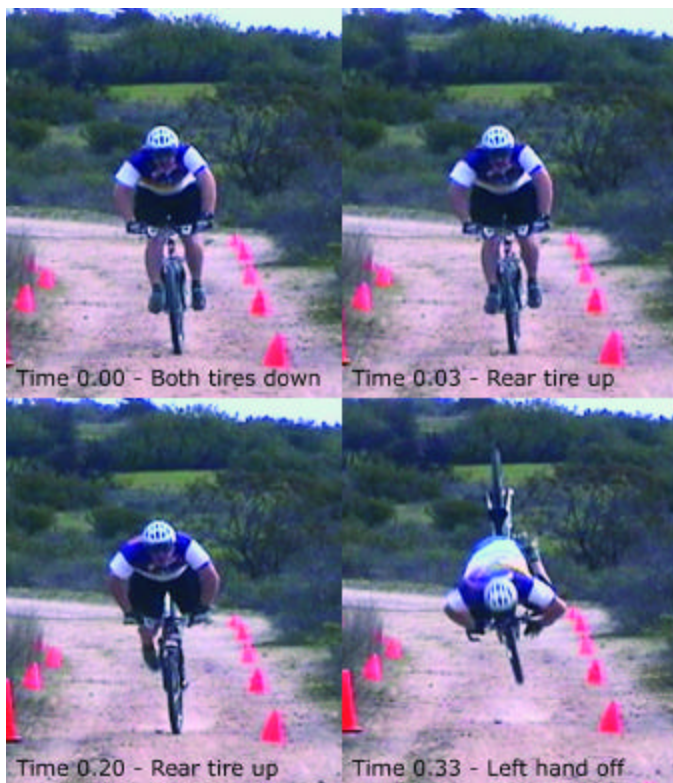


Figure 90. A mountain bicyclist traveling at about 22.5 miles per hour (36.2 kilometers per hour) applies only the front brake. Once the front wheel is nearly locked, the rear wheel starts to lift up. At about 0.20 seconds the rider really has no chance to recover. At about 0.33 seconds he releases the brake and prepares his right hand, and then his left hand for the landing. The cones are spaced in 25-foot (7.6-meter) intervals, the grade is about -2%, and the test surface is depicted in Figure 17 on page 32.

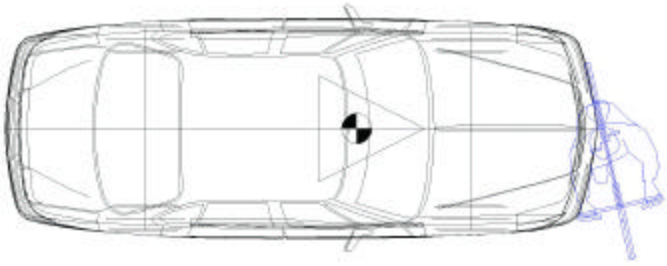


Figure 102. Impact alignment for the Brian Young collision.

the right of the license plate. This evidence gives the necessary information for alignment at maximum engagement. Initial contact may have occurred with the bicycle about one foot (30 cm) closer to the driver's side of the vehicle.

In reviewing the role of view obstructions, Brian Young should have been able to see oncoming headlights, even though his brother was on his right. Although the vehicle in lane number two may have been easier to see than the car in lane number one, both cyclists were probably aware of oncoming traffic. The "A" pillar obstruction for the driver is a less complicated matter. Given that the cyclists were stopped as the Pontiac approached, the motorist would have seen them through the windshield (not through the left door window) as the headlights illuminated the bicycles' reflectors. Oncoming headlights may have also backlit his view of the cyclists.

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A

- "A" pillar 125, 162, 177
- AASHTO 149
- abrasion 23, 89, 95, 101, 102, 106, 128, 155, 162, 167
- acceleration 56, 111, 120, 137, 146, 149, 151, 157, 176, 179
- Adobe Photoshop 24
- aerodynamic drag 39, 114, 137-139, 143, 176
- alcohol 113, 118-121, 131, 161
- ambient light 40
- angular size 124. see Harris
- anxiety 119
- Archer, Jeff. See firstflightbikes.com
- Arizona 117
- arm length 54. see fit
- asphaltic cement concrete 27-30, 38, 86, 89, 99, 147, 159, 164
 - chip-seal 29, 30
 - sand-and-seal 28, 46
 - slurry seal 27
- Australia 116, 138
- axle 51, 77, 101

B

- Baker 4, 24, 36, 119. see Fricke
- balance 119, 120
- Balasubramanian 138
- Barnett 3
- barometric pressure 143
- Beachcomber 62, 64
- Beck 32, 146, 148
- beckforensics.com 6, 7, 157
- bicycle lane 40
- bicycle maintenance 3. see Barnett

- bicycle messengers 120
- bicycle size 53, 54
- bicycle types 54, 55, 71
- biological material 44
- blood 9, 42
- BMX 32, 54, 55, 63, 67
- body armor 61
- bottom bracket 9, 52, 54, 59, 71, 92, 112
- brakes 52, 56, 57, 61, 64, 84, 89, 91, 112
 - cantilever 57
 - coaster 91
 - disc 38, 52, 57, 61, 91
 - failure 103
 - lever 122, 152, 153
 - V brake 52
- braking 137, 143, 147-149, 151-153, 155, 157
 - efficiency 38, 84, 91
 - power 38, 39
- brightness 115
- bumper 105, 106, 111, 161, 162, 170, 176, 179
- bunny hop 41
- Burns. See alcohol

C

- cable tension 91
- cadence 52, 92, 139, 143, 176
- California 113, 116
 - Davis 138
- California Vehicle Code 4, 178
- Casteel 3. see Moss
- Cavanagh 138. see Faria
- center of gravity 66
- chain 51, 67, 70, 71, 73, 92, 94, 96, 102, 170
 - outer plate 96, 97
- chain stay 56, 70, 71, 73, 170
- chainring 95, 51, 52, 54, 66, 92, 94, 102, 139, 140, 142, 144, 157, 170, 174, 175

Chicago 52
 children 54, 55, 67, 146
 chord 36. see middle ordinate
 Christini 139
 cleat 99
 clipless 52, 62, 99
 clothing 113, 115, 116, 124, 131, 162, 179
 collision scrub mark 43
 component failure 5
 compound curve 35
 computer 52, 139
 construction level 36
 Consumer Product Safety Commission 5
 contrast 115, 124
 contusion 128
 coordinate 3, 10-12, 15, 16, 166
 crack 70, 72, 73, 80, 84, 92, 93, 97
 crank arm 51, 92, 93, 139
 crown 34, 36, 159
 cyclo-cross 44, 57, 81

D

debris pattern 9
 demagnification 124
 depressants 118
 derailleur 51, 58, 92, 102, 103, 170
 detection 119, 122-124
 down tube 9, 51, 52, 71, 74
 drag factor 29, 34, 36-38, 147, 149, 159
 Dreyfuss 122
 drive-wheel size 139, 140, 142-144
 drug 16. see alcohol
 drug recognition expert. See alcohol

E

edge of roadway stripe 11
 elderly 146

electronic distance measuring device 16
end-over 58, 66, 77, 83, 151, 153, 157
Eubanks 4. see Hill
evidence match 99
eye height 40, 125

F

Faria 138. see Cavanagh
fatigue 72, 93, 119
fender 109
final rest positions 108, 109
firstflightbikes.com 55
fit 19, 53, 54, 62, 67, 113-115, 117, 131
flexibility 54, 62
Forester 145
fork 57, 59, 61, 67, 77-82, 101
fracture 68-72, 93
fracture overload 68
framebuilder 70, 72
Freeride 59, 60, 61
Fricke 4, 24, 36. see Baker
front axle 77
front overhang 170
Full-suspension Mountain 59-61

G

G-Analyst 38
Garriott. See alcohol
gear lever 77
Gear Matrix 140, 142, 143, 174
gear ratio 140, 143, 144, 176
glare 39
gloves 116
gouge 9, 23, 99, 101
grade 34-36, 143, 145, 154, 157, 159
grate 41

H

hallucinogens 118
 halogen 99, 107
 handlebar 51-53, 56-64, 74-77, 92, 101, 114, 115, 139
 Hard-tail Mountain 59, 60
 Harris 124, 126. see visibility
 Hayduk 68, 112
 head tube 9, 51, 54, 63, 64, 71, 76, 107
 headlight 40, 161, 178
 filament 40
 headset 51, 77, 107
 race 79
 heart rate 52
 helmet 43, 53, 61, 116, 117, 125, 156, 161
 high-wheeler 49
 Hill 4. see Eubanks
 hood 104, 109, 125, 170
 hub 51, 77, 81, 82, 83, 85, 92, 152
 Hybrid 62

I

Illinois 117
 inhalants 118
 injury pattern 128, 131
 inseam 53, 54, 113, 114, 170

K

kinematic analysis 137
 Klunker 59, 64. see Ritchey
 knee 114, 116

L

League of American Bicyclists 5, 177
 lean angle 137, 149-151
 lever play 89
 Li 119

lighting 27, 38, 39, 47

lights 38, 40, 46, 47

luminance 101

M

maximum coasting speed 143, 145, 157

maximum engagement 177

mechanical failure 49

mental deficiencies 113, 120, 121, 131, 161

metal clips 99

middle ordinate 36. *see* chord

Miller, Don Show 5

mirror 124-126. *see* visibility

Mongoose 169, 174, 175

Moss 3. *see* Casteel

motocross 63, 116

motorcycle 3, 55, 65, 74, 89, 119

N

narcotics 118. *see* Garriott

New Zealand 116

nighttime 24, 39, 40, 46, 115, 116, 130

nine-cell matrix 1, 2, 9, 45, 46, 103, 111, 129, 130, 149, 179, 180

Niterider 101. *see* Halogen

Northwestern University Traffic Institute 36. *see* Baker

O

obtuse angle 16

Olson 121. *see* perception-response time

oversized bicycle 67, 115

oxidation 72, 75

P

pad alignment 89. *see* brakes

pad wear 89, 90

paint 43
 transfer 21, 23, 106
 PCP 118
 pedal 51, 52, 59, 62, 92, 93, 99-101, 104, 105, 114, 115,
 122, 123, 161, 170, 176
 pedestrian 103, 123-125
 pedicab operators 120
 perception-response time 120-123, 130, 131, 152, 176,
 179
 photogrammetric 19
 photography 4, 24, 25, 29
 Photomodeler 25
 physical deficiencies 113, 120, 121
 physical evidence 4, 7, 9, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20-23, 25, 27,
 42-44, 84, 101, 103, 104, 108, 137, 141, 146, 149, 157,
 162, 165, 169, 180
 pin 96, 97
 pitch-over. see end-over
 Portland cement concrete 27, 29-31, 38, 147, 151
 power 49, 52, 82, 92, 139
 Presta Valve 87
 prosthetic limb 121

Q

quick-release 77, 81, 82, 151

R

railroad tracks 41, 42
 rain 27, 31, 38
 Razor™ scooter 3, 55
 rear suspension 60, 61, 71, 169
 recumbent 66
 reference line 12, 14
 reflector 38, 40, 99, 160, 161, 171, 177, 178
 reflex reaction 152
 rider dynamics 3, 7
 rider kinematics 2, 137, 139, 141, 143, 145, 147, 149,

151, 153, 155, 157

rider visibility 99

rigid mountain 50, 59, 60

rim 51, 52, 56, 64, 84-86, 90, 91, 102, 109, 110, 171, 179

Ritchey 59

road/race 56-58, 66, 78

rollmeter 10

S

saddle 51, 95, 98, 102, 114, 170, 173

height 19

Schrade valve 87

Schwinn 55, 59, 64, 65

Excelsior 59, 64

Stingray 55, 65

scrape 23, 84, 99, 101, 110

scratch 77, 99, 101

seat post 51, 54, 62, 95, 98, 99, 114

seat stay 170, 172, 176

seat tube 51, 54, 56, 58, 71, 114

seat. see saddle

serial number 52, 112

Serotta 114

shadows 39

sideshot 10, 11, 16, 18

signage 27, 40, 47

skid mark 44, 87, 89, 108, 137, 147, 179

Skorcz 115

snow 27, 38

solo collision 38

Southern California 63

Speed Matrix 143, 144, 175

spoke 82, 84, 85, 102, 152, 153

sprocket 52, 94, 102, 139, 140, 142, 144, 157, 170, 174, 175

Stalker ATS 38

stanchion clamp 80
stand-over height 54, 114
station line 3, 10-13, 16, 166
steel tape 10-12, 14, 16, 166
stem 51, 62, 63, 74, 76, 77, 114, 170, 173
stepping 10, 11
stimulants 118, 120
Stingray 55, 65
stopping distance 38, 120
straps 99
super-elevation 34-36, 159
SwXng 64

T

taillamps 40
tandem 55, 66
tensiometer 82
tension 82, 84, 85, 91, 102
time trial 58
time-distance analysis 137
tire 51, 52, 58, 84, 87-89, 101, 102, 108, 143, 146, 149, 152, 153
titanium 57, 59, 60, 67-69, 78, 81
top tube 19, 51, 53, 54, 58, 65, 106, 107, 114, 170
total station 3, 10, 16, 19
touring 55, 56
track 55, 64
triangulation 3, 10-12, 14, 17
triathlete 58
twilight 27, 39, 40

U

U-brake 63
UCLA 138
undercarriage 23
United States 138
utility vault 41

V

vanadium 69

V-Box 38

velocity 137-140, 143, 150-152, 170, 176

vertical curve 3, 35

view obstruction 40, 46, 103, 104, 177

transitory 40

transitory-fixed 40

Virkler 138

visibility 36, 39, 40, 46, 113, 115, 116, 121, 123, 124, 126, 131

visual estimation 10-12

W

warning signs 35, 40

watt 146

weather 27, 38, 47

website 55

weld 59, 68, 69, 70, 72, 73

contamination 68, 72

TIG-welding 68

wheelbase 56, 170

Wilson 3, 38, 149

wind 27, 39, 47

crosswind 39

headwind 39

tailwind 39

windscreen 66, 139

windshield 104, 105, 109, 111, 125, 130, 153, 156, 161, 162, 170, 177, 179

WNNX. see Miller, Don Show

Y

yaw mark 9