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# Bon Jon Pass and Back Before Dark

*Testing the Moots Routt*

**B**orzoi – that is the name that comes to mind as I climb toward Bon Jon Pass. Borzoi seems like a fitting name for the Moots Routt that I am riding. Originally, it's the name of a lean and fast Russian sighthound. It's also the name that the French constructeur André Marcadier gave the minimalist sportscars he built after first making his name with ultra-light aluminum bicycles during the late 1940s.<sup>1</sup>

The Moots' titanium frame seems to expand and contract like a greyhound's racing gallop. There certainly is some frame flex, but it's entirely beneficial: The Routt "planes" superbly for me. Pushing myself and the bike to the limit on this steep climb, I've left my companions behind. There is no doubt about it: The Routt is very fast and great fun. Weighing just 9.0 kg (19.8 lb) complete (but without the under-seat bag I carry today), the bike certainly is lean, too, just like the borzoi.

I stop to wait for my companions. A small creek has formed on the narrow gravel road – it is raining hard. I avoid the biggest puddles as I unclip and put my foot down. I don't have

The diner that marks the edge of civilization.



to wait long until Ryan and Gabe appear. Their 650B randonneur bikes may be the equivalent of Hungarian sheepdogs – fluffy-haired animals that look bulky – but underneath the fenders, handlebar bags and lights lurks true performance...just like the sheepdogs, whose shaggy coats hide lean bodies that can run with speed and endurance.

Speed and endurance are needed today, for we are on a mission to ride to Bon Jon Pass and back. The Moots isn't equipped with lights, it has no provision for fenders, and the front-end geometry is ill-suited for carrying a handlebar bag. It's not a bike designed for the adventures we usually do, yet I wanted to push the Moots to its limits. The goal is to ride from Seattle to Bon Jon Pass and back – 180 km – during the daylight offered by this late-summer day. Of course, we'll use backroads even if the main highways promise a shorter and flatter ride. This ride is about the journey and not about the destination.

A medium-sized underseat bag and my jersey pockets will hold the essentials for this ride. Since the Moots' maximum tire clearance is 35 mm, we equipped the bike with 35 - 622 mm (700C) Compass Bon Jon Pass tires. Riding these tires to their namesake pass seemed like a romantic idea. On the Routt's 23 mm-wide rims, the tires grew to 37 mm wide, but they still cleared frame and fork. Thank you, Moots and Enve, for providing a little extra clearance, just in case!

I plotted a course on RideWithGPS.com, bought paper maps for the gravel parts of our ride, and wrote a route sheet so we wouldn't lose time digging out the maps, except when in doubt. On paper, riding to Bon Jon Pass and back, on a route with 3200 m (10,500 ft) of elevation gain, should be do-able in less than 10 hours. Add two half-hour ferry rides, and 14 hours of daylight seems plenty for our endeavor.

We usually don't pay much heed to weather forecasts when planning our rides, but with the "naked" Moots, it seems prudent to check our prospects: "Cloudy with rainshowers in mid-day, then clearing" is the prediction. This might present an added challenge, but I am ready for adventure. And Bon Jon Pass is in the

rain shadow of the Olympic Mountains, so it probably will be dry even if it rains elsewhere in the region.

Our group includes old friend Ryan and new Compass Cycles employee Gabe. We meet at 6:30 a.m. in North Seattle and ride at a leisurely warm-up pace. Small streets and lanes through parks take us to Edmonds, where we catch the 7:50 ferry to Kingston. From there, we pick up the pace and fly across the northern Kitsap Peninsula to Port Gamble. For once, we reach the charming country store during its business hours. Usually, we seem to arrive here late at night or early in the morning, when the store is closed. We celebrate this rare occurrence in the adjoining café. With hours to spare in our schedule, there seems to be no rush...

After traversing the floating bridge across Hood Canal, we continue via our favorite backroads on the Quimper Peninsula, culminating in the beautiful Old Eaglemount Road. This narrow stretch of blacktop winds its way through the forest on top of a huge hill, with many ups and downs adding to the challenge and fun. The roads here used to be feared by cyclists for their rough chipsealed surfaces, but today they seem benign. It's not that the roads had been repaved, but now our bikes are equipped with 37 to 42 mm-wide tires and much more supple casings than we used to ride.

I mention a photo that shows me riding on the white line at the edge of the highway. The paint had filled in some of the depressions and made the surface a little smoother. Ryan quips: "That photo is still all over the Seattle Randonneurs web site!" Trying to replicate this on the Moots is not successful – with its long-trail geometry, the Moots has more wheel flop and cannot hold its line as precisely as the old Alex Singer I rode on the white line for miles. Gabe, who just moved here from California, has never ridden these roads on narrow, harsh-riding tires. He doesn't understand what we are talking about: "To me, these roads seem fine." Which is our point exactly.

After the wonderful prelude on empty backroads, we drop back down to the shore at Discovery Bay. For half a mile, we are on the highway that circles the Olympic Peninsula. To us, it seems like the edge of civilization.



From there, our ride will start in earnest as we head into the Olympic Mountains. But first, it is time for lunch. Our only option is a roadside diner. It makes up for its questionable fare with boldly proclaimed political opinions. The whole experience adds to the feeling of being on a frontier...

During my planning, I found promising gravel roads that will deliver us to the base of Bon Jon Pass. I've checked satellite images to make sure the roads I plan to take really exist. Everything looks fine, except... the maps from the U.S. Geological Survey don't show one of the roads we are going to use. But then, topographic maps often are out of date – this one was last updated in 1995 – and the satellite images show the "missing" road clearly, with trucks parked near a house indicating that the road is still in use. It seems reasonable to

According to Google Maps, this beautiful road connects to the base of Bon Jon Pass. The reality is a bit different.

assume that the road shown on Google Maps exists in the real world as well.

We turn off the main road onto a side road, then onto an even smaller road that immediately starts climbing steeply. As expected, our road turns to gravel. So far, all is going to plan. With the help of the maps, we navigate a few unmarked intersections, but then our road dead-ends at a house. We explore a few side roads, even ask the people living in the house, but finally conclude that the “missing” road does not exist after all. A few days after our ride, I check the satellite images again and realize that part of the “missing road” does exist, but that it does not connect to the road we took, even though the connection is shown on Google Maps. If we bush-whacked for half a mile, we would reach the road with the parked trucks and houses.

We don't know this, and in any case, half a mile is a long way to bush-whack through the dense forest of the Olympic Peninsula. Instead, we turn around. We descend the long climb, giving me a first real test of the Moots on gravel. Its Enve cyclocross fork absorbs shocks much better than the stouter “gravel” fork of the Litespeed we tested previously.<sup>2</sup> If you are fine with limiting your tire clearance to just 37 mm, then the Enve fork is a superior choice. Together with the supple tires, the Moots is fun on the fast descent.

The 3T Ergosum Pro handlebars also are a much better shape than the same maker's



Ryan descends the steep gravel road after turning back.

Ergonova bars we've tested before. The specification of the Moots indicates that its makers really ride bikes, and the difference is noticeable on the road.

Dark clouds are crowding the horizon above Walker Pass to the South as we reach the valley again. The missing road hasn't caused any panic, because I've mapped an alternative that is shown on all maps, just in case. After a pleasant ride through the valley toward Quilcene, we turn onto Snow Creek Road and enjoy a more gradual climb on its wide expanse of gravel. The ever-changing gradient gives our derailleurs a workout.

The Moots is equipped with a full Shimano Ultegra drivetrain. The latest iteration of STI brake/shift levers is a great improvement over Shimano's older models. The swing required by the levers is much shorter than in the past, and I have no trouble shifting from the drops. The smoothness of the front shifts is impressive. The latest generation of ramps and pins allows the chain to transition quickly and quietly from one ring to the other, making the shifts almost imperceptible.

I get plenty of opportunity to enjoy the smooth shifts, because the Ultegra cranks have a wider chainline than standard, resulting in serious cross-chaining when riding on the big chainring and one of the two largest rear cogs. These are gears that I use a lot on my own bikes, which I ride like a “single chainring plus granny”, but with Shimano's latest drivetrains, it results in much noise and a gritty feel in the pedals.

Better to shift to the small ring, but now the Achilles heel of STI makes itself felt again: To compensate for the large 16-tooth step between chainrings, I need to shift two or three cogs on the rear while the chain moves to the smaller ring. Pressing on the lever results in only a single shift, so I must push the lever two or three times until I can pedal at my normal cadence again. By then, I've lost my rhythm.

Altogether, the rear shifts are less impressive than the fronts. Even though the bike has been overhauled by Moots' mechanics before it was sent to Seattle, the rear shifts are a little unpredictable. When I shift two cogs at once, the chain often moves just one cog, then pauses for a pedal stroke or two, before finally



completing the shift to the second cog. This built-in delay ensures that the shifting ramps are lined up correctly before the chain climbs to the next cog, but I very much prefer immediate shifts, even if this requires reducing the pressure on the pedals for a split-second, racer-style, to avoid graunching noises.

We've gained considerable elevation. The clouds that we saw on the horizon now are almost touching our helmets. The first sprinkles are falling. The rain quickly turns into a drizzle, then intensifies until it is a veritable downpour. Twenty minutes later, I am reminded of the typhoons I experienced in Japan. So much for the Olympic rainshadow! We elect to take a small sideroad for much of the climb to Bon Jon Pass, and that brings us to the beginning of this story, where the Moots stretched its legs and reminded me of the borzoi sighthound.

When Gabe and Ryan stop next to me, I envy them for their fenders. But I am not really suffering: The rain is warm, and as long as we keep going, I'll be fine. For this article, we do need a few photos, though, and that is where it's good to have friends. Ryan takes the BQ camera that he's been carrying in

his handlebar bag – there is no room on the Moots for the bulky apparatus – while Gabe spreads his rain jacket to provide shelter. To get useable photos, we need to keep the lens clear and the electronics dry. With the photos in the box, we continue toward Bon Jon Pass. Trying to find the “missing road” has taken up valuable time, and I am beginning to worry about our schedule. The cloudy sky makes it hard to judge the time of day, but my watch shows that it's almost three o'clock. Including the ferry ride, we've been on the road for eight hours. We haven't even reached Bon Jon Pass yet. Only six hours of daylight remain.

The rain drowns all other noises, even the scrunching of our tires on the gravel. It's fun to ride on this deserted one-lane forest road. The gravel is smooth, and the Moots feels in its element. On the uphill, even at a good effort, the speed is low enough that the spray of the fender-less wheels is not too bothersome.

The rain lets up a bit as we reach the “main” road to Bon Jon Pass. I remember this way from testing the Jeff Jones 29er in the snow here.<sup>3</sup> It's a different experience with the landscape colored in shades of green, and the

The test bike came with Schwalbe cyclocross tires: too slow for the long paved approach to Bon Jon Pass, so we installed the pass' namesake tires instead.

Read the full review in [Bicycle Quarterly 58](#).