



Karen Schultenburg photo

Mark McCormack attacked from the gun on stage 10 after Bill Sykes told the team to "shape up or ship out."

A neo-pro team joins the big leagues

First-year pro team IME didn't bask in the glory, hype, swarms of media or awed fans that surrounded other teams at the 1992 Tour Du Pont. Instead, the Massachusetts-based team struggled—in and out of the peloton. And to its credit, it endured.

Its first battle emerged one day before the tour even started. Upon arrival in Wilmington, Delaware, the neo-pro team found cancelled hotel reservations and a blurb in a press release stating that IME was a "no show." Apparently, the race organizers had not received team director Bill Sykes's message that IME had postponed its arrival, while awaiting delivery of new, custom bikes. Not an auspicious beginning.

Sykes had been informed only one month before the tour started that his team—whose sponsor, Independent Medical Examinations, is a second-opinion agency for the insurance industry—could race. While he welcomed the opportunity, he was well aware that IME's domestic training schedule wasn't adequate preparation for the tour—particularly when compared with teams that spent their early season racing in Europe or Colombia. Nonetheless, he and his team were open to the challenge.

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IME joins the big leagues...

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During each of the tour's 11 stages, Sykes drove a team car in the race caravan, and mechanic Sal Lilienthal catnapped in the passenger seat until needed. They got all information from the race radio....

"IME! IME to peloton," roared the French-accented voice of Canadian commissaire Pierre Gagné over the radio. Sykes yanked the steering wheel to the left, floored the accelerator and blasted the car horn—as he maneuvered around media motorcycles and other team cars. He couldn't tell if an IME rider had crashed, flatted a tire, or just wanted to hand back his arm warmers.

"IME, mechanical," squawked the voice. Sykes slapped Lilienthal on the arm and said, "Sal, mechanical!" Lilienthal jerked awake and grabbed two wheels from the back seat, in case his rider needed a new one.

Sykes then spotted IME rider Mark Walsham, whose rear tire was going flat. The car screeched to a stop, and Lilienthal jumped out to make another eight-second wheel change. A sprinter from England, Walsham was destined to get the team's highest stage placing: 14th, on stage nine, from Wintergreen Resort to Richmond, Virginia.

In what was considered the toughest stage, from Hot Springs to Wintergreen Resort, Virginia, Frank McCormack was the only IME rider in the lead breakaway, which splintered as it climbed Wintergreen Mountain. Sykes seized the chance to give some support.

"Don't lose it," the manager called from the team car. "Frankie, you're climbing with the big boys here. Nobody said it was going to be easy."

Afterward, McCormack described just how difficult it was. "Some of those climbs I thought I was going to get dropped," he recounted. "I just kept pushing and pushing and passing more guys."

Not all the team members rode as well. Mike Costello abandoned on stage four, somewhere in central Pennsylvania. "It's a really hard decision to make as a rider to pack it in," he admitted. "You're really humbling yourself."

In many ways, IME's experience at the 1992 Tour Du Pont was similar to the 7-Eleven team's first crack at the Tour de

France, in which only six of that team's nine starters finished.

"We were in the dark when we did the Tour de France in 1986," recalled Jim Ochowicz, general manager of Motorola, formerly 7-Eleven. "Basically, they are in the same position we were in then. It was just a bunch of rookies going to kick some butt."

Sykes admitted that his team was overpowered. "Mentally, they can handle it," he said. "Physically, they're not quite there yet."

Perhaps IME's expectations for the Tour Du Pont were too high. The team wanted to win a stage, place a rider in the top 10 overall, and have all its riders finish. It didn't get that, but it saw what *could* have been when former team member Dave Mann—now of Coors Light—won the yellow jersey on stage two and wore it for four days.

"When a guy gets good results like Dave (Mann) did last year, you risk losing him," Sykes explained. "I just didn't have enough money to compete with the Coors Light dollars."

Stress built and emotions flared as the tour progressed. After voicing his disgust with the team's poor performance, Lilienthal attempted to leave, during stage five from Hershey, Pennsylvania, to Hagerstown, Maryland. Sykes talked him out of it, saying, "One thing you have to learn, Sal, is that the first time a team does Du Pont these things happen."

But then, at a team meeting held the night before stage 10, Sykes told his riders to "shape up or ship out." It worked. On the next day's circuit race in Richmond, Mark McCormack attacked from the gun. His brother Frank counterattacked when the pack caught Mark, and then teammate Skip Spangenberg joined three other riders, who chased and caught Frank. This breakaway survived, even though McCormack, and then Spangenberg eventually dropped back to the peloton.

Sykes was pleased anyway. "We finally started racing today," the proud team director said. And then, promising that IME will be back for the 1993 Tour Du Pont, Sykes added, "We will race the event next year, instead of just riding it."

—Robert Schuller

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LETTERS

Kodachrome collision?

I am writing in response to the behavior of one of your photographers at the Grundig World Cup Mountain Bike Race, at Mount Snow, Vermont. About three miles into the course, there was a very technical section, which consisted of a slippery, off-camber turn. Your staff person approached this spot and set his bags down inside the course markers. He walked into the middle of the course to check the lighting for pictures, and then went back to his bags and stood inside the tape, waiting for the next group to come through. I politely mentioned to him that he should move his stuff and stand outside the tape. After all, the reason for putting the tape up is to keep spectators off the trail during a race. I told him people had been crashing there all day. He responded with, "They're pros, they won't crash here." Within minutes, one of the riders got in the wrong line, hit a stump, and landed in his stuff.

If this is the manner your people report races, I don't want to read about them or see the pictures. Imagine if he was checking the lighting in the middle of the trail and Tomac had come through. With the incredible speed he was carrying through there, your man would have never gotten out of the way, and somebody would have gotten hurt. Think what a field day the other mountain-biking magazines would have had with that. Headlines read: Rider Injured as *VeloNews* Reporter Gets in Way.

Tom Matuszak
Adams, MA

VeloNews photographer Tom Moran responds:

I was shooting this race from exactly the same spot

as last year (see p. 38 of World Cup Guide) and was well aware of where and how riders might crash. My position inside the boundary marker was based on this, and was not jeopardizing the riders or the race in any way.

*It is my job to "see" the race for 50,000 *VeloNews* readers. That is why I wear a press credential, and that is why I occasionally step over barriers for a better view. I keep an eye on the trail at all times, and, when I stepped onto the course to check the lighting, I knew by my stopwatch that the leaders wouldn't be through for at least four minutes. While none of the pro men crashed, it is true that Chantal Daucourt slid off the course and parked it at 35 mph into my bags. Her impact was, if anything, cushioned by my equipment, but my bags played no role in causing her fall.*

I also like to race and would never do anything to endanger the racers. All of my actions were in line with the job of race photographer, and I apologize if this interfered with your enjoyment of the race.

The customer is satisfied

Virtually every article I have ever read on the topic of supporting my local bike shop uses the same argument about a late-day wheel-truing before a big race. While this



scenario may save the day for the racer, how likely is it to happen? Does the possibility of requiring such a service (rendered at a fee, of course) justify charging double the mail-order price on almost every item in the store? While I rarely purchase clothing and would never purchase a bike through mail order, I almost always purchase parts and tools that way. A Dura-Ace bottom bracket is a Dura-Ace bottom bracket, whether I get

it at the shop for \$90, or through the mail for \$45. The same holds for tires, rims, saddles....

Even if the local shop supports a team, the owners must realize that competitive cyclists wear out a tremendous amount of parts, and that their prices had better be in line with all available sources of these parts, or they are going to lose out on the business. And besides, I mail-ordered a truing stand.

Bob Mihalek
Cold Spring Harbor, NY

We are still good friends

I was surprised and upset to read your coverage on IME and Du Pont, in the June 22 issue of *VeloNews*. This article implied that as a result of the performance of cyclists on my team, I would abandon them during a

stage race. This is not true.

The IME cycling team and I have developed a strong relationship over the past several years. Not only have I wrenched for the team during single-day and stage races, I have meticulously assembled the cyclists' De Rosa frames with state-of-the-art Campagnolo components. In addition to living with the cyclists and staff at the spring training camp, I have stayed with Bill Sykes' family for extended periods, to make certain that the bicycles and other equipment are race ready.

This article does not reflect my relationship with the IME cycling family, or the sequence of events that took place on the day in question. It takes more than the atmosphere of a race to dissolve years of commitment and friendship.

Sal Lilienthal
Friend and mechanic
IME cycling team

Flat truth

In the June 22 issue of *VeloNews*, UFO tires ran an add (page 62) saying that the IME team had no flats in the 1992 Tour Du Pont. Maybe UFO should check with IME, before they make that claim. On page 49 of that same issue, you reported that IME rider Mark Walsham's rear tire started to go flat and was changed by the team mechanic.... Isn't that a flat?

Jack Diemar
Bedminster, NJ

VeloNews welcomes letters from readers. Letters for publication must be less than 300 words in length; include the writer's name, address, and phone number, and should be mailed to Editor, *VeloNews*, 1830 North 55th Street, Boulder, Colorado 80301. Letters may be edited for clarity.