Jonathan Maus (00:00):
Welcome to the BikePortland Podcast. I'm your host, Jonathan Maus. In this episode, I want you to join me for a walk around the Ladd's 500. This is the really massive event that happened on Saturday in the Ladd's Addition neighborhood of Southeast Portland. If you haven't seen the coverage yet, would highly recommend checking out our photo gallery. We've been covering this event for years, but on Saturday, the turnout for this thing was twice as much as I'd ever seen. It was absolutely huge. It seemed like everybody in the bike scene showed up. It's really becoming a pre-Pedalpalooza gathering of sorts of all the different clubs and groups and friends and all kinds of stuff. It's almost as if the entire bike community was eager to get out of their winter doldrums together, and it didn't hurt that the day before Saturday, we had maybe the sunniest day of the year.
(00:52):
So, folks were just really primed to come out, spend the day in the park and watch all their friends ride around in a circle 500 times and also maybe do some laps themselves. The Ladd's 500 to me is just such a great illustration of what makes Portland cycling scene so special. It's a very grassroots, there's no one really making money on it. There's not a lot of corporate sponsorships or signage or anything like that. There's no registration. You just show up, grab a pen and a piece of paper, write your team name, get a few friends, and then start tallying your laps. That might be why I think I counted about a hundred teams taking part on Saturday, the entire street around Ladd Circle Park, which for folks who don't know, in Portland, there's a nice traffic circle with a park in the middle of it, it's got a bunch of bushes and trees and folks picnic there and stuff like that.
(01:43):
So this is a street around the park where David Barstow, who goes by DBR, he had this idea starting I think in 2016 to do this event when he realized that 500 laps around Ladd Circle Park is equivalent to a hundred miles. And in the biking world, riding a century is a big accomplishment. So, that's what led to him to start the Ladd's 500, and I don't think anybody at the time realized that it could turn into something this special. I'm not sure why we didn't expect that since there's been plenty of other fun, weird, quirky things in the Portland bike scene that have turned in to be massive spectacles, so we should have maybe expected it from the Ladd's 500. Either way, this thing has absolutely surpassed all expectations and has become just a real pillar of the community.
(02:29):
And keep in mind of the who knows, 800,1000 people that were riding around this traffic circle, they weren't all just on bikes. This year especially, I noticed that there was a ton of roller skaters. There were lots of skateboarders out there. There were unicycles, one-wheels, there were electric unicycles, there were tandems, there were of course a lot of tall bikes. There was people running. There was one guy who ran all 500 laps, actually started Friday night. So that was very impressive. So as you can imagine, just an absolute outpouring of chaotic cacophony in the park, everybody having a good time.
(03:06):
And the infield is where Taylor and I walked around on Saturday to chat with folks and see what was on their minds. So buckle in and get ready to experience some of the best of Portland's bike culture at the Ladd's 500. Oh, and the first person I'll talk to here is David Barstow, the founder of the event.
(03:29):
For folks that don't know what the hell's going on, how would you describe what this is? What's it called and what the hell's going on?

David Robinson (03:33):
This is the Ladd's 500 . We make people do 500 laps of a traffic circle because life is meaningless, but it's also whimsical. It's the sixth first annual. We've had some interest from other cities but setting up sister events, which would be the first second annual.

Jonathan Maus (03:48):
And I've been thinking, I mean, that's a natural evolution of what's become a Portland classic for sure.
David Robinson (03:55):
I got an official page on Shift, so it's not just on the calendar anymore, so I think I finally made it.
Jonathan Maus (04:02):
Okay, I'm here with a nearby homeowner. What is it like having something like this in your neighborhood?

Nearby resident (04:09):
It's why I want to live in this neighborhood. I love these kind of events.
Jonathan Maus (04:14):
And you're a little bit challenged here. You're on a bike waiting on the outside of the circle and you need to get to the other side and there's no breaks in the traffic of bikes. So how are you going to approach this conundrum here?

Nearby resident (04:25):
I'm going to watch the timing and count it down and just go for it.

Jonathan Maus (04:31):
Just like enter the school. It's like you're a little fishy. You got to just jump in and just start swimming, right?

Nearby resident (04:35):
Exactly. And pedal like crazy.
Jonathan Maus (04:38):
Don't catch up.
Speaker 4 (04:39):
We're the David Glowies..

Speaker 5 (04:40):
Half bike, David Glowie.

Speaker 4 (04:41):

Yeah.

Speaker 6 (04:42):
That's right.
Speaker 5 (04:43):
She invited me. I didn't know what it was about.
Jonathan Maus (04:46):
What's your strategy out there?
Speaker 7 (04:47):
Have fun.

Speaker 4 (04:48):
Yeah.

Speaker 7 (04:48):
Pump it out there.
Speaker 5 (04:49):
Grab as much free food as you can that they hand out on the side.
Jonathan Maus (04:54):
So you're always on the inside lane, right?
Speaker 5 (04:55):
Yes, inside lane. Take the handouts, pet the dogs.

Speaker 8 (04:59):
Cake pops. Who wants the cake pop? Woo!
Jonathan Maus (05:05):
I managed to find folks that are doing the official resupplying of the riders with... What are these that you're handing out?

## Daniela Lais (05:12):

Those are actually vegan cake pops and they're homemade and with white vegan chocolate and they're a little bit tie-dye, like our team. We are tie-dye team.

Jonathan Maus (05:21):
I know.

Daniela Lais (05:23):
And so yeah, they have all tie-dye colors.

Jonathan Maus (05:27):
You got your team, looks wonderful as do these homemade cake pops. Why did you come out to the Ladd's 500 today?

Daniela Lais (05:34):
Because we want to do something really, really stupid and we want to have stupid much fun.

Jonathan Maus (05:41):
Do you have any strategy for your team to complete the 500 laps?

Daniela Lais (05:44):
We want to lose really big and we want to be just slow and eat a lot of cake pops.

Jonathan Maus (05:53):
Have you thought about any strategies on how you're going to cheat?

Daniela Lais (05:57):
We just say we did 500 laps.

Speaker 9 (05:59):
We don't know how to count.

Jonathan Maus (06:03):
Oh, that's a good one.

Daniela Lais (06:04):
We will be high on sugar.

Jason (06:16):
Ice cream [inaudible 00:06:16].

Jonathan Maus (06:16):
Okay. I found the ice cream man. Can you tell us your name and what you're doing out here?

Jason (06:20):
My name is Jason and I am passing out cones, Team Cream. Just bringing some joy to all the people in Portland. I love biking.

Jonathan Maus (06:32):
Do you have to be on your bike to get a cone hand up?

Jason (06:37):
If you're in the circle, I'm okay with that, but I don't like people stopping. It's dangerous really for people to stop and get a cone while they're actually riding in the circle.

Jonathan Maus (06:47):
What flavor are you dishing out today?

Jason (06:49):
We got cotton candy and spumoni, a classic.

Jonathan Maus (06:53):
Is there a technique to handing out the cones without causing any crashes or spills?

Jason (06:58):
There is actually. The first year I did this, I learned a lot about that. And essentially, what I try to do is when I'm handing it off to somebody, I go with the flow. I leap it off to them and I don't necessarily just cold drop it in their hands. I let them take my hand with them as they grab onto the cone, so takes away some of the shock factor in the cone when it's just getting grabbed really quick.

Jonathan Maus (07:23):
Love it. You've really thought this through. I'll let you get back to it.

Jason (07:26):
Word. Thank you so much man. Have a good one.

## Maggie Min (07:40):

My name is Maggie Min. I'm a doctor of physical therapy and I am enjoying the splendor of the bike community. I am not keeping track of how many laps I did, but I rode several bikes. I got many, many hand ups, ice cream cones. I stole someone's entire bag of family-sized potato chips. On the way back around, they were like, "There she is again!" And I stole the White Claw out of their hands. Yeah.

Jonathan Maus (08:07):
Did they come after you or just let you keep going?
Maggie Min (08:10):
They didn't really have time to come after me and I was going really, really fast.

Jonathan Maus (08:14):
Until 30 seconds later because you're coming around again. Did you have a strategy when you were out doing your laps?

Maggie Min (08:19):

My strategy was to cause as much mayhem as possible. I wasn't actually a registered participant. I was one of the rogue riders who was weaving and bobbing. I wasn't riding backwards on my handlebars, some of my compadres, but I was having just an epic time trying to go as fast as I could, weaving and bobbing, creating mayhem. I did not actually cause any accidents because I also announced my presence by going, "Whoa!"

Jonathan Maus (08:54):
Holy shit.

## Maggie Min (08:59):

Whoa! Whoa!
Jonathan Maus (08:59):
Everybody just pulled over.
Maggie Min (09:00):
They can hear me coming. They know to avoid Maggie.
Jonathan Maus (09:08):
I'm having trouble understanding your costume.
Brock Dittus (09:10):
That's okay, so am I. I'm wearing a bear on my head. A teddy bear. Got holes for my eyes, holes for my mouth.

Jonathan Maus (09:18):
You also didn't think about the bear apparently.
Brock Dittus (09:20):
Well, I mean, honestly, I showed up here and I was like, "Oh, you got a bear for me, right?" And we had to cut everything up. And yeah, I don't understand it. I don't know that we have, other than a picture on the internet that inspired it. We don't really have a big backstory, but I've been to every Ladd since 2017. It was 2017, my first time. I was solo, 500 laps all by myself. I was easily the last place guy by a couple of hours, so I don't recommend it. It's much more fun with the team. Hang out with your friends.

Jonathan Maus (09:51):
Why on earth do you do this?
Brock Dittus (09:53):
Why? It's spring. It's time to do something stupid.
Speaker 13 (09:55):
Okay, look at this one.

Speaker 14 (10:01):
Whenever I see shit like this... Oh, sorry. Whenever I see stuff like this, like the Pedalpalooza events and stuff, I remember how many cool people like to bike. And it's not just people in the slicked back bikes, outfits, it's like actually cool people.

Speaker 15 (10:18):
Yeah, it's great to see everyone out here just riding bikes for fun. It doesn't have to be about transportation or commuting. So I think it makes me more excited to ride my bike around and maybe other people feel that way too.

## Armando Luna (10:29):

My name's Armando Luna. I'm all about the fun cycling and I think it's important to get new people riding that is not a sense of, "Oh, I'm a cyclist where I get in my Lycra," and things like that. You don't have to do that. You can be a social rider, you can ride for fun. And Ladd's and other Pedapalooza events are just those types of things to do that. It gets them thinking of, "I could be doing things more on a bike rather than driving."

Speaker 14 (10:56):
And everyone's nice too.

Armando Luna (10:57):
And everyone's nice, everyone's nice. That's the incredible thing I think the biking community in Portland is so big because everyone is so nice.

Speaker 17 (11:05):
Like a chocolate.

Speaker 18 (11:06):
More pressure.
Speaker 19 (11:07):
Yeah.

Andrea (11:09):
Okay, my name is Andrea. This is my first Ladd's. I wish this would happen all the time. I'm actually excited for the summer. I am like, "Oh, where are all these people all the time?"

Jonathan Maus (11:27):
What team are you on?
Speaker 21 (11:28):
We're celebrating somebody's birthday who was born in the year 1988.
Jonathan Maus (11:31):

Okay.
Speaker 21 (11:32):
Therefore, the 88 theme.
Jonathan Maus (11:34):
Can you describe your outfit?
Speaker 21 (11:35):
Top is a jacket, a windbreaker jacket.

Jonathan Maus (11:40):
Colors are what, pastely?
Speaker 21 (11:43):
Pastely, and then there's a fun pattern on the top that's a little, I would say, cosmic kind of. On the bottoms, this is actually a swimsuit bottom.

Jonathan Maus (11:52):
Okay. Well done.
Speaker 21 (11:53):
I would say geometric patterns for the top and the bottom.
Jonathan Maus (11:56):
Nice.

## Speaker 21 (11:57):

Over top of a pair of nice blue legging.
Jonathan Maus (11:59):
How about let's talk Ladd's 500 strategy.
Speaker 21 (12:02):
I like to hang in the middle lanes for a little while because that's where you get all the freebies. I've seen people getting hot dogs, Rainiers, ice cream cones and such. So strategy is to start in the middle and then just gradually make my way out because it kind of seems a little more chill on the outer lanes.

Jonathan Maus (12:22):
What brought you out?

Speaker 21 (12:23):
I came last year.

Speaker 22 (12:25):
Six left!

Speaker 21 (12:26):
Six left! And we had a great time, so can't stop. I love the bike community in Portland. I didn't really ride bikes before I came, and now that I'm here, I'm all about it.

Joan (12:42):
I'm Joan. The thing that is amazing about Ladd's 500 as an event is that it achieves what seems impossible. It is a bike event where you don't go anywhere. So you both get to ride your bike and hang out in one place. It's delightful. I had been bike commuting and doing longer recreational rides for a long time and wanted to go to social events but didn't know anyone.
(13:04):
And then Armando, who l'd only met once, issued an open invite for a bike scavenger hunt six years ago. So I joined him for that and then we became friends. And now, what I really like to be able to do for folks and try to do is have an open team and say to folks, "Hey, you can be on our team, so join us and it's okay if you don't know anyone, we'll talk to you. We're friendly."
(13:32):
We like meeting new people. I like making it okay for people to just join in even if they don't know people already. I think part of the reason these events are so popular, it's both because in these COVID times, you can be outside in social. I also think that people like riding their bikes and it does feel a little more scarier to be riding around just on your own. But I also think that doing events like this and just getting out on your bike can bring good energy to biking that then does get people on their bikes more around town too.

Monel (14:04):
My name is Monel and I'm here with super best pals forever.

Jonathan Maus (14:15):
Why do you like the Ladd's 500?

Monel (14:15):
It's my first year here, and I love Portland because there's just less overhead infrastructure to shut these things down like in other cities.

Jonathan Maus (14:27):
Why do you say that? Because we're standing in the middle of a public park.

Monel (14:29):
We're standing in the middle of a public park. We're blocking traffic. There's like 2000 people here.

Jonathan Maus (14:37):
Lots of amplified music.

Monel (14:38):
Amplified music.

Jonathan Maus (14:40):
So you think the place you used to live, this would've been shut down?

Monel (14:43):
I used to live in LA and it would've been shut down. I can't tell if the park people don't know about it or if they just let us do whatever we want. That's what's great about Portland is that yeah, the park rangers or whoever's overseeing the park either doesn't know this is happening or they're just turning a blind eye.

Jonathan Maus (15:07):
I'm going to go ahead and let you discover that on your own because I think as a person who's newer to Portland and experiencing this, I think it's a fun thing to come to that in your own experience and realize that well, they actually probably do know about it.

Monel (15:22):
Yeah, they absolutely do know about it.

Jonathan Maus (15:23):
And they just let it happen.

Monel (15:24):
And they just let it happen because they know that we're doing things safe, sane, and consensually.

Jonathan Maus (15:29):
So you are here and your job is to learn how this happens in cahoots and I wouldn't say in cahoots with the powers that be, but in collaboration with, right? So that's what you can. We have to always be creating more people that know how to put on these kind of things. Anyway, anything else about Ladd's 500 you want to share?

Monel (15:47):
It's a communal effort in the sense that we keep track of each other. When there was a bike that fell a few minutes ago, everybody stopped. And even though there's prizes for the "fastest team", I don't think anybody really is keeping track.

Jonathan Maus (16:14):
Okay, I'm here with Fiona who just got done with a bunch of laps. How did it go out there for you?

Fiona (16:20):
It went great. I'm really proud of myself. I come out here looking classy.

Jonathan Maus (16:25):

What's your strategy when you're out there doing your laps?
Fiona (16:27):
Really keep your eyes open, constantly watch, not trying to fall, not trying to hurt anyone out here, trying to grab as many snacks as I can. Just have fun, silly, fun times.

Speaker 25 (16:38):
And this is going to be so fun!
Fiona (16:38):
I know. I am baby-free.
Jonathan Maus (16:43):
Dead Baby Bikes, winners in the Ladd's 500 . What are you going to do now?

Fiona (16:47):
I'm going to spend a minute over there.
Speaker 26 (16:48):
We're going to go party.
Fiona (16:48):
Yeah. Right now, I'm-
Speaker 27 (16:51):
We're going to go drink and get loaded.
Jonathan Maus (16:52):
Because you're not doing that yet, so that's good. Speaking of which, how did you win? I mean, what was the strategy?

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (16:57):
We turned left.
(17:01):
A lot. A lot left. A lot left turns. Yeah.
(17:02):
501 times.
(17:03):
High gear ratios.
Jonathan Maus (17:04):
High gear ratios?

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (17:05):
Yes.
(17:06):
We rode fast. We rode faster than everyone else.
(17:09):
Oh, and don't forget, we took chances.
(17:10):
Yeah. And very many supporters.
(17:12):
Yep.
(17:12):
Lights, bikes.

Jonathan Maus (17:14):
Was there any cheating on your path toward victory?

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (17:19):
No. We never cheat. Never cheat. We're straight on board.

Jonathan Maus (17:22):
I'm asking everybody that question so no, don't be offended.

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (17:25):
No, we're not offended.
(17:26):
We're like, we're just not cheaters.

Jonathan Maus (17:27):
Some people are proud of it.

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (17:28):
No.
(17:28):
No.

Jonathan Maus (17:28):
It's good.

Speaker 25 (17:29):
No, no, no. We're all above board. We always win.

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (17:33):
Yeah.

Jonathan Maus (17:35):
Tell me about some of the bikes that you rode.

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (17:36):
They're fast.
(17:36):
Yeah, they're fast. Fast but-
(17:36):
No, no, no.

Jonathan Maus (17:40):
This one deserves an explanation.

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (17:42):
This one is not fast. It's my mini penny farthing freak thing. And it does not go more than five miles per hour. It is not fast.

Jonathan Maus (17:56):
I know because I did two laps on the damn thing.

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (17:58):
Yes. It is. It's fun.

Jonathan Maus (18:03):
But what is it? See, this is a non-visual medium, so you have to describe it.

Speaker 25 (18:06):
So it's a small bike, with a really big wheel and a very small wheel, but it's still like child size.

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (18:13):
It's a unicycle with a children's bike frame. With the mini APE hangers with a threadless... Is it threadless down stem? Threadless headset. No breaks. A beautiful Brooks C17 saddle. It's gorgeous.

Jonathan Maus (18:35):
There's one thing about this bike.

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (18:36):
And then there's a tiny wheel and then there's pegs. But have you seen this Brooks saddle?

Jonathan Maus (18:42):
Well, how do you power the thing?

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (18:45):
You keep pedaling forward and when you want to stop, you take your feet off the wheels and you don't stop.

Jonathan Maus (18:54):
But it's fixed, right? It's a fixed wheel.

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (18:56):
Yeah, it's a fixed, it's a unicycle.
(18:58):
It's short enough, you can just jump off of it.
(19:00):
Yeah, you can put your feet back onto the pedal.
(19:02):
Because fix gears rule, all right? Gears are weird.

Jonathan Maus (19:06):
So is the stem loose on purpose or did you just do that when I got on it or what? That was a pain in the ass.

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (19:13):
It's loose because I set it up probably like last night. Didn't do a safety check because safety third and because we just keep turning left.

Jonathan Maus (19:22):
Okay. Any last words of wisdom from Dead Baby Bikes at the Ladd's 500.

Dead Baby Bike Club Member (19:27):
Support your local dead babies. See you at Bike Prom
(19:29):
And rubber side down.
(19:31):
Bike Prom, June 30th. Support your local dead baby.

Jonathan Maus (19:34):
I happen to find someone who has been in this cycling scene for quite a while. I'm here with Beth Hammond.

## Beth Hamon (19:43):

I attended all the Ladd's 500s and rode two of them as part of a team. This is my first bike event back after a long illness. And I have to say I'm not riding today, but it's glorious. It's the happiest darn bike event in the city.

Jonathan Maus (20:02):
And you know a few things about bike events in the city, right? When did you start becoming involved in the bike scene here?

Beth Hamon (20:08):
Oh, gosh. I did some Critical Mass stuff about 20 years ago. Well, I worked in the bike industry for 20 years and I still keep my hand in it by fixing up bikes for people in need at home.

Jonathan Maus (20:24):
What do you think about in terms of what you're seeing today and what you saw at those critical masses in terms of how this community has changed in two decades? And then how are you feeling just looking out at this scene today?

Beth Hamon (20:39):
Well, this is certainly a lot less angry than Critical Mass was 20 years ago. I just feel like it's cycling is that thing that transcends generational divides because you have everybody from babies to grannies on a bike. And not just at events like this, I mean, I know that so-called commuter ridership has fallen off a bit, but I think it's still multi-generational, and I still think that cycling can be that thing that helps us transcend generational divides.

Jonathan Maus (21:11):
Certainly, the crowd I'm seeing today is, diversity is a pretty thick word, but the different types of groups that are here, let's say. I counted almost a hundred teams over on the board. So there's like this outpouring of, it seems just so many different types of little clubs and little groups getting together who weren't around in Critical Mass days.

Beth Hamon (21:30):
What's nice about the Ladd's 500 is that a lot of these teams are not long-standing teams. They're ad hoc.

Jonathan Maus (21:36):
Yeah, they're making this event.

Beth Hamon (21:37):
There're six friends who said, "Hey, let's do this thing." "Okay, we'll be a team and we'll each take so many laps." And the beauty of this event is that it's not sanctioned, it's not official. I think the most official thing about it is that the guy makes themselves patches. It's really, in a sense, it remains cycling at its most grassroots and community-minded. And that's why I keep coming back every year.

Jonathan Maus (22:02):
And you're somebody who, I'm going to just say it, let's say found a home, so to speak, in the bike community here for many years. And can you say something about how there's such a range of people here at Ladd's 500 who I feel like can just sit down in this muddy park and find a home? Do you feel like it's still like that?

Beth Hamon (22:21):
Oh, I do. I came today because we are having a Team Slow reunion. These are people I raced with 15 years ago when I was racing, if you can call it that. I was not much of a racer, but I said, "I'm really tired. I'm running out of spoons. Heck, I'm just going to go do it. I'm not going to ride. I'm just going to go and hang out with folks and just enjoy the vibe." And there are still times and places and ways in which you can do that with cycling in Portland. And it's just, it's fun. It's fun. And the focus is on fun. Before everybody got so political about bikes, do you remember when it was just something you could do to get from point $A$ to $B$ and something you could do with your friends to go have fun somewhere? "Hey, let's go ride bikes." "Okay." Well, since I don't commute anymore, all my rides are fun. Unless I have to go to the market, my rides are very seldom purpose-driven now. And that's a delightful place to be.

Jonathan Maus (23:31):
And before we wrap up this episode, I want to let David Barstow, the event founder, share a sponsor message. BikePortland is not being paid for this. This isn't an ad so to speak, but I want to underscore how so much of the cool stuff that happens in Portland is essentially free bike fun. That's what folks like to call it. It's not actually free. There are human beings that must pay with their time and often pay of out of their pocket books to make some of these magical moments happen for us all. And often, they are subsidized by great folks in the community who do donate to them. This event in particular, the Ladd's 500, in addition to a lot of other really cool events in Portland, actually have a fiscal sponsor. It's called Umbrella, umbrellastreets.org. They are a nonprofit that helps to promote really cool street culture, and they provide fiscal sponsorships so that folks like David and events like the Ladd's 500 can receive donations. So here's David giving a shout-out to some of the folks who stepped up to support this year's event.

David Robinson (24:33):
So yeah, thanks to Berkshire Ginsberg for the big whole event sponsorship, and then both BikeLoud and the Go By Bike, Bike Valley under the OHSU Tram kicked in to help upgrade the portable toilet situation this year.

Jonathan Maus (24:52):
And that'll do it for this episode. Thank you so much for listening. The BikePortland podcast is a production of Pedaltown Media, Inc. If you like this episode, please subscribe and browse our archives for past shows. Leave us a review and tell your friends about it. BikePortland is a community media source that relies on the community and individual subscribers to stay in business. Please sign up today if you aren't a subscriber already. And I'm your host, Jonathan Maus. Until next time, I'll see you in the streets.

