

THE AMAZING ECOCYCLE

or

MUSCLEWATT MANIA

or

HOW TO GET YOUR BODY IN SHAPE,
HELP SAVE THE PLANET,
AND HAVE FUN TINKERING,
ALL AT THE SAME TIME,
IN THE PRIVACY OF YOUR OWN HOME
(AND FOR ONE LOW PRICE)

by

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photographs courtesy of
Mandy HL Rhead

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(filled with errors and omissions, hopefully to be
corrected in future editions through reader feedback)

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CONTENTS

1. PHILOSOPHY/PSYCHOLOGY(THEOLOGY?) EDITORIAL
2. A NOTE ABOUT HISTORY WITH A LEAD-IN FOR A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR (OPTIONAL)
3. A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR (PLEASE READ THIS!)
- 3.5 HISTORICAL UPDATE
4. WHY AN AUTOMOBILE ALTERNATOR? (MORE PHILOSOPHY--SKIP THIS IF YOU WANT)
5. THE FIVE TECHNO-CHALLENGES (IF NOT NOBLE TRUTHS)
 - A. MOUNT IT
 - B. SPIN IT
 - C. START IT
 - D. CONTROL IT
 - E. APPLY IT
6. "MOTIVATIONAL ELECTRONICS" (A.K.A. "FUN BELLS AND WHISTLES")
7. FUTURE INNOVATIONS
8. SOURCES FOR COMPONENTS
9. DISCLAIMER
10. TROUBLESHOOTING
11. ON TRANSFORMATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS
12. STAYING CURRENT

1. PHILOSOPHY/PSYCHOLOGY/(THEOLOGY?) EDITORIAL

There seems to be a severe and dangerous imbalance in our industrial culture's relationship to the earth. One small manifestation of this imbalance can be seen in the concurrent use of "labor-saving" (usually energy-gobbling) devices and exercise equipment. It seems curious that we burn polluting and precious fuels to generate electricity which allows us to avoid using our muscles (i.e. to "save labor"), and then use our muscles to move about pieces of exercise machines which accomplish nothing other than providing resistance to the movements of our muscles. I am most acutely aware of this insanity when I find myself cruising the mall parking lot for a parking space 50 yards closer to the door to save myself having to walk that distance--when I have earlier in the day jogged around in circles going no place in particular for the exercise. It seems that there has to be a way, other than becoming a farmer or laborer, that those of us with desk jobs can get some exercise and also achieve greater balance between our bodies, our souls, and Mother Earth. One possibility is to convert a stationary bicycle from a brake pad grinding machine to an electricity generating machine.

2. A NOTE ABOUT HISTORY AS A LEAD-IN FOR A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR (OPTIONAL)

I got to tinkering with my own exercycle for the reasons noted above, in combination with a life-long inclination toward tinkering with gadgets. In the course of procuring supplies and advice from Bill Simmons at Real Goods Trading Corporation I mentioned that I was trying to build a better exercycle/generator system. I said this with some trepidation, since I knew that Real Goods had a such a product in their catalog, so I imagined I might get some resentment that I was placing myself in a position of competing with them. Instead of resentment, the response I got was interest. Bill said that a lot of people called for advice about how to build their own small musclewatt (that term just came to me as I was typing this sentence) devices. He said that many of them could probably build their own such devices, better suited to their own particular needs than the one sold by Real Goods. He suggested that I might provide him with a write-up of whatever I had learned through my efforts, which he would in turn mail out to people who called him with inquiries about how to approach such a project. At this point I had to admit to myself (but not to Bill) that I really was feeling a little competitive and that in fact I had some vague fantasies of getting a patent and then getting rich. Bill's suggestion that I give

it away stood in sharp contrast to my millionaire fantasy, but seemed more consistent with the notion of living in balance and harmony with Mother Earth and my fellow creatures. After a few days of mulling things over I thought of the notion of computer shareware, in which somebody writes a program and distributes it without charge, with the understanding that those who choose to use the software would send its author a small fee.

***** READ ME ***** READ ME *****

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* 3. A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR *
*
* Feel free to use the ideas contained herein and to *
* reproduce and distribute them. If you get a *
* fifth-generation photocopy which is hard to read, send *
* me \$3.00 (U.S.) and I will send you a new one. If you *
* decide to use the information presented here, I would *
* appreciate your sending me \$20 (more if you feel so *
* moved, less if that figure does not fit your economic *
* circumstances) at the address at the end of this *
* paragraph, in return for which I will put your name on *
* my mailing list for updates and will provide a *
* reasonable amount of advice over the phone. Send your *
* check to: *
*
* John Rhead *
* Suite 205 *
* 5560 Sterrett Place *
* Columbia, MD 21044 *
* (410) 997-5060. *
*

***** READ ME *****

3.5 HISTORICAL UPDATE

Since talking to Bill Simmons I have actually built up two exercycles. One is a Tunturi single action (i.e. you just pedal it, so your arms are free) and one is a DP dual action (i.e. you pump with you arms and legs both). The Tunturi has a small desktop mounted in place of the handlebars, which allows me to type on my computer, generate electricity, and sweat, all at the same time (as I am doing at this very moment). The DP gives the advantage of being able to increase the electrical output a bit, due to the added contribution of using one's arms, and to get a little upper body exercise in the bargain. The drawback is that you can't operate a keyboard while using it.

