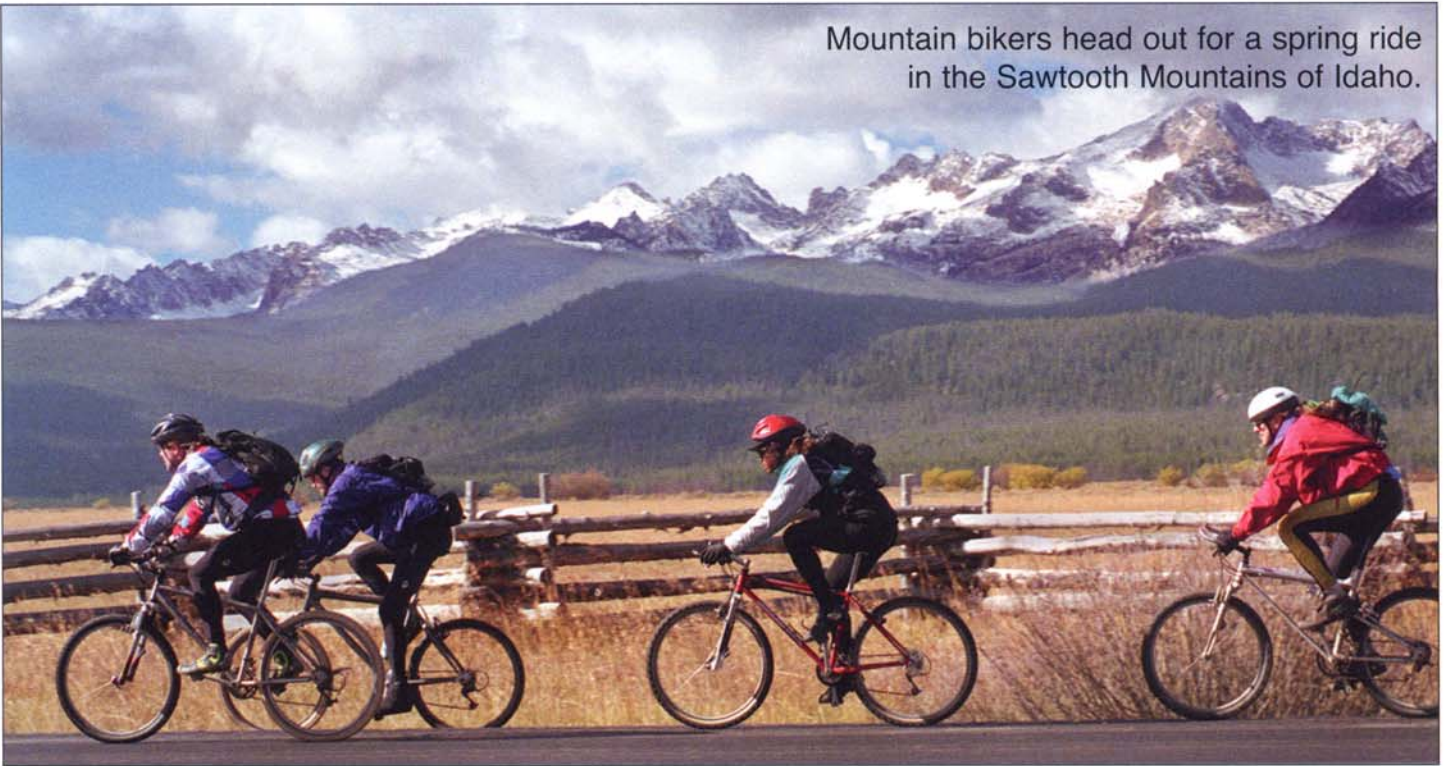


• • • Story and photography by Ken Levy

Mountain bikers head out for a spring ride  
in the Sawtooth Mountains of Idaho.



# Mountain Biking in IDAHO

*Correct equipment essential to safe, fun experience*

**M**ountain biker Steve Allton of Meridian said he took on the sport by default, after punishing his body as a runner for 24 years.

“My body said ‘stop this,’” Allton said. But he wasn’t about to give up on challenging himself both mentally and physically.

“Biking is the best alternative I’ve found that doesn’t

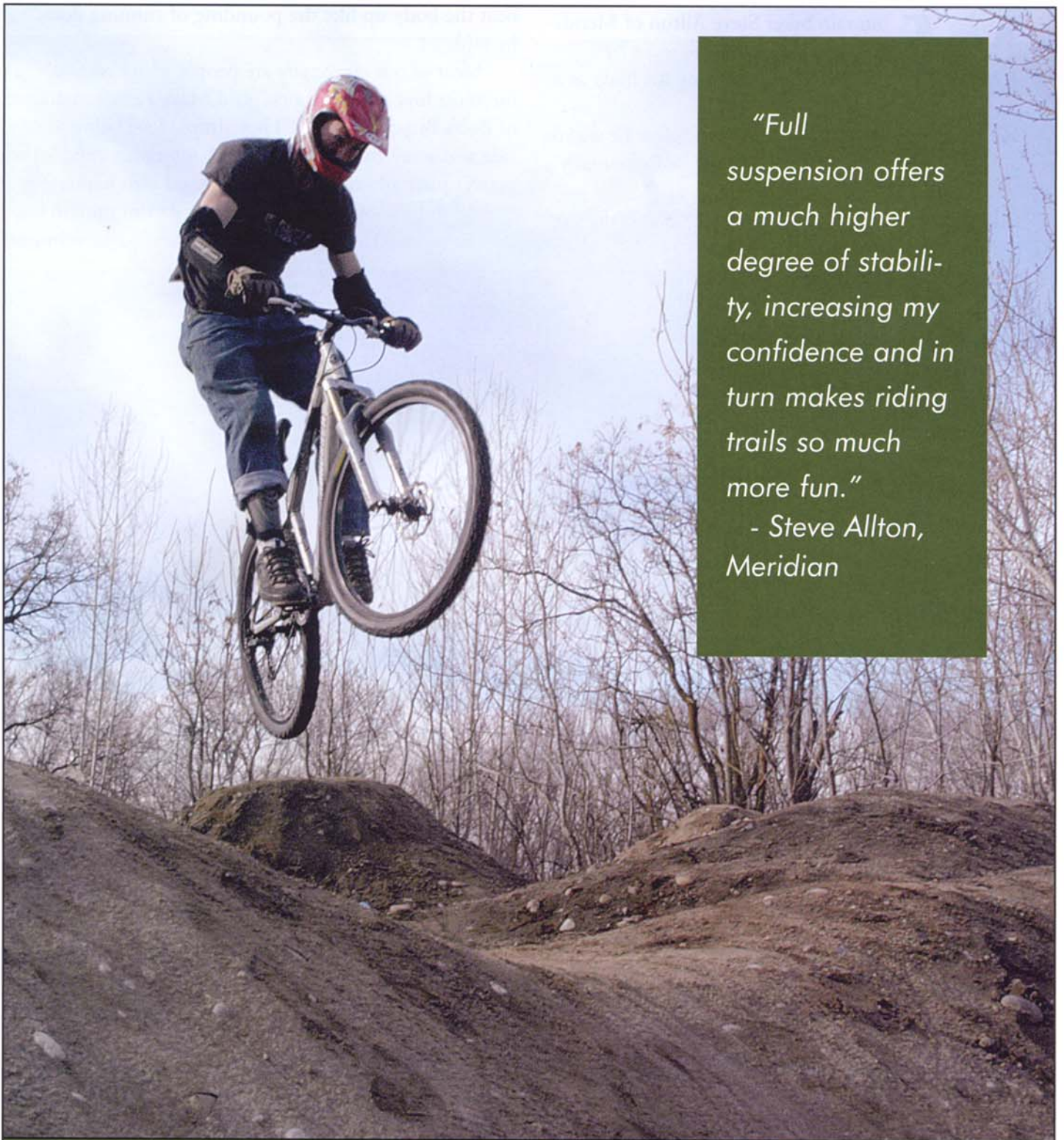
beat the body up like the pounding of running does,” he said.

“Most of our customers are people who first and foremost love the outdoors,” said Mark Hume, manager of Bob’s Bicycles, Boise. “They simply love being outside and away from the rat race. A mountain bike is the perfect piece of gear to get you off and into nature.”

Add those motivations to the fact that mountain bikers can be into the hills away from traffic in 15 minutes,



Mike Wieser cleans and tunes a WSD (women specific design) mountain bike at Idaho Mountain Touring, Boise. WSD bikes feature different grip and handle placements and other features found to be favored by women bikers. Good fit is critical to any good mountain biking experience, said head mechanic Mark Claiborne.



*“Full suspension offers a much higher degree of stability, increasing my confidence and in turn makes riding trails so much more fun.”*

*- Steve Allton,  
Meridian*

Mountain biker Mike Wieser goes airborne during jumps at the Willow Lane Athletic Complex, Boise.



*Wearing a helmet can make the difference between an uncomfortable headache or a serious injury.*

and you have the inspiration for an ever-growing number of devotees.

“The thrill is just getting out and exploring,” said Brian Schutter, manager of Boise-based Idaho Mountain Touring. “We are lucky to live in a place that the trails are literally at our back door.”

While many hit the trails on a mountain bike for the experience of enjoying nature, others, like Boisean Mike Wieser, live to express themselves through extreme riding, where they push themselves and their machines to their limits. Wieser calls it “rallying, just going fast and being on the edge of control.”

For riders like Wieser, Southwestern Idaho Mountain Biking Association and Boise Parks and Recreation built a jump park at Willow Lane Athletic Park in Boise. Man-high undulating hills dip swiftly into narrow-rounded gullies that help give jumpers the acceleration they need to go airborne. Wieser said that



Single-track trails in the Boise foothills provide challenges and great views to mountain bikers. The new tower going up at St. Alphonsus Regional Medical Center can be seen in the far distance from the Tram #14 segment of the Ridge to Rivers Trail.

while this type of park offers jumping opportunities for virtually all skill levels, some lesser-known tracks provide even greater challenges.

One such location is Ussery, named after a North End street that dead-ends at the base of the foothills. Numerous tracks with deep gullies, sweeping berms and high jumps challenge the enthusiast's need for speed-driven flight.

“The sport of mountain biking is in a state of constant growth and change. Riders are continually challenging themselves and their equip-



Signs inform trail users of the need to protect and preserve foothills trails at the Tram #14 trail segment of the Ridge to Rivers Trail System near Tablerock.



ment, with new and exciting ways and areas to ride,” said Schutter. But whether they’re on a day trip to catch spectacular scenic vistas, or challenging themselves to the limits of endurance, mountain bikers need to know the limits. Those are set not only by their own physical condition but also by the quality of the equipment they choose.

Allton said he and his wife, Judy, tried riding the Fisher Creek trail in Stanley. They were ill-prepared for the experience that quickly became a nightmare.

“We didn’t have the right equipment,” he said, just “old heavy rigid-framed bikes with no suspension, not enough food or water. It took us close to four hours of steep climbs, thinking the end had to be over this next ridge, to down what seemed like never-ending descents that numbed our hands from the constant braking and the relentless jarring terrain.”

After that experience, he said, they realized the importance of matching equipment to conditions and abilities.

“The sport is equipment driven and the list is endless,” said Mike Cooley who, with partner Tom Platt, runs three George’s Cycles shops in the Valley. —But virtually every mountain biker agrees that a helmet is the most important piece of

equipment one can take on any mountain-biking adventure.

“Having gone over the handlebars a few times, once seriously causing permanent damage to a disc in my neck, the helmet by far is the most important piece of equipment to own,” said Allton. “It’s not a place to cut corners in fit or cost.”

Allton said that wearing a helmet “can make the difference between an uncomfortable headache or a serious injury.”

Other equipment includes riding gloves, shorts and jerseys, cycling shoes, a tool kit for tire and other repairs, water bottle and cage, seat bag and a lock.

As for the bikes themselves, standard equipment can include front suspension forks or a full suspension, shocks and disc brakes.

“Full suspension offers a much higher degree of stability, increasing my confidence and in turn makes riding trails so much more fun,” said Allton. “Now, instead of being so vigilant and distracted trying to avoid rocks and other obstacles on the trail, I ride over the majority of them as the shocks absorb the impact, having little to no effect on the line I’m riding.”

“It’s not necessary to spend \$3,000 anymore to get a very nice riding bike,” said Hume. “There have been a lot of advances in suspension technology and bikes are being delivered that are simply better than ever at cheaper prices.”

“Starting range for a bike that will hold up to true off-road riding is roughly \$500,” said Schutter. “At around \$1,000 you can get a bike with full suspension and disc brakes. As the prices increase, weight comes down and durability goes up.”