

## Happy 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Mercier 300!

In 2023 my bicycle turned 50 years old. The Mercier 300 was the company's top-of-the-line model sold in the United States. It retailed for \$308 in the early 1970s at Winters Bike Shop, in Wakefield, Massachusetts, where I had worked as a mechanic since 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I already had the cheaper model Mercier 100 and I used that as my everyday bike to commute from home in Reading, about 3 miles away. But my boss, Ivan L. "Bud" Winters, offered to sell me the Model 300 at his cost, something around \$200. He let me take the bike and then pay in installments from my wages (which started at \$1.50 an hour and went up to \$3 by the time I left for college in 1976), so I went for it. These were the original specifications:

**marque des champions**

THE CONNOISSEURS MACHINE, EMBODYING THE WORD "ULTRA" TO THE LIMIT. FORK AND FRAME UTILIZE REYNOLDS "531" SEAMLESS DOUBLE BUTTED TUBING, SET INTO HAND FEATHERED LUGS, WITH SIMPLEX "ITALIAN STYLE" REAR FORK ENDS MADE FOR CUSTOM MOUNTING OF THE SIMPLEX PRESTIGE DERAILLEUR. FORK ENDS FRONT AND REAR HEAVILY CHROMED. TUBULAR HUTCHINSON SEW UP TIRES MOUNTED ON FRENCH "AVA" GROMMETED TUBULAR ALLOY RIMS. HUBS ARE NORMANDY "COMPETITION" WITH QUICK RELEASE. ALLOY HANDLE BAR AND STEM, MAFAC ALLOY CENTER PULL BRAKES WITH RUBBER COVERS ON HOODED LEVERS WITH CABLE ADJUSTERS. "STRONGLIGHT" ALLOY COTTER-LESS CRANK SET WITH CLOSE RATIO 5 PIN CHAINWHEELS. CLUSTER



IS CLOSE RATIO FOR THE SERIOUS RIDER. "COMPETITION" SADDLE, TOE CLIPS, STRAPS AND PUMP MAKE THIS A CYCLE OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY AND PRESTIGE, "ULTRA".

FRAMES & COLORS:  
[SAME AS MODEL #100]

[U L T R A   R O A D]  
MODEL: **300**

Despite what the advertisement says, the original handlebars and seat post were not aluminum alloy, but steel, so I replaced them right away with the lighter-weight alloy. I also bought a leather Brooks saddle instead of the hard plastic original one.

Here's Mr. Winters with me at my high school graduation.



My bike went through many changes over the years. When we moved to Ithaca in 1981, I wanted to keep the close ratio of gears, but also have low enough gears to climb the many steep hills. I modified the bike to do two things that are common now but were unusual then: I replaced the bottom-bracket axle with a longer one to accommodate three chainwheels, going from two chainwheels of 46 and 52 teeth, respectively, to 38-46-55; and I replaced the five-sprocket freewheel on the back wheel with a six-sprocket one, bringing my lowest gear from 21 to 26 teeth. The original bike had tubular rims with sew-up tires. The tubes were enclosed in the tire, which had to be unsewn to repair or replace a tube and then resewn. I was lucky for a long time not getting any flat tires, but when it started to happen more often, I replaced the wheels with conventional alloy “clinchers” with separate tires and tubes. Both front and rear derailleurs are different from the original Simplex ones, replaced by a Suntour front and a better Simplex (Super LJ) rear, as are the pedals and one of the cranks. It’s not the most attractive-looking vehicle, and purists would be aghast at the changes I have made to it, but my Mercier 300 is still going strong at the start of its second half-century.

