

**8 p.m.:** ...the VIP line at Caesars. We cross beyond the velvet rope, where a fellow in a tuxedo and nearly undetectable toupee leads us to a pair of booths. We're five rows back, right along the elevated rim of the stage—in other words, best seats in the house. And it's worth it, because the curtain comes up, and out comes the greatest jazz singer who has ever lived. He's resplendent in a bright blue suit; he's got a 40-piece swing orchestra—not to mention a string section—and he is style, class and pure artistic genius. Bennett sings the standards—everything from "I Left My Heart in San Francisco" to "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." The guy isn't just great. He's moving.



**9 p.m.:** The show's over. We step outside and encounter an effusive Greg Bagni, of Schwinn. "Guess who we just saw," he giggles. "Tony Bennett!" "Yeah," I say. "We were 20 rows in front of

you." Blammo!



**10 p.m.:** Back up in my room, Zap and I have a heart-to-heart about the future of the magazine. These are pretty introspective days at MOUNTAIN BIKE. In some ways, we're like Vegas: locked into the personas we've created. The question is whether you bust out, or sharpen, sharpen, sharpen. Is 10 years too long for a couple of guys to be writing about bikes? Tony Bennett's been singing for half a century.

**11 p.m.:** Out on the Strip, Central American immigrants stand in line, handing out flyers for \$500-an-hour hookers.

**Midnight:** Not so drunk, ready for bed. A good chance for you to review some of the show's best bikes (most of which can be afforded only by

high-priced call girls).

**1 a.m.:** Does Salsa still exist? The Northern California company was bought by Quality Bicycle Parts and moved to the Midwest. But some of the original Salsa folks live on with a bike company called Soulcraft, based out of the same building the predecessor company occupied. The custom frame the boothless Soulcraft crew was showing around Vegas proves that Petaluma steel remains as saucy as ever.

**2 a.m.:** Two off-road pioneers—Moots and former Ibis torcher Wes Williams (of Willits Cycles)—introduced off-road bikes with 29-inch wheels. "You've got to try it," Wes said, "to believe it." You've got to have thousands, too.

**3 a.m.:** Most interesting bike? Ibis' new Softtail. This titanium rig—the frame costs about \$2,000—uses a larger elastomer rear-suspension unit than similar rigs from Moots; travel is 1.75 inches. The flex at the bottom bracket,

as usual with the Ti versions of this design, comes from the inherent qualities of the metal itself—and from a very cool machined set of chainstays. Would I want one? Let's say that I'm really curious about the design.

**4 a.m.:** Now, for the budget category. Schwinn's Moab 1 rules, and at \$1,000, with a just-over-three-pound aluminum frame and spec that's the perfect combo of light and rugged, it's hard to imagine why anybody would want to spend a penny more.

**5 a.m.:** If you like big air but don't have big bucks, you should at least check out Marin's Quake 7.0. The bike is designed for serious abuse by slalom and big air specialists. Price: \$799.

**6 a.m.:** The God-bless-Mexico category: a bike that will never get airborne is Enrique Coronado's south-of-the-border-built Sand Bike. Burly frame, elevated chainstays and three-inch-wide motorcycle tires. John Stamstad was on the verge of ordering one for next year's Iditabike.

