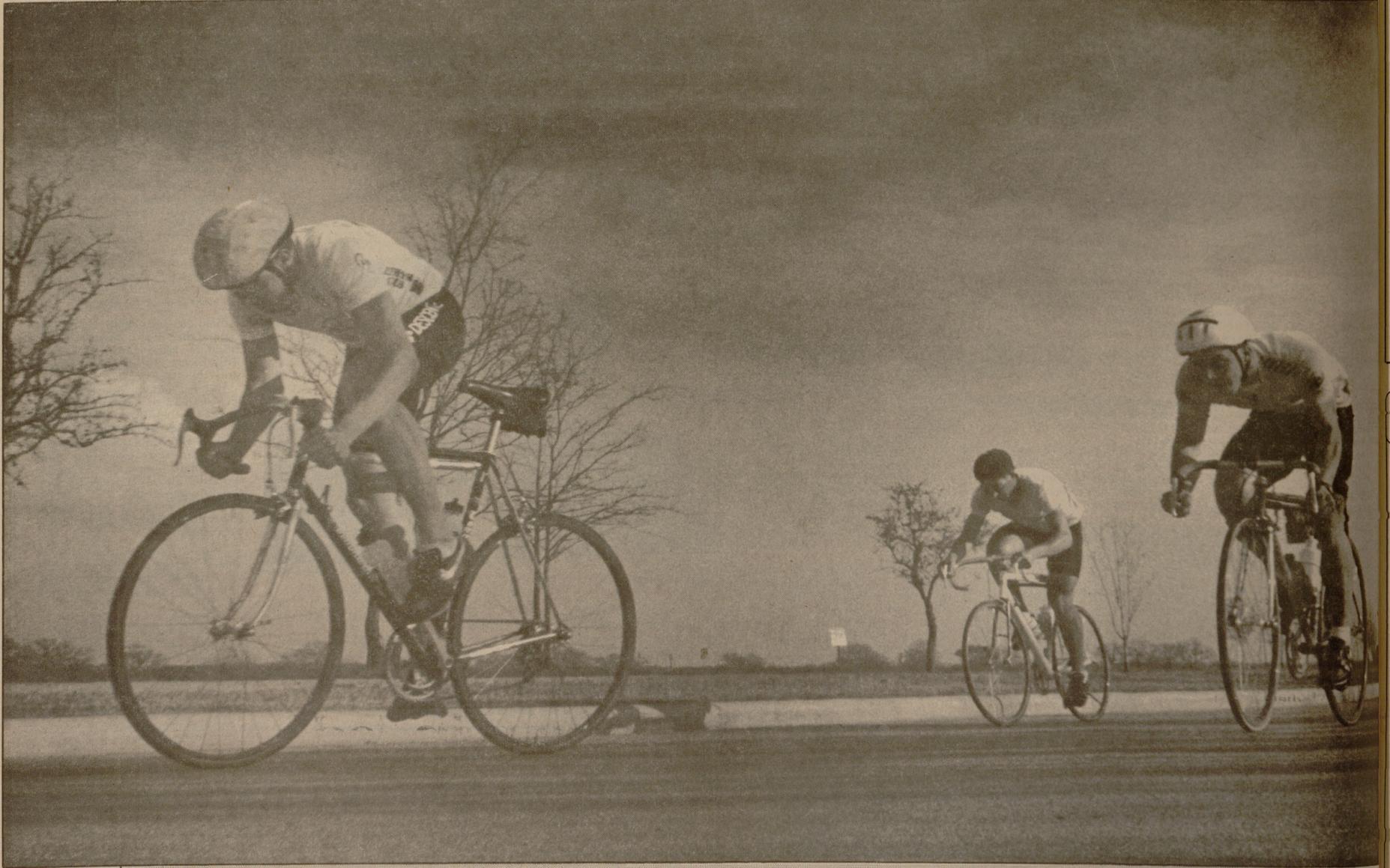




Pedal Power



Sophomores Patrick McGrath, Darren Lewis, and junior Tim Poppe ride as part of their daily schedule with the racing team.



John Pommier sprints in Research Park as part of his daily practice.

Speed and the rush of adrenaline — these are integral parts of the Texas A&M Cycling Team's challenging world.

"Racing is really exciting. Sometimes it's almost like a natural high," Patrick McGrath, treasurer of the A&M Cycling team, said.

McGrath said the real challenge of cycling is the discipline bikers must use while training for a race.

Mike Ashton, vice-president for the team, said the racer needs to be in shape mentally as well as physically. The physical and mental endurance is necessary for the 70-to-80 mile meets in which advanced cyclists compete, Ashton said.

Not all members of the A&M team, however, ride the extreme distances that the advanced bikers do, McGrath said.

Four categories make up the team. Beginners are placed in the 'C' category, intermediates in 'B' and advanced cyclists in 'A.' Women's racing is in a separate category.

The beginners' training consists of riding about 100 to 150 miles a week, McGrath said, while advanced bikers pedal close to 300 miles a week.

"You really have to push yourself," McGrath said.

The cyclists ride 12-speed racing bikes. Some bikers use 14- or 16-speed bicycles.

McGrath said cycling is not an inexpensive pastime that an uncommitted person might try for a hobby.

"The bottom line for buying basic equipment would be around \$500," he said. "The real good bikes can run you all the way up to \$4,000."

The team uses the bikes to compete in meets with 25 other teams as part of the United States Cycling Federation, Ashton said. The team also races in the South Central collegiate division.

The 15 to 20 active cyclists on the team travel throughout Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arkansas. The team pays for the excursions through funds from the intermural office and membership dues. They will sell racing team t-shirts to raise some extra money in a road

meet the A&M team will host on March 31.

Presently the A&M racing team is ranked sixth out of the 10 teams in the South Central Collegiate Region, Ashton said.

Team rankings are based on a points system. Each rider receives points for finishing a meet. The best scores are used to determine the team's standing.

Both McGrath and Ashton said they joined the cycling team for the challenge and to have fun.

Cycling can be contagious, though, Ashton said.

"I joined the team to have fun but once you've started you're hooked," Ashton said.



Photos by Eric H. Roalson
Story by Sean Frerking

The team meets in front of Rudder Tower every afternoon for practice.