

# SPIN

PEOPLE, PLACES, VIBES AND THINGS

ACTION FIGURE



## BIKE, MEET BRAIN

MIT prof Ted Selker loves cycling as much as he loves technology. When he combined the two, he got the Media Helmet.

Sure, it looks goofy. But it obeys your every command.

LEAH EASTIN





## ACTION FIGURE

**A**s head of the Context-Aware Computing Group at MIT, 48-year-old Ted Selker has created such innovations as the Track-Point (the button that serves as the mouse on some laptop computers), smart doors and smart beds—all in an effort to make computers and humans get along seamlessly.

Yet bicycles are never far from this year-round bike commuter's mind, and sometimes he integrates bike-friendly thinking into his inventions. One such project: Selker's group is working on a smart car for Chrysler, which includes a system to warn approaching vehicles—including cyclists—that the car's doors are about to open.

His latest project is made specifically for cyclists. The Media Helmet, a.k.a. Walter's Helmet, named after Walter Bender, the executive director of MIT's media lab, is a mix of whimsy and genius, and parts (though likely not all) of its design could change what cyclists are capable of doing while riding. Tech-crazy bike commuters, get ready to upgrade.

**How does someone working at the far edge of technology reconcile being in love with a low-tech vehicle that hasn't changed significantly in 100 years?**

I've been absolutely crazed with bicycles all my life. I own eight or nine bikes, though none of them is beautiful. When I was 16, a friend and I rode from Long View, Washington, to Alaska. I designed and built my own panniers for the trip.

**So what exactly is a Media Helmet?**

It mediates communication from the person to the outside world. If you tilt your head to the left or the right, it turns on blinkers; if you get a telephone call, it turns off your Walkman; if you yell, it turns on a horn; it turns on lights at night. This

"It's fun to think of these things," Selker says, "and then no one believes you, so you build them and find out you're wrong. Then you fix them."

helmet adds to the things you can do, and the problems you can solve, without taking your hands off the handlebar or your eyes off the road. It doesn't intrude on anything people do while riding, and it increases their safety as well as their enjoyment.

**Umm...isn't it dangerous to talk on the phone or listen to music while you're riding?**

We have a microphone on the outside of the helmet to let you know when a car is coming. What we want to figure out is when to amplify the sound from outside and when to diminish it.

**Fair enough. Now what in the hell made you want to create this?**

I'd been developing a cell-phone interface for my bike, because I talk on the phone when I ride to work. It's very calming. So I created this hel-

**"The person you're talking to will think you're in an office. Except for the heavy breathing."**

met that cuts down all the sound from outside, for the microphone. You can talk on the phone and the person you're talking to will think you're in an office. Except for the heavy breathing.

**Is the world ready for the Media Helmet?**

I'm riding with the helmet now. If someone wants to contact me about making it into a product, I'd be delighted. I'm ready.—*Brian Fiske*

**BECAUSE YOU RIDE**  
OUR ONGOING TALLY OF RICH REWARDS

**55**

The number of 6-oz. lobsters that would replenish the 9,180 calories\* you'd burn riding the 225-mile Katy Trail (p. 48) at 10 mph. \*based on a 150-pound cyclist