

# The *Love-* Buggy



BY MARK MATHEW BRAUNSTEIN

The quarter-page ad depicts a bare-chested healthy young stud. Above the waist, he's built like the lifeguard at the beach. Below the waist, he's the 90-pound weakling who gets the sand kicked in his face. This beach scene is not mere metaphor, because all he wears are swim trunks and he sits upon a sort of beach chair. He hugs a young bikini-clad woman. Except for his atrophied baseball bat legs, their pose calls to mind Rodin's "The Kiss."

You may recall the ad from past issues of *NEW MOBILITY*. You may have yawned as you turned the page or yelled as you cancelled your subscription. If you felt stirred, it's probably because you count yourself among the ad's target audience, namely disabled males and their enabled partners.

The ad promotes a product — the IntimateRider — that fosters sex, so is it a sex tool or a sex toy? It may aid some couples to engage in sex in ways that may have long been forgotten, but maybe should stay forgotten. So is it a techno wonder or a techno blunder? Joy ride or sleazy rider?

## On the Road to Sexual Recovery

One likely suspect to round up for questioning is the ad's poster boy. Meet Brian Chavez. Two years ago, at age 32, Chavez fell six stories from a rooftop and injured his spinal cord at T12-L1. While he did not quite walk away from it, it's a miracle that he even survived. In rehab, he tried bumping around with long-leg braces and a walker, but that got him nowhere. An athlete, he quickly adapted to wheelchair sports, especially baseball. He has recovered sensation right down to his toes, and then some. His sexual function came back, too, but he lacks the leg muscles to position himself to do it aggressively.

Chavez credits the IntimateRider with enabling him to reclaim his sexuality. "Having sex using the IntimateRider," he says, "is almost like walking again." Whoaaaa! Did we hear that right?

Now attending college full-time, Chavez meets a lot of women. His friends include female athletes and softball players who walk not just to first base but all the way home. His home. He says two women's initial reactions to the IR were the sarcastic "you got to be kidding," and the doubtful "I don't know about that." Yet after his coaching and some warm-up exercises, their tune changed to "Great!" and "Cool!" In the nine months he's driven the IR, "it's had a lot of road time."

To evaluate its road worthiness, let's take a look under the hood. Most noticeable is its low seat, which evokes the gospel classic:



“Swing low, sweet chariot ...” While some beach chairs rock in an arc, this one glides straight back and forth. Think of a skateboard. Or think of a car creeper.

A car creeper, despite its creepy name, is what your auto mechanic lies upon supine while poking around the underside of your car. The J. C. Whitney catalog lists several models. One features padding, a headrest, and an adjustable half that folds up as a backrest. Even this luxury model looks clunky and lacks brakes, but it costs one-third the price of an IR. Still, a temporarily modified car creeper might be worth taking for a spin, because you cannot test drive the IR — for sanitary reasons, it can be neither returned nor refunded. But J. C. Whitney guarantees your satisfaction.

One thing the IR can guarantee is our skepticism. Yet this writer’s own skepticism was effectively dispelled by Chavez’s enthusiasm. While Chavez got paid for modeling, he does not make a cent for yodeling, and Chavez is unabashed about his use because he says he wants to publicize the benefits of the IR to the disability community. Putting his best foot forward, he sure walks that talk. His energy may spring from the groin, but his advocacy clearly stems from the heart.

## A Labor of Love

It’s been said that a day laborer works with his hands, a skilled craftsman with his hands and head, and a creative artist with his hands, head, and heart. Meet Alan Tholkes, the IntimateRider’s designer. Tholkes is a creative craftsman who works with his head and heart, but not his hands. A C6-7 quadriplegic from a car crash as a teenager, the 49-year-old designer commands just barely enough wrist flexion to propel a manual wheelchair. Objects slip through his fingers, yet he holds patents for ergonomic improvements to office furniture, computer equipment, mobility aids, and one immobility aid, namely the EasyStand standing frame.

Tholkes is very inventive. His patent for the IntimateRider still is pending, but meanwhile he is not just sitting on his hands. Scheduled for release this Valentine’s Day, his Extra Large version is a measure of the occupant’s derriere, not genitals. Still, in order to assuage insecure macho male egos, the present standard size may need to be designated Extra Medium.

Tholkes’ research and development for the IR, which he conducted with his wife, was a true labor of love. He has sensation in the “critical areas” but lacks motor function to thrust at the hips. Mainstream sex furnishings such as the Love Swing and the Liberator offer no help, so Tholkes fended for himself. Here again emerges the unresolved question, sex toy or sex tool? If sex is work and drudgery, then the IR is a tool. But if sex is fun and ecstasy, then the IR is a toy.

Whether the IR is a toy of recreation or a tool for procreation depends upon the couple taking it for a joy ride or a test drive. While the male commands the driver’s seat, the female passenger often commands the purse strings. Tholkes says that usually it is she who buys the IR for her mate. Love conquers all, or almost all, and money buys the rest.

## Preposterous Postures

The closest many of us will ever get to the IR may be through viewing its website. That’s [www.intimaterider.com](http://www.intimaterider.com). You may need to switch off your browser’s parental control. Now the fun begins. The homepage invites us to “See the IntimateRider in motion,” which links to a video “meant for mature audiences only.” Oh, baby!

Our bold friend and “posture boy” Chavez soon rolls into view —

more clothed here than in the magazine ad. We should feel right at home as we watch him set up. Once he’s positioned on the Rider, an alluring young woman materializes out of thin air. Wasting no time, they immediately go at it, but in the heat of passion they neglect to tear off their clothes. Such safe sex at least neither imperils their health nor impairs our morals.

Throughout the video, background music chimes in, thereby masking the primal moans of the young couple. Voicing over the soundtrack, a woman with a very sexy accent offers narration. Her commentary sounds half sportscaster and half advertiser. For example, “How little effort it takes to get into motion. It practically moves by itself. It is so easy, so fun. It’s hard to stop.” And hard for us to stop smiling!

Certain to keep us smiling is another webpage titled Positions. There reside 30 tiny thumbnail images of couples duly entwined. Each image looks like a frame of a comic strip intended for the young and innocent, or maybe just the young. That leaves out most of us, as we strain our weary eyes to discern what’s going on. Thirty positions



seems 20 too many, because some look simply impossible and some truly painful. These preposterous postures may have been inspired by the gods and goddesses of erotica memorialized on the facades of the Hindu temples at Konarak and Khajuraho. Carved in stone, their bodies surely are more durable than ours.

So what further reception awaits the IR? Perhaps its acceptance will become secure and engraved in stone. Or once its novelty wears off, maybe it will be delegated to the back of the bedroom closet. Or perhaps it will be inducted into the standing fleet of crutches, walkers and wheelchairs. Maybe it will sell by the millions. Or perhaps sink into oblivion. Maybe it will sell a million and then sink into oblivion. Meanwhile, with or without it, we should limber up, tone up, and stay tuned.

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*Mark Mathew Braunstein admits to writing this review without actually taking the IR for a spin, which may be congenital, since his brother once wrote a restaurant review without visiting the restaurant or tasting any of its food.*