



Unicycles are taking over South Stockton Street

By MARY JO BEIL

South Stockton Road in Farmington Hills may well be the unicycle capital of the state, perhaps even the country. And all of the one-wheel excitement in this otherwise quiet neighborhood is due to two teen-age boys, Jim and John Kruse, and their father Gordon Kruse.

John Kruse, 16, who can jump rope while riding his nine-foot-high unicycle, said the one-wheel craze began about four years ago.

"My brother Jim and I started riding up and down the street and one by one everybody started buying unicycles," he said. "Now there's about 40 or 50 kids who ride 'em on this block alone."

Gale Barnumert, 15, and a member of the South Stockton unicycle gang, says she really enjoys riding the one-wheeler.

"They're safer than bicycles and more fun," she said.

The rest of the kids agreed but said that learning to ride unicycles can present some problems.

JOHN EXPLAINED that new riders always seem to bang their ankles against the pedals when they take a tumble.

But the temporary bruises don't stop the young stalwarts and they compete constantly to see who's most adept with the one wheel wonder.

But 7-year-old Paul Donovan feels pretty confident about his ability already.

"I'm good enough and right now," he said, "and I don't need to go any faster."

When it comes to speed, the other kids admit that Sue Donovan, 15, is

the fastest among the girls.

"She even won a race up at a Pontiac Mall last year," they said.

Linda Donovan, 13, and her sister Laura, 10, are two more members of the Donovan family cyclists, who, along with the rest of the neighborhood kids, credit the Kruses with the unicycle fad.

MIKE EASTMAN, 14, is one of the new comers to the sport and although he seems to have no bloody ankles, he does swerve a bit.

But Kruse explained that riding the unicycle takes practice.

"Balance is the most important thing," he said, "and you learn balance in about a week. After you conquer that, you can graduate to things like jumping rope, riding up a ramp or tackling a taller unicycle, but it takes about six months to become that expert."

The Stockton Road kids ride a variety of different sized unicycles, ranging from 24 inches to nine feet in height.

And it's John and Jim Kruse who are the trend setters.

"I ride a nine footer," John said, "but there's some guy in Ohio who rides a 30 footer."

But John said he isn't interested right now in trying to break that record. Because he and his brother Jim, along with Pam Conn, Shari Boorman, the Kane twins, Cris and Kathy and the other Stockton kids, think that unicycling is just a whole lot of fun.

And as Mr. Kruse said, "It's the only way they can ride to the store and return with a candy bar in one hand and a bottle of pop in the other."

