

Entrepreneurial Spirit Continues to Fuel Specialty Retailers

Retail experiences have become increasingly uniform. It's possible to shop at the same retail superstore whether you live in Wichita, Kansas, or Long Island, New York. And whether you're shopping at Best Buy or Wal-Mart, it's likely you'll find the same array of brands to choose from.

In our own industry, companies have gobbled up small brands creating larger and more powerful companies. As the big companies become even more

dominant, bike retail is in danger of the same homogenization that has plagued other retail channels.

Yet our industry remains unique in that sales are still largely through independently owned retail stores. Owners can choose the products they carry and stock unique brands as long as attractive options exist.

Fortunately, hopeful entrepreneurs have always supplied selection and inspired innovation. Companies like

Camelbak, GT and RockShox began as small brands with unique offerings. As long as a spirit of innovation remains alive, new brands will emerge that allow specialty retailers to differentiate themselves.

Now, the same entrepreneurs behind past industry successes are returning to the fold to launch fresh brands.

Truativ founder Micki Kozushek has launched an accessories company called Lezyne. Chris Cocalis, who cre-

ated Titus, has developed a new high-end mountain bike brand, Pivot Cycles. Meanwhile, Doug Stuart, who was behind FSA, recently launched Corsair downhill and freeride bikes.

As these entrepreneurs have in the past succeeded on the backs of specialty retailers, they hope to propel new brands through specialty retail partnerships. And in return they may give specialty retailers the means to remain "special."

Guest Editorial

Glass Half Full: We Must Show Our Faith in Professional Cycling

BY PATRICK BRADY

Cycling's myriad doping scandals have embarrassed the sport in the biggest multicultural joke since "Borat." The non-cycling media writes about bicycle racing with the derision normally reserved for political reporting, while the cycling media writes of athletes with shoe-drop apprehension.

With each new revelation cycling fans are turning off the TV and turning away from the sport. This is a crisis of perception that could have lasting consequences unless we act quickly.

So what is the root of the problem? Not the doping itself, but rather, our suspicion. Each new rider who rises to the top of the sport automatically becomes a doping suspect for no reason other than his achievement.

Consider that for a second: To some, the sport seems so dirty that a mere accusation is equated with guilt. The litany of names is synonymous with the Tour de France podium: Armstrong, Ullrich, Basso, Vinokourov, Landis, Rasmussen and now (accord-

ing to German doctor Werner Franke) Alberto Contador.

The Salem Witch Trials proved that accusations should not be enough to convict. Indeed, I commonly hear friends ask, "What happened to 'innocent until proven guilty?'"

As it turns out, that's a particularly American idea and Europe has several hundred years' history of gossip-fueled, guilty-until-proven-innocent justice, which was formalized in the Napoleonic Code.

We, as cyclists, fuel the cycle every time we repeat any half-baked rumor we hear. Any time we advance one of David Walsh's accusations against Lance Armstrong, we hurt a man innocent of doping charges.

The damage doesn't stop there. We hurt our sport's most impressive and enduring legacy: its draw of new riders. That damage is bigger than a falloff in sales for Trek; it's damage to each retailer selling bicycles today.

Do you think there is a warm body that has walked into a retailer in the

last seven years that wasn't at least partly motivated by Lance Armstrong's story?

Anyone watching this year's Tour de France coverage could see the shock and confusion on the faces of the Versus commentators, but only Phil Liggett correctly surmised that the 2007 Tour de France may be remembered as a turning point in the efforts against doping, that this may be cycling's finest hour.

Unlike baseball's handwringing over Barry Bonds, the UCI and many teams have acted decisively. We may think that we are merely spectators in this, but each of us in this industry has a role to play. Doping will never fully go away. However, judging by the comments of many riders, a sea change has occurred.

The peloton wants to ride clean. It wasn't so long ago that pros staged a protest against increased drug testing. Now they are protesting the riders who persist in doping.

Pro cycling needs an image make-

over—that is, an overhaul in our perception. It is up to us. From sales reps to shop owners to the wrenches on the group rides, everyone in this industry needs to give the sport a show of faith. Faith that we believe the sport has reached a tipping point where more riders are clean than not.

The logic here couldn't be simpler. Trek, Giant, Specialized, Shimano, Giro, etc.—manufacturers who form the road market's bread-and-butter—have sponsored teams with the belief that the athletes riding their products won't test positive for drugs.

T-Mobile and Rabobank can leave the sport as Festina did, but the bike manufacturers are here to stay. They have placed their faith in the integrity of the riders they sponsor.

We have a duty not to undermine that. Now, more than ever, we need to promote our sport's stars.

Patrick Brady, former publisher of Asphalt Magazine, wrote the forthcoming "Bicycling Los Angeles County."