



## Bike culture thrives in Philly

**P**hiladelphia pulls out all the stops for cycling the first weekend in June.

Police officers block off major roads. Amateur racers descend on the Wall to tackle the famed climb before the pros do. College kids turn the streets of Manayunk into an extended block party. Cycling aficionados set up camp on Lemon Hill cheering for riders with the passion of Italian tifosi.

It may be the closest thing to a European stage race this side of the Continent. And if just a sliver of that passion seeps into the pores of Philadelphia residents, then its retailers stand to reap the rewards.

While the TD Bank Philadelphia International Cycling Championship happens only once a year, everyday cyclists are getting support from the city and its pro cycling mayor as well.

Continues on page DT12

Continued from DT1

## Bike culture thrives in Philly

As we experienced during our Dealer Tour of Philadelphia in June, Philly's streets have plenty of pitfalls for urban cyclists—from deep trolley tracks to large potholes to errant car doors. But city officials are consciously taking strides to become more hospitable to cyclists. And those efforts appear to be working.

Jay Rosenblum, owner of Jay's Pedal Power Bikes, recalled when riding Philly streets was like playing Frogger.

"I remember the days when riding was a sport, between all the cars and trucks," said Rosenblum, who has been in his Fishtown location for 30 years. "Now there are certain areas and corridors where you see a constant flow of bikes."

Rosenblum and others credit the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia as the moving force behind a growing bike movement in the city. According to the Bicycle Coalition, Philadelphia has, per capita, twice as many bike commuters as any other big city in the country. The organization found that 2.16 percent of the city's population commuted to work by bike in 2009. That's up from 1.2 percent that commuted by bike in 2006.

That jump may be due in part to more cycling infrastructure such as the recent installation of dedicated bike lanes on Spruce and Pine streets. While on the Dealer Tour, we rode these dedicated right-side one-way bike lanes, which are gently buffered by painted white lines and designated by bike stencils.

"That was a big concession last year—putting true bike lanes on Pine and Spruce. That's huge in that it allows timid riders to ride and the fact that there

are no parked cars is a safety factor," said Rosenblum.

Other Center City retailers like Lee Rogers at Bicycle Therapy note the increase in bike commuters over the recently renovated South Street Bridge, one of the main arteries for bike travel into the city. "It's become a hipster thing to do to get a cool bike and travel around town," said Rogers.

Despite the large urban and surrounding suburban population across the Delaware River in New Jersey, the retailing environment is fractured without one major player. Locals attribute this to the once-dominant Bike Line chain, which once owned more than 70 franchises throughout the Delaware Valley.

Though Bike Line still has 14 locations, its influence has waned. Some of its former franchisees still operate in the market under different names, such as Human Zoom with two stores in the area.

As Bike Line has shrunk over the years, it has allowed strong independent operators like Breakaway Bikes and Bicycle Therapy to capture more sales in Center City.



Electric bikes take up the entire floor at Philly Electric Wheels.



Dealer Tour riders hit Center City shops on SE singlespeeds.

Across the Delaware River in the suburbs of New Jersey, other independent retailers such as Action Wheels and Keswick Cycle have thrived. But Keswick co-owner Brian Hackford cited a challenge of operating in such a densely populated area: traffic is so heavy that people rarely drive to neighboring towns. "Places you can drive to in 20 minutes don't exist," said Hackford.

The two Keswick locations are 18 miles apart and serve entirely different clienteles. "It's so dense that people shop in their neighborhoods. They rarely go out to other places," he said, contrasting that with destination retailers in other

markets such as Wheat Ridge Cyclery in Colorado or Bike Barn in Texas that draw customers from miles around.

Hackford said that the model for East Coast retailing works very differently. "There are large stores but not behemoth stores," said Hackford.

Still, he has bold plans for Keswick to take advantage of the geographical boundaries by opening new locations. But he said with any additional locations, he will strive to live up to the long-time reputation of the store. "When you have a reputation within the community," he said, "it's important you don't forget about that." —Megan Tompkins

## Philadelphia as a cycling city has moved beyond the nod

People have been doing it for years. The traders on their way to and from Babylon did it. American settlers did it. Car drivers at the beginning of the last century did it. Early morning runners do it. And cyclists in most cities still do it. But what I noticed when riding on the last day of the BRAIN Dealer Tour in Philadelphia is that, in Philadelphia at least, bike commuters no longer do it.

I'm referring to the nod—you know, that respectful acknowledgement you give someone when they do something a little unusual. But as the unusual becomes the usual, the nod fades. That is where the cycling community is headed in Philadelphia. Cycling is becoming normal.

Honestly, if the Dealer Tour riders had nodded at all the other bike commuters we saw that Friday in Center City, we would have looked like bobble heads. The same was true over the weekend. If you were not wearing Lycra and



sporting your favorite team's or club's uniform, you looked a little out of touch.

In Philadelphia the first weekend in June is all about cycling. For the 27th year in a row, the largest one day U.S.

race—the Philadelphia TD Bank International—took over the city, with helicopters following the breakaways rather than fires or traffic jams.

Philadelphia cyclists have gone be-

yond the nod thanks to the work of countless advocates and a mayor who really gets it—not so much as a cyclist himself, but as someone who wants our city to be efficient, progressive and green.

We saw Mayor Michael Nutter at the race on Sunday following the end of the Dealer Tour. Mayor Nutter told BRAIN publisher Marc Sani that while taking a lane away from cars on Spruce and Pine and giving it to cyclists was not popular, it was the right thing to do because the streets are to be shared; they are for cyclists, too.

He also explained that he would be closing a car traffic lane that goes north to south to help make cycling safer and more abundant.

So, here's a nod to Mayor Nutter, the mayor of the most bicycle friendly big city in America.

*Patrick Cunnane,*  
Advanced Sports International