

DEFINING THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN CYCLIST

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THE MAN BEHIND THE 100 MILES

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ONE TEEN'S TRIP INTO EURO RACING

BIKING IN BOISE
PEDAL MASHING IN POTATO PARADISE

GOING CAR-FREE
CARGO BIKES COME OF AGE



New

Framebuilders' Collective

Works to Sustain Custom Bike Trade

by Riley Polumbus

Today's cyclists are luckier than ever. They can choose from an international list of bike brands, an assortment of building materials and a variety of designs. But first, a cyclist has to decide between either a custom-built bike or one from the rest of the field.

More and more consumers are investing their hard-earned cash in handmade bikes, custom fit to their body and riding preferences. Thanks to the Internet, consumers have a vehicle for finding their two-wheeled vehicle.

However, the Internet is also responsible for a new generation of amateur framebuilders, many of whom garner their knowledge from "how to" websites, podcasts and online video, resources that may not always be reliable. Unfortunately for the consumer there is no board certification or specialized college degree to designate the title of framebuilder.

To address this issue, some concerned custom framebuilders have taken a stand, forming a group that they hope will guide novices while preserving the integrity of their trade and providing transparency to the consumer.

Last February at the North American Handmade Bicycle Show (NAHBS), eight handmade framebuilders announced their existence as a group called The Framebuilders' Collective (TFC).

Images courtesy of TFC

Self-described on their website framebuilders.org as “a group of like-minded, career craftspeople,” the members view themselves as equals and each has experience to bring to the table in a quest to protect and honor the heritage and profession of custom framebuilding.

Founding TFC members include Nick Crumpton, Curt Goodrich, Dave Kirk, Darrell McCulloch, Dario Pegoretti, Richard Sachs, Carl Strong and Sacha White. Pegoretti is from Italy and McCulloch from Australia, and the other members hail from across the United States, including Connecticut, Minnesota, Montana, Oregon and Texas.

Between email, online forums and networking face-to-face at NAHBS, the group spent two years talking about issues affecting their trade before going public with their ideas.

Their timing coincides with a decision by NAHBS to allow only the more accomplished framebuilders into its national show. NAHBS exhibitors are now expected to have been in business for at least two years by the time of the show, have built at least 200 frames and hold product liability insurance.

“Making frames is one thing, and making frames responsibly and running a business doing so is another. I think that’s where TFC is,” Richard Sachs said. “We want to set a standard for ourselves and have that rub off on people.”

Sachs thinks of a bicycle as a vehicle, and because a bike is on the road with traffic, framebuilders have a certain responsibility to create a reliable frame.

“You can’t just go to YouTube and become a framebuilder,” Sachs said. “The integrity of the finished piece is really where TFC will be focused.”

Sacha White thinks the group can act like a “beacon” for integrity and “hopefully bring other people who care about it like us into the fold so that we can start to gain more momentum and band with other builders.

“All of us feel really passionately about preserving framebuilding as a trade and also looking after its integrity,” White added.

Carl Strong believes that going public as a group creates an environment of accountability.

“Custom framebuilding is suffering from the consequence of radical popularity right now,” Strong said. “The idea behind The Collective is to provide guidance, mentoring—a clearinghouse for accurate information.”

Strong said most of the information available on the Internet is provided by the less experienced framebuilders.

“People are flooding in, they are trying it and there is no clear avenue to success so most are failing,” Strong said. “In the interim, there’s a lot of marginal work out there.”

Strong believes there is a gap between the experienced framebuilder, who can make enough quality frames in a shorter time to make money, and the inexperienced framebuilder, who struggles with every frame. He hopes TFC will help close that gap and create experienced framebuilders out of inexperienced framebuilders.

“We want to promote the craft as a viable profession,” Strong said. “We want them to earn a living so they can get good at building frames.”

Strong teaches the business of custom framebuilding seminar at NAHBS every year. He said each of the eight founders has his own niche of expertise.

With eight experienced framebuilders also comes unique personalities and at least eight ideas of what TFC will evolve into. But together they can communicate the importance of their craft.

“As a group we can communicate the deeper value of handmade bicycles to the general public,” White said, comparing the trade to the coffee roasting industry, which has improved through an effort by coffee companies to better educate the public.

The TFC vision addresses sustaining the trade by preserving and obtaining quality building materials.

Before TFC came about, Sachs had already become his own materials supplier. When builders started experimenting with aluminum, titanium and other materials, he feared his precious metal would dry up. So he began to buy his own stock. He not only supplies himself, but he sells to other builders.


“It would be mighty fine if TFC as a group or just a few of its members eventually undertook projects of a similar nature,” Sachs said. “We all have to deal with that looming over our collective—no pun intended—heads.”

Aside from its announcement issued at NAHBS and creating the website, the group has not done much yet. They have spoken to a few framebuilders who are interested in joining TFC. According to the website, potential members are expected to have a five-year run as an independent, full-time professional framebuilder.

Interested framebuilders can contact TFC and fill out an application. Although a handful of builders have done this, the founders have not announced any new memberships yet.

Currently they are working out how to meet regularly. Strong said once they establish the infrastructure, they will take new members, and TFC will begin to take on more life. For now, he said they are in no hurry and are “letting it grow organically.”

“What people ask from us is going to define what we can provide,” Strong said. “We all learned through the benevolence of some other builders, and now we owe it to the people who are coming in to share what was shared with us.”

“We are more of a peer group than anything else,” Sachs said. “If one framebuilder’s life as a commercial entity is improved as a result of something we did for that person, whether it’s advice or nurturing or mentoring, it’s a success.” 

The Framebuilders' Collective vision includes

- Support and promote ethical professional framebuilder practices.
- Mentor and preserve proven framebuilding techniques and business practices.
- Pursue continued development and supply of quality raw materials used by professional framebuilders.
- Define our craft.
- Guidance for bicycle framebuilders entering the framebuilding trade.
- Act as a resource for dissemination of information and resources bringing positive attention to the profession of framebuilding.