



"I make frames that suit the rider,  
and never limit myself with material."



Who and what are Strong Frames? Well, we can tell you that Carl Strong lives to ride bikes, and this is directly reflected in his passion for frame building. Carl is, "happy and lucky," to be a framebuilder day in and day out, which is a great quality for a person that dedicates his life to building some of the best frames around. Fortunately for those of us who enjoy riding custom bikes, Montana's short riding season allows Carl more time to build us those one of a kind bikes!

Strong, 44, grew up racing bikes from the age of 8, only recently taking some time off and returning this fall to the cycle-cross race scene. Those competitive years of racing encouraged Carl to fabricate custom parts and build his own race frames. This eventually led to what Strong Frames has become today, surpassing their 3500 frame and being awarded the Best TIG Welded Bike award at the 2009 North American Handmade Bicycle Show . (<http://nahbshow.blogspot.com>)

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When you look at a Strong frame, it is easy to see that Carl is very detail oriented and he finds life right serendipitous as a frame builder. Many of us likely understand that an art is truly enhanced over decades. It is apparent to Strong who has a college business background and has been building professionally since 1993. “Most builders think of business as a necessary evil. I enjoy it.” Carl says. Strong Frames’ specialty is focusing on customers for whom he can innovate the approach to building a custom bike.

When we say custom, we truly mean CUSTOM, right down to the fabrication approach. Carl likes to work backwards, as it leads him to quality intelligence about the rider. “You are buying the builder, not the frame.” Carl exclaimed. With bikes that have a four-month turn around period, there is sufficient time to become friends with the client. Strong wants to deliver the exact bike you manifest in your dreams. You’ll be on a bike designed, specified and color coordinated exactly to your specs.

“I talk to my customers about priorities.” Carl explained. One strength of the Strong Company comes from Carl’s experiences that lead to exceptional customer service. “I owe it to the customer in regards to the safe and stable company we have become.” Carl stated. “When the order is placed, I develop a relationship with the customer.” Carl gets to know the rider. He wants to know what is important to the client and has developed a protocol to fabricate the bike desired. “I communicate with the customer [at least] once a week to

get to know them.” Strong emphasizes that learning about his customers and getting to know what kind of rider they are, is a huge component to building them the best bike suited for their personal style. Carl gets the job done right, and it shows because 30 – 50% of his customers are repeat business.

Strong frames can be made from a variety of 4 tube types, although Carl is admittedly a steel junky. “It’s not a custom frame if all you know is steel tubing and lugs.” This is Carl’s

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philosophy, and his reason to build. He knows the qualities of different metals and tube sets and works with steel, titanium, aluminum, or carbon. When he talks about composites, he says, “Carbon has unique qualities that apply to about 5 % of my customers.” Carl understands that while carbon is suitable for some clients, in most cases it ends up that metal and alloy tube sets are best. He is cognizant of carbon’s incubating period; the material has to converge on it’s potential as a frame material. Carl is testing carbon joints at his shop, but his passion lies with metals.

Strong’s sleek shop is all about getting the work done when he can. “I like to focus on my work.” That means relishing the quiet and minimal distractions that can be enjoyed during those early ‘6 am morning hours’ when few people are yet awake. He likes to be at his shop from 6 am to 3 pm to get work done in the beginning of the day and get out for a late day ride. Carl makes himself rather accessible because any time saved can be put into communicating with customers or updating his knowledge of the tubing market and related bike industry. He is fully submerged within the custom industry, which is apparent when you ride one of Carl’s custom frames.

Even though Strong is a successful custom builder, he realizes the importance of passing the trade on. He has an apprentice that learns from his business and fabrication model. Carl is also one of eight members in the framebuilders collective ([www.framebuilders.org](http://www.framebuilders.org)). It is a commonwealth of knowledge for up-coming builders in the trade. These dedicated artisans involved with the collective want to make sure that the trade is done right as well as make themselves available to help others learn the trade. Carl is aware of the various small builders out there and wants to help them be successful too.

This defines Strong’s character. Refined: he has a steel road bike and a steel 29er hardtail with front suspension (which he enjoys riding from home to the trailhead). Practical: he works 8 hours 5 days a week. Passionate: he is one of eight members of The Framebuilders Collective that love their art.

A frame build-up will run you between \$1650 and \$3200, plus \$200 for a very limited Strong forged badge. That’s a whole lot of doll hairs (read: dollars), but she sure is pretty.