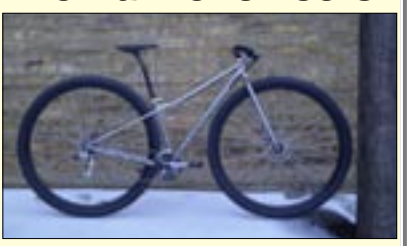
Tech Briefs

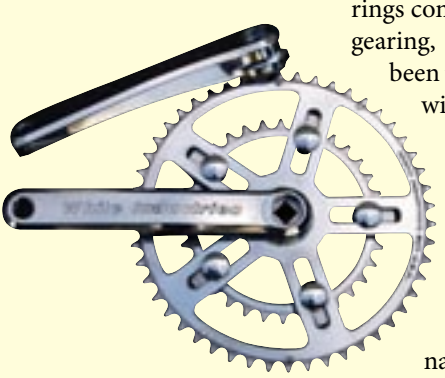
Retailer Offering Larger Alternative to 29ers



FARIBAULT, MN—From the state that gives us the double-rim-wide Pugsley comes a bike to run with the big dogs—a 36er mountain bike built around 36-inch unicycle wheels. Ben Witt's shop, Milltown Cycle in Minnesota, targets high-end custom 29er riders. So stepping wheel size up by seven inches made perfect sense. "People that ride it come back with the biggest smile on their face. At this point I'm not sure a 36er is going to be the best at anything, but it sure is fun," Witt said. Mike Pofahl built the 36er frame and Witt built a wheelset using 36-inch rims and tires from online unicycle retailer Unicycle.com. The unicycle tires are slicks weighing 1,600 grams (56 ounces) with 4-ply casings. Witt cuts a tread pattern into the slick that works well. But he sees developing an ISO 36-inch standard important to generating more interest in the bikes. The prototype is only a few weeks old, but Witt has one firm 36er order and four to five solid prospects for his $4,000 36er.

White Crank Uses Variable Bolt Circle Rings

PETALUMA, CA—White Industries' VBC crank allows inner chainrings with different bolt-circle diameters to be used. Why? "Because it stiffens the rings up," said Doug White, founder of White Industries. The bolt circle of every VBC inner ring, from 24 to 38 teeth, is unique. Outer rings spline mount to the crank and have a slotted five-finger spider where the inner chainring bolts mount. Outer rings come in 38 to 53 teeth, and depending on gearing, the cranks sell for around $250. "I've been testing a 26- and 50-tooth combination with Ultegra 10-speed and it works without a problem," White said. Bolting the inner ring to the outer ring as close to the teeth as possible is what makes the system stiff. White also opted to retain a four-sided bottom bracket axle since the variety of sizes available allows riders to get their Q-factor as narrow as possible. In addition to giving customers flexibility to use any ring combination, White thinks some will use a VBC to replace mountain bike triples.



Ritchey's MTB Carbon Fiber Fork Trims Weight

SAN CARLOS, CA—At 470 grams (16 ounces), Ritchey's new WCS carbon fiber mountain fork is not much heavier than its Comp carbon fiber road fork. The off-road WCS fork is two pounds lighter than the lightest suspension fork. But with consumers trending toward more travel, who cares? Apparently, quite a few people. "We've sold out in North America. Distributor interest is better than anticipated and there are more orders in the pipeline," said Mark Deterline, Ritchey's director of marketing, North America. "We are targeting the high-end single-speed market here, and European riders who still buy rigid forks." It appears the company is hitting its target. The $495 fork is 100 percent carbon from its steerer to the tip of its dropouts as well as its disc brake mount—borrowing all the tricks from state-of-the-art road forks. Beyond the single-speed crowd, racers can swap a WCS fork in for smooth courses and save two or three pounds.

Gordon Redesigns His Brakes for Wider Use

PETALUMA, CA—Bruce Gordon's cantilever brakes formed from titanium tubing had many people wondering what they could sell to afford the almost $1,000 brakeset. To get it out to a wider audience, Gordon has redesigned the brake, allowing it to be machined out of aluminum. "Other cantilever brakes have an industrial look and work better on widely spaced mounts. I wanted a look that went well with a lugged bike and I wanted the brakes to work on narrow 7.2-centimeter spaced mounts," Gordon said. The $149 brakes come with Koolstop road pads, but can be used on wider-spaced mounts by switching to an adjustable mountain bike pad. "Those titanium brakes took me three to four days to make, which is why they are so expensive. Even these require a lot of time for me to hand polish," he added. Gordon also offers a $30 Linkwire setup that matches the brake's look.