

Bicycle Retailer

AND INDUSTRY NEWS

Heard in Taichung

Ergon Keeps a Grip on IP

Richard Todd, Ergon's international sales manager, wasn't just looking for customers as he cruised through the Tempus, Evergreen and Splendor hotels during Bike Week. He was also looking out for companies that were knocking off Ergon's patented ergonomic grips and saddles.

Todd carried a stack of letters, written in English and Chinese, from RTI Sports, Ergon's German parent company, that he was ready to hand out to apparent offenders.

The letter explained the many patents that RTI owns concerning the construction of its products, materials and packing. It politely suggested that recipients direct any questions about the patents to RTI.

By the end of Bike Week, Todd said he'd delivered only two of the letters. But he said the exercise was important because it put competitors on notice that RTI is serious about protecting its intellectual property.

Ergon is no stranger to patent infringement cases. It's currently involved in IP lawsuits and has settled others. Staying on top of the problem is an ongoing challenge, he said.

"I liken patent law to drunk driving laws. It's not going to stop the problem; it's just going to discourage it," Todd said.

Easy as Pi

Bike officials weren't the only stars in Taichung this week. A crew of movie set designers and crew members have been staying at the Tempus Hotel, preparing sets for acclaimed Taiwan director Ang Lee's latest movie, "Life of Pi."

Lee, best known for "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," "Brokeback Mountain," "The Ice Storm," and "Hulk"—okay, they can't all be masterpieces—is shooting his 3D adaptation of Yann Martel's novel in India and in Taichung.

The Taichung scenes will be filmed at Taichung's old Shuinan Airport.

A Westerner who lives in Taichung said he's run into crew members at the Tempus Hotel's gym. They'll be in town long after the bike guys leave, as filming isn't scheduled to begin until early next year.

Organizers Consider Earlier Dates



More than 120 exhibitors participated in Taichung Bike Week, including these companies at the Tempus Hotel.

Now that Taichung Bike Week is over, organizers are starting to think about next year's event. And, as before, timing is at the top of the list of decisions they'll need to make.

"The million dollar question: Is it before or after Thanksgiving?" said Steve Fenton of Pro-Lite, one of the volunteer organizers of Bike Week.

Bike Week ended yesterday, after a four-day run that brought suppliers together with product managers from Europe, North America and other countries to discuss spec for 2012 product lines.

Because it's an informal event, organizers don't track attendance. But Fenton said the bike industry filled an estimated 1,500 hotel rooms in Taichung during Bike Week.

North American product managers, who are dealing with earlier production schedules, are pushing for dates in November, while Europeans are happy with the current timeframe in early December. This year's Bike Week ran from Dec. 5-8.

Another consideration concerns the days of the week. Fenton said a Monday through Thursday event would work well with the host Taichung hotels, because many do a boom-

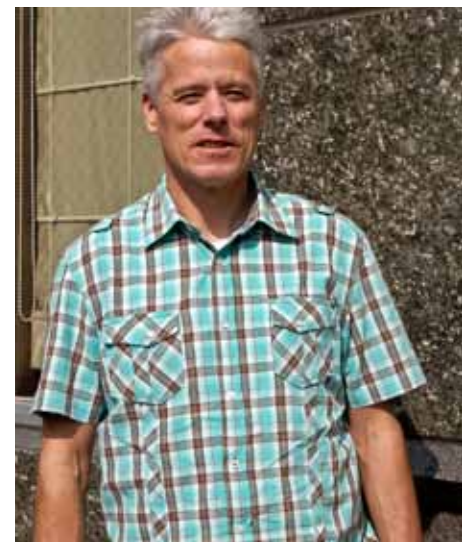
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Reynolds Owner Launches Carbon Rim Division

MacLean Quality Composites, the parent company of Reynolds Cycling, has created a new division to supply price-point carbon clincher rims to the OEM market.

Called Pacific Rims, the division is targeting as many as 100 suppliers that currently source private label carbon rims from one of 10 Asian factories, said Hartmut Boelts, head of European sales for Pacific Rims and Reynolds.

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Hartmut Boelts

TRP's 'Cross Brakes Move From V-Brake to Hydraulic

TRP has built a sizable brake business innovating in the spaces where Shimano and SRAM have left an opening. Neither of the component heavyweights does a time-trial brake, whereas TRP is on its third generation with its TTV. But it's the company's 'cross brakes that is driving its North American success.

"The CX9 has been incredibly successful this year because no one else offers a linear-pull 'cross-specific cantilever," said Lance Larrabee, TRP's marketing director.

The company offers a full range of traditional 'cross bike cantilevers, wide and narrow profile carbon, magnesium and aluminum versions—essentially, whatever material or profile a racer could want. But it appears the extra stopping power of its V-Brake design CX9 really struck a chord.

"We shortened the arms a bit, so they are shorter than mountain bike V-Brakes to provide good power and modulation from standard 'cross levers. So racers don't have to swap out levers to use the brakes," Larrabee said.

Although Larrabee credited the line's sales success to the extra braking power

they provide over cantis, he noted that many users also like the low-profile design. But the CX9's success may be short lived as the industry moves quickly to get disc brakes on 'cross bikes.

"If product manager interest in our hydraulic disc brakes for 'cross use is anything to go by, I expect the switch to disc brakes will happen fast," he said.

Because TRP's disc brakes are, at this time, for product manager's eyes only, the company did not disclose information on its 2012 product.

Larrabee did say that its new linear-pull TTV time-trial brakes, which require proprietary pivot locations, will be showing up on more bikes than the T922, which found itself on slippery 2011 frames from Kestrel, Pinarello and Specialized.

"The TTV shares nothing with the T922, not even the pivot location. It's been designed to tuck in behind a fork leg or seatstay to extend the trailing edge," he said.

Due to UCI rules, manufacturers are limited to no more than a three-to-one aerodynamic 'cross section on frame tub-



Lance Larrabee

ing. Since the TTV brake is a component and therefore outside of the rules, TRP engineers have shaped the brake arms to complete the tubing's trailing edge. This allows frame designers to increase the cross sectional aspect ratio beyond the UCI limit.

"The T922 tucked out of the way, but the TTV is even more so, and it makes frames and forks sleeker than they could be without a brake," he added.

—Matt Wiebe

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Gates Hires Local Engineer to Support Belt Drive System

Gates Carbon Drive has hired Taichung-based design engineer Ken O'Rourke to work with local bikemakers and ensure their frames support Gates' belt drive system.

Gates' chainless system requires stricter frame alignment standards in order to operate effectively. O'Rourke works with frame engineers at Taiwan factories, using custom-made tools to ensure the frame line is precise.

Gates-equipped frames also require a separation for the belt insertion. He also collaborates with product managers to make sure the hub, bottom bracket and crankset line up properly.

"It's not difficult, but it's something they have to pay attention to," said Todd Sellden, global director of Gates Carbon Drive.

O'Rourke, an American, moved to Taichung a decade ago while working for Trek. Two years later, he started his own industrial design and engineering company, and has contracted with brands like Crank Brothers, Bontrager, Fizik and Fox Racing Shox.

He contracted with Gates a year ago and now works with about 15 suppliers.

The complexity of his work changes by the company. For some, he fills a temporary engineering role if a factory doesn't employ an engineer. For other larger brands, he consults on an as-needed basis.

O'Rourke will likely play a more important role as Gates continues to pick up spec for its belt drive, first introduced three years ago in conjunction with

Spot. The system is now spec'd on urban and mountain bikes from more than two dozen North American and European brands, including such notables as Trek, Norco, Raleigh and Civia.

At Taichung Bike Week, the company marketed a lower priced version that will allow brands to spec its belts on bikes in the 599 to 799 euro range.

"That helps us on the volume side," Sellden said.

For late model year 2011 and for 2012, Gates developed Center Track, a stronger, slimmer belt with improved dirt and debris shedding capabilities. It costs 15 percent more than its predecessor, but this week attracted about 10 brands looking for a halo product, Sellden said.

The carbon belt drive system is part of the new applications



Ken O'Rourke

division for the Gates Corp., a large supplier of belts, hoses and hydraulics based in Denver, Colorado. —Nicole Formosa

Organizers

Continued from pg 1

ing wedding business on the weekends.

Because Taichung Bike Week is part of a loosely organized confederation of events, Fenton said he and other Bike Week officials plan to talk to officials from Ride On and SRAM, which also hold mini-shows for product managers in early December, before settling on 2011 dates.

Fenton is also seeking feedback from current and potential exhibitors and visitors to Taichung Bike Week. They can email him at info@taichung-bike-week.com.

He's soliciting comments on preferred dates, days of the week, and any other aspects of the show. "What can we do to make it better?" he said. "Are we missing anything blatantly obvious?"

Erik Kimble of Colmax, a Taiwan agent and distributor for several U.S. and European brands, said the Thanksgiving holiday in the United States—traditionally the fourth Thursday in November—creates a logistical problem for show dates.

"If you move [Bike Week] before Thanksgiving, it's not like you can have it on the 23rd. You have to move it way before," he said. "The Americans would love this. Early November, first week in November, that would be their dates,"

he said.

But if the show is too early, some Taiwan suppliers might have trouble getting new product ready to show, and European product managers may not bother coming.

"If the product's not cooked and ready, this is not a good time for them," he added. "This is not crucial for them at all, to have it so early."

Kore's Lance Bohlen said the North American and European needs are so different they could almost use different shows.

The best time for North Americans would be October, he said. His sales agents now visit product managers at that time, but it's difficult to see everyone.

"Nothing is as nice and easy as sitting in a room and having them visit you," he said.

A growing Bike Week risks ruining the very things that make it special, said Richard Todd, Ergon's international sales manager.

"It's pure bike people, and what



Chrissie Huang

worries me is that that might get diluted somewhat," he said. "Other shows like Eurobike and Interbike, there's so much other stuff going on, it's just not that intimate."

Chrissie Huang of First Components, who helped market Bike Week to local Taiwan companies, said organizers would resist pressure to grow too big.

"Some people want us to change, because they want us to be big. But we don't want to be big. We want to be a quality show," Huang said. "We don't want to compete with Taipei or be as big as Taipei," she added, referring to the Taipei Cycle Show. —Doug McClellan and Nicole Formosa

Ridden's New Tool Draws a Bead On Tubeless Tire Problems

You probably don't have a beadometer in your toolkit, but with a name like that any toolophile knows he needs one. Ridden, an engineering, design and standards firm, created the device to measure tire bead diameters.

"Under load, bead dimensions can change up to three millimeters, which no one really wants to talk about. But knowing this is vitally important if you have any pretensions for tire safety," said Josh Deetz, Ridden's founder.

Tire dimensional tolerances is not a huge issue with tube-type tires. But knowing a tire bead's dimensions become vitally important with tubeless tires, particularly for high-pressure road use. Until the beadometer, Deetz said, there has been no way to accurately measure bead diameter.

Deetz was a tire designer at Vittoria and consulted for other companies. His co-partner in Ridden, Tom Delacy, was a long-time WTB product manager.

"Even if you make your tire bead from a low-stretch fiber like Kevlar, if you braid it, it's going to stretch. So the issue is how to account for that stretch if you don't know how to measure the bead accurately to begin with?" he explained.

The beadometer is accurate to within a quarter of a millimeter. It will measure the bead diameter when a tire is relaxed and is indexed to measure the diameter at any tire pressure. Ridden is targeting



Josh Deetz

the tool to tire companies, distributors, retailers and team mechanics for quality control use.

"What dealer has not experienced tires that are impossible to mount on certain rims, or others that are known to blow off? With the beadometer, dealers can take a few tire measurements and quickly figure out if the tire or rim is the problem," Deetz said.

Deetz expects tech-savvy retailers will measure and index tires so they can pull a tire solution from inventory: using smaller-bead-diameter tires for riders who blow tires off wheels, for example, or larger-bead-diameter tires for riders with tire mounting issues.

Ridden expects to begin delivering its beadometer this summer. The company's first tire tool, the sectionometer, which measures tires and rim dimensions to accurately predict a tire's cross-section, is available now. —*Matt Wiebe*

Reynolds

Continued from pg 1

"It's just another player in the market," Boelts said. "As a customer, you have more choices. You have more prices to compare. That's a gain."

Pacific Rims offers carbon clinchers in 32-, 46- and 66-millimeter versions, but will consider making other sizes and options depending on customer requirements.

The rims are produced in MacLean's Hangzhou, China, factory, as are Reynolds rims. The two divisions employ different technology, materials and molds.

Taichung Bike Week was Pacific Rims' first introduction to OEs, and Boelts said the project drew interest from several suppliers.

He believes there is potential for growth in the coming years as carbon rims become standard spec on road bikes. Another market driver would be increased use of hydraulic disk brakes for road bikes—currently in development by SRAM and Shimano, he said—which would eliminate any problems created by braking in wet weather on carbon rims.

"This will boost carbon rims, and we want to be a part of that boost," he said.

Boelts said MacLean executives first started considering the Pacific Rims project about two years ago. The company wants to apply its expertise in sourcing, technology and manufacturing to expand its bike business.

"It increases product and increases raw materials to get down fixed costs per rim. All this is how to get bigger," he said.

—*Nicole Formosa*

When Should A 700c Tire Be Labeled a 29er?

When Marin developed a line of 700c Urban bikes, it called them "29ers." To enhance the marketing message, it asked Continental to take its stock Town Ride 700-by-47 city tires and slap a hot patch label on them that magically transformed them into 29-inch by 1.6-inch tires.

Marin was hoping to capture the eye of 29er off-road riders who wanted to keep their around-town ride equally trendy. And Continental was curious about the market impact of re-branding a plain Jane 700c city tire as a chic 29er tire.

The question is, what happens when consumers need a replacement and discover that "only" 700c tires are available?



Brett Hahn

"That was an OEM program for Marin which we are happily continuing. But my reservation is that we don't offer a replacement tire with that hot patch," said Brett Hahn, Continental's North American brand manager. Continental is entering its third model year providing the custom branded Town Ride tires to Marin.

"Dealers know the tire we do for Marin is just a re-branded, stock 700 by 47 Town Ride and can provide riders with correct replacement tires. But I worry we may confuse riders who want replacement tires exactly like the tires that came on their bike and are disappointed to find they are not available," Hahn added.

Hahn acknowledged that Continental has not been swamped by letters from angry consumers insisting on genuine "29er" replacements. Nor have other brands asked for Urban tires with the 29er brand name.

But as a tire guy who knows how tire labels in general can confuse consumers, Hahn wonders where Urban 29er labeling may lead.

"I see how the 29er brand crosses over between 29er mountain bikers and urban cyclists, and I know how popular the 29er category is. So should there be an urban 29er tire category?" he asked.

—*Matt Wiebe*



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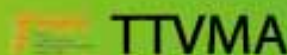
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