CARRYING THE TORCH

Turning 25 this year, Foes Racing remains dedicated to made-in-USA aluminum mountain bikes while also rolling with the times.

By Toby Hill

SAN DIMAS, Calif. — In a high-end mountain bike market ruled by carbon full-suspension models manufactured overseas, Foes Racing founder and president Brent Foes remains committed to hand-making his hydroformed and monocoque aluminum frames in Southern California. A born fabricator and tinkerer, he understands the skeptics who continue to ask whether he’ll have to switch to carbon and offshore production — as many of his boutique brethren have — in order to survive.

“He’s just not buying into that thinking. They’ve been asking me that three or four years. But if I had to go overseas and build carbon frames, I’d just find something else to do. There’s no challenge in that for me, because I’m not actually making it. For me there’s just

Continues on page 20

Bicycle retail 2.0: New-school dealers shape future of IBD

By Val Vanderpool

HOOD RIVER, Ore. — The scene is predictable at Dirty Fingers Bicycle Repair on any given afternoon. Mechanics tune shifting while pausing occasionally to pour a beer for a customer from the taps behind the counter. Customers seated on Park Tool stools sip beverages, their gaze shifting between the techs working their repair magic and a mountain bike film playing on a television in the corner. Numerous dogs mill about, looking for crumbs dropped off plates from the adjoining cafe.

More customers enter through the open garage

Continues on page 24

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Americans who don’t ride. The new study confirmed the one from two years ago, whose key finding was that about a third of Americans over age 3 rode at least once in the past year. It’s a simple metric that goes to the heart of PeopleForBikes’ mission, but surprisingly no one had determined it — at least by this definition — with any scientific validity until the 2014 study.

Prior to the 2014 study, the most common bike participation figure came from the National Sporting Goods Association, which has annually tracked participation in leisure activities for more than 30 years. The NSGA report generally says that about 12 percent of Americans participate in bike riding — a much smaller number than PeopleForBikes came up with. But the NSGA has a different definition than PeopleForBikes: NSGA only counts those who said they rode six times or more in the previous year, and only counts those age 6 and older. PeopleForBikes counts those over age 3 and anyone who said they rode outside at least once in the past year.

PeopleForBikes’ second participation study, conducted last fall and released in June, asked the same questions as in 2014 with almost identical methodology. Boldry, who has a doctorate in social psychology and years of experience crunching data like this, is careful to emphasize that two data points do not make a trend. Boldry won’t talk about trends until 2020, when she expects PeopleForBikes to do its fourth biannual study.

“I’ll be happier when we have 10 [studies],” said Boldry with a smile.

So while the second study does not reveal trends, it adds validity to the results of the first and allows Boldry and others at the organization to ponder the Infrequents and other groups identified. Who are they, in terms of age, gender, location and other demographics? Why did they ride when they did? Do they want to ride more, and if so, what is preventing them from doing so? And finally, what can the industry and organizations like PeopleForBikes do to increase the riding frequency?

Although Boldry would like to see more studies on the Infrequents, PeopleForBikes has already launched several programs aimed at that group. For example, the participation study revealed that about half of all Americans don’t have access to a working bike, and it showed that access to a working bike is a big barrier for many people who said they want to ride more, including women and people who live in urban areas.

The study didn’t ask if respondents had a non-working bike available. But given the number of bikes sold over the years, and the anecdotal evidence at bike shops and elsewhere, it’s a fair bet that there are many “non-operational” bikes hanging in garages with no problem other than a flat tire. That’s one reason PeopleForBikes promoted Fix a Flat Day in June as part of the group’s Bike Days of Summer.

PeopleForBikes didn’t have the budget to buy national ad space to promote Fix a Flat Day, but the group promoted it through its own social channels and provided creative assets and help to suppliers, retailers and other groups. On its website, the organization encouraged those with flat tires to visit their local bike shop, and listed a few shops around the country that were running special promotions.

Other data from the two participation studies bolstered PeopleForBikes promotions. The studies revealed that Americans who use bikes for transpor-
Concern about personal safety

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Source: PeopleForBikes U.S. Bicycle Participation Study 2016

In part to verify that responses were not out of line with other respected studies, respondents were asked about bike riding as well as other activities, including leisure activities, chores and sports.

While the study was interested in the Infrequents, it had no use for the Unreliables. Those are respondents who said they had visited a phony website the study asked about. Respondents who claimed they had checked out the make-believe site had their answers thrown out.

Quotas were set to ensure that a sufficient number of responses were available in each of 48 combinations of demographic profiles in terms of age, gender, and geographic region. Then the sample was weighted to represent the U.S. population ages 3 and older for gender, age, region, ethnicity and income.

The result is a report that is said to provide an overall margin of error of less than plus or minus 1 percent at a 95 percent confidence level.

The full study can be downloaded from the PeopleForBikes website at no charge: www.peopleforbikes.org/pages/u.s.-bicycling-participation-benchmarking-report.