

FALL EVENTS

CycloFest boosts consumer traffic, but retail attendance lags

By Toby Hill

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Three years. That's how long it takes to truly establish an event, Interbike vice president Pat Hus said after the inaugural Fall CycloFest trade/consumer event last year.

With consumer attendance up 10 percent in its second year this October, the Southeastern festival appears to be on the right path with that audience. The retail side of CycloFest is a different story.

After drawing 500 retail attendees in its first year — below Interbike's expectations — CycloFest saw retail attendance drop about 25 percent for the event's trade-only days this October.

"Our retail attendance was down significantly, and I'm not ashamed to admit that. But it's frustrating," Hus said.

And exhibitor count was down by about half, from 115 companies last year to fewer than 60 this year.

But after opening the demo to the public a half-day earlier this year, Interbike saw enough consumer traffic to bring CycloFest back for that make-or-break third year in 2018.

"With a smaller footprint we generated solid traffic during those consumer days. I think that's where everyone is pretty happy, and that's what's going to keep the event on the calendar for next year — the consumer piece," Hus said.

At BRAIN's press time, Hus said Interbike planned to meet around the Thanksgiving holiday with host venue the U.S. National Whitewater Center in Charlotte about tentative dates for 2018, likely around the third week of October. "October is a pretty light month for them, so I know they want to see this thing continue, as do we," Hus said.

Bike suppliers at this year's event reported strong booth traffic particularly on the consumer days, including the new addition of Friday afternoon, when the



Consumers jam the aisles of CycloFest in October at the U.S. National Whitewater Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. Event presenter Interbike said the fall festival drew 10 percent more consumers than last year, when more than 3,000 turned out.

expo opened to the public following a trade-only morning.

With a prime location next to one of the demo area's two entrances, Specialized sent its 60 bikes out on 500 demos over the four days. "We could have brought 100 more bikes and still not satisfied the demand," said Derrick Lewis, Eastern regional marketing manager for Specialized.

In between sending out consumer demos at the Santa Cruz booth, the brand's David Frye said he saw about the same number of dealers during the trade days as he did last year, despite the drop in retail attendance.

"I saw a lot of comments last year that it was slow, but it was great for us. We put out more demos that weekend than we had all season long. We really had our heads down. As a demo event for brands that people want to ride, it's cranking," he said.

This year, Santa Cruz sent 24 bikes out on 249 demos.

Marin Bikes decided late to come to CycloFest this year in order to build on

the success it has seen demoing its new Wolf Ridge mountain bikes, featuring the buzzed-about R3ACT 2 Play suspension design, and Hawk Hill price-point model this fall at Interbike's OutDoor Demo and at Outerbike in Moab, Utah.

"Getting some visibility with the dealers that come through and maybe haven't considered Marin, but they've heard about the Wolf Ridge or Hawk Hill, they come by and say, 'Let me take a look at this bike I've been hearing about.' And from the consumer side, getting butts on bikes is the key for us. The dealers want to see it in real life, and the consumers want to ride it," said Tom Jackson, Marin's national sales manager.

Jackson manned the Marin booth along with dealer Matt Haynes of Billygoat Bikes in Asheville, North Carolina. Likewise, Charlotte retailer Bike Source had staff helping at the Raleigh Electric booth, and Mills Davis from South Main Cycles in nearby Belmont lent a hand and passed out business cards for his shop at the Pivot booth.

"The days that meant the most to me were those when we got to interact with our customers," Davis said. "Luckily one of our flagship brands, Pivot, has been there both years and they allowed us to partner with them and gave us space at their tent to talk to customers, assist them and get them out to demo bikes."

Hus said Interbike hopes to encourage more of that collaboration between local retailers and their brands that exhibit at CycloFest.

"We're looking at figuring out how suppliers can sponsor their local retailer to be a part of it and be out there for the weekend. That way the retailers are promoting it to their customers, and if someone wants to buy a bike they can close the deal," he said.

Like last year, retailer attendance was highly regional, concentrated from Virginia to South Carolina and Georgia.

"I think we pulled from the region really well. But I don't think people got on airplanes, and that was our hope," Hus said. For 2018, Hus said he'd like to see retailer attendance at least return to the first year's level.

"But I'm also realistic. If people aren't going to get on planes, it's only going to go so far. So the retail attendance won't be the driver on whether this event is produced next year. It will be based on the consumer side," he said.

In the meantime, Interbike will continue to tweak its CycloFest formula, de-emphasizing elements like live music, which was sparsely attended this year, and perhaps taking the event down from four days to three to reduce cost.

"Each year you figure out little nuances to improve upon," Hus said. "That's why it takes three years: You never get it right the first year; you might get closer to right the second year; and hopefully the third year you pretty much nail it. And if it tanks then, it doesn't have legs." **BRAIN**

Boulder retailer organizes an 'antidote to the Ladies' Night'

By Steve Frothingham

LOUISVILLE, Colo. — Boulder, Colorado, retailer Elorie Slater has a dim view of the "Ladies' Nights" that many bike shops hold in hopes of attracting more female customers.

Slater, who bought Boulder's Sports Garage in 2016, has a professional background in marketing and economics and a passion for riding bikes on dirt.

She said most ladies' nights revolve around wine and cheese, perhaps a product presentation by a softgoods rep, and the promise of a store discount. She said they do little to help women advance in

the sport or to build the shop's brand.

"Mostly they just reinforce the idea that you can wait until ladies' night to get a discount on all our stuff," she said.

This fall Slater organized her idea of a better version of a ladies' night, or maybe "an antidote to ladies' nights," as she described it.

"I didn't want an event where women just shopped and networked. We wanted to create something where women had a voice and that offered a different kind of value."

Inspired by the tech industry's meet-up events, Slater organized a weeknight meeting called the Women's Offroad Cy-

cling Congress, held in a large presentation room at Pearl Izumi's headquarters in Louisville, a few miles from her shop.

About 130 women pre-registered and attended the event, including some industry representatives who flew in from out of state. The participants included many Boulder-area women who work in the industry or racing community, some experienced riders and racers who work in other industries, and a handful of less-experienced riders. The average age was 41.

The event was designed to offer the attendees information and inspiration, as well as networking, a taco bar, wine and

beer. But Slater wanted information to flow in both directions.

"The ultimate goal is to collect feedback from more than 100 women who identify as off-road cyclists, and share that feedback with the industry," Slater said.

The event started with speeches from four women who have found success in the bike world: Slater; Betty Bike Bash founder Amy Thomas; industry veteran Dorothy Pacheco; and Ashley Rankin, the founder of the women's clothing brand Shredly.

It then broke up into seven short breakout sessions at stations around the room. The sessions included instruction on bikepacking, racing, gravel riding

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Inaugural Roam Bike Fest brings brands, women together

By Val Vanderpool

SEDONA, Ariz. — On a perfect late-October day, Ash Bocast stood on an outdoor stage, microphone in hand. With Sedona's red rock landscape awash in the golden light of the setting sun at her back, Bocast welcomed more than 200 women to the first-ever Roam Bike Fest. She thanked sponsoring brands, the 150 attendees who traveled from as far away as Alaska and Florida, and volunteers.

Then she said something that would set the tone for the weekend.

"You like to dance, right? I know I do!" Bocast shouted into the cheering crowd. "Then let's dance, just for one minute to get this party started." On came a song, and everyone busted a move in the middle of the venue, kicking off the first, but certainly not the last, dance party of Roam Bike Fest.

This multi-day women's mountain bike festival was a long time in the making. Bocast, who previously worked for Liv Cycling, is no stranger to the alchemy that can happen when a group of women ride together. But when it came to the opportunity to really experience new product, Bocast thought there could be another way.

"When I was a demo driver, I knew it could be possible to provide a better experience than a short ride in a parking lot," Bocast said. "It was born out of the idea of giving participants a multi-day, meaningful interaction to get to know products and brands."

Bocast left Liv a year ago to start Roam Events and put on four women's weekend retreats. Each event, which drew about 30 women and a handful of brands, included demos, food, lodging and group rides.

Based on the success of Roam's retreats, Bocast thought she could scale the model. At first she conceived a tech clinic weekend, but as brands signed on and registration grew, it became a full-blown festival.

Pivot, Liv, Yeti, Juliana and Specialized brought more than 75 demo bikes to the Red Agave Resort for women to test ride, apparel brands Zoic and Shredly had riding wear for sale, and Bell had helmets to demo. Nonprofits IMBA, Project Bike Love, Camber Outdoors and others were there, and Sedona's four bike shops also supported the event in some way.

Most women took advantage of the opportunity to try something new, even if they had brought their own bike.

"They want to take time to learn the bikes, and compare them," said Carla McCord, Pivot's marketing manager who has since left the company. "There was interest in the long-travel stuff, which operates kind of counter to some expectations at a women's event. But there are so many op-

tions in that category today, and it's amazing. Such a big change from decades ago."

Riding was the focus of the weekend, and skills clinics, which have become somewhat synonymous with women's events, were noticeably absent.

"We've shown that you can instead focus on other riding experiences," Bocast said. "Clinics take more time and more money, and we want to keep the cost affordable and also have free time in the schedule."

But there were other opportunities for education at Roam Bike Fest, with workshops held daily.

"We taught four tech clinics," said Sara Jarell, SRAM's women's program coordinator. "It was a great environment for manufacturers to interact with consumers, versus a race because you're talking with people who shop at bike shops, who want to buy a bike or upgrade their seatpost to a dropper. That interaction can really move the needle for your company."

An Industry Influencers panel held Saturday evening drew a large crowd. Co-hosted by Camber Outdoors, the panel featured seven women who shared how they began working in the bike industry, insights into their roles and tips to help more women find a career in the industry.

"As an industry, we do a good job of having a unidirectional relationship with the consumer," said Victoria Hunt, Specialized's women's category manager. "They don't always get exposure to anything more than our frontline. This consumer-facing panel was something new, an open-kimono approach that said we're going to let you engage with us in a more meaningful way."

In 2018, Roam Events will offer retreats and has added a second Roam Bike Fest weekend, to be held at Reeb Ranch in Brevard, North Carolina, from May 11-13, and will return to Sedona the last weekend in October. The Sedona festival will be marketed to experienced riders due to the venue's technical trails.

"Having a location like Sedona for this event and thus gearing it toward intermediate/advanced riders allows for the evolution of how we treat and interact with female mountain bikers. The sport is evolving rapidly and having outlets outside of racing for intermediate and advanced riders gives new realms for the sport to grow," said Janette Sherman, Yeti's marketing manager.

Sponsoring suppliers agreed that the time is ripe for more events like Roam Bike Fest. With a breadth of women's-specific bikes, gear and apparel available, more retailers engaging female customers and the rise of skills



Event organizer Ash Bocast (on stage) welcomed 200 women for a weekend of riding, demos, food and dancing to Sedona's Red Agave Resort for the first Roam Bike Fest.



Group rides led by Specialized and shuttles provided by Hermosa Tours gave women access to Sedona's many trail networks to test demo bikes and improve their technical riding skills.

Photos by Brenda Ernst

clinics, many believe that after years of hard-fought efforts to get more women on bikes, there is finally healthy momentum in the right direction.

Liv marketing manager Jen Audia said events like these are also good for the industry as a whole.

"The weekend was about everyone riding together and tearing down walls. We [brands] are here to provide different options, but this was also about celebrating each other as women. And the more women we get on bikes, the more we'll all be successful," she said. "It showed that we don't need to keep doing things the same way they've always been done." **BRAIN**

and other riding skills, as well as min-seminar sessions on industry branding, best practices to attract, retain and elevate women in the bike industry, and one titled "Bike shops and the dreaded service department."

The service department session was moderated by Pearl Izumi/Shimano's Foley Armknecht and was one of the more lively sessions in the room, with women airing complaints as well as solutions related to what they've experienced when they bring bikes into stores for service.

Armknecht quickly filled up a flip pad poster with likes and dislikes.

A common complaint was that shop employees lacked the skill to adjust a conversation to the customer's experience and interest.

"They really need to be taught how to talk to people," said one woman. "They can ask leading questions to assess my knowledge. A lot of times they are making an assumption about what I know or don't know. So really it's all about training by the store."

On the plus side, women said they tend to trust bike store employees — perhaps more than salesmen and service writers in other industries.

"I think they are usually honest, and if you can develop a long-term relationship with them so they get to know me and my bike, it's great. The problem is there is so much turnover that it seems like I never talk to the same guy twice," another woman added. She said she chose to go to a very small shop where the owner

did most of the service, so that she could count on seeing the same person every time she brought her bike in.

Another theme was a shop culture that is unwelcoming to some.

One woman, who said her partner is a bike mechanic, noted, "I'm not walking in to get a chest bump and get into a contest about who knows the most about bikes. And I know that's part of the culture, but that's not something I need."

Several women noted that male customers who don't appear to be experienced cyclists likely have similar experiences.

"I'm sure it's just as bad if you are an overweight 45-year-old guy," one said.

Besides increased staff training and paying more to reduce staff turn-

over, participants suggested stores hold women's repair nights that teach specific mechanical skills and maintenance tasks, or hold short tech clinics prior to group rides.

Slater is gathering information from the sessions and preparing a report she will share with the industry in December.

She said she'd like to repeat the WORCC meeting in other markets — to perhaps four other cities next year and eventually more.

"This industry lags behind other similar industries — like snow sports, climbing and backpacking — in how we appeal to a diverse market set, including women. My goal is that this industry will lead the other industries by providing the best experiences," she said. **BRAIN**