

Ti'd together: Merlin Cycles back as sister brand to Dean

By Steve Frothingham

BOULDER, Colo. — After several ownership changes and relocations, the legendary Merlin titanium bike brand is now owned by Janus Cycle Group, the parent company of Dean Cycles and Velosport Imports, a distributor of products including ALAN, GIOS and Hersh bicycles, Floyd's of Leadville products and Alchemist Carbon Wheels.

Janus co-owner John Siegrist has been making Dean titanium bikes in Colorado since 1989, and Merlin bikes are now being made in the same facility as Dean in Boulder's Gunbarrel area, although the brands have separate designated welders and brand management.

Merlin was launched just a few years earlier than Dean, and Siegrist has always been an admirer of the brand and has had a friendly relationship with the handful of major titanium builders around the country.

"There was Merlin, and then Litespeed and then a couple years later there was us, I think," he said about the early titanium makers. "I always thought highly of what they did."

Merlin was founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1986 and quickly became one of the best-known high-end brands of the era. The company supplied several major teams and athletes and offered an ever-expanding array of titanium products, including racing wheelchairs.

Hyde, the owner of Saucony shoes, bought Merlin in 1998. American Bicycle Group, owner of the Litespeed brand, took it over about two years later. In 2011, ABG sold the brand to Competitive Cyclist, then an independent e-commerce business based in Little Rock, Arkansas. Just a few months later, Competitive Cyclist was acquired by the owner of Backcountry.com, the Utah-based e-commerce giant.

The brand was off the market for a few years before Competitive Cyclist reintroduced it at the 2013 North American Handmade Bicycle Show in Denver. The Colorado Cyclist Merlins were manufactured in Arizona by Form Cycles, which initially offered just the Extralight road frame. Competitive Cyclist also briefly offered a carbon fiber Merlin road frame made in Italy.

Siegrist, who is the brand manager for Merlin as well as managing director of Ja-

nus Cycle Group, has brought back the Extralight road frame model. He has also sought to appeal to history-minded bike consumers by restoring the brand's original Merlin logo, which had been changed over the years. The new Merlins also feature a head badge inspired by those on the



Merlin's new owner, Janus Cycle Group, has revived the Extralight road model. It's available for rim or disc brakes.

earlier bikes, made by Revolution Cycle Jewelry of Philadelphia.

All the new Merlins are made in Colorado with U.S.-made titanium tubing.

Siegrist has expanded the Merlin frame line to include the Sandstone gravel bike, the Telluride mountain bike, the Mendocino adventure bike and the Por-

tage cyclocross bike. Merlin offers custom sizing and specifications.

Siegrist noted there are many more options available on custom frames than in decades past: Customers can specify axle spacing, bottom bracket type, brake-mount type and more. Merlin also offers several finish options.

"You have to be very flexible now, but it's actually a good thing for custom framebuilders; it allows us to offer things the big guys can't," he said.

Siegrist said he has received several inquiries about the Merlin Newsboy, a curvy cantilevered frame the brand offered briefly in the 1990s. He said there are no plans to bring it back as a standard model.

"The opportunity cost is too great — it would tie up a builder for a week. It would have to be a very special custom order from someone who could wait a year or 18 months and was OK with that," Siegrist said.

Janus has accounts with dealers around the country with the Dean and Merlin brands and Velosport Imports. Merlins are sold through dealers when possible, but are sometimes sold direct to consumers if there is no dealer nearby. **BRAIN**

BPSA to get additional industry data in new contract with The NPD Group

By Lynette Carpiet

PORTLAND, Ore. — The Bicycle Product Suppliers Association has entered into a new three-year partnership for stats on the industry with The NPD Group.

As part of the deal, the BPSA will now gain access to what NPD calls "rest of market data," which is sell-through of bicycle products at mass retailers (think Walmart or Kmart), sporting goods (think Dick's, Academy, Modell's, etc.) and online retailers (including Amazon).

Previously, BPSA members would have monthly access to IBD sell-through numbers only, in addition to wholesale sell-in data. The BPSA collects complete bicycle sales data sold into retail as part of its sell-in data. But retail sell-through data, collected by NPD Group, includes both complete bicycles as well as parts and accessories. Sell-through data is received from a panel of retailers.

Thirteen suppliers, representing about 20 brands, currently report their wholesale data to NPD, which compiles the monthly reports. All of the industry's top brands are currently reporting their sales. Reporting companies include ASI, CSG, Haro, Jamis, QBP, Accell, Trek, Norco, Specialized, Giant, Kona, Downeast and Felt. The BPSA's membership is much larger, but the association does not require that its members report their sales.

The BPSA has contracted with NPD, formerly Leisure Trends Group, since 2009 to collect data on supplier sell-in to IBDs and sell-through to consumers.

NPD started tracking rest of market as part of its Retail Tracking Service in January 2013 and made the data available in May 2016. With that expansion, NPD said it covered 85 to 90 percent of the cycling market in the U.S.

"This will give us a bigger picture of the total market," said Bernie Doering, chair of the BPSA statistics committee and senior vice president of global sales/market-

ing for Stages Cycling, of the inclusion of rest of market sell-through data for BPSA members.

"When you look at bicycles, there's a predominance of them sold through retailers. With P&A, a larger percentage of sales are coming through online dealers like Competitive Cyclist, Backcountry or through Amazon."

Doering said NPD is also making the data much easier to understand. It will be delivered in a spreadsheet format with dropdown features that will allow companies to get the details they want quickly and easily.

Previously, BPSA members had access to NPD's Decision Key, its data platform, but it was not user friendly.

"In my talking to our constituents, I found no one's using it," Doering said. "Now it's a usable form of data with pivot tables and dropdowns."

A company can focus its data query on a month or the last trailing 12 months and on specific categories or subcategories in both IBD specialty and rest of market channels.

Doering, who took over as stats committee chair at the Bicycle Leadership Conference in 2017, has made it his priority to push for more comprehensive data from NPD. He said the data delivered has gotten much better as NPD has tweaked its algorithms and expanded to include sales data from other channels besides specialty bike retail, as well as expanding its panel of reporting retailers within specialty bike.

"NPD has significantly increased the pool of retailers that report in IBD, and that's helped the accuracy of the data," Doering said. From 300 retailers, Doering said the number has grown to more than twice that over the past two years.

All BPSA members are able to buy more brand-specific data at a greatly reduced price as one of the perks of membership. **BRAIN**

PBMA rolls out shop certification program

AUSTIN, Texas — The Professional Bicycle Mechanics Association is now offering bike shops — including mobile and service-only operations — the opportunity to be designated as PBMA Certified Shops.

To qualify, at least half an operation's service staff must be PBMA-certified mechanics. Shops also have to show they are legitimate businesses, meeting whatever legal registrations are required in their community. The annual cost is \$175 for the first location and \$100 per additional location.

Benefits include two free PBMA mechanic memberships per location, a listing in a PBMA directory, access to Myagi tech training videos, access to discounts on insurance, tools and other services and materials, and reports on market trends and service data. Certified shops will also receive "PBMA Certified Shop" materials that can be used in the store and on the web.

"The idea of the program is to highlight shops that are focused on service and provide qualified service to consumers. By certifying their mechanical staff and recognizing the shop as a leader in service, we can highlight the businesses as well as the technicians in our directory," PBMA president James Stanfill said.

The PBMA announced earlier this spring that it was working with a group of independent mobile service operators, and Stanfill noted that the Certified Shop program is open to mobile businesses if they meet the criteria.

"In January, we had a great discussion with a handful of independent mobile owners and came to the conclusion that there are challenges for legitimacy within our industry for businesses that aren't built in the traditional sense. In discussion with owners of traditional shops, mobile shops and service-only enterprises, we thought the best way forward in our changing industry would be to continue to look specifically at service and what service can provide for the shop and the community," Stanfill said. —Steve Frothingham