

Q&A Chris Cocalis Aims to Turn Pivot Into a Powerhouse

BY JASON NORMAN

TEMPE, AZ—Chris Cocalis is known as an Arizona guy, but unbeknownst to many is that his cycling roots were actually formed in Chicago.

Like so many in the industry, Cocalis got his start in BMX, racing for Sundance Cycle.

“Sundance turned out more fast racers than anywhere in the U.S.,” Cocalis said.

“The shop was owned by Jim McMahon. He is the best example of what passion for the bike industry is all about. He always gave 100 percent back to the kids that raced for him and the families that frequented his store. I wouldn’t be in the bicycle industry today if it wasn’t for Jim.”

Racing might have been in his blood, but Cocalis was always tinkering with his BMX frames. In 1987, he discovered mountain biking.

“I had pictures on my wall of the Nishiki Alien and other Mantis frames,”

Cocalis said.

A friend taught Cocalis how to braze in 1989, and his first frames were elevated chainstay designs. He was fortunate enough to have one of his bikes featured alongside a Mantis and Nishiki bike in a *Mountain Bike Action* article entitled “Bikes of the Future.”

“That was the beginning,” he said.

Cocalis formed Titus Cycles shortly thereafter, building the company from the ground up. It didn’t take long for Titus to gain a following for producing quality mountain bikes.

In 2001, Titus merged with composites technology firm Vyatek Sports. Cocalis retained equity in both companies, securing a five-year contract as part of the deal.

Cocalis decided to leave in 2006 when negotiations broke down over a new contract, calling it a “difficult decision” to sell the company. GAI Cycles now owns Titus.

Cocalis took some time off, but it



Chris Cocalis

was never his intention to sit on the sideline for long.

“I wasn’t planning to leave the bicycle industry or stop designing and manufacturing bikes,” Cocalis said. “I feel like I’m just getting started. I enjoy the people, the product and the

life-long relationships I’ve built over the years. This is much more than an industry to me. It’s a sport that defines my life, my passion, and the people in it are my close friends and family.”

So it came as no surprise to those who knew him best that he’d start up a new mountain bike brand. In the summer of 2007, that’s exactly what Cocalis did, launching Pivot Cycles. Cocalis distributes the new high-end Pivot line alongside the BH brand of Spanish road bikes.

“There’s a lot going on in the world of full-suspension mountain bikes and I would like to think that we are helping to evolve this segment of our sport with new ideas and fresh thinking,” Cocalis said. “That focus is important to being the best in this rapidly changing segment of the sport. At the same time, I really enjoy road bikes. The racing, the culture and the rapid evolution of equipment in this area are all very exciting.”

What are the biggest differences between when you started Titus and your latest venture with Pivot?

Cocalis: I don’t even know where to begin. I started Titus when I was 21 and in college so that should tell you a lot. It was started on pure passion, enthusiasm and drive. I grew up with Titus and followed a long and winding road to success with a fair amount of mistakes along the way. Pivot was certainly started on a similar level of passion, enthusiasm and drive, but with a lot more planning, knowledge and experience. With Pivot (and BH), I have a much clearer plan and path that I want to follow. The biggest thing is that I have been through the pains of growth and know what we need to do now to set up for the future. As a company we have a better structure, better systems and the best people. Having a great team in place makes the biggest difference of all.

Would you have started Pivot knowing that the economy was going to slow down as it has over the past year?

Cocalis: Actually, I think our sport is in really great shape as a whole. We’re certainly having a great first year, and many of our dealers are up as well.

Some dealers may be down a little, but much of this has really been weather based. Both Shimano and SRAM are up and many of the big parts distributors are up as well, which points in only one direction. Even though there are issues with segments of the economy that affect us all, I think the bike industry will not be hugely affected. The bike is a symbol of freedom and hope. Even if you don’t take the big vacation, you can always ride your bike to get away. A bike is an investment in your health, and recreation that gives back every time you ride it. Commuting is also up and with this comes the opportunity to get new people involved in our sport. A certain segment of new commuters are bound to get bitten by the cycling bug beyond just riding to work. These riders are my future customers. I was going to start Pivot come hell or high water. Where there’s a will, there’s a way.

How have you fared your first year out of the chute?

Cocalis: The first year has been exciting and very successful. We’ve really been welcomed by the dealers, the consumers and the magazines. The task has been enormous given what we’ve accomplished in less than a year, but it

really couldn’t have gone much better. I certainly couldn’t have done it without the support of my friends in the industry. A lot of people have really gotten behind us and helped us to succeed.

How many U.S. retailers do you currently have? And are you looking to increase that number?

Cocalis: We have about 65 stocking dealers and 16 outside sales reps. We definitely want to grow that number where it makes sense. There are areas of the country where we want to be better represented. We have had a lot of new dealers contact us for information and our reps asking for early info on 2009 because of all the interested dealers. I expect that we will have a very busy booth at Interbike, both for the Outdoor Demo and the indoor show.

Tell us about your strategy going into Eurobike, and your European strategy overall.

Cocalis: BH will have a large stand at Eurobike and we will have a nice space separated within their booth. BH Spain has actually hired a Pivot product manager to handle the brand and we are in the process of hiring Pivot-specific sales

people for Spain, France and Portugal. There are a couple of other markets that BH handles directly and we will move into those areas with BH when the time is right. For the rest of Europe we will be looking for distributors to handle Pivot. We would like to be with distributors who are familiar and successful with high-end mountain bike products. I think the frame stiffness, durability and overall pedaling and suspension performance of the Pivot product line will be very popular with European customers.

How many bike models do you have on the market, and are you adding any in 2009?

Cocalis: For Pivot, we have three frame models that make up seven complete bikes. The 429, our new 29er model, we released in July as an early 2009 model. We will have a new six-inch-travel bike that we will show at Interbike as well as some surprises for the ladies. As for BH, there is a lot going on. We have more sizes for the top of the line G4 Ag2r team bike, a new women’s model, a new TT bike, a new carbon ‘cross bike that is available now and some other major changes in the line that are worth checking out. **BRAIN**