

Bay Area DEALER TOUR

Trains, ferries and bikes!

We went multi-modal in late January as we canvassed the Bay Area, visiting 15 shops in the East Bay, Marin County and San Francisco and tallying 75-plus miles in the saddle over three days.

The BRAIN Dealer Tour kicked off with visits to Berkeley and Oakland shops; we crossed the San Francisco Bay via ferry in the morning and returned on the BART rail at the end of the day, wrapping up with good beer and Mexican food at the Chrome Industries headquarters in the city.

Day Two we glided across the Golden Gate Bridge on our journey to Marin County. Mountain bike pioneer Joe Breeze joined us along the way and the WTB staff ambushed us with cowbells in front of their headquarters in Mill Valley as we rode by. It was a photo finish as the sun set behind Mount Tam on the ferry ride back to the city.

The folks from the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition (SFBC) routed us around the city's steepest hills on the final day, leading our group on a 20-mile jaunt around San Francisco, where we took in the Presidio, the Painted Ladies and sampled freshly painted green lanes on Market Street.

We took plenty of photos and asked lots of questions. We hope you enjoy the profiles and business stories in the following pages.

Special thanks to our jovial ride leaders from the East Bay Bicycle Coalition, the Marin County Bicycle Coalition and the SFBC.



SERVICE BY THE BAY

By Steve Frothingham

If you want to know the kind of customers a bike shop serves, talk to their service managers. On the BRAIN Bay Area Dealer Tour, we explored a wide variety of stores, most easily categorized from the front door, if not the curb.

But while all the stores' repair areas

include the same basic tools—and labor rates varied surprisingly little—the tech departments serve widely different demands from their clientele.

At historic shops in San Francisco, Berkeley and Sausalito, Cinzano-capped connoisseurs rummage for vintage parts and pay for full-bike restoration jobs, complete with custom-made decals.

City hipsters, seduced by brown leather, black denim and high-polished aluminum, look for help converting modest lugged sport bikes into stylin' urban machines.

Affluent roadies in the city and in Marin County expect pro-level, white glove treatment, preferably performed by someone with a deep racing pedigree.

Commuters on both sides of the Bay need fast turnaround—sometimes even free quick repairs at curbside.

And in the mountain bike's motherland of Marin, the ability to rebuild suspension pivots or tune a shock are skills you can take to the bank.

mark. Its tech department is primarily in the store's Annex, across the street from the main store, and serves cash-poor U.C. Berkeley students and vintage bike enthusiasts, said Charles Betz, who has worked at the Link since 1981.

"We are an anomaly," Betz said. "We work on a lot of old bikes."

The Annex's rafters are full of Star-Tru replacement wheels as well as a variety of old bikes and frames, from a mid-'80s Mongoose Moose Goose to a vintage Masi.

"We get a lot of old bike enthusiasts who we help out with projects," Betz said.

Many of the enthusiasts have a taste for European parts and the department has invested in a Campagnolo 11-speed chain tool, although Betz concedes the \$150 device has popped just a few pins.

He's more proud of a custom Campy hub bearing race remover that he made out of a cut-down 1 1/8-inch quill stem.

Missing Link's hourly labor charge is \$70.

Making 'old turds' like new

Tam Bikes in Mill Valley is in the mountain bike's Holy Land, and the service department sees a wide variety of off-road machines, from handmade Steve Potts frames to the latest long-travel full-suspension rigs. Many arrive in a sad state of affairs, and service manager George Travin takes pride in being able to return them to running order.

"We can take an old turd and make it ride like it's brand new," he said.

Shock and fork repairs, rebuilds and tunes are a shop specialty. For this kind of work, area enthusiasts can be relatively patient (compared to city commuters), and turnaround can be up to two weeks during the summer, Travin said.

"It can't be any longer than that; we don't have room to store the bikes," he said.

Tam Bikes' hourly labor rate is \$90. "Rent here is really high," Travin explained.

Dollar a minute

At San Francisco's Box Dog Bikes, the service department gets a mix of demands, from time-crunched commuters to folks doing restorations and conversions of randonneur and touring bikes.

Mechanic Geoffrey Colburn said the store generally charges \$1 a minute for repairs, which suits the needs of both types of customers.

The store's urban clientele has special needs beyond quickness. A Sawzall comes in handy for chopping bars and basket stays, and a shop specialty is turning used chains, wrapped in used inner tubes, into saddle theft-prevention devices.



Not for sale: Dealer Tour bikes take over the sidewalk.



Bay Area Bikes' Glenda Barnhart and Clay Wagers

Bay Area Bikes, Oakland

Employees: 8

Sales floor space: 1,600 square feet (Oakland main store); 2,000 square feet (Pittsburg store)

Emphasis: Commuter, family

Main brands: Giant, Raleigh, Tern, Dahon

Years in business: 9

Owners: Glenda Barnhart, Clay Wagers

Bay Area Bikes has the look of a store in the middle of revitalization, much like the Oakland neighborhood it calls home.

The shop has a lively energy and no pretense; it's packed with bikes for families and commuters, from Giant and Raleigh, plus folders from Tern, Dahon and Brompton.

Glenda Barnhart, a high-tech industry refugee, bought the store with retail lifer Clay Wagers five years ago. It's near Oakland's "auto row," next to a posh Audi dealership, but also near some closed-up storefronts. Barnhart noted that a Whole Foods was opening nearby, which gave her hope for the neighborhood.

When the pair took over the store, it had about eight bikes on the sales floor. Now there are about 400 bikes and they're already expanding, with a second store 30 miles away in Pittsburg, and a rental and service location near Oakland's Jack London Square, a growing tourist destination.

The shop's clientele includes many folks who commute across the Bay into San Francisco every day. It's a commute that includes a stint on a ferry or on the BART train for most, which explains the store's wide selection of folding bikes.

Neither of the storeowners has a car, although they have a business vehicle that occasionally gets used to shuttle inventory to or from the Pittsburg store. They often use a cargo bike to move stuff to or from the rental location.

families, many without deep pockets. Service manager John Adams said his customers expect quick turnaround and affordable replacement parts.

"People ride the crap out of their bikes here, and they are looking for durability and longevity out of their bikes, and they ride year-round," said Adams, who got his start working in shops in Ohio and Kentucky.

During the season, the shop can turn around all major repairs in "three days, max," Adams said, and half that in winter.

Adams keeps a deep selection of affordable pre-built replacement wheels, and also tries to have shop-built wheels available to fit most bikes. "On slow days we build wheels," he said.

Bay Area offers tune-ups for \$80 and generally charges \$60 an hour for service off the store's rate sheet.

Only a few years ago, service produced half the store's revenue, but under its new owners the store is selling a lot more bikes and service now accounts for about 15 percent of sales, still well above industry norms.

'An anomaly'

Berkeley's Missing Link is an employee-owned co-op and a city land-

City Cycle, San Francisco

Employees: 12-20, seasonally

Sales floor space: 2,500 square feet (San Francisco store); 6,000 square feet (Marin store)

Emphasis: High-end road; more mountain bike at Marin location

Major brands: Trek, BMC, Seven

Years in business: 27 in San Francisco, but 3 under current ownership; 6 in Marin

Owner: Cory Farrer

City Cycle is in the middle of change, although one suspects it always is.

Owner Cory Farrer is looking to make his San Francisco location his own, three years after buying it from the estate of legendary city retailer Clay Mankin, who died suddenly in 2005.

At the same time, Farrer is looking to rebrand his Marin County location, which was formerly known as Paradigm Cycles. Farrer moved that store into a larger space last year and renamed it City Cycles.

"We are working on letting people know who we are, and we are not Paradigm anymore, and we are not the original City Cycle, either," he said.

Mankin had built his store into a high-end destination for custom road bikes, and Farrer is hanging on to that rep, emphasizing bike fit and service, although he has added Trek to the store's offerings to reach more accessible prices.

The Marin County location has a strong reputation for top service, too. It started out as Gravy's Wheels, which sold custom wheelsets to clients across the country. So Farrer has nurtured its reputation for high-quality wheel building and keeps a healthy inventory of wheel parts at both locations. The store website still features a custom wheel ordering feature, and many of the high-end bikes that leave City Cycle feature wheels built there.

Just months after moving into the new Marin County space, Farrer is planning a remodeling of the city store, changing its bike displays, repainting the walls and adding more art.

"You can't stand still," Farrer said.

Specialty: 'Being awesome'

City Cycle is proud of its experienced service staff, particularly its wheel builders. That pride, combined with high rents at its San Francisco and Marin County locations, justifies the store's \$100 hourly labor rate, the highest we encountered on this Dealer Tour.

"A lot of people come to us for service. We'd like to have them buy their bikes from us and come for service, but if they buy somewhere else and then come to us, we'll take that too," said owner Cory Farrer.

Service contributes 10 to 11 percent

of store revenue, he said.

"The service department is one department that always stays busy, no matter what time of year it is."

Service, wheel building and bike fit all contribute to the store's reputation and revenue and Farrer likes to say his locations have just one specialty: "Being awesome."

Curbside repair

Huckleberry Bicycle is on a major downtown San Francisco artery, Market Street, which remains a bike commute



Cory Farrer bought City Cycle three years ago.

freeway despite heavy auto traffic, buses and ever-present streetcar tracks that keep bikers on their toes.

The store's clientele is similar to Box Dog's—a mix of commuters and urban bike connoisseurs, although Box Dog is located on a quieter street.

Huckleberry takes advantage of its location by offering free repairs from 7:30 to 9:30 weekday mornings at a former newsstand kiosk.

The pop-up service stand handles minor repairs such as flat fixes, creaks, brake tightening or derailleur adjustments.

"We've gotten flak for giving up free repair, but we want to keep people moving and happy," co-owner Zack Stender said. "People love it. We get a lot of com-



ments on Twitter and Facebook."

The store's service department also keeps busy helping customers convert road bikes into urban commuters. Huckleberry will often take a traditional dropbar road bike from a brand such as Masi and add wide-sweep handlebars, racks and baskets. A wide array of leather saddles and handlebar tape gives customers opportunity to add a little style.

Huckleberry's hourly labor rate is \$65, one of the lowest we encountered on this Dealer Tour. **BRAIN**

Huckleberry Bicycles, San Francisco

Employees: 12, including three owners

Shop floor space: 2,000 square feet; adding 1,500 square feet next door

Years in business: 1 year, three months

Emphasis: Urban/city bikes and apparel; some road, 'cross and touring/randonneuring

Main brands: Masi, Redline, Salsa, Civia, Cannondale, Felt, Pinarello, Brompton

Owners: Zack Stender, Jonas Jackel, Brian Smith

With a little over a year under their belt, the three owners of this shop have hit a homerun with locals. Maybe it's their generosity—they give out free repair weekday mornings—or perhaps it's their uncluttered, modern but warm store where city hipsters and roadies can both feel at home. Or, it could be their location on Market Street, a heavily trafficked bike commuter route. Likely it's a bit of everything, but this new kid on the block has the city folk buzzing, according to co-owner Zack Stender.

Huckleberry is one of a slew of new businesses moving into this historic but rough downtown neighborhood that's gentrifying and seeing booming growth. The store sells mostly urban and commuter bikes and apparel—a successful mesh of cycling culture and cycling couture. It has hands down the widest selection of cycling jeans of all the shops visited, including \$110 pants by Cadence and a \$400 jacket by new Japanese brand Pedaled, next to matching accessories like Brooks saddles and bags.

Stender said stocking high-end softgoods was a big investment and risk but he claims the stuff sells well because it doesn't look like cycling gear.

He said biking is becoming classy and fashionable, not just a low-budget way to get around town, and there are buyers looking for locally made but practical goods.

The owners seek out unique products like San Francisco-based Betabrand, a women's apparel line that only sold direct online. Huckleberry worked a deal to sell it at the shop; Betabrand also makes Huckleberry's branded line of casual pants and shirts.



Huckleberry Bicycles owners Zack Stender, Jonas Jackel and Brian Smith

RETAILERS GET CREATIVE IN SPREADING THE WORD

By Toby Hill

Retail chain Mike's Bikes has the marketing and promotional muscle most shops would kill for.

Its marketing and community engagement staff numbers six people, one of whom is dedicated almost full time to social media. Staff members are out at events every single weekend. Mike's supports NICA high school racing teams in all the communities it serves. And the retailer's own local road race team is the most successful men's elite squad in the Bay Area, according to marketing director Davin Pukulis.

"We feel strongest about in-person interaction. People are saturated with media these days," he said.

Of course, all this comes with the scale of being the Bay Area's largest specialty bicycle dealer, having grown from a single store in Marin County in 1965 to 11 locations spread from Silicon Valley to Sausalito, over to the East Bay and inland to Sacramento.

Bay Area retailers without such resources have had to find more modest ways to draw attention to their businesses, often on a shoestring budget. Some pay

them," Charlotte said.

Tip Top embodies that neighborhood pride with its involvement in local events including the Ride 4 a Reason benefit, which raises money for four local schools while also letting Tip Top get its name out into the community.

Glenda Barnhart and Clay Wagers have taken a similarly low-profile marketing approach at Oakland's Bay Area Bicycles, a struggling shop when the two bought it in 2008. The duo has done some print advertising in consumer magazine *Momentum* and free local weekly the *East Bay Guardian*, but largely sticks to word-of-mouth and community involvement to beat the drum for the business.

Smartly, they preserved the Google-friendly Bay Area Bicycles name when they bought the business, helping to vault the shop to the top of online searches and drive traffic to Bay Area's website.

Wrench Science, a Berkeley-based seller of high-end custom bikes that does the majority of its business online, invests heavily in organic search placement on Google as well as advertising in consumer magazines and on websites that draw hard-core cyclists, such as RoadBikeReview.com and MTBR.com.

the shop's website, where Penzarella also maintains a handful of blogs, video galleries and online features such as a Bike of the Week spotlight that shows off the sleek shop/fit studio and its high-zoot wares.

Over the Golden Gate from Studio Velo, in San Francisco, commuter and transportation shop Huckleberry Bicycles figured it had a built-in clientele when it opened 15 months ago on Market Street, one of the city's most heavily trafficked commuter cycling arteries with a wealth of sharrows and dedicated green lanes that the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition has fought hard to establish.

It didn't quite work out that way, at least initially.

"Our assumption that, being on Market Street, bikers would find us was sort of

its home in San Francisco's Midmarket section, sandwiched between the SOMA and Tenderloin neighborhoods, both notorious for seedy hotels, prostitution and prevalent drug use, Smith said.

With little money to spend on advertising, the owners instead leveraged social media for free marketing, highlighting Huckleberry's attractive storefront, bright, welcoming layout and high level of service. Early fans helped raise the shop's profile by moving Huckleberry up to a five-star rating on Yelp.

Back at Mike's, the company's considerable resources can be a double-edged sword. "Our numbers continue to be so strong because we have such broad appeal," marketing manager Pukulis said. But that broad appeal also raises concerns

Mike's Bikes, San Rafael

Employees: 18 (San Rafael location); 235 companywide

Sales floor space: 8,000 square feet (San Rafael location), plus 10 other stores 4,000 to 10,000 square feet each and a 12,000-square-foot distribution center

Years in business: 48

Emphasis: Family and performance road and mountain

Main brands: Specialized, Raleigh, Wilier, Santa Cruz

Owners: Ken Martin, Matt Adams

Founded in 1965 with a single shop in Marin County, Mike's Bikes has grown into an 11-store giant covering the entire Bay Area and even reaching out to Sacramento, the chain's largest store at 10,000 square feet.

But the San Rafael store, opened in 2005, is Mike's nerve center, housing the company's central offices in addition to 8,000 square feet of retail space ringed by a test track. Across town, a 12,000-square-foot distribution center serves all 11 stores.

The nation's No. 1 Specialized and Raleigh dealer, Mike's continues to spread its footprint, having opened stores in San Jose and Pleasanton in the past year.

little mind to marketing or advertising at all, instead banking on word-of-mouth to build their customer base.

That's exactly how Oakland commuter and transportation retailer Tip Top Bike Shop has operated since opening in 2007. Outside of a sporadic e-newsletter augmented by a smidge of Facebooking, owners Richard and Charlotte Oclerich rely almost entirely on word-of-mouth, commuter traffic on nearby bike thoroughfares connecting downtown Oakland and Berkeley, and good old-fashioned neighborhood loyalty.

"It's a big city, but there are neighborhoods here and people are really proud of

"Our big thing is we want enthusiasts who want to build great bikes," said owner Tim Medina, who routinely stocks \$300,000 in frames for custom builds that can top \$20,000 or more.

Scott Penzarella, CEO and managing partner of Studio Velo, caters to a similar high-end clientele—so much so that he has built a luxury bicycle tourism business, SV Travel, out of his shop in the affluent Marin County town of Mill Valley. Paired with gourmet dining and premier accommodations, travel packages include local trips to Napa and Sonoma and adventures to the French and Italian Alps.

Penzarella markets SV Travel through



Left: Joe Breeze does a circuit on the test-ride track at Mike's Bikes.

Below: The San Rafael store also houses Mike's Bikes' company offices. A separate distribution center across town serves all 11 of the retail chain's locations.



incorrect," said co-owner Brian Smith. "I don't know if they were busy looking out for potholes or what."

To grab their attention, Huckleberry turned an abandoned newspaper kiosk on the street into a bicycle service station, where passing cyclists get minor repairs for free. The shop now has a direct connection to its core demographic: the daily cyclist and commuter.

Huckleberry also faced a challenge in overcoming negative perceptions of

about maintaining "authenticity" with enthusiast cyclists, Pukulis acknowledges.

So all of Mike's Bikes' promotional photography, including its summertime "I am Mike" bus ad campaign, features shop employees in local ride settings.

That ethos extends to Pukulis' marketing team as well.

"I've made it a point to have cycling enthusiasts every point of the way," he said. "The entire marketing team rides and races together." **BRAIN**

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ONLINE SALES A TOUGH NUT TO CRACK

By Lynette Carpiet

Among Bay Area retailers, Wrench Science has sunk perhaps the most time and money into its mail-order and online sales model. Owner Tim Medina has built his business around enabling customers to build their dream bikes on the Wrench Science website.

Customers use the site's online configurator to pick a frame in their size and color and every conceivable part on it—from the brake pads to the handlebar tape and even inner tubes. The software ensures all the parts chosen are compatible and also tallies the weight and price of each part as it's added. Bikes are then shipped to the customer; about 20 percent are picked up in the store.

Medina said the programming was a considerable investment and had to be built from scratch. But 11 years in, his idea is delivering profits. Wrench Science has seen double-digit growth since 2006, he said.

That success is unheard of for most other retailers in the Bay Area who are selling online.

Bay Area Bicycles in Oakland has a SmartEtailing website and signed up for Supplier Sync, which allows it to show more of the products its suppliers carry as being in stock or in warehouse. Its POS system is synced with the site,

showing real-time inventory. It can't sell complete bikes from its suppliers, which forbid those sales, but co-owner Glenda Barnhart said Bay Area Bicycles has an exclusive to sell folding bike brand Tern online on the West Coast. And it works with Shopatron to fulfill sales of Saris and Dahon products that customers make through those suppliers' websites. Still, online sales make up less than 5 percent of its business.

"We're hoping it will increase this year," she said.

Cory Farrer, owner of City Cycle with stores in San Francisco and Corte Madera, has had a SmartEtailing website for years, but more recently signed up for Supplier Sync. He said his online sales have seen a small bump as a result.

"We're selling things that we wouldn't have sold. Like today somebody in Texas placed an order for a couple of forks. One of them was in stock at QBP's warehouse and one was in stock at BTI, so we emailed him and said there would be a delay until we get them from the warehouse but we're going to sell these forks we otherwise wouldn't have," he said.

"It's not knocking us over, but it's helping us capture sales we weren't capturing before," Farrer added. "Online shopping is not going away. So if you're not at least embracing it to the extent that you can, you're not thinking about the future."

Farrer learned long ago to temper his expectations for online revenue and he doesn't have the internal infrastructure—including a dedicated web person—to handle big Internet volume. Plus, he admits he will never be competitive on price.

"To me it's an enhancement for local customers; we give them the convenience of shopping online," he said.

For Studio Velo, its web store allows it to reach customers globally, Scott Penzarella said, and the Mill Valley store sells quite a bit to customers in Australia, Japan and Europe who are willing to incur the shipping costs. Most of what it sells is softgoods, including apparel and lots of nutritional. He says the shop chooses to sell brands, like Capo, where it can be competitive, meaning the supplier enforc-

cooperative. Box Dog also sells its house brand—a Pelican randonneur bike and frameset—on its website. Its virtual inventory caters to commuters, tourers and randonneurs.

American Cyclery's Kimo Toguchi said most inventory they sell is available through small suppliers. "We're selling products we designed for Soma and Merri Sales, unique items from small importers and that are available in small batches," he said. "The price isn't going to be the lowest, but these are unique, hard-to-find items on the Internet. We try to stay away from products that are price competitive."

And, as Toguchi and others noted, Internet sales are complementary and an extension of the store more than a core revenue source.



Wrench Science, Berkeley

Employees: 15

Shop floor space: 4,000 square feet

Years in business: 18 years total; 11 as online/mail order

Emphasis: Custom high-end road and mountain bikes

Main brands: BMC, Colnago, Ibis, Moots, Pinarello, Niner, Knolly, Yeti

Owner: Tim Medina

Tucked away in an industrial part of Berkeley, Tim Medina's store is easy to miss. But that suits Medina just fine, as most of the store's business is mail order and online.

"It might not sound like the most inviting thing, but people just coming in to kick tires and look around, that's difficult for us," he said.

Medina started the business as a high-end service shop in 1994. But five years in, he came up with the idea for an online bike builder to let customers match their frame and selected parts, ensuring compatibility. The current system is the second iteration of the program, which he launched in 2002.

Medina says that while most custom builds start online, they require some follow-up, either through email or phone.

"You've got customers that while they are enthusiasts, don't know the ins and outs. There are a lot of considerations that generally lead to a correspondence with us in some fashion," he said.

Much of his business comes from beyond the Bay Area, and the store fields a fair number of international clients.

Other than bare frames hanging from the walls, and a few shop-branded kits, there isn't much inventory for customers to peruse. Instead, computers are set up for people to access saved builds or start a new build.

Medina keeps \$300,000 worth of frames at any given time from such brands as Niner, Pinarello, BMC, Knolly, Intense, Turner, Ibis, Ellsworth, DeRosa, Moots, Yeti and Merckx, among others.

The average bike it rolls or ships out of its doors retails for \$8,000, but it's not unusual for builds to go as high as \$20,000.



In Wrench Science's early days, owner Tim Medina (above) lived on the shop's upper floor for a time. He has since grown his Berkeley-based business into a high-tech—and very high-end—online dealer of custom road and mountain bikes.

es minimum advertised pricing.

"It makes up a small to medium portion of revenue," he said. "We need to have it to be relevant, but it's not critical to our mission."

San Francisco's Box Dog Bicycles and American Cyclery are relative newbies to the world of Internet retail. Box Dog opened the doors to its virtual store in November; American Cyclery launched its Shopify e-commerce site at the end of last year as well. Owners at both stores say they carefully tailor their online inventory to include products that aren't widely distributed or price-shopped.

"Schwalbe makes high-end tubes; they're really nice. Most people don't want them but some do, so we sell those online," said Anderson Reed, one of four owner-employees of the worker-owned

All the retailers noted that competing on price and building awareness for their virtual stores are barriers to growth. Most rely on email marketing to build web traffic as they have a limited, if any, budget to spend on advertising or optimizing search engine placement.

A little less than half the shops visited don't bother with e-commerce. Retailers including Oakland's Tip Top Bike Shop, Berkeley's Missing Link and Fairfax's Sunshine Bicycles prefer to spend their energies on local walk-in business.

"We've sold old parts on eBay and tried doing Shopatron, and it's just not worth it," said Tony Merz, manager of Sunshine Bicycles. "Online is less personal and we have so many return customers locally. We'd rather focus on providing a good customer experience." **BRAIN**

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BIKE CO-OPS FIND THEIR GROOVE IN HIGH-COST MARKET

By Lynette Carpiet

It's no walk in the park running a retail store in the Bay Area, where the cost of living means a larger percentage of a shop's total revenue is sucked up by high rent and payroll. Adding the complexity of decision-by-consensus from being worker owned and run sounds like a recipe for disaster. But Berkeley's 40-year-old Missing Link Bicycle Cooperative and San Francisco's 8-year-old Box Dog Bikes are mainstays in their neighborhoods.

Among the biggest benefits of a co-op is less staff turnover than at a traditional shop. Each employee-owner has a say in the decision-making process, which fosters a greater sense of ownership.

At Missing Link, James Hill is among the veteran staff, having worked there close to 25 years.

However, it takes a bit of a learning curve for those who haven't worked in a collaborative environment.

"We talk about how we engage with each other a lot and that takes some time to learn, but it creates a shop culture that is fun and makes you feel like you're part of something," said Anderson Reed, who has worked at Box Dog Bikes from the beginning.

Reed, who felt bullied working at other shops where he was ordered around or yelled at by his managers, said the non-hierarchical model where everyone has equal input was a welcome change.

Another benefit is in cross-training and increased job mobility. At both Box Dog and Missing Link, staff often rotates roles and duties.

John Suzuki, a 10-year employee-owner at Missing Link, put his background with apparel brands The North

Face and Marmot into play as the store's clothing buyer when he joined. Today he enjoys managing the store's cross team and getting involved in advocacy and community outreach. But, he says laughing, "I will never be a bookkeeper."

Tired of being tied to a desk, one employee at Missing Link is transitioning out of the financial controller role, so another staffer is taking some college courses to learn the job and eventually take it over.

"People gravitate toward what they like to do, so there's more willingness to work," said Bill Sparks, who started at Missing Link in 1990.

The most noted pitfall is delayed decision-making, as major operational changes require some level of negotiation and sometimes could take several meetings.

With 18 employee-owners, decisions are made at a glacial pace, said Missing

Link's Scott Hicks, an 11-year veteran of the co-op.

Big capital expenditures call for a two-thirds majority vote, he said, so something like replacing old carpet during Christmas—typically a slow time since college students and faculty are on break—has been delayed until spring break.

On the flip side, Hicks said, the store is very fiscally conservative, staying out of financial trouble and paying its bills on time, something many bike shops struggle to do.

Box Dog's Reed adds, "Sure, sometimes things take longer than you want them to, but that's mostly true in all aspects of life. Choosing to take agency in your environment at least gives people an opportunity to put others in check and make decisions that affect how much money you take home at the end of the day." **BRAIN**

Missing Link Bicycle Cooperative, Berkeley

Employees: 18 worker-owners, 1 member candidate

Shop floor space: 5,270 square feet including mezzanine (main store), plus 1,000-square-foot repair annex

Years in business: 40

Emphasis: Service; hybrid and commuter bikes

Main brands: Trek, Marin, Bianchi, Linus, Surly, Jamis

Owners: 18 (all are employee-owners)

This store got its start as a student-run worker co-op on the University of California, Berkeley, campus in 1971. Two years later it became a formal business, and in 1978 it moved to its current location on Shattuck Avenue, just a couple blocks from the campus. In 1994 it split off its service and repair department into a separate store across the street. But students remain a big part of its clientele and business; its bread and butter are \$400 to \$700 hybrids.

Missing Link is collectively owned and run by 18 employees—soon to be 19. One current employee is working toward becoming a member of the cooperative, something that the members vote on once a worker has put in 360 hours at the shop.

Everyone makes the same hourly wage and has equal say in different matters, from hiring to shop hours, compensation and health care policies. And employees also have the freedom to choose what they want to do and will rotate between sales floor, wrenching, buying product, receiving inventory or other back-office work.

This business model is appealing to Berkeley residents, who remain loyal customers despite growing competition, said Bill Sparks, an employee-owner who started working at Missing Link in 1990.



All of Missing Link's employee-owners have equal say and equal pay.



Founded at U.C. Berkeley, the co-op moved to Shattuck Avenue in 1978.



Box Dog co-owner Anderson Reed



The shop keeps commuters rolling.

Box Dog Bikes, San Francisco

Employees: 6 or 7

Sales floor space: 1,700

Years in business: 8

Emphasis: Commuter and touring

Main brands: Jamis, Surly, Breezer, All-City, Pelican

Owners: Dan Thomases, Ian Lautze, Anderson Reed, Gabe Ehler

With transportation, touring and randonneur bikes from Jamis, Breezer and QBP's Surly and All-City, Box Dog Bikes' core customer is summed up thusly: "I think people in San Francisco are looking for something they can do everything on, whether it's commuting in the city or riding weekends in Marin," said Emily Conner, one of five staffers who work alongside four employee-owners of the 8-year-old shop.

Box Dog occupies two ends of the utility bike business: \$500 to \$600 built bikes and more sophisticated custom builds on the shop's fillet-brazed Dedacciai double-butted steel 650b Pelican randonneur frameset, made by Wisconsin's Winter Cycles, or other small-batch frames such as Velo Orange's Rando or Polyvalent "low trail" frame. Customs account for 20 percent of bikes sold.

With limited space, Box Dog doesn't carry apparel, and P&A is carefully selected based on what the shop's owners and employees like and use in their everyday riding. "It's all tested here," Conner said.

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COMMITTING TO FITTING

By Toby Hill

There may be as many definitions of what “bike fit” means as there are retailers providing the service.

“We go really deep into fit with our customers,” said Tim Medina, owner of Wrench Science in Berkeley.

Medina devised his own fit system based on the LeMond model. His online customers—the overwhelming majority of Wrench Science’s business—are asked for their height, weight and shoe size, and are provided detailed instructions on measuring torso length, inseam, arm length, shoulder width and body flexibility.

“We also get their current bike measurements and ask what they like, and what they don’t like, about their bike,” Medina said.

Going to such lengths is understandable when your average bike sale comes in at 8-grand, and the occasional custom \$20,000 road rig, outfitted with ultra-high-end Lightweight carbon wheels, rolls out

your front door.

At Box Dog Bikes, a commuter and touring shop in San Francisco, every customer is sized to the appropriate frame, but there’s no technical fitting or time aboard an indoor trainer, said staffer Emily Conner. However, if a customer brings back a bike saying they’re too stretched out, a stem swap-out and saddle fore-aft adjustment are no problem.

The shops are two extremes, to be sure. But both also illustrate how the somewhat amorphous concept of “fit” can be shaped for each retailer’s unique customer base.

Mojo Bicycle Café’s Remy Nelson takes a more macro view of fit than most. “It’s not only body fit, but the bike should fit your lifestyle,” said the owner of the combination café and urban, road and commuter shop.

That’s not to say cyclists wanting a detailed fit are out of luck. Mojo’s Rona Hung, a veteran road racer with years of custom bike fit experience working for A Bike Odyssey in Sausalito, is happy to

break out the plumb bob, goniometer and other traditional fit tools, Nelson said.

“It’s plain as day there’s a commuter market here, but more of those riders are getting into higher-end road,” Hung noted.

Some retailers are fine just ceding the high-end fit business to the surging number of dedicated fit studios cropping up in the Bay Area.

Huckleberry Bicycles does a free basic fit on a trainer with every bike purchase, but refers customers out to a studio if they want more detailed attention. “We’re so heavy on lifestyle, versus performance, that we really don’t need to invest in high-end fit,” said co-owner Brian Smith.

With commercial real estate at such a high premium in the Bay Area, fit service often becomes a victim of limited space.

“We’d like to do much more fitting, but it’s hard right now,” said Quoc Phan, co-owner of Tam Bikes in Mill Valley.

All three of the Specialized dealer’s owners—Bryce Kirk and Den Satake are the others—have gone through BG Fit training, and the shop has a Serotta fit cycle for custom builds.

But Tam Bikes’

“things shops have been using for years,” said manager Tony Merz.

The Cannondale dealer has considered bringing in a Guru fit bike following last fall’s purchase of the Canadian custom bike brand by Cannondale parent company Dorel Industries. But first, the shop would need to find somewhere to put it.

Studio Velo in Mill Valley displays a number of bikes in its showroom but doesn’t sell any completes straight off the sales floor—all bikes are built to order, so fit figures into every sale.

The cost of a Retül 3D motion-capture fit is put toward the purchase of the bike, said owner Scott Penzarella, and Studio Velo additionally offers fit improvement on customers’ current bikes. For custom frames, Studio Velo also has a Guru fit



Tam Bikes sells a lot of mountain rigs but also views itself as “the family shop” of Mill Valley, co-owner Bryce Kirk says.

Studio Velo, Mill Valley

Employees: 5, plus 3 partners

Sales floor space: 2,450 square feet

Years in business: 10 (originally as Bike-RX)

Emphasis: High-end road and cyclocross, bike fitting, clothing, travel

Main brands: Independent Fabrication, Guru, Time

Owners: Scott Penzarella, Colin Beardsley, Chris Reed

This operation started as a mobile bike repair business just a decade ago. Now it’s an elegant destination store that moved into a new location a few months ago, a former dry cleaner’s store in upscale Mill Valley.

Founder Scott Penzarella has whittled down the store’s product lines, trimming its bike offerings to Independent Fabrication, Guru and Time. He cut some other lines he said demanded preseason orders or that sell through discounters.

The store has a minimalist studio design befitting its name, with just a few carefully chosen shades of gray, red and white throughout. Semi-custom LED ceiling light fixtures and black wooden clothing shelves complete the look.

“We are not purely a studio, but we wanted to have some European panache,” Penzarella said.



Founder Scott Penzarella moved Studio Velo to an expanded space last fall.

Tam Bikes, Mill Valley

Employees: 10-12

Sales floor space: 2,600 square feet

Years in business: Four and a half

Emphasis: Mountain, family and road

Main brands: Specialized, Santa Cruz, Soulcraft, Retrotec, Cervélo

Owners: Bryce Kirk, Quoc Phan, Den Satake

Situated in the shadow of the cradle of mountain biking, Mt. Tamalpais, it’s no surprise that Tam Bikes’ business leans heavily toward the off-road side—70 percent of bikes sold are mountain rigs.

But even with the solid MTB rep, Tam strives to be “the family shop of the town,” said co-owner Bryce Kirk, who grew up in the shop’s hometown of Mill Valley. That means offering a full range of price points, from the low end to the high, and a sales structure with no commissions to prevent pushiness on the shop floor.

The roadie crowd get its due too: Tam Bikes has been doing well with Cervélo since bringing the line aboard six months ago.

dedicated fit room, part of the store’s original build-out, has been taken over as much-needed office space. And although Tam promotes its fit service online, the increasing number of performance fit specialists in Marin County appear to be grabbing that business, Phan said.

Sunshine Bicycles in Fairfax is packed cheek to jowl with product, so staffers haul a trainer out to the patio for fittings done with old-school tools like a FitStik—

cycle offering infinite adjustment on the fly without the rider having to dismount.

The detailed fit process helps build the customer relationship, Penzarella said, and can drive additional P&A sales for items like shoes, pedals, stems, bars and bar tape.

Penzarella’s fit business has also expanded across the Bay to San Francisco, where in August he opened a studio and retail space selling lifestyle products inside café The Station. **BRAIN**

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American Cyclery, San Francisco

Employees: About 15

Sales floor space: Less than 3,000 square feet (total, two locations)

Years in business: 72

Emphasis: Mountain bikes, vintage bikes

Main brands: Bianchi, Raleigh, Specialized, Soma, Gunnar, Waterford

Owners: Bradley Woehl, Kimo Toguchi

Like any landmark institution, American Cyclery has its heroes, its stories and ... a ghost.

American Cyclery was founded in 1941 by six-day racer Oscar Juner, famous for, among other feats, being the first to ride a bike across the Golden Gate Bridge. He was also the first to be arrested for doing so.

Years later when the Marin County mountain bike pioneers were grubbing for drivetrain parts, they came to American Cyclery to root around.

These days Oscar's shop is crammed to the rafters with parts and accessories (mostly parts) both vintage and modern. Current owners Bradley Woehl and Kimo Toguchi operate in two locations, across Stanyan Street from each other.

Woehl likes to show visitors a basement archive full of old magazines, catalogs, brochures and his head badge collection.

But the one-time Schwinn "total-concept" store is not all about history. It stocks high-end modern bikes from Bianchi, Raleigh and Specialized. And the operators are seeking an artist and a grant to repaint a giant mural that once graced the exterior of American Cyclery II, one of the locations. That store also is in line to get a "parklet"—one of the city's new programs that converts parking spaces into public recreation spots.

As for the ghost, it's reported to have moved around some of the store's old trophies, to the bafflement of employees. Perhaps it's one of the many riders Juner defeated in the early 20th century, looking to finally get an edge on the wily Oscar.



One of American Cyclery's service areas



Owners Bradley Woehl, Kimo Toguchi

Blazing Saddles, San Francisco

Employees: Hyde Street store, 8-12; companywide, 50-120

Shop floor space: Hyde store, 13,500 square feet

Years in business: 30

Emphasis: Bike rentals

Main brands: Marin, Fuji, Specialized

Owner: Jeff Sears

This rental operation was the home base for the pick-up and drop-off of the Fuji and Kestrel road bikes during our three-day sojourn in the Bay. It has seven locations in San Francisco, two in New York City and one in Monterey, California.

High demand for sightseeing on two wheels anchors its success and that of its competitors. Owner Jeff Sears says 17 different rental ops do business within a half-mile radius of his Hyde Street location.

His fleet covers every taste and skill level—from a basic hybrid for a family on vacation looking to ride across the Golden Gate, to full-suspension rigs for the enthusiasts headed to Marin's world-renowned trails, to carbon road and tri bikes for athletes who brave the Escape from Alcatraz triathlon.

It even has tandems and e-bikes, the latter of which make the city's steep hills accessible to casual riders. Each of its rental locations has a specific focus and the staff to suit the clientele.

Sears acquired the business after 9/11. He said rentals boomed after the Presidio transitioned from a military base to a national park, opening access to bikes on the waterfront.

"When we first started, riding was confined to Golden Gate Park," Sears said.

He's banking on further developments along the northern waterfront that will make it more accessible to bikes and pedestrians.

Blazing Saddles also does guided tours and sells a few electric bikes from Stromer and Ultra Motor, mostly to city dwellers working in the financial district.

"We're trying to open an e-bike-specific retail location this year because we think the public is missing out," Sears said. "We want to have a separate place to have that conversation."



Blazing Saddles' Hyde Street location



A Dealer Tour Fuji gets the once-over.

Tip Top Bike Shop, Oakland

Employees: 6

Sales floor space: 2,000 square feet

Years in business: 6

Emphasis: Commuter, road and women's-specific

Main brands: Trek, Jamis, Felt, Salsa, Surly

Owners: Richard and Charlotte Oelerich

Tip Top may be the quintessential neighborhood shop, drawing a loyal following from Oakland's Temescal section—which has seen a recent revival with a number of independent businesses and restaurants moving in—as well as commuters riding on nearby cycling routes between downtown Oakland and Berkeley.

Husband and wife Richard and Charlotte Oelerich—she's a British expat, he's a Yank with 20 years in and out of bike shops—skew their product mix toward the utilitarian, offering transportation and road bikes from their primary brands and moving the occasional Surly Big Dummy cargo rig, the most expensive bike on the sales floor at \$1,900. Women's-specific bikes get prime placement by the front door to downplay the intimidation factor.

And a broad selection of racks, bags, lights and locks helps keep their commuting clientele out of the driver's seat—much like the Oelerichs themselves, longtime bike commuters who have not owned a vehicle in three years.



Tip Top owners Charlotte and Richard Oelerich are committed bike commuters.



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**SEE
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Mojo Bicycle Café, San Francisco

Employees: 5 in bike shop; 12 to 15 in café

Sales floor space: 900 square feet for bike retail and service; additional 900 for café

Years in business: 6

Emphasis: Urban, road and mountain

Main brands: Jamis, Breezer, Dahon, Surly, Soma, Surly, Rock Lobster

Owner: Remy Nelson

This combination bike shop and café—sales split 50/50 between the two businesses—earned its rep early on with practical commuter and city bikes as much as it did with its appealing menu of sandwiches, coffees, teas and craft beers. Having developed a taste for two-wheeled life, however, six years on those entry-level customers are coming back for more.

So in addition to the sub-\$1,000 Jamis transportation bikes that dominate the small retail space at the back of the café, Mojo also does an increasing number of custom builds on framesets from Rock Lobster, Soma and Surly, as well as Jamis' higher-end carbon models.

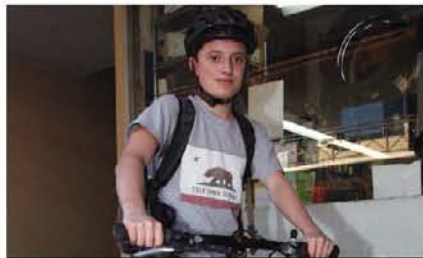
And customers bringing bikes in for service can while away their time sipping a latté in the relaxing "parklet" in front of the store or admire the cycling-inspired art inside the café while washing down a beer-braised pulled pork sammy with a pint of San Francisco-brewed Big Daddy IPA.



Our ride guides relax outside Mojo.



Mojo owner Remy Nelson



Sunshine is a big supporter of local high school mountain biking teams.



Sunshine Bicycles manager Tony Merz

Sunshine Bicycles, Fairfax

Employees: 7 full time; 3-4 part time

Shop floor space: 1,700 square feet

Years in business: 42

Emphasis: Mountain bikes, hybrids, family, custom

Main brands: Trek, Cannondale, Surly, Moots, Ibis

Owner: Martin Hansen

In business since 1971, this shop has seen a lot of history pass through its doors. Gary Fisher worked here just before founding his mountain bike business in 1979.

"I bought it in 1984, but when I first started working here in 1979 as a part-time mechanic, Gary Fisher was still here before he went down the street to open Fisher with Charlie Kelly," owner Martin Hansen said.

Other mountain bike notables also put in stints at Sunshine including Joe Murray, White Industries' Doug White and local custom welder and builder Paul Brown.

On Center Boulevard, where most Marin and road and off-road rides pass through, Sunshine is at the center of Fairfax's cycling hub in a strip mall building where Marin County Bicycle Coalition and Osmo Nutrition are headquartered.

The shop sees a constant stream of cyclists ride by on weekends. It's within steps of two popular cycling hangouts—Iron Springs Pub & Brewery and Java Hut.

Three to four guys wrench on bikes daily. Manager Tony Merz says quick turnaround on service—one to two days—keeps a constant flow of business. The store also sponsors several high school mountain bike teams.

"Schools here are overflowing with kids and high school teams are huge," Merz said.

The store sells quite a few mountain bikes to youth and families—off-road bikes make up 70 percent of sales—but Sunshine takes pride in being an all-around shop serving the youngest kids all the way to the most veteran racers.

A Bicycle Odyssey, Sausalito

Employees: 4-5 full time

Shop floor space: 2,900 square feet

Years in business: 38

Emphasis: High-end road

Main brands: Bianchi, Giant, Look, Time, Colnago, Marin Bikes, Scott; a handful of smaller niche brands

Owner: Tony Tom

This store is part museum, part retail store. It's crammed to the rafters with goods from the past 35 years that founder and owner Tony Tom has collected since he opened in 1975, alongside the newest bikes, apparel and parts.

Tom sells all kinds of bikes, but his heart—and bread and butter—is in high-end road racing rigs, the more esoteric the better. Road makes up 90 percent of sales. He says his customer base is pretty diverse, with about half coming from San Francisco. Unlike the trend toward carbon, he touts the attributes of steel, titanium and lightweight aluminum.

"The carbon fiber market is so commodified," he said.

Throughout the Bay Area his shop is known by cognoscenti for its top-rate builds and exceptional repairs, which have earned him high ratings on Yelp. The store gets the job done, even if speed of service isn't the priority. Tom has plans to expand his business, opening a second store just a couple of blocks from his main location to offer demos and rentals of high-end road bikes.



A Bicycle Odyssey owner Tony Tom



The Sausalito retailer is a Bay Area destination shop.

DEALER TOUR BAY AREA 2013

Photos by Bob Huff



Honey Stinger's new POP



ASI director of marketing Kaitlyn Phillips befriends handlebar tape mustache guy at Huckleberry Bicycles.



"Fast Freddie" Rodriguez escorts our crew through Berkeley.



ASI's Frank Zimmer demonstrates how to carry two cases of beer in a Chrome bag.



Train tracks, streetcars and buses keep riders alert on city streets.



BRAIN publisher Marc Sani (left) and Breezer brand manager JT Burke turn onto the street from a bike path in Berkeley.



A quick pit stop for a photo op before riding across the Golden Gate Bridge



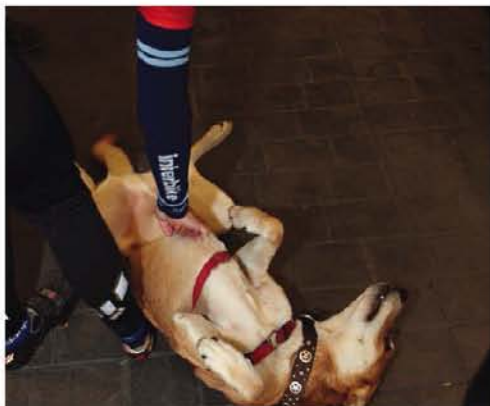
San Francisco Bicycle Coalition's Kristin Smith points out a green lane on Market Street.



ASI's Pat Cunnane is cheered on as he works up a steep hill.



Bikes Belong's Bruno Maier ready to get off the ferry from Marin County



One of Mike's Bikes' shop dogs gets some lovin'.



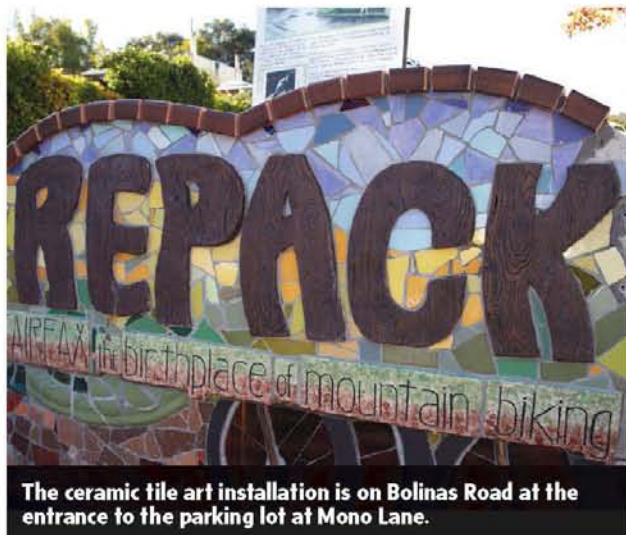
Missing Link's component vending machine doesn't accept credit cards.



Bell's Shannan Valette high fives elementary kids as we ride through a school.



Joe Breeze points out the history detailed in the Repack mosaic in Fairfax by artist Quintilia Nylin.



The ceramic tile art installation is on Bolinas Road at the entrance to the parking lot at Mono Lane.



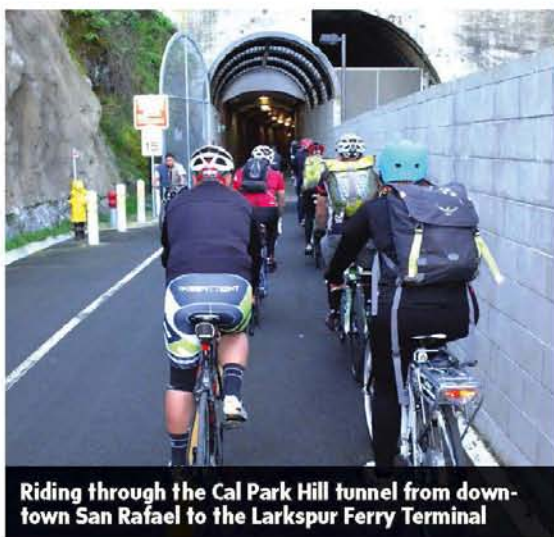
Riding up a trail toward Mt. Tamalpais



San Francisco Bicycle Coalition executive director Leah Shahum gives us a rundown of the city's growing bike infrastructure and the nonprofit's advocacy work.



The view on the ferry ride back to San Francisco from Marin



Riding through the Cal Park Hill tunnel from downtown San Rafael to the Larkspur Ferry Terminal



The WTB crew hails us with cowbells as we ride past their headquarters.

JOE BREEZE SHOWS DEALER TOUR CREW THE WAY IN MARIN COUNTY

This was my third BRAIN Dealer Tour, after Dallas and Portland. On both those earlier tours I was surprised by the degree of bike infrastructure improvements. Everyone is aware of Platinum Portland, but what I saw of the Dallas area also impressed me.

I once thought my home county, Marin, offered the safest bicycling in the nation. Not anymore. Traveling around the country over the past decade I've witnessed extraordinary improvements that allow people to better traverse cities by bike. Many cities have equaled or exceeded what we have in Marin. Still, we do have a good thing going here and I was delighted to show off Marin on the recent tour.

I met the group for lunch in my hometown of Fairfax. Outside the window of Iron Springs Brew Pub, moms whizzed by on e-bikes with one or two kids per rear deck. To even the casual observer, Fairfax is a bike town. There are bikes everywhere. The whole Ross Valley supports 10 bike shops with 50,000 resi-

dents across five miles.

Cycling has been strong in Marin since the early 1970s. Fairfax became the early epicenter of mountain biking, being at the foot of Mt. Tamalpais and the Repack downhill. Our new Repack Mosaic downtown is a tribute to the crucible that continues to attract mountain bikers to Fairfax from around the world.

Repack's legacy continues to spawn many things cycling. We formed the Marin County Bicycle Coalition (MCBC) in 1998. Many local industry players such as Patrick Seidler of WTB stepped up and made a difference. On BRAIN's Marin tour day, as the riders passed through Mill Valley the WTB crew came out with cowbells clanging.

My son's elementary school in Fairfax hosted one of three U.S. pilot projects for Safe Routes to School. The program started in 2000 when he was in first grade, so he and his peers grew up with encouragement to ride. When Fairfax kids reach high school age and discover the NorCal High School Cycling League,

they sign up in droves. Drake High has been California state champions the past four years.

After lunch in Fairfax we rolled on to San Rafael and Mike's Bikes. By chance, Drake senior Lucas Newcomb, one of NorCal's brightest stars, rode up alongside us. Lucas was UCSF 15-16 Junior National Champion, and last year was the 17-18 runner-up. He went to the Worlds in Salzburg, but unfortunately broke his collarbone the day before his event. Fit now, he hopes to lead Drake to a fifth straight state title this season.

At Mike's Bikes we saw employee Brian Popplewell, whom I see wrenching on bikes at many local events and races. Mike's is one of Marin's biggest supporters of bicycling and the MCBC.

Heading back south we rode through the CalPark Hill Tunnel, a key component of Marin's bike transportation network. At the end of the tunnel the Larkspur Ferry awaited, ready to take the riders back to San Francisco. The MCBC hopes to reopen another abandoned

railroad tunnel farther south, and make Marin's core system almost as flat as Holland—but with better weather!

As Marin's bike dealers support their local bike coalition, promoting safe ways to get healthy while getting places in our busy lives, they are reaping the rewards of a better community and increased business.



—Joe Breeze works with ASI as a frame designer for Breezer Bicycles. A mountain bike pioneer who devoted his brand to transportation bikes in 2002, Breeze has been sharing the somewhat secret joy of bicycling for more than 40 years. He sees everyday use of bicycles as a way to expand cycling in America.

BIKING IS A LIFESTYLE FOR BAY AREA RESIDENTS; SHOPS REAP THE BENEFITS

Cities like Portland, Seattle and Minneapolis are often the poster child for cycling in the U.S., but San Francisco is making drastic inroads in becoming a model cycling city. After spending three days riding around San Francisco, the East Bay and Marin County, it became clear that cycling was a way of life for an increasing number of people and a thriving group of independent dealers were there to support every demographic. Riding down the Embarcadero you would see everything from the businessman in a suit riding a hybrid to work, to the college student with an old steel frame road bike loaded down with groceries for the week.

A vast majority of the shops we visited catered specifically to cyclists who made a lifestyle choice, those who wanted to not only commute to work by bike but make as many trips as possible by bike instead of using their car. In shops like Tip Top Bike Shop in Oakland, you will not find a \$6,000 road bike, but you will find a large selection of bikes, accessories and clothing designed specifically for city riding and commuting. Local shops understand their customer base and design their stores to fit their clientele.

On the tour we heard story after story about how retailers were making their money from the repeat business of the everyday rider, not from the one-off sale of a bike. They would see customers at regular intervals for new clothing and tune-ups. The same customers were seen with even greater frequency for consumables like nutritionals and maintenance products like lubricants and degreasers. The strongest shops were those with a focused selection of parts and accessories, as well as a quality service center.

Though other cities overshadow San Francisco and the Bay Area when it comes to cycling, this will not be the case for much longer. The city provides a vibrant backdrop for an ever growing and increasingly passionate cycling community. Every year more and more shops pop up to fill the demand,

and those that know their customer and focus on repeat business not only succeed, they thrive.

—Derek Goltz, social media director, White Lightning



BAY AREA OFFERS RICH CONTRAST OF SHOPS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

We Bell folks enjoyed a great time riding in the East Bay and Marin. The two days we spent were both refreshing and worthwhile. We met with a wide cross section of very independent retail pros and appreciated the local route knowledge provided by our ride guides.

Our industry team was an engaging and fun group and our West Coast "winter" weather wasn't bad either. Riding back to our hotel from the Chrome retail store along the Embarcadero on a clear night was a rare February treat. I cannot wait to return and share some of the same routes with my family and friends in the near future.

The first thing we noted in Oakland was the surprising strength of the folding bike market, the creative merchandising of helmets, and the ease with which we were able to cross town on bikes in a big group. Lunch in a cycling-themed restaurant was a pleasure, as was riding through quiet Oakland neighborhoods with Freddy Rodriguez guiding. I was struck by the impact small changes in infrastructure and route communication can make to widen the gateway to cycling for many.

The variety of specialty bike retail locations we visited during our day in Marin County was amazing—from classic road- and mountain bike-focused shops to core cultural icons and even a unique boutique with a high fashion bent. Rolling through Fairfax down to San Rafael with Joe Breeze was a treat, as was riding around an open grade school where the bike path was routed past the playground—kids love bikes!



—David Hayes, senior channel development manager, Bell

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