



SEATTLE DEALER TOUR



Seattle retail: The more things change ...

By Steve Frothingham

With a fast-growing population of young, active, affluent residents and ample outdoor recreational opportunities, Seattle should be a bike retailing dream market.

And it is. But even though Seattle has been making every list of fastest-growing cities since long before Jerry Seinfeld mused, in 1991, that “everyone is moving to Seattle,” the city’s bike retail market is surprisingly stable.

That’s probably due in large part to the ever-increasing cost of real estate in and around the city. So while new niche retailers are always popping up around the periphery, long-term players on the BRAIN Dealer Tour like Gregg’s Greenlake (open since 1938), Velo Bike Shop (established 1968) and Alpine Hut (opened in 1975) continue to hold their market share.

Gregg’s and Velo serve the middle of the market, as does Seattle-based REI, which operates a massive headquarters store there, with a bike department focused around the family and commuter market.

The newer, smaller players aim for the niches. Speedy Reedy, for example, founded by former Gregg’s employee Reed Sillers, is the city’s go-to triathlon and multi-sport specialist, and Christiaan Bourdrez’s tiny Ride Bicycles location has a lock on a piece of the urban, stylish “grocery getter” market. Scrappy Recycled Cycles is a mainstay for the university district and Cascade Bicycle Studio is the place to go for a custom Seven road bike and a matching Rapha kit.

All these players and more serve the city proper, but the bike lanes, paths and streets in Seattle are busy with commut-

ers who come in every weekday on bikes. Hundreds of thousands of workers commute each day by car, bus, monorail and even ferry, leading to backed-up freeways and lines at the critical bridges leading into the city. That makes bike commuting an attractive option, despite the sometimes cool and foggy conditions and bike infrastructure that is still developing. U.S. Census data shows bike commuting in Seattle is up 78 percent since 2005.

It might be unfair to judge Seattle’s climate based on the week of BRAIN’s Dealer Tour, which coincided with the start of a historic “Fogmageddon” pattern that lasted for several weeks. But it was telling that one supplier said Seattle “leads the country in sales of aftermarket fenders,” and the scores of well-equipped riders who passed the Dealer Tour group backed up that assessment.

While the commuting growth has been steady and local advocates point to improved facilities around town, Seattle has not developed new protected bike lanes as quickly as some other cities, including Washington, D.C., Portland, Oregon, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Those cities have seen even faster growth of bike commuting in the past half decade.

The new urbanism

Seattle is becoming the pre-eminent example of a “new urban” city, a position that is only being reinforced as the job market improves and major regional employers like Amazon, Microsoft, Adobe, Boeing and Starbucks expand. And that should mean even more growth for bike retailers within the city who focus on the transportation, urban and utility markets.

“You have a very pro-bicycle envi-

ronment and there’s a huge number of transient people like myself,” said Raleigh USA sales manager George Simone, who recently moved to the Seattle area from Rhode Island. Raleigh is headquartered in nearby Kent, Washington.

Simone pointed to recent trends among young people, who are moving back into cities from the suburbs and who have little interest in owning a car. Many don’t even bother to get a driver’s license, a trend that has the auto industry deeply concerned.

But it’s good news for the bike industry, Simone reckons, and the trend is very apparent in Seattle, where the proportion of commuters who arrive by car dipped below 50 percent last year, the first time in decades.

Among retailers, newcomer Ride Bicycles is positioning for the new urban market, and is especially focused on the female segment. But Velo Bike Shop has made the most dramatic adjustment to the acceleration of demographic trends in Seattle. As recently as March, Velo would be described as a homey family shop in an established Seattle neighborhood. Now, thanks to an alliance with a downtown developer—who is also a longtime customer—Velo is in a trendy new home in a fast-changing area of downtown, adjacent to the new Amazon headquarters. Velo has a staff that is nearly half female and operates a bike



Christiaan Bourdrez caters to the “new urban” city dweller at Ride Bicycles.

club with storage and showers for commuters.

“It’s been a crazy year, but I think it’s going to turn out to be a really good move in the long term,” Velo manager Ashley Thompson said. **BRAIN**

Scan this QR code to see video footage from the Seattle Dealer Tour.



HERRIOTT SPORTS PERFORMANCE

Employees: 5

Sales floor space: 1,200 square feet, plus 2,300-square-foot training studio

Years in business: 5

Emphasis: Performance road and training

Main brands: Specialized, Colnago, Guru, Look

Owners: Todd Herriott, David Richter

Former pro road racers Todd Herriott and David Richter opened Herriott Sports Performance five years ago to bring bike fitting, training and a pro retail shop under one roof. A recent expansion into the space next door has afforded HSP a much larger retail space, which includes an open-air service area that has become a focal point for customers.

The pro shop is stocked only with

products that Herriott and Richter personally endorse. “Everything we sell in this shop, we’ve tried ourselves,” said Herriott. “We have ridden it or raced with it, so we are comfortable selling it in our store.”

Bike fitting, coaching and training take place next door in the studio, which includes areas for spin classes, medicine ball training, and conditioning using the Norwegian Redcord core strengthening system. HSP is the first place in Seattle to offer Redcord training, and Herriott said it’s been well received.

In winter, training studio business makes up for the seasonal slowdown in the pro shop, which accounts for about 90 percent of Herriott’s business in the summer. “But both sides really do feed each other,” said Richter.

The training club has around 80 members, three-quarters of whom are



Co-owners Todd Herriott (left) and David Richter

racers. “Most of our clients come with a specific training goal in mind,” said Herriott. “Men make up the majority, but we’ve just hired a female coach, so we are hoping to see more women in here.”

An expansive bike fitting area is situated in the training studio, and Herriott said bike fit is a priority at HSP. “We want everyone to fit on their bike,” said Herriott. “That is our No. 1 goal.” **BRAIN**

Sleeper in Seattle: Cyclocross scene quietly flourishes

By Val Vanderpool

Portland may be home to the largest—and likely most talked about—cyclocross series in the world, Cross Crusade. But what many don't know is that the Rose City's neighbor to the north has an equally robust 'cross scene.

Two separate weekend 'cross series afford Seattle racers a nearly four-month-long season with very little event overlap, giving the 'cross crowd the chance to race both competitively. A handful of independent one-day races fill out the calendar, giving motivated racers the chance to race every weekend.

Seattle's thriving 'cross scene is approaching Portland's numbers in participation, with Seattle Cyclocross (SCX) races averaging around 750 racers per event and the MFG series drawing nearly 1,000 to each of its eight races.

Cyclocross racing in Seattle dates back to 1990, when the SCX series began. Current race director Matt Weintraub has been involved with SCX for nine years, five of which he served on the directing board.

A Seattle local, Weintraub started racing 'cross at the ripe age of 15. "The 'cross scene just keeps getting bigger here," he said. "When I started racing, a race with 350 people was huge. Now, it's not unheard of for 1,000 racers to show up."

MFG regularly draws nearly that many racers, and expects around 1,300 racers to show up for the last race of the 2013 season. In the five years MFG has been holding races in Seattle, co-director Zac Daab has seen the local 'cross scene

become one of the largest in the country. "I've been racing 'cross for a long time, extensively in the Northeast, West Coast and Colorado," he said. "Seattle's scene definitely holds its own."

While SCX is a USA Cycling sanctioned series, MFG's races are not—which could help explain why the younger series draws a bigger crowd. But Weintraub says SCX is evaluating whether to keep the series sanctioned moving forward.

"I don't think working with USA Cycling provides any inherent value," said Weintraub. "For starters, the extra cost of buying a cycling license doesn't provide easy access for beginners—if you just want to try racing, the extra cost is often prohibitive."

And not being sanctioned appears to be working in MFG's favor. Daab said a huge beginner field shows up at MFG's series. "We can charge less, which lowers the barrier to entry for many first-timers," he said.

A beginner rate of \$15 and free demo 'cross bikes provided by title sponsor Raleigh help to draw new racers to MFG's races. The largest category at MFG's races is the beginner men's masters, which averages around 200 per event. But perhaps even more striking is the number of women who show up for race day. "We easily get 40 beginner women coming out to race," said Daab. "And that number is growing fast. The atmosphere is friendly and it's not expensive to get started."

And the women's 'cross community in Seattle is as cohesive as it is strong. This past year, a group of women racers formed the Washington Women of Cross (WAWCX), which held a success-



Women racers hop to it at an MFG series race this fall.

Photo by Derek Blagg

ful women's cyclocross festival in August. "A couple hundred women came out for clinics and women-only races," said Amanda McNabb, one of the administrators at WAWCX. "And many of these women had never ridden a 'cross bike before and have now raced the entire season so far this year."

McNabb, also an avid road racer, said that many women come out to race 'cross because they love the culture. "It's fun and I always look forward to the social scene," she said. "Even when it's the same people I race road with, it's a totally different vibe."

While there is still plenty of cowbell, beer and good cheer, the 'cross scene in Seattle tends to be a bit more serious compared with Portland's—which may help explain why Seattle 'cross racing

doesn't get the same kind of attention. "You're always going to hear about a good party, and there is always a good party at the Portland 'cross races," said Weintraub. "So you could say they steal our thunder a little, even though the scene here is big."

Daab said 'cross in Seattle is the best of both worlds. "It's a good balance of serious and competitive and having fun. It's not too aggro," he said. "Which is why I think the growth of the sport will continue on an upward trajectory for a while here."

Weintraub agrees. "As long as it's a fun cycling event and more than just a race, people will always come out to try it," he said. "And that's the key to keeping it fresh—helping people find a new way to have fun on two wheels." **BRAIN**

ELLIOTT BAY BICYCLES

Employees: 6

Sales floor space: 1,800 square feet

Years in business: 30

Emphasis: Full-service frame shop hand-building custom Davidson frames

Main brands: Davidson, Bianchi, Orbea, Breezer, Surly

Owners: Bill Davidson, Bob Freeman

A stone's throw from Seattle's famed Pike Place Market is an unassuming retail storefront that obscures a full custom framebuilding enterprise. Among the assortment of bikes sold at Elliott Bay Bicycles, including mainstream brands such as Bianchi and Orbea, are Davidson frames made to order right on the premises.

Bill Davidson started welding frames under the Davidson name 40 years ago. He and Bob Freeman opened the retail shop in 1983 to support the brand. In

the early days, Davidson made custom bikes for a number of national caliber racers. Now, he offers everything from full randonneur to tandems to superlight track bikes.

Davidson completes on average three frames per week. Everything is done on site, from mitering tubing to welding to painting frames. Freeman said by keeping it all in-house they can keep lead times to two months, unlike some newer framebuilders. "There's all these newbies quoting five years to never. I don't know how that business model works—you've got to have cash flow," he said.

These days Davidson makes more titanium bikes, using American-sourced titanium. "People are coming back from carbon," he said, noting the potential failure of carbon fiber. "Ti, they're never going to break on a JRA."

In addition to welding new frames, Elliott Bay offers frame repair and restoration services for bikes and wheels. Bikes

arrive from around the country for restoration and for sale. But Freeman noted that owners are often shocked at the cost to restore old frames. "People bring us these bikes. They have no clue how much work goes into them. I don't do estimations, I do restorations," said Freeman, noting one current restoration will likely be a \$3,000 job.

In addition to restoring vintage bikes, Freeman collects them. The store's ceiling and a warehouse behind the framebuilding area also serve as a storage facility for about one-third of his collection of vintage bikes. Among them is a 1972 Schwinn Paramount, which got him started in collecting. "I got it in '87 when it was only 15 years old," said Freeman. "It was one of the bikes I lusted after in my youth. Now I have a bunch I've always wanted." **BRAIN**



Bob Freeman opened Elliott Bay Bicycles with framebuilder Bill Davidson 30 years ago.

Cycling paths grow by leaps and bounds, but gaps remain

By Toby Hill

Seattle is a gold-level Bicycle Friendly Community in what is, according to the League of American Bicyclists, the most bikeable state in the nation. It's little wonder given the expansion of cycling infrastructure since the city adopted its Bicycle Master Plan in 2007, aimed at making Seattle the best cycling community in the U.S. within 10 years.

According to a recent update from the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), the city added more than 150 miles of bike lanes, trails and other cycling facilities from 2007 to 2012, or 60 percent of the network called for in the Master Plan. Gains during that period include the protected cycle track completed three years ago along Dexter Avenue, one of the city's most important bike commuting arteries. Looking ahead, Amazon.com will build a fully protected bike lane in front of its new downtown headquarters currently under construction.

But gaps remain in Seattle's cycling infrastructure.

Dexter, for instance, traverses hilly terrain and isn't accessible for cyclists of all ages or fitness levels, notes Emily Kathrein, field programs manager for Seattle-based advocacy group Cascade Bicycle Club. Westlake Avenue runs parallel to Dexter and is flat, but is currently served by an unprotected cycling route through a parking lot aisle.

It's here that Cascade Bicycle Club is seeking a protected bikeway that would connect with the Burke-Gilman Trail, the 20-mile mixed-use path that is among the crown jewels of the regional cycling network.

"It's a huge priority for us because the project has been funded already, so it's just a matter of working with the city, community members and the business owners on what the best design is going to be," Cascade's Kathrein said of the Westlake route.

But Cascade's current top priority—and also job No. 1 in the city's Bicycle Master Plan—is construction of a new cycling route along the "Missing Link" of the Burke-Gilman Trail in Seattle's Ballard

neighborhood, where the off-street path empties into heavy motor traffic and crosses two hazardous train tracks before resuming three-quarters of a mile later.

"The regional trail just dumps you into this area so that you go from being on a trail that is used by everyone from little kids learning how to ride their bike to people biking to work or running, and they get dumped into a dangerous zone and there are no other safe options," Kathrein said.

Cascade's long-range goal is to have a path separate from motor traffic. Progress has been slow to come, in part due to legal action from interests in Ballard's nearby maritime industry who claim the proposed trail route would hinder their vehicle access and increase the chance of colliding with cyclists.

Meanwhile, businesses located directly on the Missing Link see injured cyclists being transported to hospitals every month, according to Kathrein. "They all keep first-aid kits right at their front doors because they see accidents constantly," she said. **BRAIN**

Evergreen does heavy lifting on local mountain bike trails

It's a good time to be a mountain biker in the Seattle area, no matter what kind of terrain riders get their stoke on. And they have the Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance to thank for much of the dirty fun.

Located underneath Interstate 5 near Seattle's Eastlake neighborhood, the I-5 Colonnade mountain bike skills park became a model for urban bike parks when it opened in 2007. Once a haven for junkies and the homeless, the 7.5-acre city park snaking through the towering concrete pillars of the interstate was funded and built by Evergreen, Washington state's largest MTB advocacy and trail-building group.

Since the park's completion, however, it has become something of a victim of another Evergreen success story: Duthie Hill Mountain Bike Park, on the Issaquah Plateau outside of Seattle. The 120-acre forest park, packed with flowy fern-lined cross-country single track, freeride trails and skill-building features, has

proved so popular that it's drawn ridership away from Colonnade. The decreased use has allowed some of the undesirable element back into the area.

"It's an ongoing challenge to deal with the effects of homelessness on a park like that, and the things that come with it that are not inviting to mountain bikers and other park users," said Glenn Glover, Evergreen's executive director.

And while Colonnade and Duthie may be Evergreen's highest-profile projects in recent years, bike parks alone fill only a limited demand, Glover acknowledges.

"Beyond the park environment are frontcountry and backcountry trails. At Tiger Mountain State Forest, which is a BNR [Bureau of Natural Resources] property, we're building trails there right now and we've had a huge community response to that," he said.

For almost two decades, mountain bikers had access to just 7.5 miles of trail at Tiger Mountain, a

35-minute drive from Seattle. This summer, the Cascadia Dirt Cup held one of its enduro series races on a new trail developed by Evergreen at Tiger Mountain. By next summer the state forest will have a total of 15 miles of MTB trail.

And at Olallie State Park, an old-growth forest on the Snoqualmie River 40 minutes outside the city, approval and funding have just gone through to build a 17-mile out-and-back trail that Glover expects to open in 2015.

Glover credits the improved access to the equity that Evergreen—founded in 1989 as the Backcountry Bicycle Trails Club—has built up over the years with land managers through all levels of government.

"We have a great relationship now where they have a known, credible partner. And in turn for that, they are providing us with recognition that mountain biking is a key part of recreation in the state," he said. —Toby Hill

GREGG'S GREENLAKE CYCLE

Employees: 130

Sales floor space: 20,000 total square feet including storage

Years in business: 81

Emphasis: Longstanding family-owned retailer committed to customer service and quality products

Main brands: Trek, Specialized, Cannondale, Pinarello, Santa Cruz

Owners: Stan and Judy Gregg

Gregg's Greenlake Cycle has come a long way from renting bikes for a nickel an hour to ride around Greenlake. "It's quite a bit different than when it started in 1932 with balloon rental bikes," said Marty Pluth, the store's general manager since 1987.

One of the major changes Pluth has seen is the increased complexity of the business. "When I started here Specialized had like seven models. Today they have over 200. You could hire people off the street, teach them a limited amount and they'd sell 20 bikes a day. Today there is so much more complexity," said Pluth.

He said the greater level of staff knowledge needed is

a particular challenge due to the seasonality of the business. Gregg's reduces headcount from 130 people to 90 people in the off-season. "We couldn't be profitable without rehiring," Pluth said of the condensed Seattle selling season.

Still, Pluth attributed part of the company's success, particularly in an off year for the industry, to its staff training programs. Overall, Gregg's sales are up 10 percent this year, and high-end road bikes are up more than 15 percent—a category the industry struggled in this year.

"We had 70-degree temperatures in March when everyone else in the country had bad weather. Manufacturers did some pricing discounts we were able to take advantage of," said Pluth.

With more than 20,000 square feet including a second story for storage and service and high ceilings to hang bikes above its main floor, Gregg's has ample room to stock bikes and take overflow from its other two locations.

Started in 1932, Gregg's is now under the third-generation ownership of the Gregg family. In 1983 it



opened its second location in Bellevue. Gregg's purchased another shop a mile away in Aurora in 1987 and moved it about 13 miles away to a new location in 2007. That same year, the owners tore down 40 percent of the original Greenlake building to remodel. The company owns the Greenlake and Bellevue locations. **BRAIN**

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND CYCLE

Employees: 5 full time, 3 part time
Sales floor space: 3,500 square feet
Years in business: 16
Emphasis: Commuter, road, mountain, tri
Main brands: Specialized, Kona, Orbea, Niner, Salsa, Volagi, Seven
Owner: Tom Clune

Bainbridge Island Cycle got its humble start in 600 square feet of space below a barbershop on its namesake island in Puget Sound. Owner Tom Clune has moved the business twice since then, eventually settling into a 4,000-square-foot space in 2008 that once housed a NAPA Auto Parts store.

"Now NAPA stands for 'No Auto Parts Anymore,'" quipped the native of Queens, New York, who moved to Bainbridge more than 25 years ago after wea-

rying of city life and growing restless in his design and production management job at a company that made custom carpets for the White House, Air Force One and wealthy private clients.

The island is home to 23,000 residents, many of whom commute daily to Seattle via a 35-minute ferry ride. Commuters linking up both ends of their trip by bicycle represent a substantial portion of Clune's business, but you're just as likely to find a slippery T'T bike, high-end 27.5-inch mountain rig or a kids' bike—fat bikes, too, for riding on the island's packed sand when the tide is out—among the 100 or so bikes on the shop floor. A rented storage space just outside the shop's back door holds an additional 400 bikes ready to roll into the showroom at any time.

Need a custom Seven tandem with SS couplers and a Rohloff hub? Clune is happy to hook that up too—and has.

A self-described born road rider who

grew up tinkering with his own bikes, he is also a master BG Fit bike fitter, and has carved a lucrative niche working with triathlon club members off the island who come to Bainbridge just for his services.

"I've been fitting people to bikes since 1988. Nobody was doing it back then," said Clune, who co-owned another shop on the island for nine years before launching BI Cycle in 1997.

Like many Seattle-area shops, BI Cycle takes on some ski business during the winter months. But Clune limits the shop to services like tuning and edge repair rather than converting his retail space to ski and snow equipment sales.

"There are enough big shops around the Seattle area that can't put the bindings on right away or get the skis tuned up for two weeks, but we can do it here locally and turn it around in 24 or 48 hours, generally," he said. **BRAIN**



Owner Tom Clune

ALPINE HUT

Employees: 8-10
Sales floor space: 2,800 square feet
Years in business: 37
Emphasis: Family bike and ski, commuters
Main brands: Raleigh, Diamondback, Felt
Owner: Kyle Fisher

Alpine Hut owner Kyle Fisher grew up in the store, which his father Ron started in the mid-'70s. But Kyle had to sow his oats a bit before taking over the business from his dad. He worked (and skied, and biked) in Utah and elsewhere before returning to the family store about 10 years ago. Ron Fisher continues to operate the store's rental business across the street.

Alpine Hut serves bikers and skiers, and unlike in some parts of the coun-

try, both activities can be enjoyed nearly year round in Seattle. So although Fisher transitions much of the sales floor to skis in winter and to bikes in summer, and adjusts his service staff seasonally, the store maintains at least some ski and bike inventory and service capability all year.

"The ski wall stays up year round," said Fisher, pointing to a retail display. Overall, ski sales are about 60 percent of the store's business.

The dual emphasis means storage and showroom space is at a premium and the timing of preseason orders and shipments is key—Fisher said there's no way his store can digest a large shipment of bikes in January, prime selling season for his snow business. And at the other end of the season, the market has come to expect Labor Day weekend ski sales, so Fisher has to switch emphasis to snow while the bike season is still under way.

Fisher said the store has sold Raleigh as long as he can remember; the brand's flexible preseason terms and its product strengths in urban and entry-level road bikes suit the store. Fisher said Raleigh's U.S. headquarters in nearby Kent is another plus. He likes to do business with K2 Sports, headquartered in Seattle, for the same reason. **BRAIN**



Kyle Fisher, owner

BIKE WORKS

Employees: 14 full time (nonprofit group); 5 full time in shop
Sales floor space: 850 square feet plus outdoor display
Years in business: 17
Emphasis: Community used bike shop; youth cycling programs
Owners: N.A. [501(c)(3) nonprofit organization]

In the southeast Seattle neighborhood of Columbia City, 30 percent of residents live below the poverty line. It's also a culturally diverse community where a language other than English is spoken in more than half of homes. Youth here had little access to bicycles—and to transportation in general—when Bike Works opened its doors in just 350 square feet of shop space in 1996.

With the mission of building sustain-

able communities by educating youth and promoting bicycling, the nonprofit used bike shop has grown over the years and now has separate administrative offices, classrooms for youth programs, and storage a block away from its original storefront in a converted house.

A third of the shop's donated bikes are priced under \$300—some at \$150 or less—and sale proceeds go toward Bike Works' youth initiatives.

"The reason we have a bike shop is to earn money for our youth programs," said Steve Maluk, shop director.

The centerpiece of those programs is Bike Works' Earn-a-Bike initiative, an eight-week course where youth ages 9 to 17 log 18 hours of classroom and drop-in time working on other people's bikes. Kids can also earn points toward purchasing parts and accessories.

Once they're on bikes, the focus shifts to keeping kids engaged through rides, field trips, bike vacations and other

events. "If you really want to make an impact, you have to stay with them a long time," said Deb Salls, Bike Works' executive director.

Donated bikes, frames and parts come from private parties and a number of local industry sources, including Accell North America's Raleigh, Diamondback and Seattle Bike Supply. Seattle-based REI also donates scratch-and-dent bikes. Twice a week, waste-reduction company CleanScapes drops off a container of discarded bikes to be stripped for usable parts.



Sales of used bikes fund Bike Works' youth programs, including this eight-week Earn-a-Bike class for kids ages 9 to 17.

Sales of those donated bikes fund about half of Bike Works' \$1 million annual budget, and helped the nonprofit serve 600 youth participants this year, double the number just two years ago, Salls said. **BRAIN**

SEATTLE DEALER TOUR

RECYCLED CYCLES

Employees: 25 full time, 11 part time
Sales floor space: 7,000 square feet (over two locations)
Years in business: 20
Emphasis: Used and new commuter, road and mountain bikes; used and new parts
Main brands: Raleigh, Kona, Surly
Owners: Steve Donahue, Scott Martini

Recycled Cycles is a treasure hunter's dream. Crates full of second-hand hubs, brake calipers, shifters, derailleurs and other components beckon bike geeks to reconnect with their cycling past, as do the vintage rigs hanging from the shop's ceiling (a chrome Diamondback BMXer threw at least one BRAIN editor into nostalgic reverie).

Though Recycled was founded in 1994 as a used bike shop, starting around 2000 the supply of secondhand bikes couldn't keep up with consumer

demand, recalled co-owner Steve Donahue. So the shop brought in new bikes and parts, starting on the bike side with lower-tier brands from Raleigh.

Donahue and business partner Scott Martini have deepened their relationship with Raleigh over the years, and now carry a full line from the local brand, in addition to bikes from fellow Washington-based supplier Kona as well as Surly. New bikes and parts make up more than 60 percent of sales revenue, compared with about 20 percent for used.

Still, "we are the only used bike shop in Seattle that has it as our flag," said Donahue. "We're the only one who does it on this scale, especially the parts."

Located next to the University of Washington, Recycled's flagship store draws many customers, as well as lots of trade-in bikes, from the student body and faculty. The campus also provides a steady stream of seasonal part-time employees, allowing the shop to maintain its full-time headcount year-round, Donahue said.



Bike sales at Recycled Cycles' two locations—the second opened in Seattle's Fremont neighborhood in February 2012—are split fairly evenly among genres, with no particular category dom-

inating the mix.

"We definitely feel the commuter traffic during the week to and from work," Donahue said. "On Saturday and Sunday, it's families looking for bikes." **BRAIN**

VELO BIKE SHOP

Employees: 6 full time, 7 part time
Sales floor space: 3,700 square feet
Years in business: 45 years
Emphasis: Family, commuters, entry-level road
Main brands: Giant, Bianchi, Masi
Owner: Lloyd Tamura

The BRAIN Dealer Tour came to Velo Bike Shop during one of the 45-year-old store's most significant years. Because one weekend in March, the store's employees and friends packed it up and moved operations just under a mile from the homey, somewhat cluttered neighborhood location it had inhabited for more than 20 years. Velo's new location is a bright, airy, purpose-built example of modern retailing, with high

ceilings, custom-made bike storage and display fixtures, an open-concept service area, and even a gas-fired fireplace.

The store is located on the street level of the Via6 high-rise apartment building, which sprung up last year in a fast-developing area of downtown. Via6 is adjacent to the new Amazon.com headquarters, now under construction, and its developer had a vision for a "vertical neighborhood" that would include a bike shop and a bike club to attract the thousands of Amazon employees who will soon work and live nearby. The club, called ViaBike, is owned by the developer but managed by Velo Bike Shop. It includes storage for 150 bikes, showers and lockers for building residents and nearby desk jockeys who ride to work. Bike storage and shower access costs just \$15 a month. Locker rental is a few dollars more.

While the location is on the cutting edge of modern retailing and urban development, storeowner Lloyd Tamura and his extended family bring decades of bike retailing credibility and history. The store couldn't fit its extensive bike collection in the new space, but a few vintage bikes are on display, including several Sekai bikes. The Sekai brand, familiar to retailers who rode the wave of Japanese-made road bikes in the 1970s and early 1980s, was developed by the Tamura family and



Velo relocated this year to the new Via6 apartment high-rise.

eventually sold to Norco.

A store representative said that in its first season at the new location, bike sales are down a bit, but in the fast-developing neighborhood, Velo appears ideally positioned for the future. **BRAIN**

RIDE BICYCLES

Employees: 5
Sales floor space: 450 square feet
Years in business: 3
Emphasis: Commuter, entry-level street bikes and "grocery getters"
Main brands: Raleigh, Public, Felt, Marin, Torker, Spot, Surly
Owner: Christiaan Bourdrez

Ride Bicycles owner Christiaan Bourdrez launched his small transit-focused shop three years ago with \$15,000 in inventory and a distaste for the level of customer service he saw at some larger bike retailers.

"The business model in the past has been to just buy all these bikes and hire guys who don't really know what they're doing as your bike builders. The bike gets a quick five-minute inspection and then goes out, and the salesperson says, 'Hey, you'll get a free tune-up. Cables will

stretch and things will happen and you'll need to bring it back and we'll take care of it,'" Bourdrez said. "So all of these riders are having a substandard experience, in my opinion, and I think it actually damages cycling."

That's why Bourdrez and his staff pre-stretch cables, true up and tension wheels and give all bikes a thorough test ride.

"We don't want our customers to come back just because they need their bike tuned up. We want them back because they're stoked on the bike and it's riding great and they want more product," he said.

With just 450 square feet of sales floor, Ride Bicycles is absolutely packed with merchandise. Inventory overflows into the shop's small closet/office and bathroom, and a separate 350-square-foot space in the same building houses boxed bikes and a workstand for builds and repairs. Outside, about 10 locked-up city and cargo bikes frame the shop's streetfront windows.



Despite the constraints of his space, Bourdrez's bike selection covers a broad spectrum, from \$300 Public step-through bikes to \$2,000-plus Spot Brand belt-drive models. His average bike sale comes in around \$900, but add-ons like fenders, panniers, lights and mirrors

typically tack on an additional \$150 to \$250 in product and labor.

And 60 percent of Ride Bicycles' customers are women, which Bourdrez attributes to the approachable nature of the shop and absence of bike-snob attitude. **BRAIN**

CLASSIC CYCLE**Employees:** 7**Sales floor space:** 2,500 square feet**Years in business:** 28**Emphasis:** Island bike rentals, road, commuters**Main brands:** Trek, Scott, Raleigh, Colnago**Owners:** Jaime Amador, Paul Johnson

The Dealer Tour enjoyed a foggy ferry ride out to Bainbridge Island to visit Classic Cycle and nearby Bainbridge Island Cycle. We were rewarded with a great seafood lunch with the owners of both shops. And the classic bike fans among us spent a happy afternoon ogling Classic Cycle's museum, which dominates its retail floor.

The store began in the mid-1980s as an offshoot of an animal feed store. Original owner Jeff Groman started the classic bike collection, focusing on early

road bikes and related memorabilia. When current owners Jaime Amador and Paul Johnson took over, they agreed to rent Groman's collection for \$1 a year. Johnson also set out to expand the collection, bringing in early BMX and mountain bikes and more recent road machines.

The museum even includes an interactive exhibit: one Gavin O'Grady, a former road pro, Coors Classic stage winner and national team member. O'Grady has worked at Classic Cycle since 2007, as a mechanic and salesman.

Classic Cycle is also a thriving retail store, with a large fleet of rental bikes to serve island visitors and new bikes from Trek, Scott, Raleigh and Colnago. The store's museum and staff add credibility that keeps it at the center of the local roadie community and keeps the service area busy. **BRAIN**



Owners Jaime Amador and Paul Johnson

REI**Employees:** 30-40 (bike department)**Sales floor space:** 5,700 square feet (bike department); 69,000 square feet total retail space**Years in business:** 75**Emphasis:** Family, commuter**Main bike brands:** Novara, Cannondale, Scott, Marin**Owners:** Member-owned co-op, with a 13-person board of directors

Of REI's 137 locations across the country, its first flagship store in downtown Seattle is also the multi-sport retailer's largest. Completed in 1996, the store boasts a 5,700-square-foot bike department that, despite long, rainy winters, stays busy year round. Although REI Seattle's customer base ranges from families to avid cyclists, the cornerstone of its market is the full-time bike commuter. In

its repair shop, one stand is always kept open for walk-in commuters needing emergency repairs.

Via its house brand Novara, REI has offered a full spectrum of cycling products including bikes, soft goods and accessories since 1983. "One of the coolest parts about REI's cycling department is our brand Novara and the ability to innovate with that brand, especially when it comes to women's-specific bikes and clothing, which we began offering 12 years ago—well before most other companies were," said Jamie Gudmastad, bike department manager.

REI offers weekly bicycle maintenance classes, with every other class reserved for women only, all year long.

Heavily involved with the local cycling community, REI has longstanding relationships with advocacy groups including Cascade Bicycle Club, Evergreen



Mountain Bike Alliance and the Bike Alliance of Washington. The company is also sponsoring a bike-share station with a \$20,000 per year grant with Puget Sound Bike-Share, launching in spring 2014.

In addition to serving a vibrant commuter market, REI encourages its own employees to commute to work by bike. Employee incentives include free bike repair as well as bike parking, lockers and showers on site. **BRAIN**



Jamie Gudmastad, bike department manager

SPEEDY REEDY**Employees:** 5**Sales floor space:** 1,900 square feet**Years in business:** 13**Emphasis:** Triathlon, ultra-running**Main brands:** Cervelo, Felt, Orbea**Owners:** Brooke and Reed Sillers

Triathletes have to develop the right mix of training for each of the three disciplines, a skill set that carries over from sport to retail for Speedy Reedy co-owners Brooke and Reed Sillers.

Their store is constantly looking for the right mix of product category inventory and emphasis, and excellence in every area is required to stay on top of the rapidly changing multi-sport market.

Their sunny store features the expected selection of high-end tri gear—the aero dream bikes, high-zoot wheels, wet-suits and race clothing, along with a huge

array of nutritionals. But in 13 years in business, the couple has seen the tri market change. The pockets aren't quite as deep as they used to be.

"Triathletes still spend a lot of money, but maybe a bit less in recent years, maybe because of the economy," Brooke said. "We don't sell as many complete high-end bikes, but we still sell a lot of aero wheels and things like aero helmets and new component groups, so people are upgrading their equipment that way. We install a lot of new groups."

Some triathletes also have moved on to new challenges, like muddy adventure races and ultra-marathon running events. The Sillers have adjusted their mix accordingly, increasing their selection of running shoes, including hard-to-find ultra-specific shoe models from brands like Hoka. Brooke said shoe vendors, even some of the largest brands, have been accommodating when the store cherry-picks their lines for the handful of models that suit their clientele. **BRAIN**



Owners Reed and Brooke Sillers

Always new things to learn ... even in your own back yard

Raleigh had the privilege of participating in the BRAIN Dealer Tour along with several other industry companies. We visited with shop owners and employees to learn about their successes and struggles. Through shop input and evaluations of Seattle's ridership and cycling infrastructure, we gained fresh insight into our home market.

We rode 2014 Raleigh bikes—road, cyclocross and gravel grinder—through miles of city streets and bike paths, stopping in at 13 bike shops. Cascade Bicycle Club, the largest bike advocacy organization in Washington state, led the group, giving the tour contingent an honest perspective of a day in the life of a Seattle commuter. We cruised some of the most highly traveled cycling corridors in the city while also navigating some of Seattle's most congested and prohibitive areas for riders. We also pedaled to iconic Seattle landmarks, fueled up at favorite lunch spots, and recharged with espresso and coffee at the city's famed cafes.

Together the group uncovered the reasons that confirm Seattle's bike-friendly status, but we also discussed opportunities to improve accessibility and safety of bike facilities. State-of-the-art bike infrastructure is in place, but busy motorways and construction too often interrupt the ride. Cascade Bicycle Club and other organizations are working hard to advocate for these improvements in an effort to make cycling in Seattle safer for both cyclists and motorists.

An overriding theme from the trip

was that the more people riding bikes, the better. Seattle bike shops tend to agree. Each retailer had something unique to offer the city's varied riding populace, but no single shop is trying to meet the needs of every rider out there. Shops pride themselves in being diverse, having a personality and building a community within their store. Business is good, too; countless commuters in Se-



attle kept popping in for parts, repairs, accessories—and bikes, of course.

The BRAIN Dealer Tour was a great experience. It was a fantastic way to tour our hometown on a new level with an entertaining and diverse group of industry comrades.

—Brian Fornes, marketing manager, Raleigh Bicycles

Seattle retailers rightly put emphasis on service

Seattle is often cited as an example of what cycling can and should be in a major city. After spending a week riding around the city and visiting a number of shops, I can say that it fully lives up to its promise. Every morning we would see scores of cyclists headed to work and we were able to ride through the city on any number of bike lanes or trails. Where many cities treat cycling as an afterthought, there are now buildings going up that specifically take cycling and commuters into account during the planning stages.

Every shop we visited in Seattle catered to a different audience, a different breed of cyclist, but one thing brought all of them together: a focus on service. From smaller shops like Ride Bicycles all the way up to the massive Gregg's Greenlake, the service aspect of the bike shop took center stage.

Not only was it nice to see a can of Clean Streak on every stand, it was nice to see a community of shops that understood how to take care of long-term customers and keep riders on

the road. It wasn't always about selling the new bike; it was often about the older bike that was an extension of the rider's lifestyle. With this focus on service, I encountered shops that paid more attention to the maintenance category, displayed product well and had the product knowledge to be incredibly successful with one of the few consumable products in their shop.

It is easy to see why Seattle is the envy of other cities. With an



abundance of trails and bike lanes, coupled with buildings designed for commuters and shops committed to maintaining people's everyday rides, Seattle is truly a hotbed for cycling.

—Derek Goltz, marketing manager and social media director, Finish Line

CASCADE BICYCLE STUDIO

Employees: 3 full time

Sales floor space: 1,900 square feet

Years in business: 8

Emphasis: High-end/custom road and 'cross

Main brands: Seven, Ibis, Parlee, BMC

Owners: Zac Daab, Terry Buchanon

Having recently moved into its third location in a three-block radius in the heart of Seattle's Fremont neighborhood, Cascade Bicycle Studio has perhaps found its sweet spot. Located a stone's throw from the busy Burke-Gilman bike path, CBS has seen an increase in commuter traffic—and hence, a spike in flat repair and tube sales.

"It's great being right in sight of the path," said co-owner Zac Daab. "We get walk-in commuter traffic stopping by for service or to shop on their way home."

The shop's tidy interior has a modern feel with corrugated metal ceilings and

clean lines. An open-air service department with barstool seating invites customers to take a load off while their bike is being worked on.

Because the focus at CBS is on custom bike builds, tubing samples in an array of available frame colors are displayed like artwork in the store. Daab said a good portion of CBS' business comes from special orders from Seven, where he worked for a stint. "We work closely with Seven," he said. "When I opened the shop eight years ago, I was happy to be able to pick up the line."

Besides high-end and custom builds, CBS has a strong cyclocross focus, which is partly due to the fact that co-owners Daab and Terry Buchanon also co-founded the MFG cyclocross race series five years ago. Three years ago, Buchanon became a working partner at CBS, largely because they were looking for a way to work side by side every day rather than exchanging emails and phone calls to run MFG.

"It was the best way to be in the same room," said Daab. "And it really helped streamline things."



Owners Terry Buchanon (left) and Zac Daab

Running two separate businesses concurrently is not without its challenges, but for the most part, Daab says it's a well-oiled machine. "We're both very ef-

ficient people and seem to be able to balance time and energy," he said. "We both enjoy what we do and definitely see eye to eye." **BRAIN**

Editors' picks: What's working in Jet City retail



Small and nimble can win the day: At 450 square feet, Ride Bicycles was by far the smallest shop we visited on the Seattle Dealer Tour—and that's by design, said owner Christian Bourdreux. With little space for storage, he carefully selects product and fires off orders every two or three days to maintain stock. "I don't have a lot of back stock except on quick-selling items. I just look at the hook and then I go," Bourdreux said. This allows him to be more nimble and to maintain margin throughout the year, he added. Working with a variety of suppliers happy to ship bikes and frames in small numbers, Bourdreux doesn't have to finance or take on terms. He can also respond more quickly to shifting consumer demand than shops that order deep with a few suppliers. "So I order onesies, twosies, threesies, and then in the busy season I'll do something more speculative," he said. "It's labor intensive, but I do all the ordering."



Meaningful bike sizing: Nonprofit secondhand shop Bike Works deals with a high proportion of entry-level customers who aren't educated on the finer points of bike sizing. "56 cm? What's that mean?" So Bike Works uses handwritten hangtags describing the type of bike and the appropriate rider height range—say, 5-foot-5 to 5-foot-8. Not an exact science, to be sure, but good enough to get most customers comfortably fitted and on their way to enjoying the two-wheeled life.



Outdoor track lets customers try before they buy: REI has made good use of the lush native forest that flanks the northwest corner of its expansive downtown store. A gravel and dirt test track allows customers to try mountain and 'cross bikes off the pavement before committing to a purchase. "Customers can take any bike out there so they can get a true feel for how the bike fits and rides," said bike department manager Jamie Gudmestad. "It's really a valuable tool for us, and makes the buying process a lot easier for our customers because it takes out the guesswork." Besides the test track, there is a hiking trail and a waterfall running through the park-like landscape that surrounds the store.

A club like no other: ViaBike is a bike club, but not the kind that gets together for Saturday rides. Think health club instead, with safe bike storage, showers and lockers for the many commuters who pour into downtown every day. The club is downstairs from Velo Bike Shop, in the brand-new high-rise apartment building that Velo relocated to in March. Velo, which manages the club for the building's owner, is finding it offers many advantages for its retail and service departments. "It's obviously been kind of a driver for our business because the sign-up is here [in the retail store] and it's a natural that club members would consider being our customers," said Lloyd Tamura, the store's owner. Members can leave their bikes in a special place if they need it to be serviced during the day. So far the club has 70 members. Bike storage and shower access is just \$15 a month; locker rentals are extra. Tamura expects the club to take off when Amazon.com's headquarters open up across the street in a year or so.



Devoted customers go the extra mile: Want to snap up that blinged-out Salsa Mukluk Ti fat bike on the floor at Bainbridge Island Cycle? Sorry, it's not for sale, shop owner Tom Clune informed us. Clune brought on fat bikes from Salsa and sibling QBP brand Surly late last season but quickly sold out and didn't have access to more. So while he was waiting to reload on fatties this season not only from QBP but also Specialized and Kona—launching their first models in the niche for 2014—a longtime customer volunteered his titanium beauty to keep the fat-tire conversation rolling at the shop. "He says, 'Hey, it's better to be in here being ogled over rather than sitting in my garage,'" Clune said. "We sold that to him, actually. He's got about eight bikes, so he's the perfect type of customer you want to have as a proponent for biking."



Training studio and coaching add diversity: At Herriott Sports Performance, the bike pro shop is only part of the story. With wet winters that can put a damper on cycling outdoors, having a training space next door to the store gives off-season revenue a boost. Owners Todd Herriott and David Richter are both former pro road racers and certified coaches, so they know the value of off-season training firsthand. Members pay a small fee to take classes at the studio, which is connected to the pro shop. "When the weather is bad, the studio gets busy," said Herriott. "And that accounts for about 30 percent of our revenue in the winter."



Expertise can compete with price: If she's into gels, bars and powders, a hungry triathlete would be in heaven in the nutritional corner of Speedy Reedy. Owners Brooke and Reed Sillers devote nearly as much floor space to athletic food as they do to other major product categories like running shoes and helmets. Brooke Sillers said customers look to the store for expert, firsthand opinions on the various products, but she said it goes both ways—the Sillers make sure to pay attention to what nutritional strategies their customers are trying, and stock accordingly. And when it comes to triathlon nutrition, endorsements count. When major events like Ironman tie themselves to a food brand, sales skyrocket. How can the store compete with grocery stores, department stores and even REI on price? "We don't even try," Brooke said. "And that doesn't seem to affect sales."

Borrow from other business models: Taking a page out of the handbook of car dealers' service departments, Gregg's Greenlake Cycle has a dedicated service entrance with individual kiosks to service customers. The multiple check-in counters break down barriers and improve efficiency. Easy repairs can be done immediately, while longer-term service is moved out of sight to a second-story loft with 20 mechanics' benches. "We used to have a line out the door on the first sunny day in March. Now we get them in, done, and pedaling out the door," said Marty Pluth, the store's general manager.

SEATTLE DEALER TOUR

Photos by Bob Huff unless otherwise indicated



Dealer Tour riders parked their bikes by the beer barrels at Schooner Exact Brewing Co., where PeopleForBikes' Tim Blumenthal hosted an industry reception on the tour's opening day.



Photo by Toby Hill



BRAIN's editorial team flew to Seattle ahead of the Dealer Tour to sample the sweet trails of Duthie Hill Mountain Bike Park and Grand Ridge Park outside of Seattle. Seattle Bike Supply's Dirk Sorenson provided the local trail knowledge as well as a fleet of Redline bikes for us to ride.

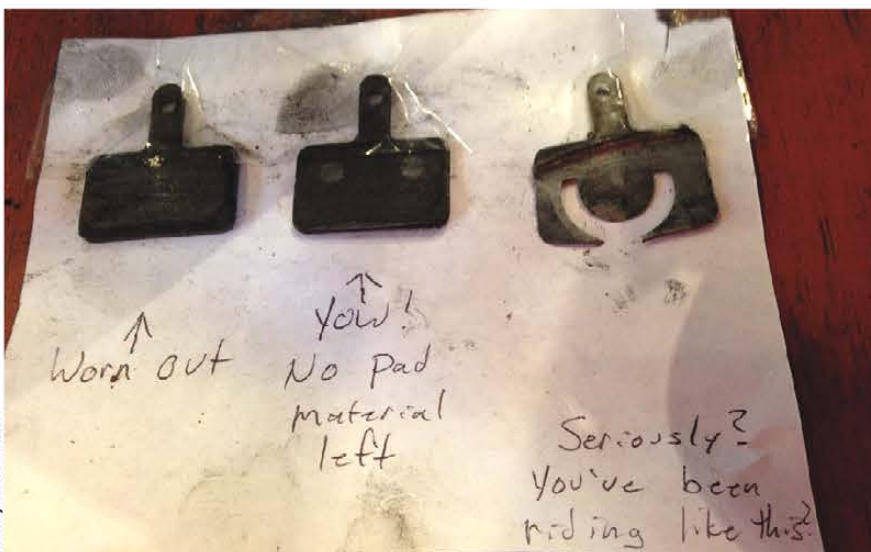


One of our guides for the tour's final day, Brock Howell of Cascade Bicycle Club was nattily attired for the occasion.



The ladies of Dealer Tour get a bit kicky at Gas Works Park, formerly a Seattle Gas Light Co. plant. Located on the shore of Lake Union, the park was added to the National Register of Historic Places early this year.

Photo by Lauren Fallert



Classic Cycle advises customers on proper brake pad care.



Our tour crossed Fremont Bridge several times over the three days, triggering this automated bike counter, one of two in Seattle tallying daily ridership.



Approaching Seattle landmark Pike Place Market on a gloriously sunny afternoon



Brian Fornes, marketing manager for Seattle Dealer Tour lead sponsor Raleigh, broke out all his Rainier Beer finery for "Rainier Day," when the neon "R" was restored to the rooftop of the historic brewery building in south Seattle on Dealer Tour's closing day.



BRAIN web editor Steve Frothingham joined more than 100 riders at an evening cyclocross practice held at Marymoor Velodrome in Redmond.



BRAIN publisher Megan Tompkins happily cruises through the I-5 Colonnade mountain bike skills park, located under Interstate 5 between Seattle's Capitol Hill and Eastlake neighborhoods. She resisted the temptation to huck the urban park's drops and jumps aboard her Raleigh-provided 'cross bike.

Photo by Toby Hill



The REI Climbing Pinnacle towers 65 feet above the outdoor retailer's flagship Seattle store.



Gracy May of Elliott Bay Bicycles was one of the few shop dogs we encountered in Seattle.

Photo by Toby Hill



Ride 2 Recovery athlete and retired Airborne Ranger Jordan Bressler, who joined us for the tour's second day, tries a Strider on for size at Bainbridge Island Cycle.



Lauren Fallert, public relations for Raleigh, leads a group down a twisting, leaf-strewn descent.



Elliott Bay Bicycles' Bob Freeman built this eye-catching wheel with a disconnected center flange to mate a 24-hole hub with a 36-hole rim.



The group rides onto the ferry for the trip across Puget Sound to Bainbridge Island.



Trees exploded with fall colors during our three days of riding around the city.

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