

Bike industry rant

I'm an active participant in the NBDA's (National Bicycle Dealer's Association) e-list, where we discuss all manner of things that affect the independent bicycle dealer and our industry in general. Someone had created a long & well thought out post about how far behind we are in the actual selling process of a bike compared to, say, a Dell computer. His point was that we don't have enough gee-whiz and don't dazzle enough with tech stuff. Which, I think, is missing the point. Below is my post in reply-

At some point we get a bit distracted by the gee-whiz and lose sight of the bicycles' elegant simplicity and transformative power.

The miracle and wonder of the bicycle comes from its ability to transform the average person into superman or superwoman. You can look at a far-off hill that would be way beyond walking in a reasonable time, and get there in just a couple hours. It's a liberating experience. You don't have the windows rolled up with the stereo blasting away. You see things as you go by. You smell things. You can take the same route a hundred times and see something new each time. Life goes by at just the right speed on a bike.

All sorts of fancy ways to sell and customize the bike will likely detract from that. There will be a niche market for it, but I still believe that it's the experience of riding a bike that will lead to more sales. Look at what Team in Training has done to make cycling popular. Look at what opening up trails does for mountain bike sales.

I think we, as an industry, suck at selling the cycling experience. We choose to focus on spec & graphics & tech and we miss the point. We attract a subset of the possible market. We've gotten so far away from what the bike can do for you that no manufacturer dares run an ad that says "You'll have more fun on an XYZ bike." They'll list a bunch of specs that most customers don't understand, or focus on the wrong things and miss out on the utility of the product. How are people actually USING their bikes? How has their XYZ bike changed their life?

OK, so Sharp now has TVs that have quad pixels. How much of my life do I want to invest to figure out why that matters? How many potential customers are willing to spend the \$\$\$ for something that could change their lives but they get discouraged by all the tech stuff?