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Back to School: Students Learn Bike Assembly

BY LYNETTE CARPIET

SANTA CRUZ, CA—It's back to school time. And for Kirk Bernhardt, that means juggling his time between teaching bike assembly at Harbor High and fixing bikes in Santa Cruz Bicycles' warranty department.

Although it's a busy time, it should be easier now, after having taught the pilot "Bike Shop at School" class of 22 students last January.

"I tried to prep them so they can walk into a bike shop and get a job as an entry-level mechanic in an assembly position," Bernhardt said. "We pulled the bikes out of boxes and assembled a \$300 mountain bike.

"I had some serious troublemakers but it was an opportunity to turn a kid

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Suppliers Test Alternatives To Quick Release

BY MATT WIEBE

ORLANDO, FL—A spate of high-profile lawsuits over quick releases, along with a New Jersey legislator who wants to ban them, is forcing the industry to reexamine its traditional quick-release designs.

Fueling that review is a Web site, www.shokmoms.org, warning parents about their dangers. But for the first time in years suppliers have options.

Cannondale, Kona and Trek retailers are getting the first production bikes with Montague's Clix quick-release

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Photo by Dieter Wertz

Cyclists frequently pass camels on the roads outside downtown Dubai where the cycling scene is growing.

Dubai Retailer Is Pumping Pedals Not Oil

BY JO BECKENDORFF

DUBAI, UAE—We had just told our Pakistani driver to take us to Wolfi's Bike Shop. "Bikes—you mean motorbikes?" he asked. "No, bicycles," we said. "Ah, motorcycles." "No, not motorcycles, push bicycles."

We gave up in hopes our driver would concentrate on the road. His speedometer was pegged at 75 miles per hour. But the speed limit was a more modest 45 as he sped past the modern skyscrapers lining Sheikh Zayed Road. For cyclists and pedestrians this has to rank as one of the most dangerous mile-long strips of shopping anywhere.

But as we pulled up to Wolfi's store, our driver told us that

a Harley Davidson shop was nearby. "No problem, I can take you there in five minutes!" he said.

Cycling in the desert? Talk to Wolfi Hohmann about Dubai's cycling scene. The German retailer is credited with helping develop Dubai's interest in bicycles, and his influence is felt throughout the seven emirates.

As we enter his Sheikh Zayed Road store, he takes us to his coffee bar. We chat during breaks as he greets customers and repairs bikes. Since opening in 2002, Hohmann has done everything himself working more than 10 hours a day, six days a week. And among cyclists in the Arab Emirates, he's be-

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Metro Cities Give Yellow Bikes Another Go

BY SHERI HEIN

LEXINGTON, KY—Imagine walking out of a coffee shop and with the swipe of a card releasing a bike from a locked rack, hopping on, and then pedaling off to work.

Once there, park in a designated rack and go about your day. Each trip costs about 50 cents, and bikes are available at stations every few hundred yards.

This vision of green transportation is being explored in communi-

ties worldwide, most recently in Paris, which just introduced its public-use program called Velib.

With 10,600 bicycles stashed at 750 stations, it's the largest program of its kind. Users can purchase a pass for a year, a week or a day, with a one-day pass costing a bit more than a dollar.

The first half-hour is free and after that minor charges are assessed for each half hour the bike is out. Major cities such as Chicago, New York, San

Francisco and Washington, D.C., are exploring similar programs to ease traffic congestion in densely populated urban areas.

San Francisco has proposed bicycle stations adjacent to bus depots, making cycling a part of the city's extensive public transportation system.

On the opposite coast, the New York Bike-Share Project has proposed a Paris-style system for Manhattan,

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Dubai...

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come a household name. When spotted taking riders out on an early morning spin, the locals point and say, "Isn't that Wolfi, the crazy German guy?"

"Over here German-made still means something," said Hohmann, who also owns a store in Heitersheim, a southern German city. But in Dubai, he said, it's his attention to customer service, his technical skills at repair and his love of bicycles that has made his Middle East retail adventure a success.

Dubai is one of seven emirates of the United Arab Emirates flanking the Persian Gulf. A landmass of 2,414 square miles makes Dubai the second largest of the seven. But massive artificial islands, like The Palm, are adding more space for its 1.4 million people, of whom more than 80 percent come from abroad. By 2010 Dubai's population will exceed two million.

Workers from some 120 countries keep the emirate running with 65 percent of the expatriates from low-wage Asian nations, primarily India and nearby Arab nations. But a far wealthier four percent are from the West. Five million visitors transfer through its airport, and Dubai boasts some of the largest state-of-the-art shopping malls outside of North America. When in Dubai you can shop, sunbathe, go on a desert safari, or go cycling.

Hohmann thanks his brother, Lothar, who also works in Dubai, for urging him to come and visit. With his wife, Gaby, Wolfgang Hohmann booked a flight, liked what he saw, and in 2002 returned with Gaby and their daughter, Anne Sophie, now nine, to open his store in downtown Dubai. "We had nothing to lose," he said.

On Friday, a day most Arab Muslims treat as a Sunday, Hohmann leads rides for the Dubai Roadsters Cycling Club. "When we started about five to 10 riders would show up. Today, when we go on a Friday ride it's with as many as 70 to 90 riders," Hohmann said, while sipping coffee. Most of his rides range from 70 to 120 kilometers.

Most rides start on Dubai's outskirts

near the horse and camel racetracks. Looking back toward the city, Dubai's startling array of high-rise buildings etches the sky. Construction cranes hover over them, including what will be the world's tallest building at more than 700 meters.

But Dubai's best-paved and least used roads lie outside of Dubai's downtown where, during rush hour, Sheikh Zayed Road with seven lanes in each direction, suffers from suffocating stop-and-go traffic. In downtown Dubai, cyclists and pedestrians fight for survival. That's why Hohmann and his "roadies" prefer leaving the city by car for their rides.

Hohmann welcomes a new customer as he walks in. He's from France and Hohmann describes him as a typical customer. "Eighty-five percent of my customers are western expatriates. They work very hard here and are extremely busy. After a while they realize that's not healthy, so they want to do something for their fitness. Some of them come to my shop."

Most work tax-free in Dubai, and are willing to pay for high-end products, he added.

We meet up that evening with the Frenchman for a night-ride on a 4.5-mile well-lit course. These rides, Hohmann said, began as personal after-work training sessions. "When others heard about them, they asked to join. Now about 20 riders come out on Sunday and Tuesday nights." It's a flat course, but a great opportunity to stretch your legs after hours spent in the office. That night, the Frenchman decided to buy a bike and a complement of accessories.

Hohmann's strategy underlies his success at selling countless carbon fiber Scott and Storck bikes as well as Felt-branded BMX bikes.

Gaby, Hohmann's wife, said that in terms of market share road bikes, mountain bikes and touring bikes sell about equally. Nevertheless, Hohmann makes his money selling high-end road bikes. In fact, he sold so many Storcks that he set up a shop-within-a-shop when he enlarged his store in 2006.

Hohmann's fame is such that Fox Sports' Far East TV channel wants to shoot film of road riders in the desert.



Photo by Dieter Wertz

Wolfi's Bike Shop in downtown Dubai sells Scott, Storck and Felt bikes.



Photo by Dieter Wertz

Wolfi Hohmann personally greets customers and repairs bikes.

The crew wants Hohmann and a Storck Fascenario on film. "I like appointments like this. It shows that they notice us here in the UAE," Hohmann said.

Hohmann's staff comprises a sort of United Nation's of cycling. Among his staff are eight Filipinos, one Indian, one Serb, one Aussie and a German. But Wolfi's reputation for excellent service is rooted in the fact that wages are cheaper in Dubai than Germany.

But they are well paid by Dubai standards, he said. "We need experienced people here, and they must have a passion for cycling." One of his Filipino employees was a top-10 finisher at Malaysia's Langkawi Tour.

Two years ago the Hohmanns met Sheikh Marwan Hasher Al Maktoum, a member of the emirates' ruling family. He came to the store looking for a time-trial bike. "I tried to explain very carefully that this might not be his best choice. To be honest, I didn't want him to buy a bike that he wouldn't be happy with. We offered to build something special for him and then I took him on a personal test ride. He bought that bike right after the ride," Hohmann recalled.

Today the 35-year-old sheikh joins Hohmann's rides as often as he can. "After a few years of riding, he finally bought a time-trial bike and he loves it." The sheikh later became a friend of the Hohmanns and is now involved in their Dubai store. There are other specialty retail stores in Dubai. One sells Cannondales next door to Hohmann, and Specialized has opened a store there.

After the Fox film shoot, we talked with Christian Handruch while sipping coffee at the shop. He's a tour guide who works for an Arabian travel agency, Dream Adventure, and he's studying the potential for bicycle tourism in the emirates.

"Today, tourism here is one dimensional. Desert safaris are the most popular, but the UAE has to look ahead. They are already preparing for a future without oil, and tourism is one way to replace it. So it's my job to think about the advantages of bringing tourists here

for cycling holidays," Handruch said.

"What all seven emirates offer are well-paved and well-lit roads with little traffic. There are enough hotels, and compared with other European winter cycling destinations like South Africa, it's very safe here. There's little crime, and the climate from September to April is ideal. But from May to August, temperatures routinely hit 122 degrees and nighttime temperatures hover around 101."

The next day Handruch takes us to Al Ain, about a 75-mile drive from Dubai and into Abu Dhabi, the largest of the seven emirates.

This village where he lives is an oasis in this desert country and is home to Faris Al-Sultan's winter training camp. The triathlete won the Hawaiian Ironman in 2005 and placed third in 2006.

Later, we climb Jefel Habeet, the second-largest mountain in the UAE. From the bottom to the peak, the one-way road climbs 2,493 feet over 7.7 miles. We linger at the summit to catch the sunset and to view the twinkling lights of Al Ain far below. We then ride down a well-lit road to the Mercure Hotel for a tea, then down another well-lit road to Mubazzarah Park for a dip at the natural hot springs.

At last we stop in Al Ain's city center, an oasis in the middle of town. And despite its beauty, there are no tourists. Handruch said it's always like that. "Listen to the quiet and how different from busy Dubai. That's why Wolfi and the Dubai Roadsters leave the city when doing their Friday rides. But Al Ain is a great destination for cyclists who want to explore the UAE," he said.

We return the next day to Wolfi's store and he tells us he hopes to capitalize on Handruch's ambitions for building cycling tourism in the emirates. "There's so much to do over here, but I can't do everything," he sighs.

Check out Wolfi's store online at www.wbs.ae.

Jo Beckendorff is a freelance trade journalist who visited the United Arab Emirates. Bicycle Retailer & Industry News helped pay for his travel. **BRAIN**


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