

Sylvan Cycles: wood composite bicycles

A great thing about bicycles and blogs is that they both connect people and places. We love both making and riding bicycles, and in developing the connections that come from this. In the big picture Sylvan is really about "using bicycles to go places". We make high-performance bicycles from sustainable wood composites. light. fast. gorgeous. smooth. green by design. www.sylvancycles.com

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2010

Interbike 2010

Howdy Everyone, Sam here.

How can it be a year since Interbike 2009?! Though it seems like two years of work and three years of fun have transpired.

There is so much to catch you up with but I have to get back in the shop and make more bikes! I'll hit the high points:

We are very excited to welcome [Merlyn Townley](#), friend, pro mechanic, teacher and owner of [Cyclic Evolution](#) (<http://cyclicrevolution.com/>) and Merlyn Mechanics (<http://www.shopmerlynmechanics.com/>) as our newest dealer and SouthEast rep! Merlyn rocks and is representing us at Interbike this year.

We are fortunate to be front and center in the Kryptonite (<http://www.kryptonitelock.com>) booth #3319 with an Adventure 54. Thank you, Kryptonite and thank you, Merlyn!

Please check out our bike and if you would like to speak with Merlyn, please send him a text on the floor at (802) 282-2852.

We are looking for dealers who would be fun to work with and with whom we can build a good partnership. If you are that shop, great! Let's talk. If you think you know the perfect shop, great! we would love to know. Drop us a line at info@sylvancycles.com.

Look for us this Fall around New England at 'cross events, rides and general hoe-downs. You can always schedule a test ride as well. Again, drop us a line.

We found a little time to work on our website (www.sylvancycles.com) so there are some more current pictures and words. The much awaited gallery is forthcoming. There have been some great articles coming out in both the industry and local press which we will link to

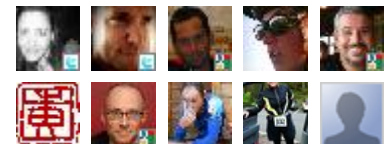
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Contributors

Sam Kelley


John Fabel

soon.

Well back to the shop for me. Happy riding and if you are in Vegas this week, trying to keep it real, swing by and pet the Sylvan and you will instantly happy. Ahhhhhh....

Cheers,

Sam Kelley

Posted by Sam Kelley at 1:06 PM 0 comments 

[Links to this post](#)

WEDNESDAY, JULY 28, 2010

The Beauty and Challenge of Stainless



Now that our new shop is getting up to speed, I thought I'd post a few pics of some of the latest stainless lugs coming out of the shop. One of the interesting insights for us coming out of NAHBS was that people are as excited by our lugwork as they are inspired by what we are doing with wood.



We offer stainless because of its many advantages (beauty, strength, longevity, durability, low impact). But what may not be apparent is how challenging it can be to work with Stainless, relative to other materials more commonly used in bicycle manufacture. Here at Sylvan, we have worked to develop proprietary methods of machining, joining and finishing stainless that enable us to offer our unique lugs. It's truly exacting work: there's no hiding. All the work is right out there in the open -- no paint!



I should also mention that we make bicycles with lugs from other materials - and we have some rather interesting things in development -- but more on that in a later post. Back to the Shop!
John

Posted by John Fabel at [9:50 AM](#) [5 comments](#) 

[Links to this post](#)

Introducing John Coull



We
are

pleased to announce that we have recently added seasoned marketing person John Coull to the Sylvan team.

To many of you in the bicycle world, John Coull needs no introduction. John knows the bicycle industry from the inside-out, having owning and operating the legendary Valley Bicycles for nearly three decades. In the business development community, many of you know John for his work as the past President of the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce.

John is great fit to the Sylvan team, not only because of his obvious history with the bicycle market, but also because of his long-standing engagement with socially-responsible business practice. John was one of the few business-people whom I saw back in the 1980's who actively and regularly put these practices into action in meaningful everyday ways. It's an honor to have John on our team.

John would love to hear from you; he can be reached at:
JC@sylvancycles.com

Posted by John Fabel at 9:37 AM [0 comments](#) 

[Links to this post](#)

FRIDAY, MAY 21, 2010

New Shop! (Website Update coming soon, too...)


It has been a whirlwind last few months, but we're finally in the new shop! And yes, I know that our website is long-overdue for an update.....

This [link](#) will take you to the google sat map of our location, 110 North Main St., Sunderland, MA 01375.

Our new building is an historic 1881 post-and-beam barn (right next to the reknowned Blue Heron restaurant). Our door opens onto some of the best cycling in the region -- come visit!

We're the barn in the background, with the cupola:



Posted by John Fabel at 5:00 PM 19 comments 

[Links to this post](#)

MONDAY, MARCH 15, 2010

NAHBS, the wonderful aftermath

Howdy All. Sam here.

My father used to say he was 'busy', 'really busy' or 'busier than a one armed paper-hanger.' Well, being firmly on the 'paper-hanger' end of things I've been remiss in my bloggin'.

John and I are officially back from the sacred ground and carnival of inspiration and love that is the North American Handmade Bicycle Show. We have reminded our families what we look like, returned to eating with silverware and cleaned up the piles of wood shavings, silver braze filings, bike parts and paperwork that accumulated prior to the show. We have started to follow up with the many, many, did I say *many*, people we met at NAHBS and are back in production, filling orders and trying to get more test/demo/review bikes out to the growing number of riders (individuals, shop owners and the media)

who really want to get on a Sylvan. We even got in a celebratory ski day before the sugarin' really picked up and Mud Season replaced thoughts of gliding through the trees in knee deep powder with thoughts of long rides on back roads (without studs and fenders) and planting peas.

I'll let John have some fun writing about NAHBS too but for me, it absolutely blew my mind. At one point I worked my way out into the aisle because the booth was packed and, quite honestly, I wanted to see it. I wasn't able to get back in for well over an hour. I could have spent a day talking with just about everyone who stopped in. Folks were engaging *and* nice *and* smart. Not any big surprise but thoroughly enjoyable nonetheless.

When I was out at Interbike in September I was taken by how many people *got* out bikes. I knew people would like them because, I think it's fair to say, they are really beautiful. I was surprised, however, by how many people understood why wood composite and/or wood composite and stainless steel would make a super high-quality bike with great ride characteristics. With that said I was still unprepared for our reception at NAHBS.

There is something evocative in what we are doing and people want it. As a craftsman, occasionally holed up in our shop for weeks on end, it was incredibly affirming. And really, who doesn't like it when people appreciate their work? I got to soak it up solo in Vegas so it was especially great to share NAHBS with John and see him 'feel the love.' I loved it when John's 3 1/2 year old daughter came marching proudly into the booth, while it was packed, big smile as always, just like she does at the shop and climbed right up him. Nothing like a little perspective on why we are doing this.

So, my impressions of what people liked... Well, a few folks came specifically to see our bike or to see our bike and the bamboo bikes of Calfee and Boo. They seemed to be interested in every part of the whole; wood composite technology, ride quality, joining and brazing, design philosophy, durability, customization, sustainability... the whole ball of wax.

Some people were drawn to the bike we brought because of it's unusual material and/or it's unusual tube shape (though a pencil is technically hexagonal, we may take many of your suggestions to heart and make a yellow one.) As folks got closer and got to talk to us there seemed to be a palpable shift from novelty interest to genuine excitement with what we are doing.

A lot of folks resonated with the sustainability questions we are asking and trying to answer. A lot of folks really liked what we offer for ride quality though I wish we could have blasted around the convention center a bit, bunny hopping cases of wine at the wine expo next door. Lots of people liked geeking out with John and I about the technology we are utilizing and have developed.

The part I wasn't expecting as much was how people, attendees,

frame builders, shop owners and the media, took to the lug work. We were on the mothership for custom bicycle fabrication and finish and what we are doing was still quite unique. We are quite proud of it and I wish our brazer and all around ace, George Combs, could have been there. Next year. A bunch of you probably got his card when I ran out of mine. At least they had the typo with my email address on them. Who knew...

The fact that our miters are light-tight, that we are using stainless steel and that we can get to the inside of the lug for brazing allows us to put a really big, super strong silver braze fillet on the inside of the lug and then just kiss the outside of the joint to make it pretty. Since we didn't paint these lugs, they really stood out. Bringing some show and tell of the joints for the table didn't hurt either.

Our designing, cutting and joining all our own lugs, dropouts, bridges and hangers was very well received. It was great to point the the plank of Ash we brought and say 'that's where our wood comes from. I'll take you to the stump.' Then, to pull out a seat cluster destined for a canti compatible Adventure frame and say, ' this is where we get our steel. we make it.'

We seemed to have a lot of dealer interest. I think many of them appreciated our desire to support local economies and shops that are active members of not only their local cycling community but also of their greater community. We also have a product that has a lot of 'Wow' and makes for good-talkin' with customers. Dealers help us get bikes further afield and under more riders. We are definitely looking forward to developing relationships with more shop owners and their communities this season.

My only regret is that I didn't get to spend more time getting to know the other frame builders, vendors and suppliers. We were just so...wonderfully... busy. These frame builders are the well from which I draw my inspiration and encouragement. I was, mouth agape and head bobbing, in awe of the beauty, craftsmanship (awkward word but accurate) and professionalism on display.

I'm grateful to Tony Maietta of Maietta Handbuilt Bicycles for getting the Massachusetts frame builders together for a picture. *That* is a picture I am proud to be in! John and I are plotting some kind of wingding for Mass frame builders around D2R2 (<http://www.franklinlandtrust.org/randonnee.html>) next summer. More as it develops.

I'm very appreciative to Don Walker and the organizers of NAHBS for an opportunity to participate in the show. Next year we get to go to Austin, TX and I get to wear my summer hat!

A final shout out (if a fourtysomething can say that) to the people of Richmond, VA. What a universally wonderful bunch of people. I would count myself lucky to ride with any of you in and around your great city!


2/12/2011

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Back to it for me. Thank you for reading and being interested and so darned supportive. We are a couple months out at this point but there is still plenty of time to get you on a Sylvan for the season. So air out the chamois and come on by... or drop us a line if that's easier.

Cheers,

Sam

Posted by Sam Kelley at [11:22 AM](#) [10 comments](#) 

[Links to this post](#)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2009

Welcome 2010!



New Year's Bike-Rack



Howdy All,

Sam here. I suppose keeping a Blog is similar to cooking a good meal: keep it fresh. Sorry for a couple of months of leftovers.

We have been cranking away here in 'The Sandbox.' I'll post some fun pictures in a couple of weeks when we shoot for the North American Handbuilt Bike Show book of pretty pictures and words. Until then, these will have to suffice.



All of a sudden it is the end of the year; the end of the decade and, arguably, the end of our start-up period. Generally I will indulge myself in

retrospective critique and doggy paddle around in memories of glories past. This year I'm thinking only of the promise, fun and the truly rewarding work I have to look forward to when I get back from visiting family for a few days. And the people! The wonderful, creative, dedicated, fun people who have graced our shop and who we have met along the way this past year I get to know better this year and meet, in all likelihood, even more.

I feel so blessed to be in a business where I get up every morning and want to go in to work and make beautiful things for and with wonderful people and, hopefully, make the world a better place for it. Thank you to everyone who has made this possible in the past year and who will continue to in 2010.




John, myself and our families wish you a fun, creative, prosperous and healthy new year.

Now its off to ring in the New Year family style!

Peace,

Sam



Posted by Sam Kelley at 4:04 PM [2 comments](#) 

[Links to this post](#)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2009

Interbike '09 Let it Ride!



Howdy Folks. Sam here. I'm finally taking the time to reflect a little on Interbike '09. Since I got back I've been focusing on the stream on emails, in and out, to and from many of the people I met in Vegas. I knew people would dig our bikes but I wasn't sure how many people would really get it without a lot of the back story from our website of from John or me personally. One of the first people who stopped me as I walked on the floor picked up the frame by the chain stay and pinged the down tube up near the head tube, felt the way the vibration moved

through the frame, put on the yummy-face and said something like: 'This is wood?! This must ride reeeeeealy nice!' From then on I kept meeting people who either got it without explanation or with just a little primmer.

I really enjoyed meeting so many enthusiastic people from the shop floor to the boardroom, designers, press, pros, activists and enthusiasts who found a way in through their buddy's shop. I had the opportunity to meet some of the most respected and talented folks in the industry who imparted their wisdom, encouragement and good energy to a very receptive recipient.

Here is Bruce Gordon (right)



<http://www.brucegordoncycles.blogspot.com/> with one of his award winning and utterly gorgeous bicycles sporting wooden rims from Ric Hjertberg at Wheel Fanatyk <http://wheelfanatyk.blogspot.com/> .

Joe Breeze was fun to talk to about our micro lamination process in tube lay-up. He really seemed to like the ability we have to tweak performance characteristics in a frame based on the species, thickness and treatment of the woods we use. He also was very generous with his encouragement and his experiences as a designer and builder. Thank you, Joe!

I'm very grateful to the the NBDA and Interbike for putting on the show and to Rich Olken, past president of NBDA, industry pillar and, as we would say back in Eastern Mass, wicked nice guy.



It is still possible in Vegas to get steak dinners and beer for four people for 60 bucks. Of course it is in a small, 'family casino' where a friendly little wooden bike frame can be put in protective custody for fear it could be brandished as a deadly weapon. This very nice security guard has obviously never crashed a carbon frame...

That dinner was with with three very cool and colorful pro mechanics including [Merlyn Townley http://www.whereismerlyn.com/](http://www.whereismerlyn.com/) . Stay tuned for more info on Merlyn's custom wheel building venture.

I was great to see see so much of what makes our little part of the globe (New England)so damn fun represented out there. Pedro's has done so much for so long for the sport. One of these days I'll rant at length on the subject of blind spots in risk assessment in small businesses like bike shops and teams letting their mechanics poison themselves on the clock while low and non-toxic alternatives exist and perform really well. Like I said, one of these days...



Jeremy Powers <http://www.jeremypowers.missingsaddle.com/> from just around the corner in Easthampton, Mass rocked Cross Vegas by pulling a fourth. I have no pictures because my cow-bell blistered and beer-soaked fingers weren't quick enough. I may get a chance to work with Jeremy a little on my motorbike between stints in North American and European mud. If I do, I'll thank Carl Ditkoff <http://www.nebikeconsulting.com/about.html> for it. We only had time for an escalator conversation in Las Vegas but he lives about twelve revolutions on da little ring from here in Amherst.

I got to pass around some cards for our first and currently our only Eastern Sylvan Cycles dealer, Norm Flye of Flye Cycles <http://www.flyecycles.com/> in Sunderland, Mass. Soon there will be a post on Norm, his support, patience, encouragement and his great shop.

I also got to spend time (never enough) with my dear friends Jannine and Scott Fitzgerald of Fitzgerald's Bicycles



<http://www.fitzgeraldsbicycles.com/> in Jackson, Wyoming. We are very excited to welcome them as our second and currently our only Western Sylvan Cycles dealer. Fitzzy worked it in the Wheelers and Dealers race at Cross Vegas after taking a sightseeing trip through the less photogenic neighborhoods of Las Vegas in his Lycra on the way to the race...on sew-ups. This picture is from after the Wheeler Dealer race but before Katie Compton showed us why she will soon rule the world. Next year I'm told the race will be a family affair. Jannine, I'll hold your cow bell. Norm, eleven months and counting to train for the East-West showdown...

I met a whole bunch of other dealers from shops from Cordoba, Argentina to Fredericton, New Brunswick. It was affirming to see so much interest in a new, innovative product, especially a product made of natural materials. As we add to our dealer base of fun, community

oriented shops that offer superior service to performance cyclists of all flavors, I'm sure there will be some faces that will be familiar from Interbike.

There were so many cool, innovative products I don't even know where to begin but the upshot for me was that John and my natural wiring for collaboration continues to find fertile ground in the bike world. This is so much fun!



On the 'what cool stuff did ya get out there' front, high performance wool still rules my world; four seasons. There were lots of great products out there. On my way through the Earth Wind and Rider <http://ewnr.com/> booth discussing our forthcoming kit I had the great pleasure of meeting Nan Eastep of B. Spoke Tailor <http://bspoketailor.blogspot.com/>. Nan makes some the coolest, most skillfully made and best designed tailored cycling clothing I have ever seen. She is making me some blue plaid western style (smiley pockets with piping and everything!) wool knickers and I am sooooo excited! Telemark and

nordic skiing bring me as much joy as anything on Earth and the fact that I will be able to wear these from September to May from biking through skiing and back to biking makes me very happy. Maybe a little classic route climbing and a few cool days on my brother's old sailboat in the Gulf of Maine just for kicks. It may even replace my kilt... Here is Nan with or Cross frame festooned in one of her Lumitweed top tube covers.

Well I suppose that is about it for now. The shop awaits. Time to get dusty.

Or maybe go for a ride...

Posted by Sam Kelley at 2:31 PM [0 comments](#)

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