



Product testing doesn't stop when the sun goes down.



Interview: Kyle Young from **TRANSITION BIKES**

Benji chats across the Atlantic with one of the founders of Washington-based Transition Bikes about what it's like starting up a bike company.

Words: Benji Haworth
Photos: Brad Walton

Singletrack: When did the company start? And why?
Kyle: We started back in 2001, but we didn't start selling product until late 2003. Basically we started the company because we were bored at our corporate America tech jobs and all we did was think about riding. We had plenty of time on our hands, so we just started dreaming it up over long ping-pong sessions. The goal was really to create a cool company that the average rider could connect with. All the big corporate brands seemed to be lacking this connectedness that we wanted and we felt we could create a cool, small, core rider-owned movement with products born out of real riders' needs and not some number-crunching marketing department.

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Kevin & Kyle.

What did you do before stating Transition?
I worked as a product manager for T-Mobile USA. My job was managing the development of large scale messaging systems that basically allows you to download crap to your phone.

Do you remember receiving/ finishing the first proper production Transition Bike? Talk us through the emotions...
Yeah, I do remember it well. A lot of nervous excitement. Our first production run was for two models, the DirtBag and Preston FR. We did one colour per model to keep it simple back then and I think we did three sizes but, if I remember correctly, we only did a hundred frames. I do remember that we were so cheap back then that we actually drove to the shipping





"And this is one I drew of you..."

yard to pick up the first lot of frames. Up until that point it was always kinda like 'are we really doing this?' but once we had those frames in hand we knew there was no going back. Overall though we were stoked. I remember driving home that first day and cracking a six-pack with Kevin [Menard, co-owner] and just going for it. Building bikes... taking pictures... Fun times!

How many employees are there now at Transition HQ?
Currently there are nine of us total.

What are your local trails like?
We have a pretty great variety of XC, flowy, jumpy-style trails. And gnarly fall-line downhill style stuff. We have trails that are fairly mellow then throw in a couple big moves as well. There's a healthy variety of natural terrain style trails and fully groomed trails. It's pretty rad that on one hillside you can

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really ride almost every style of trail you can think of.

Where is your favourite place to ride?
I ride our local mountain – Galbraith – mostly and I do a lot of what some people would call XC up there. You can get a good workout and some nice downhills and not have to make it an all-day affair if you don't want to. Otherwise for DH I'd have to say my favorite is our local spots... that I can't talk much about without fearing for my life.

What do you think of when you picture UK mountain biking?
Beer. Wait, um... local spots. It seems like the UK is all about these little nuggets of trail systems all over the place. A lot of them are small or not a lot of elevation but it just seems like everybody has their little stash of trails.

I suppose we should talk a little bit about bikes. Are you a believer in the possibility of 'One Bike For Everything' or do you embrace 'specific bikes as specific tools for specific jobs'?
One bike for everything is just a marketing term used to sell the 6in travel, full squish bike that everybody is trying to force down peoples' throats. So, no I don't believe in it. To really do what we do you really have to have a quiver of bikes. Of course you can do it all on any bike, it's just a matter of how fun it will be.

Which of the Transition bikes is your personal favourite and/or most-ridden?
Currently the Covert is my favorite bike and I ride it three to four times a week. Mainly I'm a 'big bike' and 'little bike' guy right now; splitting time on my TR450 for DH and my Covert for everything else. Right now this is a pretty killer setup.

Is it difficult to avoid playing the 'this year's model' next-best-thing hype wars?
Yeah, that's a tough one that we struggle with. A lot of times we feel a bike of ours rides exactly how we want it to and looks how we want it to. So it's tough to change something that works just for the sake of changing it. We're just now getting to the point where our bike model range is pretty complete and some models need design overhauls. It's fun doing it but can be frustrating too.

How is the 'Syren' women-specific exactly?
The Syren has a shorter top tube than we would build for a men's bike and also a lot lower standover. We wanted a bike that was a bit 'lighter' at the front to ease pulling the front end up and muscling it around. The Syren also has a very progressive leverage rate on the linkage which was to create a plush beginning stroke and a high progressiveness during middle/end stroke. We really wanted that frame to be confidence inspiring and take the hits well without a harsh feeling at the bottom out. Also we made the tubing a

bit lighter than we would on a traditional bike.

Is there a lighter tubed version of the BottleRocket in the pipeline?
The BottleRocket is pretty much staying close to the same. We're pretty happy with how the BottleRocket performs and it has proven that it can handle more beating than pretty much anything else out there. People use that frame for pretty abusive riding so we're a bit hesitant on making it lighter or compromising strength. Of course we're always thinking of something new for the future but that's about all I can say at the moment.

[The Transition BottleRocket in reviewed in this issue's Grinder section – Tech Ed]

Your colourways are always very 'on trend'. Whose job is that side of things?
Oh man, all of us help on that front. Sometimes it feels like a whim. It's like a 'what color shirt do I wear today' type of deal. Typically we get a bunch of ideas going around the office and then we all waste too much time nitpicking the details and shades

of colors. In the end things usually work out well.

How do you feel about other companies being 'inspired' (ahem) by some of your designs? There's a few BottleRocket-esque bikes out there now it seems...
It's all good. I do find it interesting in that we kind of rode the wave of popularity in the Slopestyle segment and we saw huge (and fast) growth in that segment. From the beginning when we designed the BottleRocket we felt that Slopestyle was going to be a lot smaller segment than it ended up being. Now we feel that segment is fading in popularity but other companies are still racing to invent products for it. I do think it is flattering that there are now a lot of bikes with that same look/suspension style as the BottleRocket. It's a just plain great design for its intent.

When did you start doing components as well as frames? Got anything else planned? Wafer-thin pedals and such?
I've always kinda tinkered with components. Usually the stuff we do comes out of me just playing

"I DO THINK IT IS FLATTERING THAT THERE ARE NOW A LOT OF BIKES WITH THAT SAME LOOK/SUSPENSION STYLE AS THE BOTTLEROCKET."



Either the trees are all growing at an angle or that's bonkers steep.



It's one of those 'spot the takeoff or landing' competitions.



around with designs when I'm bored. Originally we wanted components that we could brand and include in our spec but lately we've realised there is aftermarket potential if we want to go that route. We do have a new pedal coming out pretty soon - I hope! - that I've been working on for quite some time. Of key importance to us on our components is price and that's always the tough thing to come up with something that can compete with the expensive stuff but at a better price.

Are you always going to design mainly for the more experienced rider?
We mainly design what we want to ride although I don't think that means you have to be an experienced mountain biker to use our product. We sell to a lot of people just starting out and

"FOR ME THIS IS SO MUCH MORE THAN A JOB. IT'S A LIFESTYLE. I JUST DON'T SEE HOW SELLING MY LIFESTYLE WOULD BE GOOD FOR ANYBODY REGARDLESS OF HOW MUCH MONEY IS INVOLVED."

working up the 'progression' scale and it's important for us to not lose sight of those riders as well. The goal is to make products that work for common man but also perform for high level athletes.

Speaking of high-level athletes, how do you choose your team riders?

It's pretty simply but it also requires a bit of luck. Mainly we look for people like ourselves that we connect with on a rider level. From there if the personality works and it's something we can work with then it makes it all easier. We do try to have a healthy mix of athletes. We kinda break it down into the 'Race' and 'not Race' categories. From there we just try to find the right people that are like-minded with us and that we feel are marketable.

We are big on the 'rider owned and operated' and as such we tend to utilise ourselves for a lot of our media and we try to make our athletes feel like a part of the company as much as possible.

What are your hopes for your race team this season?
Hopefully we'll spread the love to all the places we go and stoke people out on riding and racing. Of course winning won't hurt either!

Would you sell the company if the price was right?
At this point nope. I love what I do for work, so selling is just not on my radar right now. For me this is so much more than a job. It's a lifestyle. I just don't see how selling my lifestyle would be good for anybody regardless of how much money is involved. ❏



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