

Two Former Salsa Staffers Carry Torch For Steel Bikes

BY MATT WIEBE

PETALUMA, CA—Sean Walling and Matt Nyiri found themselves in a predicament when Salsa Cycles, the well-known frame and component company, closed its Petaluma, California, production facility last September.

Rather than face the chilling thought of relocating to Minnesota where Salsa was headed, the two men decided to sell their own line of frames, called Soulcraft.

For a decade, Walling had welded most of Salsa's frames. Nyiri had plenty of connections working in Salsa's sales and marketing force.

"We made a lot of good contacts at Salsa and that helps. People already know the work we do, and it has been great having Ross around," he said.

The partners are renting a building from Ross Shafer, the founder of Salsa Cycles. Shafer sold Salsa Cycles to Quality Bicycle Products' president Steve Flagg in the fall of 1997.

"Yeah money is a bit tight. But as we are selling frames, we are buying enough tubing to pre-build a few to have stock when the season picks up," Nyiri said.

Whether Soulcraft will prove as successful as Independent Fabrications or Seven Cycles, companies that also arose in response to management decisions, is yet to be seen. But unlike those companies, they are a known quantity.

"Soulcraft's appeal is that they continue the tradition of steel hardtails and the purity of that," said Seal O'Neil, owner of Chile Pepper bike shop in Moab, Utah.

"The problem with the market around here is that they buy this type of bike and

keep it forever. There are Salsas and Fat Chances around here that were bought six to 10 years ago," O'Neil added.

However he plans to put Soulcraft full-suspension designs into his rental fleet and knows there are always customers that demand a custom fit.

Bradley Woehl, owner of American Cyclery in San Francisco, sold three Soulcrafts before Walling even fired up his torch.

"I'm in a city that cranks out millionaires. There are plenty of people willing to purchase something unique and rare. They drink their local beer and they want to ride their local frame," Woehl said.

American Cyclery sells numerous high-end steel bikes from Salsa, Gunner, Waterford, and now Soulcraft.

"I sell so many nice steel bikes because there are so many discriminating cyclists here that are grad-

uating to the next level of bike," Woehl said.

"Their biggest selling point is going to be customs. If they can turn them around in two weeks when it takes a month to six weeks from other builders, that's going to make the difference. It will only take a few dealers like myself to keep them really busy," he added.

Soulcraft is offering mountain, road, cyclocross and single speed frames made of Reynolds 853 tubing. Frames are available in pre-designed sizes starting at \$1,050. Custom frames are available with a turnaround of two weeks.

Soulcraft will not build individual stems, a Salsa trademark, but will offer custom stems as part of a package. □



Soulcraft offers a new line of steel frames.