

Bicycle Retailer

Published by the NBDA AND INDUSTRY NEWS

MARKET INFLATION

Tire brands new and old jump into increasingly crowded category.

By Matt Wiebe

As this issue of BRAIN went to press, Goodyear was scheduled to have its famed blimp hover above the expo grounds at Sea Otter in mid-April. The blimp promoting bike tires? Now that's a sign something is up in the industry's tire market.

Goodyear is joined by Pirelli and IRC as all three launch or — given the history of these tire companies with bicycles — relaunch tires into the U.S. market.

Why all the interest now? Much of it has to do with the nichification of rider interests — trail riding, enduro, e-bikes, gravel or bike touring — the proliferation of wheel sizes and the quickly growing attraction to wider rims and tires.

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Dockless share bikes from Ofo, Spin and LimeBike line a sidewalk in Seattle.

Spinlister's tailspin prompts other rental brands to fill the void

By Lynette Carpiet

SANTA MONICA, Calif. — Bike shops began scrambling for other software following the news that Spinlister was shutting down after failing to secure new funding to keep the business going.

The popular bike rental tech platform in March told retailers it had weeks left. But CEO Marc Loureiro later told BRAIN that he received several offers to acquire its assets or engage in partnerships to keep the service alive. At press time, Loureiro said he couldn't provide any more details about the potential buyout as negotiations were underway.

Spinlister was founded in 2012 by two college students who wanted to connect people who have a bike they're not using with people who need one via a smartphone app. But the startup soon branched out from its original peer-to-peer business to offer a bike rental platform that allowed shops to easily handle bike rentals with an iPad kiosk that customers could use to book, register, complete waivers and pay at a store. The software also interacted with a shop's website.

In its short existence the service signed up several retailers, who hailed it for its simplicity of use and integration with POS providers.

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Dockless revolution

Influx of the bike share programs to the US has suppliers and retailers mulling possible impact on sales.

By Steve Frothingham

AURORA, Colo.— Dockless bike share could put more people on bikes, reduce auto congestion and pollution and lead to improvements in riding safety and infrastructure to the benefit of the rest of the bike industry. Or the dockless phenomenon could siphon off sales from bike shops, fill the streets and paths with inexperienced riders and clutter the urban landscape with abandoned and vandalized bikes.

Craig Clark, who manages a bike shop in a community that recently got three dockless operators, is one of

many who doesn't know, yet, which way it will go.

"They are kind of everywhere and it leaves a bad taste," said Clark, manager of Treads Bicycle Outfitters in Aurora, Colorado. Clark said he has seen the colorful bikes thrown into a creek near Treads and abandoned along nearby bike paths. On the other hand, he can see how they fill a need and understands that, in the long run, more bikes in use could be good for retail.

"The jury's out, I just don't know," Clark said. "I just know I don't want them parked in front of my shop when I'm trying to make a sale."

Dockless bike share programs, whether with tradit-

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Continued from cover

Inflation

With so much in flux, and so many new trends that weren't around last year, established tire companies have been slow to respond, leaving openings in the market.

Proportionate to its oversized blimp, Goodyear opens with 100 worldwide tire SKUs, 67 of which will be offered in North America. Bringing their expertise and history in rubber compounding and casting construction to bear, the brand is focusing on the premium end of the market with a range of road, gravel, MTB and urban tires, all in wide sizes and all tubeless.

"Launching with 100 SKUs is us taking it slow," quipped Luke Musselman, Rubber Kinetics' president. Rubber Kinetics is an independent, Goodyear-funded company focusing on the bike industry.

In contrast, Pirelli opens with seven SKUs, three P Zero road tires — general race, time trial and wet/cold weather — in 23-, 25- and 28-millimeter widths, as well as urban and e-bike-specific tires.

Retailers will see Pirelli tires this year on some Stromer e-bikes and models from Bianchi, Pinarello and 3T. Hawley-Lambert is the exclusive distributor.

"We will be releasing gravel and mountain tires soon. Gravel is growing in Europe, especially in the U.K. and I think it will quickly be a big part of the road market," said Johan Mollemaker, Pirelli's head of sales. Pirelli is hiring a U.S. representative to support its efforts here, working from one of its offices in New York, Georgia or California.

Pirelli, like Goodyear, is counting on its strong branding in other industries to carry over and pique customer interest in its bike tires. Both companies will be pushing product and information on social media.

Pirelli is the tire sponsor of the Irish Aqua Blue Sport pro road racing team that includes Michigan native Larry Warbasse, who will be doing some brand work in North America.

Goodyear is the tire sponsor of the Look NRS support team, and the company is just starting its OEM push from three sales and support offices in Taiwan, Europe and the U.S.

Japanese company IRC was a big BMX and mountain brand from the 1980s to early 2000s, before a fire at its factory in South Korea shuttered its source for IRC-branded tires sold in the U.S. market.

"While IRC-branded tires haven't had a sizable presence on the U.S. market over the past few years, IRC-built tires for other brands have

really grown. But with the Toyko Olympics approaching, the company wanted to get its own brand out there again," said Bruno Suttles, IRC's recently hired sales and marketing manager at the company's office in Sacramento, California.

With an eye on the Olympics, IRC re-launched its popular Siren BMX tire in a Pro version, created with input from Sam Wiloughby and Alise Post. Post will be riding the tire in her Olympics bid.

IRC was the tire sponsor of Southern California's Belgian Waffle Ride in April, promoting its new gravel tire line.

In addition to these big tire names, two smaller tire brands have lifted their profile over the past two years, targeting specific riding styles and pushing high-end performance.

While Compass tires has made wide, super-compliant gravel tires for years, only recently has word-of-mouth grown to the point that shops are seeing riders come in asking for Compass tires.

"Our tire line grew out of the tires we needed to do the type of riding we liked — long rides in the mountains on roads and dirt surfaces. Because we rode bikes that had clearance for wider tires, we wanted to try wider tires than were on the market," said Jan Heine, Compass Bicycle owner and publisher of *Bicycle Quarterly*.

As small custom builders started building road bikes with clearance for wider tires, and as larger manufacturers followed suit, demand for Compass tires grew. Compass set up a wholesale dealer-direct business to support other shops.

Heine designs tires to support the kind of riding he likes, and he offers a simple line in two styles of casing, Standard and Extralight, both tubeless-ready.

"My props to Jan and Compass. He is doing for road tires what I want to do for mountain tires. He is pushing the ride quality of his tires and keeping it simple for the customer," said Tim Krueger, Terrene Tires' co-founder.

Krueger felt consumers were needlessly confused by tire weights, durometers, numerous widths and special tread designs. Each of Terrene's six tire models get two SKUs each — light or tough — and come in one width per tire model.

Neither company feels threatened by new players coming on the market, or bigger tire companies copying their designs. Heine and Krueger say the market they are chasing, high-end high-performance riders, is so small and changes so fast that it doesn't make sense for big companies to bother. **BRAIN**



IRC is making a renewed push into the U.S. market after having a low profile here for several years.

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