



2016 TECH AWARDS



TREND OF THE YEAR

Mobile bike shops

THEY'RE NOT ON EVERY corner yet, but mobile bike shops such as VeloFix, Beeline Bikes, and Cranksmith Mobile Mechanics may be the answer to the financial carnage impacting traditional brick-and-mortar bike shops.

It's a new take on an old approach, offering the same service and parts. But now the shop comes to you. "The business started like all businesses do, with a pain point," says Chris Guillemet, CEO and co-founder of VeloFix. "We were frustrated customers of bike shops. We found it frustrating to get our bikes serviced. We didn't think the level of service was evolving with the customer base. A lot of the

people riding now weren't riding 10 years ago, and they expect a certain level of service. The bike shops weren't matching that."

So to offer a high level of service and simultaneously reduce overhead costs, a mobile service business was born. The VeloFix franchise startup fee is about \$25,000, and the stocked truck—a Mercedes Sprinter with graphics, interior, and tools—is about \$90,000, according to Guillemet. "For about \$50,000 total investment—the startup fee plus about \$15,000 for the Mercedes deposit, and another \$10,000 in inventory and promo materials—you've got keys in your hand and

you're fully operational. It's a fraction of the overhead cost of a brick and mortar store," Guillemet says.

The mobile model also allows shop employees to engage customers in an entirely new way: on the customer's turf. While the van is parked outside a customer's home or business, the mechanic has the opportunity to sell accessories, educate the customer, and even serve a shot of espresso. Those little convenience touches add up, and customers are starting to notice.

Of course, the mobile model presents its own set of challenges. Until recently, distributors did not grant accounts to mobile outfits, making it difficult to stock the truck with parts and accessories. And what about scheduling multiple service calls on opposite sides of town in the same day, with one truck? Will the business model always make sense? The mobile bike shop is still in its infancy; whether it's a viable long-term option is still a significant question. But with operations already expanding and offering franchise opportunities throughout the U.S. and Canada, the rolling bike shop is well on its way to changing the sales and service game.

COURTESY VELOFIX

WELCOME COMPETITION AWARD

Wahoo Elemnt

GARMIN HAS LONG BEEN the king of cycling GPS computers. The company's head units offer seemingly endless options for data collection, route tracking, and navigation. But there are new players on the horizon, and few have come as close to toppling Garmin as the Wahoo Elemnt.

This intuitive computer offers similar training features and data collection as Garmin's Edge 520, but does so in a more logical and user-friendly way. A smartphone app pairs with the Elemnt for seamless Bluetooth data transfer to online training programs like Strava and Training Peaks. Initial setup and customization is straightforward and easy. You can format your data screens to be as simple or complex as you want with virtually limitless customization, all through the app.

Despite those impressive attributes, the Elemnt hasn't dethroned Garmin just yet. The device has seen its share of system bugs as Wahoo tries to keep up with Garmin's new features, such as Strava segment notifications and turn-by-turn directions. As Wahoo works out those kinks, its arrival in the GPS space offers viable competition and promises to drive innovation—for the benefit of all of us.



BACK FROM THE DEAD AWARD

Aluminum



BRAD KAMINSKI (2)

ALUMINUM RACE BIKES ONCE ruled the peloton. The lightweight metal's malleable properties allowed for new tube shaping and unparalleled ride tuning. But aluminum is inherently soft, and manufacturers started overbuilding frames to improve durability. This resulted in an unpleasant, harsh ride quality that would define aluminum bikes for years to come.

As the carbon composite craze took hold in the late 1990s and early 2000s, aluminum was cast aside. The metal couldn't compete with carbon's stiffer, lighter, more compliant ride qualities. Those advantages came with exorbitant price tags, putting even budget carbon bikes out of reach for many cyclists.

Aluminum has quietly returned. New manufacturing techniques are being used to create thinner frame profiles that still offer compliance and strength. Longtime favorites such as the Cannondale CAAD12 and Specialized Allez are lighter, stiffer, and smoother than some of their carbon brethren, not to mention less expensive. The Allez boasts the stiffest bottom bracket we've tested at *VeloNews* (0.38 millimeters of deflection), and it doesn't transmit harsh road vibrations like the aluminum bikes of yore.

Both the Cannondale and Specialized models are strong reminders of how much livelier a metal frame can feel when compared to a carbon version. Aluminum is, thankfully, back from the dead.