

Glen Copus is the man

Words/John Speare
Images/Ben Tobin



Just about every bike company now has a slick fixed-gear bike in their line-up. For many, fixed-gear bikes are as much about the aesthetics as they are about the ride. This dual purpose inspires Glen Copus, a self-described “non-artist,” to make “an attempt at artistic expression” with the fixed-gear framesets he builds in Spokane, Washington. According to Copus, with fixed-gear bikes, “you can really do something different and still have it be a completely functional bike.” Copus knows all about functional bikes. He’s been responsible for the building all manner of bikes throughout his career. He was a welder and production manager for Bontrager; did machining and brazing and TIG welding at Serotta, and was a production manager when Rocky Mountain launched their first run of aluminum framesets in the mid-1990s.

In the mid-1970s, when Copus was 13 years old, he got his first job at Wes’ BMX bike shop in Scotts Valley, California, where he hung out until the owner finally put him to work. On his first day, he learned how to assemble, tension and true a BMX wheel. He built about 40 BMX wheels that day. By the time he was 16, he was racing BMX and spending all of his income on a “new trick bike every month.”

In 1983, at the age of 17, Copus moved to Ashland with the goal of going to college, but instead ended up working in a bike shop at the start of the mountain bike boom. He continued to race and the shop sponsored him. Copus ended up racing in the professional mountain bike circuit, though without much success. “I was like the worst pro ever. If money went to third place, I was fourth; if money went to 10th place, I was 11th.”

When he was about 19 years old, Copus moved back to Santa Cruz and began hanging around the local frame builder’s shop. One of the main revenue streams for the small frame builder was rolling down 27-inch Super Champion bike rims into 26-inch mountain bike rims. Soon, Copus began rolling rims and helping out in the afternoons around the shop. The builder showed Copus how to braze and soon Copus was brazing bits of frames together. The frame-builder was Keith Bontrager.

He then went from race team mechanic, traveling all over the U.S. and Europe, to builder for Serotta in New York—and getting married along the way. At Serotta he had a hand in brazing hundreds of frames. The shop’s typical output was about 20 lugged and brazed frames a week, plus some custom orders. According to Copus, Serotta “was a great place to work. Ben (Serotta) was a great guy to work for.” Unfortunately, the climate was a deal-killer. Copus and his wife couldn’t stand the humidity, the deep snow, and the awful summers of New York. When Copus mentioned this during a phone chat with Keith Bontrager, a job offer followed



and he returned to the west coast in 1992. After a year or so at Bontrager, he went to Rocky Mountain Bikes.

Rocky Mountain was rolling out its first line of aluminum bikes and needed someone to run production. Copus had never welded in aluminum before and took a single-day crash course at Yeti cycles in Durango. The years at Rocky Mountain were exciting and incredibly busy, 16 - 18 hours a day was common. Helping get a smaller company to compete with the bigger companies was a big accomplishment, but it came at a cost. He was working late, still riding, building bikes on the side and going through a separation from his wife. Copus ended up burning out: "I think I just fried up," he says. He quit Rocky Mountain and moved from Vancouver back to Spokane, where he later ended up re-marrying.

Through a friend, he connected with a custom fabrication, machining, and manufacturing business in Spokane where's he been happily building and welding non-bike-related stuff for 18 years. And on the side, he's been building and repairing bikes. He started using the Elephant name when he was in Vancouver nearly 20 years ago. In Spokane, a handful of local cyclocross racers began to show up on Elephant bikes, which all share the same distinctive look: orange with blue panel and block lettering. Now that his daughter is off to college, Copus hopes to start building some more bikes. In addition to building cross bikes and pretty, yet functional fixed-gear bikes, he's up for just about anything else, too.

Want to get in his queue? Framesets start at \$850.
Email Copus at elephantbikes@gmail.com. *R*

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