

NAHBS proves craft bikes still shine

The star-bike at Oregon's 2008 North American Handmade Bicycle Show was bought by Lance Armstrong, watched by his buddy Robin Williams. The business for craft bikes is growing in the US. So, what happened to the UK scene? **Carlton Reid** investigates why handmade bicycles are big in America...

THE 2008 NAHBS was far and away the most successful in the four-year history of the show. Almost 8,000 attendees drooled over 152 exhibitor stands. Among the fans of bike art attending the show over three days were movie star Robin Williams and cycling legend Lance Armstrong.

But the 8,000 that visited the show in person were swamped by online visitors.

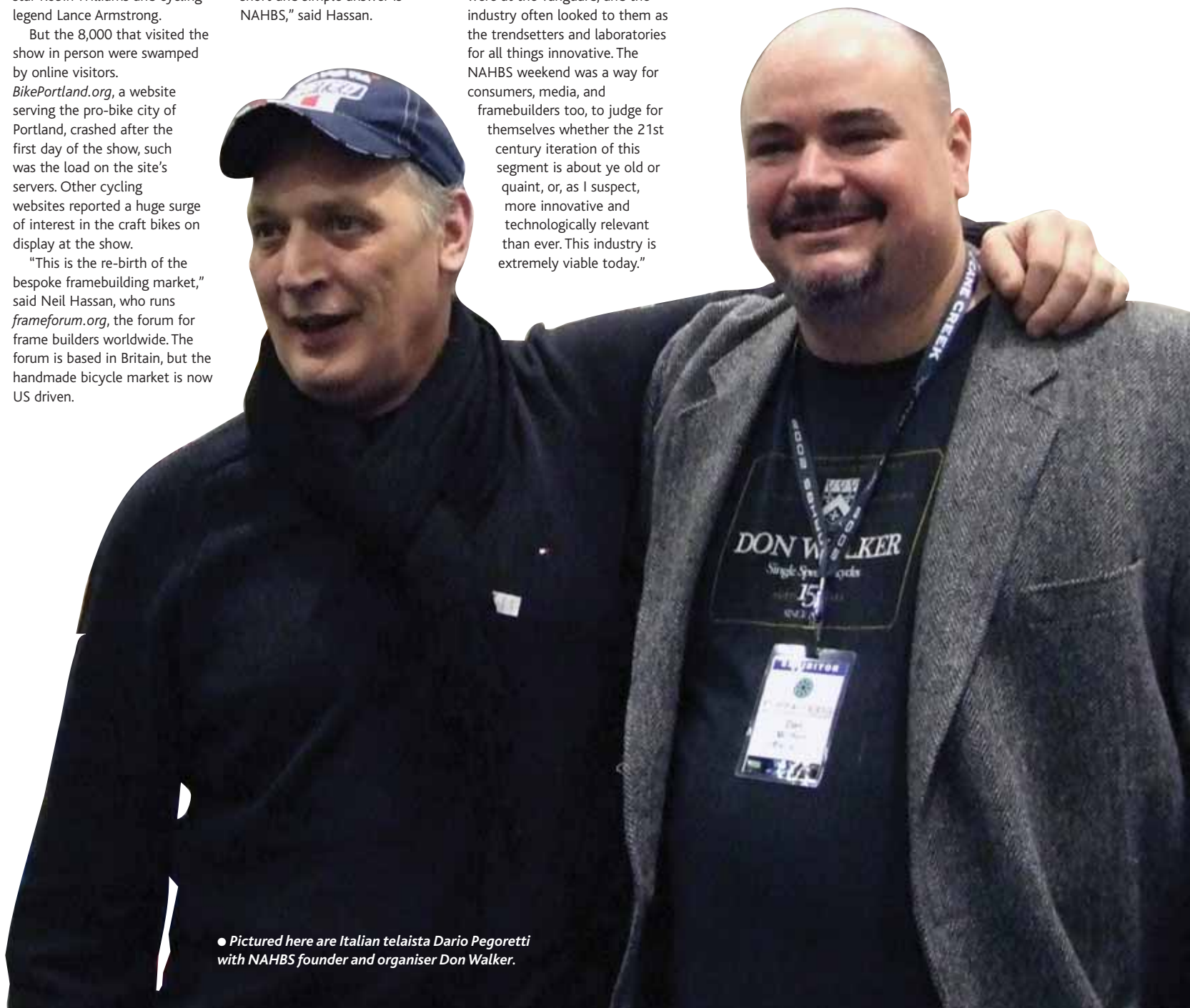
BikePortland.org, a website serving the pro-bike city of Portland, crashed after the first day of the show, such was the load on the site's servers. Other cycling websites reported a huge surge of interest in the craft bikes on display at the show.

"This is the re-birth of the bespoke framebuilding market," said Neil Hassan, who runs *frameforum.org*, the forum for frame builders worldwide. The forum is based in Britain, but the handmade bicycle market is now US driven.

"Forty years ago, South London was the centre of the made-to-measure frame building universe. Forty years on, the axis has shifted to the USA. Why? Forget the economics, dynamics, mathematics and polemics, the short and simple answer is NAHBS," said Hassan.

Richard Sachs, who is widely regarded as one of the leading frame builders in the world, said: "Not since the 1970s has there been such an interest in the handmade bicycle frame. There was a time that framebuilders were at the vanguard, and the industry often looked to them as the trendsetters and laboratories for all things innovative. The NAHBS weekend was a way for consumers, media, and framebuilders too, to judge for themselves whether the 21st century iteration of this segment is about ye old or quaint, or, as I suspect, more innovative and technologically relevant than ever. This industry is extremely viable today."

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● Pictured here are Italian telaista Dario Pegoretti with NAHBS founder and organiser Don Walker.



Neat cable routing weaves through the frame on this Pereira tourer. An in-built seat clamp also features



While his futuristic TT machine is way ahead of the game, Rüeigamer's bike is not likely to be in store or cruising streets nearby anytime soon

Matt Bracken of Independent Fabrication said: "NAHBS has helped bring the focus back to handcrafted framesets.

Looking at the growth of the show from 2004 to the present is miraculous to say the least. In 2004, 23 builders held the first NAHBS in Houston. The 152 exhibitors in Portland showed off the love, sweat, and passion for making cycle art. "Over the past ten years

the bike industry has focused on price, value and consolidation. The NAHBS is similar to what is happening across the US in cool micro-breweries in every state. People want taste, character, and unique flavour; all of which can be found at a local frame builder's workshop."

Jan Heine, publisher of the magazine *Bicycle Quarterly*, which regularly reports on the handmade bicycle industry, said: "In the past four or five years, the handmade bicycle scene in the USA has grown tremendously. The NAHBS show has given builders a unified voice

and provided exposure. Before that, every builder seemed to toil alone in relative obscurity. Thanks in no small part due to the NAHBS show, the media has given more of a voice to custom bicycle builders."

Crowds packing the aisles of the 55,000 square foot. expo hall left the fire marshals with no alternative but to close the hall entrance until sufficient people had made their exit before allowing any more custom build bike fans into the show.

The show may have a US name but it's not all about America. UK exhibitors Reynolds,

Rapha and Brooks were there, while framebuilders from Canada, Italy, Slovakia, Japan and Australia added to the international feel of the event. Visitors too, came from around the globe, with Bath-based framebuilder Robin Mather and Andrew Colvin of Croydon's Roberts Cycles, among those who travelled from the UK making the trip and thinking ahead to exhibiting next year.

Frame builders said the media attention surrounding the show has helped them take back a share of the high-end bicycle market from mass

manufacturers. They credit the show with focusing public attention on the most desirable machines in the bicycling world, and at the same time raising the quality of work across the board.

The 'bike of the show' award went to the singlespeeder from Naked Bicycles of Vancouver. It was bought by Lance Armstrong, very probably for display in his high-end bike shop due to open in Texas later this year.

Next year's show will be in Indianapolis, stretching from the February 27th to March 1st.

www.frameforum.org
www.handmadebicycleshow.com



A Crumpton SL Road carbon road frame wearing a red translucent top coat



Bruce Gordon is one of the USA's most respected builders. This touring model is full titanium



Rüeigamer shows he can do 'traditional', with this '50s-inspired fancy lugged carbon beauty