

## CREATORS: TOM RITCHEY

It would take a historian to catalogue Tom Ritchey's contributions to the cycling industry over the past four decades, which include revolutionary designs for frames, forks, rims, spokes, brakes, handlebars, stems, seatposts, tires, pedals — you name it.

A self-described “stickler for performance,” Ritchey started welding frames as a teenage road racer growing up in northern California. While building a tandem frame for Joe Breeze and Otis Guy in 1979, Ritchey got hold of an original Breezer mountain bike. Just 23, he turned around and built a mountain bike for Gary Fisher, later partnering with Fisher and Charlie Kelly to form MountainBikes, which ultimately became Gary Fisher Bicycles.

After parting ways with Fisher, Ritchey continued building frames, but also took an increasing interest in components, viewing a performance bicycle as a complete system, rather than just the sum of its parts. And because he rode and raced his designs — and sponsored one of the first high-profile mountain-bike race teams — Ritchey's designs were continually subjected to immediate, firsthand testing.

“I've just about attacked every component on a bike and tried to redesign it,” Ritchey said. “And I've had very good critical experiences because I was also racing. Breaking your own stuff, or having your racers break your stuff, is the ultimate.”

Forty years after he welded his first frame, Ritchey is still designing equipment to be functional, lightweight and reliable. In recent years he's taken a keen interest in Project Rwanda, a non-profit aimed at improving the Rwandan economy through bicycles. He still builds frames (only for friends and family); his legendary fillet-braze welds were on display at the 2011 North American Handmade Bicycle Show. Best of all, for everything Ritchey's given to the sport, he's eternally grateful for what cycling has given to him.

“I can't say I could have lived a better life,” Ritchey said. “I still ride 10,000 miles a year. I still own my company. I have wonderful people working for me. I've seen an industry grow up around me. I've seen racers develop into Olympic athletes. I've seen teams in Africa come out of nothing. I've seen all kinds of things I can't believe I've been a part of.” — NEAL ROGERS