



THE COAST ISN'T CLEAR... YET

With all this public discussion about taking to the streets on two wheels, it would seem bicycle company shares should be the next big thing to consider investing in. If only you can find any here.

By Richard Long



Despite our horrendous weather — 35°C days, muggy nights and sudden downpours — there's been a greater desire for taking to the outdoors. Be it for the almost 300 running events held annually or pedalling to work, the push to gulp open air has been contagious.

The sale of bicycles has been on the rise, along with other wheeled modes of transportation. Singapore is a city with citizens on the move.

Amidst the numerous brands imported for the local market, there's a Singapore-based brand that has been pedalling hard to make its presence felt.

Coast Cycles was launched in 2014 and has since designed and produced eight original models, with another four new models slated for release later this year. Its bicycles are priced from \$1,000 to \$3,000, appealing to the cycling enthusiast and bicycle-collecting crowd.

Founder Jansen Tan, a former national trial cyclist, says that he decided to go out and start his own brand because he just couldn't find the right "look" he wanted in the mountain bikes and road bikes popular in Singapore. He wanted a stylish bike that he could ride out to meet his friends at the café on a Saturday afternoon. "I wanted a commuting bike; made as simple, clean, and low maintenance as possible." What started as a passion project, while he ran the family's wood laminate business Lamitak, has since become a full-fledged business of its own.

Tan began with a focus on aesthetic design with his first effort. The Coastliner, currently the flagship model for Coast Cycles, was intended to be the slick city bike that Tan was looking for. Tan says that he wants to give cyclists the "right style of product for the right occasion".

In an evolution of both style and design ethos, Tan has since shifted his focus to "solving urban mobility issues" with his last two designs — the compact and practical Quinn, and the electric ready Ruckus. In the Quinn, he sees a made-to-measure work commute bike for the packed city streets of Singapore.

Tan says that the approach of providing specialised solutions to existing issues led him to devise the Quinn. "The Quinn is a specific solution to make everyday city cycling more convenient." Tan began his design process by identifying the user's needs like storage, ease of use, comfort, and

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environmental factors like weather, terrain, and space constraints in a packed city, and incorporated design elements to address them. Its size makes it manoeuvrable in tight quarters, the frame provides a handy space for the bag, and it comes equipped with tires that bounce up and down Singapore's tall curbs without puncturing.

It will, in the near future, also include a vast selection of accessories, from mountable baskets to ergonomic cup holders for your morning coffee on the go. While the Quinn came away with three design accolades recently, Tan commiserates that what the market needs and what the market wants is not always congruent with what the consumer is ready for. Providing innovative solutions doesn't immediately translate to sales. With 200 bikes made in the first production run, about 10% have been sold to local customers.

The Elusive Singaporean Customer

While out-of-the-box thinking and innovative design have garnered them a handful of awards and overseas attention, getting a foothold locally has been an uphill climb in the last two years of operation. While Tan does want to appeal to locals, he says that "convincing" the stubbornly brand-conscious local consumer to try an unknown local brand is a tricky proposition.

He is often met with incredulity when he tells first time visitors to the store that he is a local bike maker. "They ask me if Singapore even produces bicycles," he says with a laugh. It would seem that this is a challenge faced by the small, and almost secret, design and maker community in Singapore.

"It's all about brand perception with local consumers," he declares. Local

cyclists will always be more inclined to pick up a bike from well-established brands like Cannondale or Santa Cruz.

"I'm not giving up on the local market yet. We really want to work on our branding and brand positioning to get us out there." Tan feels that adjusting the price points on his products could also help open up the local market and make his brand accessible to more customers. With the intention of lowering the entry point, two upcoming city bikes will be priced at \$1,300 (the Coastliner costs at least \$400 more).

Tan however does concede that his products were probably never meant for the mass market. He sees a small "unique" group of people as his target market. Avid bicycle collectors, people who would consider using the bicycle as a daily mode of transport, and those who appreciate design and are looking for something new and special make up the bulk of his clientele.



The stigma attached to the made-in-Singapore tag fortunately doesn't travel. Coast Cycles has found a decent following in markets like Denmark, Hong Kong, Australia, and parts of Scandinavia. Factors like milder weather and more people choosing cycling for their daily commute have created a demand for a simple and stylish city bike in many European cities, a niche that Tan says the

Coastliner was purpose-built to fill. He is currently working on setting up in Bordeaux and California.

Electric Opportunities

Following the launch of their latest concept, The Quinn, Tan has already set his sights on new challenges for the future. With Personal Mobility Devices (PMDs) — e-scooters, electric skateboards, hover boards, and even electric unicycles — quickly gaining popularity in Singapore, Coast Cycles is looking to crack this sector once the opportunity presents itself.

"It is going to be an uphill task, but I see a market for it. We need to work on changing the consumer mind-set on PMDs by educating them about what we can offer."

He believes that the demand for fast, safe, comfortable, and convenient

transportation for short distances that allows users to skip the hassle of cars, trains, and buses is ripe with opportunity in a bustling city like Singapore. He is keeping a keen eye on the impending decisions from the Land Transport Authority on the legislation of PMDs, if favourable, and PMDs are made legal for use on park connectors and other public pathways, Tan says that interest for his electric assist products could spike.

In anticipation, the Ruckus and Quinn models have been designed electric ready, requiring only the addition of a suitable motor and batteries. While Chinese made bikes offer more competitive prices, Tan suggests that the consumer would be willing to spend the extra dollars on the style, comfort, reliability, and added safety that Coast has to offer. ▀



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