



PHOTO: JEFF JAMES

UNIQUE MOBILITY

BY BEN COXWORTH

For many bicycle commuters who don't own cars, it can be a major imposition to transport their bike to the shop for repairs, go without it for several days, and then return to pick it up. It is for people like these—and others—that Wyse Cycles exists. As far as its owner Ben Wyse knows, it's America's only self-propelled mobile bicycle repair service. That fact might make him an ideal guest for what is presumably America's only self-propelled mobile TV talk show... but more on that later.

A pedal-powered bike shop...

Ben started off working in conventional bicycle shops in his current home city of Harrisonburg, Virginia. In 2009, he proceeded to buy a bicycle trailer, build a wooden box for it, and fill it with bike tools and parts. Ever since, he has been pulling that trailer behind his bike throughout Harrisonburg, paying house- or work-calls on bicycles that need fixing.

Needless to say, working out of a trailer does have its challenges. Although Wyse carries things such as a repair stand and wheel-truing gear, there's no way that every conceivable tool and part can be stuffed into that little box.

"Many customers are not good at understanding what their bike needs, so they might say their brakes need to be adjusted, but in reality the wheel has multiple broken spokes and needs to be replaced," he

said. "I have wheels, but don't carry them with me...I just kind of assume that maybe one out of every three or four jobs will require a trip back to my house."

Harrisonburg has a population of approximately 115,100 and an area of 17 square miles, to give an indication of his potential riding distances. Using a truck for his business might make things a lot easier, but his belief in the social advantages of the bicycle keeps him pedaling.

Of course, not paying for the purchase price or upkeep of a truck also allows him to stretch his income farther. "I started doing this because I needed to support my family and I couldn't do it on the wages that were being paid by local bike shops," he said. "I can now charge customers less, and make more money for me. That is a win-win."

...and a pedal-powered talk show

Should Wyse ever find himself in Portland, he might end up making an appearance on the Pedal Powered Talk Show. The shot-on-location TV program features producer and host Boaz Frankel, who pedals around the Pacific Northwest city on his custom 75-pound cargo bike, featuring a built-in solid wood talk show desk. The bike was built by the folks at Portland's Metrofiets, who have previously created cargo bikes that doubled as a beer-serving bar and as a coffee shop.

The first couple of episodes have now been posted online, at pedaltalkshow.com.

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