

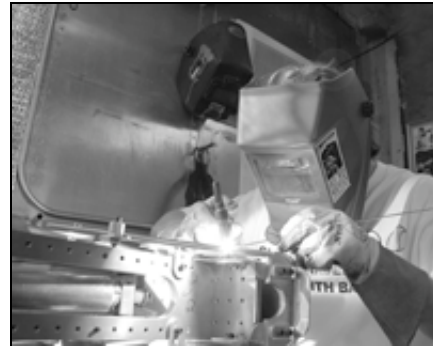
Goleta Valley Voice

Old Man Mountain rides surge in adventure biking

Goleta company fills global niche with high-end bike racks

By Richard Block, Voice Associate Editor

A stone's throw from Highway 101 and the Fairview Avenue overpass, Old Man Mountain builds a unique type of bicycle rack and sells it to customers all over the world.



The company started in 1996 when Channing Hammond, then 23, wanted to take his mountain bike on a camping trip through Santa Barbara County's backcountry. To carry his gear, he intended to mount metal racks over his bike's wheels. His bike had a suspension system, though, and Hammond soon learned that no racks then being made would fit it.

No company seemed to think suspension bicycles could be popular as touring bikes. Rather than buy a new bicycle and mount a rack on it, though, Hammond built the racks he needed.

Engineering and metalwork run in Hammond's family. His grandfather, an engineer, helped build the Spirit of St. Louis, the plane that carried Charles Lindbergh across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927. His parents used to own Specialty Metal Fabrication. Now they own Specialty Crane & Rigging and race cars at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, where they hold several land speed records.

In fact, a month ago at Bonneville, Hammond's father, Seth Hammond, crashed a car and rolled over several times. He was fine, and returned to work in a week. But if Channing Hammond hadn't built a roll cage into his father's car seven years ago, the outcome might not have been so good.

"I built the rollcage that saved my dad's ass," Channing Hammond said.

A triathlon bicycle company for which Hammond had built racks had no interest in the suspension-bike racks. Hammond took the racks to a trade show. "That was kind of our maiden voyage in the business world," Hammond said. The racks were received enthusiastically, and a company was born.

Since then, however, "The bike business changed fast." Suspension bikes rapidly became popular. Still, Hammond said, bicycle and rack manufacturers didn't keep up with the increased demand, so now the company is the only one pursuing its market niche. Its main competition, said Hammond, is a company that builds single-wheel bicycle trailers.

OMM designed a trailer once, but decided to stick with racks. The point of the racks, Hammond said, is to carry gear across backcountry, and "you can't really do that with a trailer."

Old Man Mountain's headquarters is a cottage on South Fairview, near Cox Communications and Island Seed & Feed. Hammond and his staff of three build Old Man Mountain's products in a SeaLand shipping container out back.

Although OMM's facilities are cost-effective, manufacturing in the U.S., especially Santa Barbara, is another story.

There aren't many skilled welders in town, he said. Even if there were, it costs the company 50 cents more just to get a rack painted locally than it does to get an entire finished product built in China. A rack costs Hammond \$15 to build here; he can get it built overseas to the same specifications, with the same materials, for \$2. The quality is almost the same, he said.

"If I want to continue to grow Old Man Mountain as a viable brand, I have to" get products built overseas, Hammond said. Otherwise, competition will undercut the company's prices.

Bike shops are hesitant to stock Old Man Mountain's \$120 bicycle racks even now, despite there being no alternatives for suspension bikes that lack eyelets on the frame to attach a rack.

Hammond does plan to keep building the "Cadillac model" in town. There is also a market for U.S.-made high-end bicycles, he said — which Old Man Mountain plans to move into.

OMM has begun building frames, including some touring bikes with OMM racks already attached, and high-end beach cruisers.

The cruisers will be sold at Hazard Cyclesports, Hammond said. All the bike shops in town carry OMM products, and the company also sells products in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Australia, Germany, and Canada, and on the Internet

Photo Caption: Brian Ketterer welds bike racks at Old Man Mountain's modest facilities on South Fairview Avenue in Goleta.

[Go back](#)

Goleta Valley Voice