



MSUM alum Brent Gale (right) with his business partner Ryan Carlson.

## Twin Six running on all cylinders... Riding the Fashion-Forward Gear with Cycling Apparel

by Glenn Tornell

**G**ETTING A BIKE USED TO BE A KID’S PASSPORT TO FREEDOM. Still is. But adults are co-opting that free-wheeling spirit in record numbers, stoked by all kinds of motives, from soaring gas prices and an inexhaustible fitness craze to seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong’s fame and a growing social quest to bond—either as a family or within the cycling subculture.

Brent Gale ('99, Graphic Design) is banking on it. He and his business partner Ryan Carlson last year launched Twin Six, an alternative cycling apparel business in the basement of Gale’s South Minneapolis home. And by all accounts, it was a super-sonic start.

“We exceeded our goals by over 50 percent our first year,” said Gale, a former mountain bike racer who put himself through college working in bike shops. “We sold more than 2,600 jerseys and our line of bike apparel was picked up by more than 180 bike shops around the country. On top of that, the big outdoor gear chain, REI, agreed to sell our jerseys in all 83 of its stores across the country. That really amped us up.”

More shocking, Outdoor Magazine named the Twin Six Argyle as its #1 “Jersey of the Year” in its 2006 Buyers Guide. To quote the magazine: “Unlike most cycling gear, which is either solid black or blue (thrilling!) or garish enough to offend your dog, Twin Six’s line of high-performance, retro-hip jerseys won’t make your partner cringe.”

At the time the article hit the newsstands, Gale said, Twin Six had sold just 50 of its 400 Argyle jerseys they had in stock. “By the end of the month, we sold out.”

The goal of the designing duo is to bring some design flavor back into what they call a stale bicycle apparel market, where they hope to create an aesthetic revolution.

“It’s pretty simple,” Gale said. “If you look good, you feel good. We’re just helping people ride with pride.”

Gale initially came to MSUM because he heard through the Twin Cities graphics grape vine that the university had one of the best design programs in the country. “I wasn’t surprised at all. I got a great education there. And from the technological side of design, my two years as a student employee in the university’s Publications Office were invaluable.”

Unlikely fashionistas, the two designers met while working at the Sussner Design Company in Minneapolis. Gale introduced then-intern Carlson (a college scholarship golfer) to biking. They kept in touch after Gale signed on with Target as a graphic designer, working on its men’s apparel team in Product Design and Development.

“Before joining Target I’d been freelancing for cycling apparel companies,” he said. “Then I had a moment of clarity. The major players in the market, I eventually discovered, weren’t following fashion trends. They were stuck in a rut—obsessed with neon colors and product advertising. At Target, I learned a lot about the fashion end of the business.”

Two years later Gale and Carlson, tired of working for other people, sat down and charted a business plan. One year later they launched Twin Six after setting up a booth at the Interbike International Bicycle Expo in Las Vegas, an annual trade show that attracts thousands of bicycle retailers and distributors.

Now both are work-





ing 80-hour weeks trying to keep their business in high gear.

The two entrepreneurs are not only extending their product line in jerseys and T-shirts, they're branching out into bicycle lifestyle products, from hats and socks to posters and greeting cards. And they're taking a big step this year introducing a line of custom bikes by partnering with WaltWorks, where owner Walt Wehner handcrafts cycles at his shop in Boulder, Colo.

"We've got the coolest guy doing it," Gale said. "He'll decide on the tubes and the geometry, and Twin Six will do the bikes' graphics. We hope to start with two custom sizes that should be available at the beginning of 2007."

They're definitely not Euro elitists when it comes to cycling fashions. "We came up with our own unique fit for our clothing, perfect for the average cyclist, not the stereotypical super skinny racers," Gale said. "And we've taken a grassroots marketing approach to get a good buzz going in the cycling subculture. We use blogs, a myspace.com account, host our own racing teams."

It's gotten them a mention in *Bicycling Magazine* and a front page photo in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* style section. They even got a friend,

Katie Gerdes, to wear a Twin Six T-shirt on this year's first episode of Bravo Networks "Project Runway."

Gale's time now, when he's not with his wife Jennifer (also an MSUM alum, Mass Communications/American Studies) and their three-year-old daughter, is spent mostly on distribution, packag-



**Katie Gerdes models a Twin Six jersey during the filming of Bravo Networks "Project Runway."**

ing, billing and marketing. "Only about 10 percent of my day is put into design, and most of that is just in researching the latest trends in fashion and color. That's what makes us unique."

Creating Twin Six, he said, was a no-brainer. (They named their company after the first 12-cylinder automobile engine, built by the Packard Motor Car Company.)

"We both put in six years working as graphic designers for other people," Gale said. "And we both love the cycling culture. We're doing exactly what we did while we were working for ad agencies: building a brand. Now we're doing it for ourselves. Our goal is simple, to become our own clients."

Half of all bike riders in the U.S. are over the age of 50, according to the Bicycle Market Research Institute, with household incomes over \$75,000.

Yet the bike scene is still big and decentralized, segmented into road bikes, touring bikes, mountain bikes, racing bikes, recumbent bikes, tandems, street bikes, comfort bikes, cruisers and BMX bikes. All kinds of wheels for all kinds of riders.

It's a perfect challenge for a couple of artisan designers running a bicycle business built for two.

(You can contact Gale at <http://www.twinsix.com>).



Here's a sneak peek at the 2007 Twin Six Men's Jerseys. With an improved fit, antimicrobial treatment, 16" hidden zip, three perfectly placed 8" deep pockets and the industry's best graphics.