

and even a competitive league that challenges teams of employees to rack up the most bike commuter miles.

While Surly and QBP focus on the hard goods—bikes, frames, parts—a number of smaller companies see a promising market in soft goods: clothing and other stylish accoutrements for the growing numbers of cyclists who see riding as a lifestyle rather than a race. Twin Six, founded by locals Ryan Carlson and Brent Gale, is one such outfit, infusing their ideas about what constitutes good design into street apparel for Joe and Jane Biker. They recently relocated from Gale's basement to a space near Cedar and 42nd Street in South Minneapolis to handle their expanding inventory.

Gale was working at a local ad agency several years ago when he had what he calls “a moment of clarity,” in which he realized that most bike clothes were either horribly dull or plastered with logos (he calls them “billboard jerseys”). Twin Six's jerseys and T-shirts are “cycling inspired” but not necessarily bike-specific. They sell a sporty jersey with an argyle design, for example, and T-shirts that bear a drawing of a bike wheel with wings or a vintage-look bicycle below the word “ride.” For the mainstream bicycling world, where the Tour de France's bright yellow jersey is the pinnacle of achievement, this is subtle stuff. “We're looking for people who are aesthetically minded,” said Carlson.

The market for bikes and biking accessories is just now catching up with those for snowboarding, skateboarding, surfing, and motocross—sports that have spawned companies who push

a lot of soft goods to enthusiasts and, almost as important, wannabes. According to Gene Oberpriller, proprietor of the One-on-One Bicycle Studio (“Going Steady,” p.45) “The Burton company sells a lot more sweatshirts than they do snowboards. There are ten or twelve shoe companies for skateboarders. That's what we're waiting for in the bike market.” He speculated that the lag in the biking market was due to its broad appeal, which makes it difficult to target demographically. While a large share of snowboarders are in their late teens or early twenties, bicyclists can be just about any age.

Helping matters along, he said, is the fact that bike culture is becoming more detached from the world of high-end racing. Lately, he has seen friends leave major bike companies in order to join up with clothing makers like Swobo, a San Francisco company that specializes in bikewear that looks like streetwear and favors natural fabrics over synthetic fibers. “It's not about Lance [Armstrong], it's not about Lycra,” said Oberpriller, himself a former Lycra-clad professional mountain-bike racer. “People who are into single-speeds aren't suiting up to be Lance—no offense to Lance and to people who like to suit up like him. They just want to ride their bikes.”

The shift is epitomized by a new online ad campaign by Shimano, perhaps the world's best-known bike-parts maker. The ad, apparently targeted at the estimated 160 million non-biking Americans, touts upscale but low-maintenance, auto-shifting coaster bikes from various manufacturers. Its tagline: “Less Tour de France, More Cul de Sac.” —*Dan Gilchrist*