

IN PRAISE OF BIG RUBBER

A chat with wide-tire evangelist Jeff Jones

by Alex Strickland

Jeff Jones has always been a guy who zigged as the industry zagged, churning out beautiful — if non-traditional-looking — frames for his cult-like following from his Medford, Oregon, shop.

But with the rise of fat bikes, the 29+ platform and other evangelists for wider tires (such as *Bicycle Quarterly* editor and *Adventure Cyclist* contributor Jan Heine), the industry seems to be tacking back toward Jones. What they find when they get there won't surprise longtime fans of Jones Bikes' blend of stability and quickness, and the company's namesake will be there with open arms.

"People rode fat bikes with rigid frames and discovered that fat tires are not as slow as they thought. Plus they realized they don't need suspension," he said. "This is a moment of a maturity for bikes. We've been riding the tightest wheelbases forever — we need the shortest chainstays, lightest frames, stiffest, twitchiest, etc. To ride a bike across the country in a straight line with the tightest wheelbase possible? What are we thinking?"

With the launch of his new Plus, Jones has taken the 29+ platform to its longest implementation yet, using 19-inch chainstays and a 76mm fork offset to stretch the bike's wheelbase to nearly World Cup downhill bike length.

"If you look at the history of bikes, you see those same characteristics from when they were riding cross country before roads were paved and before the popularity of racing. Forget all logic, the ride is really good," Jones said.

Geometry makes a huge difference, no doubt, but it's where



COURTESY JEFF JONES

the rubber meets the road or trail that really gets Jones going and has the framebuilder hopping up to the pulpit to preach against the prevalence of skinny tires in the name of efficiency and speed.

"We've known this for a long time, but the cycling psyche is waking up to the fact that fat tires are not inefficient. If you test things on a drum

all the time, it won't show you the true efficiency. If you actually test on a gravel road with a rider, you really see the efficiencies," he said. "I 100 percent believe that for all the people riding around on 700c x 45mm tires, if we could magically make their bikes take (Schwalbe) Supermotos or Big Apples and air them up right, they'd be having the best ride of their lives." **AC**