

SEKAI Brand History (Classic Rendezvous mailing list, compiled)

Archive-URL: <http://search.bikelist.org/getmsg.asp?Filename=classicrendezvous.11101.0874.eml>
Date: Sun, 16 Jan 2011 00:28:48 -0500
From: rdf1249(AT)aol.com
Subject: Re: [CR] Curious about Sekai Professional 4000

Brian - I worked for Sekai in the late 70s as their warehouse manager and inside sales rep. We would get a small allotment of 4000s each year. They were nicely made frames, made by a small shop called Miko. I had a 4000 track bike back then. It was an OK bike, but nowhere near as racy as my next track bike, a Guerciotti. I don't know anything more about Miko. The 4000 was designed for racing wheels, not 27". There were no 4000 touring bikes, only road and track. There was also a 5000 model made of .6-.3 tubing, the predecessor of TangePrestige. The 4000s were made of Tange Champion.

The Sekai company itself was a small family owned importer of Japanese goods and Sekai bikes and frames. It grew out of a store called Velocipede which still exists and is owned by the same (Tamura) family. The Sekai name was co-owned by Shinwa trading company, who did all the exporting from Japan for Sekai. At one time, they owned four stores plus Sekai, and they did a mailorder business through the Velocipede catalog. The other people in the US who imported through Shinwa complained that they were buying as a wholesaler and selling as a retailer, and discounting the product, an unfair situation. So in 1977 Shinwa told the Tamura brothers that they had to break up the company. They did that in name, but still continued to supply their own stores preferentially. The mailorder business was dead after that though.

During the time I was there, exchange rates were killing the business, as the yen was strengthening every month. They would buy bikes on a 90-day letter of credit, which means they would have to pay for them at whatever the rate was 90 days after they received them. They took pre-season orders from their dealers at a certain price, and in some cases they ended up selling the bikes for less than they eventually had to pay for them. Shinwa engineered a bailout by having their other North American trading partner, Norco of Canada, buy 49% of Sekai. But Sekai then had to sell Norco's line of Taiwanese made and packaged accessories. It was mostly department store quality junk and we had a hard time selling it. The situation got only worse after I left in 1979, and a year or so later Norco ended up owning the whole shebang. The family was out of it, and Norco moved their own people down to Seattle to run it. They moved to a larger facility and did pretty good business for awhile. But they were now competing with Seattle Bike Supply which grew very large, plus a number of other wholesalers selling similar stuff, and most of them doing a better job of it. At some point they quit selling the Sekai brand and only sold their own Norco Brand bikes. They finally quit and went back home to Canada about 1990.

So there you have a nearly complete history of the brand. I sent Dale some pics of one last year and it is up here:
http://www.classicrendezvous.com/Japan/Sekai_main.htm

message: 8 date: Sat, 15 Jan 2011 17:07:14 -0700 from: BRIAN FELTOVICH
<rinjin(AT)mac.com> subject: [CR] Curious about Sekai Professional 4000
to: classicrendezvous(AT)bikelist.org message-ID:
<39DEE615-EECA-49C2-A902-B7443978D0BC(AT)mac.com> content-Type:
text/plain; charset=us-ascii Recently bought a frame to replace my
daily rider and know only very little about the line, just that the

frames were brought into Seattle from Japan. My guess is that the frame is from the late 70s. Seems nicely made with features I like: cutout lugs, wraparound seatstays, slope-shouldered fork crown, etc. designed for 27" wheels? I was hoping folks on the list might have more background or opinions about these bikes. Thanks for any info. Brian
Park City, UT

Bob Freeman
Elliott Bay Bicycles
2116 Western Ave
Seattle, WA 98121
206-441-8144
www.elliottbaybicycles.com
www.davidsonbicycles.com

Classicrendezvous mailing list
Classicrendezvous(AT)bikelist.org
<http://www.bikelist.org/mailman/listinfo/classicrendezvous>