

CREATORS:
CRAIG
CALFEE

He was the first to supply an entire team with carbon bikes at the Tour de France and is currently leading the industry with his incorporation of electronics into modern frames, but Craig Calfee says his futuristic designs pale in comparison to the bamboo frames he has brought to market in Africa and the U.S. over the last 17 years.

"Bamboo bikes designed for production in Africa are really significant in terms of social development there," Calfee said. "Designing and getting carbon bikes into the mainstream was big for the industry, but it wasn't significant from a social perspective."

Almost a decade before he began working with natural fibers, Calfee began his ride to the Tour with a high-speed car-bike crash in East Boston. He was 25 years old, building carbon boating equipment and needed a frame to replace his destroyed Schwinn Varsity. Without much money, Calfee finally had the motivation to put into action the ideas for composite bike building he compiled with a borrowed MIT library card. Within a year he was out on his own, living in an apartment in the back of his new shop in San Francisco. Early setbacks, including a frightening incident where 230-pound roommate Jason Bathrick ripped out a bottom bracket out on the road, nearly led Calfee to walk away.

"It was really sketchy at that point and I was really close to scrapping it and declaring carbon fiber unfit for frame-building," says Calfee.

But he redoubled his efforts and finally hit it big when Time's J.P. Pascal connected him with Greg LeMond before the 1991 Paris-Nice. That year, LeMond's Z Team became the first all-carbon Tour squad, ushering in two decades of carbon proliferation on the road — and setting the groundwork for Calfee to spearhead the use of renewable fibers in building frames for the mass market.

— BRIAN
HOLCOMBE