



channel mastery

Channel Mastery Podcast, Episode #108: The Shaping and Evolution of Mountain Bike Racing and Events, A Tribute to Ed Zink

www.channelmastery.com

Kristin: Welcome back everybody to another episode of the Channel Mastery podcast. This is a very special episode today in honor of Ed Zink. I am a 25-year Durango, Colorado resident, and Ed passed on October 11th from complications of a heart attack. Too young. I have the honor today of having Gaige Sippy, who is the current Director of the Iron Horse Bicycle Classic, another longtime Durango resident, and Ned Overend, world champ mountain bike racer of the cross country variety and many other accolades. I know many of you know Ned. He is also a sports marketing and product development support person at Specialized. Hopefully I introduced you correctly, Ned, because you have a lot of titles.

Ned Overend: Those work.

Kristin: Okay, great. Welcome to both of you. I'm so grateful to have you on the show here today to talk about Mountain Bike Specialists, to talk about how Ed Zink created community and created massive impact through community to really grow cycling, mountain biking, trail advocacy, so many things. This is really just an episode to honor an incredible independent bicycle dealer in Ed Zink, and that was only one thing that he accomplished, but it is a central hub of, I think, the wheel of all of the impact that he created. With that, I wanted to just turn the microphone over to Gaige and to Ned to each individually give their background on who they are, when they met Ed and what capacity they shared part of their life with Ed. Let's start with you, Gaige.

Gaige Sippy: My relationship with Ed all formalized around the 1990 World Championships. I was a young guy that lived in New Mexico that wanted to race bikes. I wanted to be Ned Overend. I made my way to Durango, first time in 1989, I'd been here skiing, but I came in 1989 to ride the Iron Horse and was in awe of the event. I was a Cat-4 road racer and an expert-level mountain bike racer and really liked the Iron Horse. Then lo and behold, the world championships were going to be held here in 1990, so I came and I took part that weekend in various capacities and watched Ned win the worlds and took in the whole scene. I did not meet Ed Zink as part of the '90 worlds.

The strange circumstance that surrounds that whole thing is that same weekend, my mother and father came to Durango and wanted to buy a

retirement piece of property. When I went back to college and my mom and dad returned back to Albuquerque and notified me they'd bought a home in Durango and I should come up and visit at Thanksgiving. I did, and the first morning I was there, I call this the two cowboys walk up to a fence story. Two cowboys literally walked up to a fence and one of them, younger of the two cowboys, looked over the fence and saw my mountain bike sitting there and said, "You'd be interested in going for a mountain bike ride?" I said, "Sure, I'd love to." I rode up the hill with this guy that seemed to know a lot about the thing, I told him how great the 1990 worlds was and I figured out right then, it was Ed Zink.

Kristin: That's awesome.

Gaige Sippy: Yeah, he became my mom and dad's neighbor, so while on that ride, Ed asked me if I ever thought about living in Durango. Of course, I said, "Just trying to figure out how quickly that can happen." He invited me to call John Glover at Mountain Bike Specialists, which was actually The Outdoorsman back then. The following summer, summer of '91, I came up and went to work at The Outdoorsman at the time, Ruby Zink, Ed's mother, was still working there and running the show to some extent. Ed was there as well, and I started that and I worked that summer and then I graduated college and came back and on at Mountain Bike Specialists. At that point, I was there when we took the animals off the wall and we just became a bike shop.

Kristin: I love it.

Gaige Sippy: That was a bit of a watershed moment for the family and for the town really. Then that started my relationship with Ed, and then I left Durango for a period of time, and when I came back in the early 2000s, I started helping with the Iron Horse more at a volunteer level, and then at one point Ed approached me with Kendra Holmes, who was the director at the time of the Iron Horse, and asked me if I'd be willing to take over for Kendra. She was departing. Little did I know, that would turn into what it has turned into.

I had a 29-year relationship with Ed, and he's my nextdoor neighbor. I live on that same property now that my parents originally bought. He's been my neighbor, my mentor. He's been a lot of things me. I've enjoyed navigating things, and it's just been an incredible...You tend to reflect on these things when someone passes and you really look back at all the things that have happened, but it changed my life dramatically. I think Ned's probably going to say the same thing, but I think both of us were impacted by Ed Zink in a way that neither one of us necessarily thought we were going to be and the path that took both of us on different paths, but paths that changed my life forever and my family's life forever, to be honest. That's kind of my story of how I came to be with Ed Zink and our relationship.

Kristin: That's great. Thank you so much for sharing. How about you Ned Overend? Can you share your story as well?

Ned Overend: Similar to Gaige, it's a thread that you'll hear a lot about Ed. He takes a lot of people under his wing. He mentors a lot of people, and he did me as well. I moved to Durango in 1980 and was a car mechanic and also got into some running and then got into some riding, and I decided to try and become a professional racer. I decided, okay, I have to stop working as a car mechanic if I want to try and be a professional racer.

early
way up to
time
thriving for,

I had met Ed when I'd started racing in '82, road racing at the Iron Horse. He said, "Well, work at the shop and we'll help you, give you the time you need and stuff and support to try and become a professional racer." From that experience working at the store, which is invaluable, because all the my current job working at Specialized, it is so valuable to actually spend working in a store, especially a successful store, a store that's been well, 50 years now.

Rogers, Steve
an early

Zink kind of took me under his wing, and I know that he was helping me negotiate with different teams to get in the '83 Coors Classic, which was the first real international road race that I'd done, and we were talking with Michael Fatka of the Raleigh team that had Andy Hampsten on it, Thurlow Tilford. It's about the time that I first met Steve Tilford too. But Zink was adopter or understood very early how big mountain biking was going to be. He had the experience of promoting races with the Iron Horse Classic, the road race, and he quickly jumped on mountain bike racing.

He promoted the '86 and '87 NORBA {National Off Road Bicycle Association} nationals, and I think I won both of those races. So he also promoted the 1990 worlds, which I won. He promoted a lot of races that I won, and I like to think that we kind of had a partnership in promoting mountain biking in Durango.

than I am,
because

There's a lot of different ways that Ed helped me, but from the very beginning ... It's interesting. As I do the math, he was only six or seven years older but I assumed, and especially from early on, that he was older than me, the guy had so much experience and so much wisdom.

Kristin:
his
were
including some
Industry
these
Instagram, et
picture for
what the
the little
almost the

And vision, for sure. These are just fantastic jumping off points that I would love to dive in on. Let's start by talking about the Mountain Bike Specialists, and then I'd love to get more into the events and how just the interconnection of vision was around that. Let's go back to what you said, Gaige, about you there the day they took the animals off the wall. I'm going to be images on the podcast notes page and I know that Bicycle Retailer and News, which is a co-producer of this episode, will also have some of images of Mountain Bike Specialists up on their site and on their cetera, after the show is published. But I wanted to kind of paint a our audience right now, Gaige, since you were there that day. Tell us shop was like, and Ned, feel free to chime in, because you talked about bike shop in the back, and then what it's become now in terms of museum quality destination that we have here in Durango.

Gaige Sippy: Yeah. When I first started there in ninth in the, I guess it would have been spring of '91, when you walked in the store, you could buy anything from a Derby kit, those little things for Boy Scouts, to an expensive mountain bike. It was kind of an interesting layout. Part of it was that at the time Durango wasn't quite the thriving metropolis that it is now, and so I think at the time there was a transition going on. As Ned said, Ed and the whole crew at The Outdoorsman/Mountain Bike Specialists recognize this mountain bike thing was really going, and the '90 worlds pressed on the throttle in a big way.

Southern California started moving to Durango. When we were traveling through the summer of '91, I still remember, it felt like every week we had less and less sporting goods and more and more bike stuff, because that's who was walking in the door. That's the customer base. It was really exploding at that time. Yeti was moving to Durango. Barracuda was getting ready to make a run at it in Durango. Specialized was big and getting bigger. The other thing going on as well was the amount of professional athletes that were living in Durango, and they all tended to circle around The Outdoorsman/Mountain Bike Specialists. On any given day a John Tomac would walk in or a Ned Overend or a Juli Furtado or name your athlete, Greg Herbold.

You saw the evolution happening in the shop where there was getting to be less and less people coming in to look at guns and more and more people coming in to look at bikes. Ed, reading the tea leaves, being the astute businessman that he was, just started evolving the shop. Then as we transitioned through that year and into '92, that's when the things started coming off the walls, meaning the animal heads, the gun ... Yeah, Ned will remember, there was lions in there, there was all sorts of stuff. It was an interesting bike shop at that time. Nonetheless, you saw that transition happen in what I would guess was probably 12 to 18 months, and you went from a sporting goods store/bike shop to pretty much just a bike shop. Then it just became the bike shop from a mountain bike world. Mountain Bike Action was writing about it. It just became the place.

Kristin: Destination. Ned, can you chime in about how you went from car mechanic to bike mechanic in the back part of the Mountain Bike Specialists and your view on kind of the evolution of the shop?

Ned Overend: Well, we were selling Schwinn World Sports back then. They were \$100. It was the cheapest Schwinn road bike at the time in like 1982 or '83. People would come in and then see that \$99 price tag and they'd go, "You got to be kidding me. \$99 for a bicycle?" I mean, just so many customers would come in and you would have to explain to them why it was worth \$99 for a bike instead of the one that was \$35 at Montgomery Ward's or whatever.

It was the early days, and the bike shop was just kind of in the back 10% of the building. The back has a low roof and the front part of the building is really tall, and that's where all the, the trophies were, because Ed's dad, I think, in particular was a trophy hunter and there was a hunting and fishing the store up front. When those trophies came down, there was a ton of space to hang up a

lot of memorabilia, and by that time there was a lot of memorabilia. Ed's collecting world championships jerseys and national championships jerseys and classic bikes like the bike that Juli Furtado won the worlds on in 1990, and even there's a couple of my early Schwinn race bikes that were custom made by Paramount that are hanging up in there, and they are from '85 and '86.

But there's an amazing museum of stuff, and they're fortunate they have a lot of room to hang that stuff, the banner from the 1990 worlds. There's a group of like 40 Germans that come here every year, I mean, there's several groups, but this group in particular makes this their destination spot, because they're fascinated by the history of mountain biking and also the trails here. They can come here and they learn about the sport of mountain biking and they ride all the great trails around Durango.

That's another area that you have to credit Ed, and that is the development of trails. He realized early on that, in order to sell mountain bikes and in order to make this a mountain bike destination and for quality of life for the people who live in Durango, you have to have great trails. He early on was a big supporter of Trails 2000, which is our local trails group, and he helped get that started and fundraised and made the local politicians realize how important trails were to the people who are living and coming to Durango.

Kristin:
development. Again,
that Ed
going to
Specialists.
mean, it
Durango, it's

Yeah, and Mary Monroe-Brown is carrying that forward in an incredible, incredible way. Thank you so much for bringing up the trail I feel like all of the activity, and there's so much in terms of the vision had, and it's interesting that it all ties back into the shop. Again, we're put images of just kind of the museum facets of Mountain Bike There's trophies in there. I know that there's Olympic jerseys in there. I truly is an incredible destination. For anyone who does come to important to check that out, I think we'd all agree.

many facets

I also just want to note that he was always ahead of evolution and trends. I mean, just in the last five or six years, we've seen a lot of the states in the country establish offices of outdoor recreation and building a "outdoor recreation economy." I think that that really is what Ed was doing from day one, and he saw how important that was to the vitality of the community and the people who live here, especially the young people. Literally, when you call and you're on hold, which it doesn't last long, because they don't keep people on hold long at Mountain Bike Specialists, but they literally go over all of the local things that Ed and Patty Zink support through Mountain Bike Specialists, such as the afterparty for prom, obviously Trails 2000. They reached into so of this community.

Again, that's why we thought it was so important to talk about the legacy that Ed Zink has left and I think you guys continue to carry on. On that note, let's talk a little bit more about Ed's past in terms of shaping the evolution of mountain bike racing and events. Then I would love to have you share the story, Ned, of the mail order catalog that you guys purchased to change the name from The Outdoorsman to the Mountain Bike Specialists. But let's start with the early,

well.
experience

early on races such as Mammoth and some of the things that we talked about in our rehearsal call. If you could speak to that, Ned, around Ed's involvement with just shaping mountain biking in terms of a destination with events as Before social media, et cetera, people actually would come out and these things in person.

Ned Overend: Yeah, yeah. Along that same vein, if you wanted to learn about something, you kind of had to travel there. Unlike these days with social media and the internet where you can just learn so much by Googling it, Ed traveled to Mammoth in the early days to ... That was, I would say, some of the biggest or the biggest mountain bike race in the early 80s, was Mammoth. They had massive races early on, probably some of the biggest ones, and Zink, like I said, already had experience with running the Iron Horse Road Race, which was a big event, and he started incorporating a mountain bike race with that. That race eventually became the National Championships which would be had in '86 and '87. Then after that we also had the world cup in Durango and some of them were at the ski areas and some of them were down in town.

as
would
bike
there'd be a

It's interesting, he kept changing it, and Gaige can speak to this for sure, as far where the race venue was held in order to make it the most successful. He brought some of these events right downtown. They had to actually have a time trial on mountain bikes that would go do a loop of a city block and they take the glass out of the front window of some stores and the mountain racers and they would race right through the center of a store and pile of rocks that they'd ride through and stuff like that.

Kristin: That's awesome.

Ned Overend: Making it very much entertainment based. Have serious racing as well, but also have events like that. And Gaige, you've promoted events like that.

Gaige Sippy: Yeah, and you know, Ed firmly ... he would go to an event. We'll use Ned's example of Mammoth, and Ed was very ... he would take everything in that was going on around him and he would process that. He used to say the word, "I am processing this," often. And he would process and then he would act on what he had processed. And we would spend a lot of time discussing when Ned talks about moving venues and trying different things, he was a firm believer in critical mass. That if you had an event, it needed to look like someone was there in order for anyone to care.

So, we would always spend a lot of time figuring out how we could do new things, try new things, and get people out there to spectate, take part in it, feel like they were a part of the scene, if you will. And Kristin, you've been to the Iron Horse. We try lots of different things. If you've been to the mountain bike race through the bar.

Kristin: Yep.

Gaige Sippy: It's kind of a crazy scene that you don't necessarily get anywhere else. So Ed was very systematic in his approach to how he tried to weave all aspects together as best possible to include the largest group of people possible, and that included how he ran the shop to some extent.

rock When I worked at Mountain Bike Specialists, we spent a lot of time figuring out how we could sell \$500 bikes to people at the time. Those were hoppers, and how we could sell a \$3000 bike and how they could all interact together. That's very much how Ed wanted to run the events too.

that He loved having Ned Overend there, but he also liked having Jane Doe there just bought a bike and was just getting into it. So I think Ed was very holistic in his approach around how do I involve the most amount of people to get this thing off the ground.

Kristin: And in today's marketing parlance we call that inclusivity, right?

Gaige Sippy: Exactly.

Kristin: And this is something that just was part of how he operated as a human being which is great. And everybody literally was welcome. I think from the time you do packet pick up through the entire weekend it feels like a family affair but then you have literally like people that are known on a global level for their athletic prowess, participating in these events right here in our hometown of Durango.

It's just really interesting because all of this happened before social media and I think easily the work that Ed did around cycling in and around Durango and in the United States really got out there on a level that we see things get out there today in a viral manner, before there was a conduit for virality, you know what I mean?

Gaige Sippy: Yep.

Kristin: And I'm sure part of that has to do with a tight community of people in mountain biking, and it really comes right back around to building community around this. I think just again, everything that we see that he impacted in this town had to do with helping the most people in the community and really leaving no stone unturned.

The fact that he really always came from a place of service, and again this is co produced by Bicycle Retailer and Industry News. I think all of us on this call know in different ways just the struggle and the challenges that independent bicycle dealers face today as the consumer keeps evolving. And both of you have mentioned multiple times in just sharing your memories of your time with Ed that he was always focused on the consumer experience first, and in today's marketing parlance that's called consumer centricity, right?

further It's just a way of doing business as a specialty business owner, working to specialty disciplines of cycling. This is not like let's be everything to everyone. He

literally understood the value of a niche, but also was very inclusive around it and focused on the special consumer that drew into the shop both as tourists, but definitely from a local standpoint.

reporter.
and 10
turnover.

And I just want to take a few minutes to talk about the incredible team working at Mountain Bike Specialists. First of all, very little turnover, and that's incredibly rare having worked in these markets for a long time, first as a trade
One of the things that I've heard from clients over the past 20 years, years prior to that as a journalists is just the challenges that retail with

Some of that comes from brands saying it's impossible to get our brand story told because there's so much turnover. Well, not at the Mountain Bike Specialists, everybody. I mean, literally they know your name as a local when you walk in there. They know exactly what bike you're calling about before you even get there. They know exactly what the last tune up was that they did on your bike if you're a regular customer there. I mean, I literally have never experienced anything like that, and I'm a shopper. I love to shop. Everywhere I go I always pop into stores, and I have to tell you Mountain Bike Specialists is literally the best mountain bike shop that I've ever gone to, cycling shop.

pretty
have

That store has helped me ... the staff at that store has helped me do some crazy things as a not-young mom, okay? It really, I don't think I would have the confidence to try and do Leadville for the first time in my late 40's if I didn't have the Mike Phillips, and Darien, and Dane and all of the people there helping me. It does take a village, let's just put it that way.

So I also just want to put a shout out to the incredible, incredible people that make Mountain Bike Specialists the destination that it is for locals as well.

Gaige Sippy:
worked

And Kristin, if I can add something to that as a ... Ned and I both have been employees at the store. I am fortunate enough that both of my kids have worked at the store. My son currently works there one day after school a week, but one of the things that when you talk about long term success in any business, let alone be it bicycles is the consistency component. And you know, John Glover's been there since they invented the bicycle, and I say that jokingly but he's been there a long time.

But you know, I attend quite a few Mountain Bike Specialists events for one reason or another, and the fact that they have a weekly store meeting and have since 48, 50 years, they never miss a weekly store meeting where they get the employees together, and they invite me to attend those to talk about the Iron Horse or things we have going on in the community. It is Ed and Patti's passion, and John's passion and the crews passion to make sure they do the best, but I mean they spend a good hour to an hour and a half once a week really trying to hone in how they can perfect their craft, after 48 years or 50 years.

So I think that's part of what keeps them successful and makes your experience great, my experience great, and then the other thing that we were just having

it would
and
know

this discussion and Ned has been to more of these than I have I think, but the annual Mountain Bike Specialists Christmas party is coming up and that's always held at the Zink Ranch. This year, there was some question on whether be at the Zink Ranch because Ed's gone and of course Patti stepped up there's no place that this party would be other than the Zink Ranch, you what I mean?

So the family atmosphere, the taking care of their employees, the part of the community, it isn't just something they talk about. It has always been something they have done at 100%.

Kristin:

And Ned, I would love to have you chime in about the mail order business that changed the name of the company, and then your take on the Mountain Bike Specialists as well.

Ned Overend:

Well, before I talk about that, along the same vein of the company meetings, I can remember those company meetings back in 1982, the store meetings. One thing Zink would emphasize, and we heard Gaige say, "Okay, you've got all these international stars that are constantly in this store," and to this day it's Payson McElveen, Quinn Simmons, Sepp Kuss, Todd Wells. So all these are constantly in the store and Zink would emphasize from way back in days, don't be elitist, you know?

like
people
the early

Don't be swayed by the fact that you're working on the bikes and dealing with some of the most famous cyclists in the world. Focus on respecting all the customers. And Zink could speak to that because Zink was a recreational cyclist. I mean, he's done some races but he's not a bike racer and he's not an accomplished mountain biker, so he could speak to that, what the recreational cyclist is looking for and what they found threatening.

So he would emphasize that back in the day and I know he still emphasizes it at the store meetings here, what is it? 30 years later at least?

Kristin:

Yeah.

Ned Overend:

So Zink very much lived that recreational cyclist and he could understand that cyclist and he emphasized it. He would tell us that, "I don't want to hear anybody making fun of any cyclists even if they're not around, even to each other I don't want you making fun of certain customers." You know? Because we were all a bunch of sarcastic kids and that's what you tend to do. You be sarcastic about people, but he didn't even want to hear it when the customers weren't around. So he emphasized it from early on.

An example of Zink's vision, I think, was in the mid-80s we realized there was ... the magazines were writing about mountain bikes, mountain bike races, and all these different mountain bike models that were for sale, but they weren't for sale in bike shops. It was hard to find bike shops that carried a very good selection of mountain bikes.

He saw an opportunity in acquiring this Mountain Bike Specialists mail order. It was in Fort Collins, and it was actually going out of business. So he bought the assets, I was a small investor as was John Glover, the current manager of Mountain Bike Specialists. We went to meet with our vendors and there was going to be some left over debt which we were not acquiring, so the meetings were going to be kind of a little tenuous you might say.

who

The guys we were meeting with were Tom Ritchey, Gary Fisher, Bob Buckley was the founder of Marin Mountain Bikes. So we took a trip out to the Bay Area and I remember we met with Tom Ritchey in his house in Redwood City and we sat down at the table in his kitchen and Zink was the one who was doing all the negotiating. I was just there as support.

and
Fisher,

It was amazing to see Zink develop a relationship with Tom Ritchey. He was humble, he was sympathetic to the fact that there was going to be some left over debt that we were not going to take care of, but he also explained that we love your product and we want to continue to sell it and it's important for us we came out of every one of those conversations with Tom and with Gary with Bob Buckley, we also met with Bontrager over in Santa Cruz and it was all very positive. They were happy to see us continue to represent their line in the Mountain Bike Specialists catalog.

It's interesting how Zink, who was a rancher by trade, was a bit of a Renaissance man, right? I mean, he could travel to the Bay Area and speak to these guys who were not small egos either in many of those cases and owners and starters of the big companies.

So it was just, it was impressive for me to see how Ed talked with these guys and developed a relationship from something that started out being kind of negative for them.

Kristin:

of

And I just, I guess I'm kind of curious, and this is a question that we didn't talk through prior to me hitting the record button, but obviously he was the first. He really built the destination in the Mountain Bike Specialists. The market has changed a lot over the years, but there's some things that I think have really stayed the same. He really has created a sense of consistency throughout a lot the storm of change, and this is even true, Gaige, I'm sure with the road racing facet of the Iron Horse.

How would he coach you guys or talk with you as partners in terms of just the evolution of cycling in the community of Durango and also in the United States? I don't know if you can speak to that at all in terms of how the shop welcomed competition and how it was better for the community, et cetera. Like anything you can share on that front I think would be valuable for the audience, especially of Bicycle Retailer.

Gaige Sippy:

So the Iron Horse Bicycle Classic and Mountain Bike Specialists were obviously woven very closely together. For many of the years, the Iron Horse ... which it's

...
and
been around since 1972, the Iron Horse has, so the shop hasn't been around much longer than that, but they've always been tied together. But that did not Ed was passionate about making sure that even though MBS was closely tied to the event that we were always reaching out to the other bike shops in town, they've changed through the years, to make sure they felt like they were part of it too. Part of the Iron Horse.

gotten
wanted
much,
got
afraid of
that
He did not want to have a lock on the fact that the Iron Horse was kind of MBS related. He was very passionate about the idea that if the tide rises, it'll help all the boats in the water. He was excited that the Iron Horse had grown and to something that had become somewhat of a staple on the cycling calendar, certainly a staple of a holiday weekend calendar here in Durango, and he to invite all of the shops to take part in it. We have events that are sponsored by the other bike shops in town that happen at the Iron Horse. Ed was very to use your word again, inclusive in the idea that the more people we involved in this thing, the better off we all were going to be. He was not the competition, he would study the competition and try to understand what they were doing well and how they could adopt that, change that, whatever may be, but he never was happy to sit and say, "This is the way it's been done, that means this is the way we're always going to do it." So he was always charging forward, but he was not afraid of sticking with something that was working well and it was going to take a little more of a current to get him off that, if you will.

So he definitely had a good mix of looking forward and looking back and balancing those things to try to make the best possible outcome go free to the shop, the event. He was ... Ned uses the statement Renaissance man. That's a true statement but he was very good at taking in all aspects of what was going on around him and putting that into action, if you will.

Ned Overend: I would say that, Gaige, and you might agree with this, that an important thing for a race, an event to do is to adapt to the different times which is what the Iron Horse has done over the years. And I know that you are even now looking at how should the Iron Horse Classic evolve, you know?

You started a gravel race a couple years ago because the gravel side is growing. There were several years where we didn't have a mountain bike race because the numbers were down, and then we looked at different ways of promoting it and now that the mountain bike part of it is successful again, similar in a bike shop, Kristin, how a lot of bike shops don't adapt quickly enough to changes in the demands, the different kinds of models. Or they adapt too slowly and it affects their profitability.

I mean over the years XC riding was big and now trail riding is much bigger. Gravel bikes have now taken over and they're now larger than road bikes. I remember fat bikes like three years ago were huge, and if you weren't careful you would end up with too many fat bikes, because that trend changed very quickly.

And now eBikes is the big growth area and Zink saw that and embraced it early on. And he's been a big advocate of eBikes and it's one thing that's really helping the shop right now.

Kristin: And also the community as a destination. I mean that's one of the things I know looking at just the amount of politics involved in enabling eBikes to be a viable category for an IBD. But I know that he was obviously working at that from a community standpoint, not just looking at the best interest of his shop.

Gaige Sippy: No, he was leading that charge. Make no mistake. He believed in the e-bike thing, like Ned said years ago, and knew the wave was coming. And back to how he handled it way back when mountain bikes were coming in in the 80s, he started enlisting the community, the different government organizations and started the dialogue because he knew that one of those things without the trails, without the paths, without the roads, the rest of it doesn't work. So he was all encompassing in his ability to see all the facets that needed to come together to make it work.

Kristin: And I think part of that comes from him working the front lines. I mean he was in the shop, he's been at the events, you know he's been really part of I think just the living breathing entity of cycling evolving as a category in his shop as a part of the community here and then on a national level, I believe. One of the things I wanted to ask about is remember when the race was sanctioned by USA Cycling, the Iron Horse Bicycle Classic and that changed. I thought we could have you speak a little bit to that because I think there's a lot of people in the audience who are maybe looking at what that might look like for gravel.

you I think that there was some talk in the community when that, remember like have to have a day license and all that stuff to do the Iron Horse. It went away and honestly it didn't affect the race at all. Again, because you were focused on the people participating, not so much the tiny percentage of people who are actually looking at it to further their race palmaris. You know what I mean? So if you could talk a little bit about that I think that could be interesting in terms of looking at history as a marker for the future.

Ned Overend: Yeah. That topic could probably be a podcast in itself.

Kristin: In and of itself. I know.

Ned Overend: It's interesting. I mean I'm doing the Gravel Mob in a couple of weeks in, it's in Ojai. And I believe that has a, I'm not exactly sure, but it's a USA cycling permit, but it's a gran fondo permit.

Kristin: Interesting.

Ned Overend: So they do a permitting for events that aren't races. And Gaige, maybe you're more familiar with that, but how USA cycling evolves with event promotion, that's a complicated topic.

Kristin: Well, I'm curious, yeah, I'm curious to hear kind of how did this come to be where it was a sanctioned race and then it wasn't any more, and then maybe weigh in on on your thoughts on that Gaige.

Gaige Sippy: Well, when I started as the Director, we were a sanctioned event and the Iron Horse was the longest running sanctioned event USA Cycling had. And so Ed had been on the Board of Directors at USA Cycling. He was instrumental and NORBA was taken over by USA Cycling, the national off-road bicycle association, which was kind of the predecessor organization that started mountain bike racing from a sanctioning standpoint. So Ed had been in all the governmental bodies of cycling. You had ties to UCI, he'd done it all. He helped write the rule book for the Olympic rules. He helped write the 1990 Worlds stuff. So he knew all the stuff in and out.

And how it kind of started transpiring was that this was one of the things that Ed and I spent a lot of time on. I guess that must've been six or seven years ago looking back on it, but what we were trying to understand, the Iron Horse was big, we were successful, but we were trying to understand what the value proposition was anymore with being a sanctioned event. And you brought up a couple things that were starting to become a challenge for us. One was those darn waivers. And the waivers, we had to have two waivers at registration, one for the Iron Horse and one for USA Cycling. Well you know how much people like standing in lines and then when they get to the front of the line they get to fill out not one but two waivers and then they find out they're going to spend \$10 on a one day license and you know, so those kinds of things.

And then online registration was coming about in a much stronger fashion. And there was some questions around can you do an e-signature or not? So we convened with our attorneys at the Iron Horse and we started looking at it and the insurance aspects and said we don't necessarily need to be a sanctioned event. And we could probably do away with a couple things that are aggravating our customer base. And that was a very hard one for Ed. If Ed and I ever had challenges with each other, that was one of those times where he and I went back and forth a lot because I was in the camp of, it's time to move on from USA Cycling. And Ed was really struggling with that. We had several phone candidly, at conferences with the President of USAC and so on and so forth. And willing to hung up one point we were at such heads with USA Cycling and they weren't bend our way and we weren't really willing to bend theirs and Ed finally the phone and said, okay, we're leaving.

And that's how it happened. And so Ed struggled with it, but he understood it, knew we had to evolve in that direction but up until he passed away, he and I would still have discussions about, is there a place for USA Cycling again in our events and let's make sure we keep the dialogue open with them. So it wasn't like he never wanted to do anything with them again. It just didn't fit our business model at the time.

Cycling But we have been successful without it. And I think the challenge for USA is that so many of these big events now are not sanctioned. And so I go to all of

the Epic Rides events or most of the Epic Rides events and I go to, my children participate in the high school leagues, the NICA stuff and it's thriving. And it's not thriving under a USA Cycling umbrella. So I think there's just a problem of trying to get that alignment in place. But we certainly were a tipping point probably for a lot of other event promoters. When the Iron Horse said we're going to soldier out on our own and do it without, and I know others went with us.

Kristin: I totally agree. And that's exactly what I was hoping you'd share. I just think it's a lot. You can bring a lot of illumination to the topic to a lot of people listening.

Gaige Sippy: Yeah. I support and we support what USA Cycling is doing. It's evolution though. And looking at the business model and what works and it's just real hard for an event promoter and event business like we are to look at it and say it meets our needs. And I don't think we're different than any business. You have to look at those things from time to time and say what works, what doesn't and that didn't work. I am happy USA Cycling's out doing what they do. But I don't know if that model fits for them anymore. That may not be where their strong suit is.

Kristin: I totally hear you. You know, as we look to wrap up here and you've both been so gracious with your time, I think one of the other topics that we would be remiss to not spend a little time talking about is the vision that Ed had around trail development. And if anybody knows Durango, we have a lot of public lands surrounding our community here and there's a lot of different leadership entities of those land managers, if you will, with different agendas. And I think that obviously Trails 2000 and Mary Monroe Brown does an exceptional job. I think bringing multiple leaders together and keeping conversation going around multiple stakeholders, but I believe that that was something that Ed really started in this community. Would you guys agree?

Ned Overend: Absolutely. Yeah. With Trails 2000 I think creating an organization and Gaige, I don't know if he created that organization but he was one of the founders of Trails 2000, I think that's probably accurate. And he was the leader of Trails and on the board for awhile and he brought in Bill Manning who did an amazing job and that's one thing Zink is good at is finding good people to help them. And Gaige, you're a prime example of that, right?

2000

He believed in you enough to have you take over the Iron Horse Classic. John Glover, who has worked so long at the bike shop and been successful at it. Bill Manning at Trails 2000 and now Mary Monroe who's doing such a great job at Trails 2000 as well. But in trail advocacy he recognized early on and he owned property himself that he would assign trail easements to like over on the west side mountain park as some people call it. But so I mean he also was involved in getting trail easements on property that even he owned and getting other people to realize how important it was, like the political entities. Because I mean it's a huge draw, tourist draw, for Durango and it's super important not only for the quality of life for the people living there, but also to bring those tourist dollars to Durango.

Gaige Sippy:

And if I can add to it, Ned just said, Ed and I spent some time around when the 1990 World's 25th anniversary came and went a few years ago, we celebrated that here in Durango. And one of the things we did in conjunction with Mary Monroe and Trails 2000 is we had a land symposium where all of those leaders of the different land organizations, federal, state, you name it, we got them all together to discuss where we're at 25 years later. But one of the things Ed pointed out was that at the 1990 Worlds they held a land symposium at the '90 worlds. It was kind of the first one around the mountain bike question. So Ed saw that going on then and he was passionate about 25 years later we're getting getting some of those.

could
and that
put the
you can
And Ed
and trails
successful. So

He invited people that were there in 1990 to come back, even though they were retired from their federal jobs, he brought them here to Durango so we reflect on what has gone on in 25 years since the '90 Worlds with trails kind of thing. So again, Ed's forward thinking vision around, we've got to full package together here because if we're missing many components, only take a few components off a bike before it doesn't work anymore. understood that it took all components to make this whole thing work and advocacy and all of those things were paramount to making it you know, up until, well as an example, I just helped hold a symposium type of event in a much smaller scale at the Colorado High School Mountain Bike Championships that were held here in Durango. That was Ed's vision before he passed away. He didn't know he was going to pass away, but he wanted to make sure that we got people up to this new land we have in Durango called Mesa Park to make sure that we got the political leaders and so on and up there to see what goes on and what could be done with that of property. So he was already trying to share with them his vision of community needed to go. So it was never ending with Ed.

Durango
so forth
particular piece
where our

Kristin:

That is a great, I'm so glad that you shared that. Before we wrap up here, is there anything that you guys would like to share about Ed and his impact on your lives that we didn't cover here today?

Gaige Sippy:

I'll go first, Ned. Kristin, we had a strategic planning session yesterday for the Iron Horse Bicycle Classic and when we originally planned this meeting, Ed was to be part of it and it was part of the direction as we head into the 50th Iron Horse. And we all sat there yesterday trying to understand what the road forward looks like without Ed.

fulfill
so

And I'm here to tell you, that's hard to figure out. So we all talked about how we're going to have to double down, triple down, quadruple down to try to what Ed's legacy would have been had he been around many more years. And I think for me, if you were at Ed's Memorial service, the thing that rang true in all of that was Ed's willingness to get out there and get involved in stuff and try to do a good job and get people involved with him to try to carry this idea forward.

Whether it was at the shop, at the bike race, trail advocacy, whatever it was, he wasn't afraid to roll up his sleeves. And so my take away from my relationship

with Ed is he made me a better man around getting involved and taking action. We have lost someone that we are not going to be able to replace and it is going to be incumbent on our community to try to step up and be some type of man like Ed was really is how I feel about that. I feel blessed I got to be in his sphere.

Kristin: That's awesome. How about you Ned?

Ned Overend: Yeah, that's well put. It's hard to kind of put it into words. You know, since Ed's passing, you realize the size of his footprint. Not just for the community, but for me personally, right. Because I'm going over all of the early memories of whether it was the races, celebrating my race wins, he'd be celebrating them with me. We'd be going to the bike show in the early days when mountain bikes were blowing up. You know, maybe it was that trip to visit guys like Tom Ritchey and Gary Fisher out in Marin. So many memories and it's funny you don't think about that as memories. They're in there, but they're not stimulated. And when someone passes you have all these memories, but you don't have that person to share them with anymore.

So you share them with people who have other memories of Ed, whether it's Gaige or John or different people in the community. And that's what you're left with. So I guess it's a reminder that you should share memories with people that matter to you while they're still around.

Kristin: Incredibly well put to both of you. And again, our goal is to really honor the incredible legacy of Ed Zink. And I think that you've just created an incredible call to action Gaige and also, you know, echoed in what you just shared, Ned, that really the way that we carry this forward is by continuing his vision. And for the broader listenership, if you will, of this podcast, think about your own businesses. I think Ed really knew how to create a specialty business by again putting the end consumer first, creating experiences.

I mean look at the retail and event experience and how he tied that together. And then the backdrop, keeping the area pristine, building awesome trails, bringing together multiple land managers. And to your point Ned, hiring incredible people to run really important parts of this legacy. All of that is from one man and that is incredibly proud and I'm so grateful we were able to come here and our hope to you, the bicycle retailer and industry news audiences, that this brings you some inspiration because no matter how challenging it is there, there is a place in the heart of the consumer for a very special out experience today visionary, that you offer. And I think that everything that we talked about here proves that, and I think Ed is a specialty minded business leader and whether he would call himself that or not.

That was his approach and I think that we all have a lot to learn and be inspired from with that and just know both of you how grateful I am that you took the time to be on the Channel Mastery podcast here today. Steve Frothingham, my Editor at Bicycle Retailer was absolutely delighted when he heard you are interested in doing this. And you know anytime any of you are in Durango, please stop by the Mountain Bike Specialists. We would love to host you here

and again, thank you Gaige and thank you Ned for taking the time to honor Ed in this podcast today.

Gaige Sippy: Thank you.

Ned Overend: Yes, thank you Kristin.