



channel mastery

Channel Mastery Podcast, 129: Jayson O'Mahoney

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- Kristin: Welcome back, everybody, to another episode of the Channel Mastery Podcast. I am absolutely stoked today to introduce Jayson O'Mahoney to you, who is the founder of Gravel Cyclist. Welcome to the show.
- Jayson: Thank you for having me, Kristin.
- Kristin: You like to be called Jom, is that right? J-O-M?
- Jayson: J-O-M, correct. My surname, which you just pronounced, O'Mahoney, is often butchered in the United States, so I said it's really much easier to go by J-O-M. Incidentally, I learned how to pronounce my surname in this country when I watched Police Academy years ago.
- Kristin: That's awesome.
- Jayson: Officer Mahoney. Officer Mahoney, yeah.
- Kristin: It is an absolute American treasure in the bastion of American who knows what. But anyways, here we are.
- Jayson: Yes.
- Kristin: We are recording this at a very precarious time, obviously. We're just about to head into April 2020 and we're not going to talk about the COVID-19 virus. We thought everybody could use a nice break. I will be asking a couple questions about it around how Jayson is working to serve his audience during this time, because I think it is a tricky time and how could I not ask him that, being a leading member of the Gravel Cycling Press. But at the same time, we really want to just talk about just gravel and take our minds off it a little bit and learn a little bit more about how you came into what you're doing and your vision for it and how things are changing, et cetera.

Why don't we start by having you tell my amazing audience about your background and how you founded Gravel Cyclist.

Jayson: All right, I'll try and give you the Cliff's Notes version, otherwise we'll be here all day. I got into cycling way back in 1991, in Australia. I'm originally from Australia. I moved to the United States around about 1998. I'm a legitimate dual citizen. I hold two passports, so all legal. I really loved cycling from that point on, and I was mostly into the road side of things.

When I moved to North Florida around 2004, I was finding it quite challenging to ride, because of my regular job, to ride and get good training intervals and whatnot. So, I met up with some friends and we started doing mindless loops off this office park not far from Gainesville. After about 3,000 miles there one year, at nighttime, mind you, every Tuesday and Thursday night, I swear I could see ruts being formed in the pavement. It's just this existence of going around and around and around, and I said, man, this is doing my head in.

That led me to go exploring around the area and I noticed all these dirt roads when I've been riding around in the daytime and I started exploring those on a mountain bike initially. That's what ultimately led into me founding the website, although much later. That process I was talking about then happened around 2005-2006.

Kristin: Awesome. I love that you could see ruts in the pavement. That's a long time ago for gravel, right?

Jayson: Oh my god, it is. But we had a lot of fun doing it. We used to call them winter intervals. People joke about the winters here in Florida. We actually get some pretty cold temperatures down here, into the high 20s sometimes, and it's really frigid cold. So if you're going to do training at that particular time, you had to have some friends to go do it with because there was no Zwift. There was very little internet, et cetera. Well, there was internet, but it wasn't really developed to have online training, so to speak.

Kristin: Right.

Kristin: That's really interesting that you have been doing this for a long time, since 2005 or '06. I'm sure you run into the same people I have in the cycling industry, like Ned Overend, et cetera, who are just like, "Yeah, I've been riding gravel since you were in fifth grade," or whatever. Love Ned Overend.

But, point being is we have seen this genre of cycling blow up and you have literally been at the front of that wave, so I wanted to talk a little bit about what it was like for you to be pushing the boulder uphill, and then just have it take on incredible traction and momentum.

Jayson: Well, initially, just real quick, the website, I started it back in August 2014 I think. It was

mostly intended to be a repository of my silly races and training ride stories. Because back then, I guess, there was not really much idea of what sort of bike to ride, what sort of gearing to run, that sort of stuff. So I just started writing these things down.

Then, my website got a following and I noticed still so that it's the environment started changing later on, particularly around maybe 2018-2017, when I saw a lot of faster riders, professional maybe coming in, and that definitely did change the landscape somewhat. But it's also, at the same time, I think reinvigorating cycling because a lot of people were really tired of the road scene and a lot of the negativity that comes along with that.

Additionally, the gravel, for me, you get freedom. You get to go out on these roads that you normally would never, ever drive your car on because it's so bad, and you get to see scenery you never see, and because of the car factor, which is a real deal in America, too much distracted driving, that's really been a drawback for a lot of people to come across this sport as well. Also, it's very encompassing. It's, just in my experience, people from all types of cycling are welcome and all abilities and all genders. It doesn't matter how good or bad you are, how fast or slow you are. It's like a big party most of the times, and I hope that never changes.

Kristin: Oh my gosh, me too. I think you're absolutely right. It's a little bit of the anti-road. As I think about this year, 2020, and I know we'll get into this, but we might as well start talking about it now, we love our calendar. You have a calendar on your site that I think it literally the bible of what's happening in gravel and I wanted to just ask specifically, here we are looking at events being postponed and delayed, but the headlines are really being taken up in the cycling press about what's happening on the world tour level. It is unprecedented, but at the same time, and I'm devout, I watch everything, I read as much as I can. I just love cycling.

But what I'm really hoping and holding out hope for is that some of these iconic gravel events actually take place. Because for us, not getting together with the community I think is almost going to be like mentally and emotionally wounding in addition to just our, let's face it, we're not going to be in the best shape, right? Maybe we will, if you look at Zwift, but we'll talk about that.

But what are some of your thoughts just in terms of, I'm curious to know, when is the first gravel event you did? What was one of the earlier ones that you did that you've really seen blow up? What are some that have kept their character? What I'm trying to do here is understand how the world can see a really fast-growing facet of a sport, cycling, that we're all trying to really keep pure and weird, you know? So I'm curious to know if you could chime in on when you jumped into the event fray and how you've seen that developing lately.

Jayson: Around about, I think, 2010 or 2011 was the first events I started doing, and most of them are on the east coast. In particular, North Carolina there was an event promoted. He's no longer promoting events, unfortunately. His name is Andrew Stackhouse, and he

ran a promotion company called Pirate Race Productions, I think it was called. He had this race, which was a homage to the original Three Peaks Cross Race in the UK.

It was called Three Peaks USA. It was in Banner Elk, North Carolina. I'd ridden there quite a few times, so I left Gainesville with a mate of mine. We thought, okay, how bad can this thing be? So, we weren't sure what bikes and whatnot to ride, so we walked up with cross bikes because that's what you had back then, okay? I had a pretty nice cross bike.

Jayson: Anyway, oh my god, this race was so mental. It was basically like a Grinduro race. The bike was completely insufficient. It was really a mountain bike race, and oh my god, I got scared straight so many times on some of the descents and whatnot. But it took me so far away from the road scene at the time, I thought, oh my god. Even though I was complaining about almost dying on the descents and having to walk my bike up 22% grades, it was so much more fun than any road race I'd ever done. I said, man, this is awesome. You know road racing, I'm done with that crap. That was the first time I really got into that side of the sport.

Another event that comes to mind that I think has maintained its grassroots feel and it's never, ever charged an entry fee, is Almanzo 100 in Minnesota. It's often known as the granddaddy of all gravel races. Now, it's not going by that name anymore, and I think that the originally promoter has since walked away. I believe it's called The Heywood now.

I had the opportunity to ride that race in 2017 I think it was. It was held in horrendous conditions, but that point aside, it was a fantastic event and one I would love to do again at some point in time. He didn't charge a single dime at that point in time. In fact, what I liked about it was the whole community, Spring Valley, Minnesota, were mainly the driving factor of that race. They were just glad to see people coming in, hanging out, and spending money locally. It used to draw, on good weather days, 3,000 riders.

Kristin: What?

Jayson: It was basically a glorified Facebook event. Yeah, it's one of the biggest races in America, and I've seen media talk about all these monuments, which I think is kind of rubbish, but anyway. This is one of the best races going and not a lot of people know about it.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jayson: We get on this whole monument thing that the big media cracks on about.

Kristin: Let's talk about that, because I have heard that there are some OG gravel cyclist journalists, shall we say, that have quite an opinion about just the popularity of gravel and how the endemic press has jumped in on that. I mean, obviously, their readership, I'm sure, is hungry for that content too. But at the same time, can you weigh in on what your thoughts are in that because I have a feeling you have quite an opinion there.

Jayson: Well, I'm not going to plug every single media entity out there, okay? But I will mention

one, and one is VeloNews, and I've got a couple of acquaintances who work there, but I noticed they had a big shift this year towards covering gravel because mostly a lot of people were sick of reading about the road scene. They, to me, brought across a roadie flavor to the gravel which does not sit well at all with me, and they had this list of monuments of gravel.

There's a couple of those races that are run by friends of mine, so I'm not dissing those events, but just the way they covered it I thought was rubbish honestly. It's just glorifying road racing in a gravel form. Now, talking about the pros that go on there. I'm thinking, you know what, man? I don't care about the pros who will go on there. I'm there to have a good experience and talk to regular people. I'm more interested in talking to the man or woman who finished last in the race. They're just out there having fun. Who cares about some dude who retired last week, he's a pro, end up smashing it? I have zero interest in reading about that sort of stuff.

In fact, there's one pro, I'm not going to mention his name, but now he's training harder than ever and I say why? To beat up on guys like me with a regular job as well? Seriously, man? So that sort of stuff, I worry about that taking away from the grassroots aspect because I was starting to see a divisive line where you have these big events, and then you have these smaller events which I think will still maintain their feel and the bigger events will draw more of the roadie crowd and maybe the race heroes will want to go try to beat up on some of the ex-pros.

So that's fine. There's enough for everyone to go around. But definitely seeing some changes.

Kristin: Yeah, for sure. I do value so much what you said about the monuments. It's almost as though they're grafting on a genre of cycling journalism onto a different facet of the sport in a way, I think they're almost feeling like they're making it understandable to their audience that way, when in actuality I don't think it's an apples-to-apples comparison at all. Honestly, even the pros that have crossed over to do it would tell you the same thing.

I also just wanted to say Allison Tetrick was somebody who's been doing this for years and years, and it's not like the most recent bumper crop of pro cyclists who are now doing this are pioneering something.

Jayson: Correct. Allison's been around a long time. She's a lovely lady. I've had the pleasure of meeting her several times, and she likes to have a beer or two. I like her a lot. Nice girl.

Kristin: And very funny. Her Twitter feed never, ever disappoints. So, I'm curious, first of all, you're drinking a Jolt cola and I wasn't sure that that brand even existed anymore. What's going on with that?

Jayson: Jolt remanufactured the line a couple years ago. I'm not actually sure who was the company behind it. I used to be an addict of Jolt cola when I was a younger lad, so I acquired quite a stash for not a lot of money and I use it usually as race fuel. So for today's interview, I'm getting suitably jacked on Jolt. [crosstalk 00:19:51] touch caffeine.

I have pretty average coffee in the house. In fact, if I do race, I often use the Jolt, like I said, or I take a bowl of oatmeal and straight black coffee, and I call it coffee meal. It's amazing.

Kristin: Oh my gosh, that's actually a really good idea.

Jayson: It is. So, you've heard it first here. If anyone steals it, it's my idea. Okay?

Kristin: Okay, we could trademark that.

Jayson: Credit to me, yes, please.

Kristin: One thing I'm also, obviously we don't need to get into your day job, necessarily, but I do

think it's incredibly proud that you've built the community that you have and the media empire, if you will, that you have around it.

Well, I think in a lot of ways, you really established a stamp on this type of journalism and cycling, but I'm sure one of the things that has been, as an ex-journalist, one of the things that probably has also stood out as odd for you lately is the fact that you're getting wined and dined and flown all over internationally for product launches. Talk about what it's like to be a gravel journalist today with the press trip opportunities. Because that sure is, you know what, didn't happen three or four years ago I'm sure.

Jayson: Yeah. Well I never started the website with that intent ever in mind. In fact, the first time

I was contacted by Parlee Cycles to do a bike review, it's like seriously? And I thought to myself, okay, I have no idea how to review a bike. I'm going to look at how these other people are doing it. I found a way that I thought worked for me, being genuine and not trying to sell advertising. The bike launch is pretty amazing. I've been very flattered and been to some pretty cool locations in this year and last year particularly.

In fact, I just returned from Spain just before the coronavirus broke out for a bike launch. I can't talk about it right now, it's embargo, and that's just blown my mind. These are basically fantasy cycling camps most of the time. You're wined, you're dined. You get to ride really nice bikes in amazing areas. It's all covered by the company. Then you go home and you write about it. It's pretty amazing actually.

Kristin: I remember those years, Jayson. They were some of the best in my life.

Jayson: It's a nice perk. But a lot of people don't realize, okay, that's a nice perk, but it wasn't like

this happened overnight. I put a lot of work into this website. You mentioned I have a regular job. I don't want to mention what I do for work. I don't work for the CIA, I promise you that, but-

Kristin: I'm pretty sure you're not a police officer, even though you were quoting that movie earlier.

Jayson: No, not a police officer. My regular work is actually boring IT-related stuff. But anyway,

that point aside, I get a lot of vacation time from my job, which I can meter out. I have this official spreadsheet to meter out my vacation time so I can attend events. My boss is a good bloke. He knows what I get up to sometimes.

The other thing is, I'm not married and I've got no kids. In fact, I'm probably the most eligible bachelor in gravel cycling. I had to plug myself there, you like that? But my life's unrealistic compared to most people. I've got a lot of free time but since the site's grown, et cetera, I've been really focused on just pumping out content. Not just garbage. I get a lot of press releases and stuff and whatnot, because my site has become a hub of information for a lot of people. But my reviews in particular, people like that, and they also like my ride experience videos. I ride by myself a lot, so I've been doing the social distancing thing for a long time. I'll be in the middle of nowhere. I did some really awesome rides back in the start of January 2020 in Australia on the edge of the Outback, and oh my god, all I saw was kangaroos out there. It was amazing.

Kristin: I watched some of that and it's great footage. I also just want to let anybody and everybody know who's listening to this who might be dedicated to indoor training right now, which so many of us are, Jayson has posted some fantastic 90-minute, which is perfect, distance, or length rather. So you've got the DK, you've got Steamboat, and you just posted one more.

Jayson: Yeah, I'm very fortunate. The videos I've always posted have been edited down for YouTube. Basically 10 minutes tops. But I had all this stash of video, and I had this idea that came from another friend of mine, and I said, "What if I made some training videos?" Ironically, COVID broke out, and now it's worked out pretty well.

So I've got, oh my god, at least 50 event videos probably. I've got terabytes of data. Good problem to have.

Kristin: That is a great problem to have. So, make sure you check those out because, literally, it's a lot better than ... I mean, Watopia's great and all but I really ... It's great for me because I'm supposed to be doing these events, assuming they happen, and I've never done DK. I've never done Crusher. I have done Steamboat and it's literally, I mean, yes, they pay me to say this, but it's hands-down a fantastic event. Then obviously, now, Verde's working with Lifetime, so we have Crusher, we have Big Sugar and DK on our calendar, which is exciting.

Jayson: Yeah.

Kristin: I really, really hope that we can get together. Just on that note, you guys can probably see that Jayson's wearing a Gravel Cyclist t-shirt. He was wearing one that said, "Gravel Cycling's Most Eligible Bachelor," but I made him change right before we hit play.

Jayson: Oh my god.

Kristin: Sorry, I had to put that in there. So, I wanted to also ask a couple questions, first of all, about, you just brought up, obviously, the fact that these, I did and you did, about the races potentially not happening. You saw that we launched recently, just a couple days

ago now, that the Dirty Kanza's launched a, it's almost like we took our camp format and we're putting it into an online party where people can still get the content, so our 100 campers, they get the content free, and there is an actual blueprint in there that we present at the camp. So, there's actually resourceful information in there too, but we really worked hard to build in a very entertaining content lineup over the three days of this online event, and thank you for posting that.

But the whole purpose of that is to try to bring people together, and we have some pretty, I think they're quite on-brand and Michelle Duffy and Kristi Mohn have had a great time pulling that together. So thank you for posting that. But what else do you think that we can do to bring this community together, because you're obviously a media entity in and of yourself? I'm curious to know what you're seeing out there in the landscape. Aside from people getting together on Zwift or potentially this summit that we're hosting, what are some of the things that you think are going to work to keep people connected during this time?

Jayson: Well for me, I made one announcement about COVID because I don't really want to keep talking about it. We know it's out there, so I want to focus on the positive. So, just real quick, my announcement was basically, "People, try and refrain from doing group rides. It's not a good idea right now." That's the only thing I had to say about the issue.

So, moving on from there, I'm focusing on hammering out as much content as possible, whether it's ride videos, press releases, silly stories, anything. Basically, I think people are looking to be engaged. They want good news. They don't want to keep hearing about COVID-19.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jayson: So, I'm in the fortunate situation of sitting on a massive pile of content. I have the world's worst problem, which I love. So it's just a matter of me pumping the stuff out. So I'm going to keep just pumping out content and showing, I'm fortunate I can ride still outdoors, so on my Instagram account, I'm posting photographs of riding bikes, scenery and whatnot, so I'm just trying to keep people engaged and distracted from the issue at hand.

Kristin: I agree. I think that's exactly what we should be doing because this is our happy place.

Jayson: Totally is.

Kristin: So, let's talk about your channels. Obviously, you've had a lot of interesting growth over the past couple years, especially, I'm sure, from an audience standpoint, and I know that you're working over with Craig at his podcast. Let's talk about that partnership. Let's talk about some of the things that you've seen spike in terms of the way people are engaging with and consuming your content, where your audience is growing today.

Jayson: Okay. So, when I decided the website, I thought, hm, I should probably do some social

media because who's going to find the website? So I started with Facebook for starters, and that's been a slow platform to grow. It's gotten quite a lot now, but it was initially pretty slow.

Then, another friend of mine said I should do Instagram and I thought, hang on, isn't that for Millennial kiddies? I don't know. So, I started doing Instagram awhile ago, probably about four years ago I think it was. It started going berserk about a year and a half ago. I'm at 65,000 followers.

Kristin: Wow.

Jayson: Yeah, I'm pretty stoked about that. Mine's been purely organic. There's no paid subscribers or paid followers or any of that rubbish. My focus is on bike photographs

and

scenery. Once in a while, you might see me in a photograph where I've used my drone to show me riding a review bike, okay? I'm not into selfies. I see a lot of channels with selfies and whatnot, it's like, okay, I don't want to see narcissism-ville. I'm here to look at cool bike photographs and whatnot. So that's my focus.

Also, I use Instagram as a teaser to generate interest on my reviews. So a lot of times I'll post a video on YouTube of me unboxing a bike and talking about the key features. Real short video. Then, I will encourage people to check their Instagram and I'll post teasers of me riding the bike during the review process until a review comes out. I think I'm the only guy doing that, so hopefully no one steals my idea.

I don't know, I mean I don't want to just to and see a review. I want to see what led up to the review. I also do real-world reviews. My reviews aren't sitting around a bloody parking lot riding a bike in circles and having a camera crew film me. It's me doing everything. So, I think there's something to be said for that.

Kristin: How many miles do you put on a bike for a review, on average? Or what are some of the things? Like, do you have an actual, "I have to ride it for this long or in this many different conditions," et cetera?

Jayson: Honestly, I like to have the bike for at least six weeks because you're not going to get a proper opinion of a bike in two rides. That's too hard to do. I mean, you could do a short-term review I guess, but still, I want to have a proper review. Honestly, I'd really like to have at least three months, if the manufacturer's cool with it. Some manufacturers, they give me carte blanche. I had one manufacturer, I had the bike for 10 months. They didn't care. The review came out at some point. They just liked seeing the post on Instagram and social media.

A lot of times, I've got multiple bikes going on. In fact, oh my god, this hurts my head thinking about it, October last year, I stupidly agreed to have way too many bikes in my house at once, and there's a reason why I live alone. I mean, the bloody living room's full of bikes. So, I had nine review bikes at once. It got really overwhelming and I said, okay, this year I'm not going to have as much going on, so I've toned it down a little bit.

But yeah, the bike reviews I really enjoy doing because I'm a bike geek, and that's one of the big draw cards for me doing the website. I'm really fortunate. I get sent some amazing bikes and all the latest gear to play with, and I haven't ridden any of my own bikes for quite some time. It's pretty embarrassing actually.

Kristin: It sounds like you have just a fantastic job and you're super passionate about what you do, and I love that. I have a very dear friend who literally I've known for 25 years in Aaron Gulley, who has run the Outside Magazine bike test forever. He's now freelance, but he and his wife Jen would literally get a box van and load a bunch of bikes in there and go down and have whiskey and ... It's almost like a VRBO before they had VRBOs. He would invite people down to help him. I always loved his approach and I love learning about how people write about and review gear, because that's what I used to do when I was a journalist.

I also think that sites like Blister.com do a really good job with the super, super long-form reviews, and they do take a long time reviewing. Are there any other sites out there like DC Rainmaker or any outside of our industry? He's a little inside now, but are there any sites out there that, maybe you're in the automotive industry or some other industry that you think do just a great job with reviews?

Jayson: Yeah, well first of all, DC Rainmaker, that guy, I had the pleasure of meeting him in Australia this year, he has set the benchmark for anything related to electronics. I said I don't even want to review electronics. It was such a pain in the bum. So that's his domain.

But I watch, I'm a bit of a car nut to some degree, and there's a reviewer I noticed a couple years ago. He's quite well known, his name is Doug DeMuro. His style is, he just wears shorts and t-shirt like me, and I looked at how he did his videos and said, "That's how I'm going to model my bike reviews. Just be very genuine. Try and cover as much detail as you can."

But the difference is, I've also incorporated drone technology into my videos. I find that people, if I look at a magazine review, it's like this is boring. It's 2-D. Come on. So I want to see video of me riding the bike. That's how I always thought about it. When the drone technology became available, it's like this is my own private helicopter. This is amazing. So, I've been leveraging that big time, and different camera angles. I got a few other little cameras I use. I'm not going to give all my secrets away.

But yeah, I try and get creative because most of the reviews I see are boring. I think you need to have some personality in there as well. I don't want to drone on in a monotone voice saying, "Oh, this bike's got amazing compliance." If I ever hear that word one more time, that is the most overused C-word in cycling journalism. Compliance. And supple. Can you think of some different words, people? Seriously. So I try to avoid using those words totally.

Kristin: You bring up such an important point for my audience, which is the humanization of the

process.

Jayson: Right.

Kristin: When people see formulaic, they actually are getting very smart. It's almost like the new way to stuff keywords into a headline is to make a review formulaic and I think that there's a lot of content creators out there who feel that there is an approach that you have to follow. Anybody who steers away from that and brings their personal touch to it, I think if, assuming they have a good personality, which you do, sometimes you're just like, "Really? That joke was not funny." Or can you please tell me a joke or something? I mean, we are not curing cancer. This is gravel cycling. We want to have fun. I just feel that some of the commercials, for example, I've seen specialized producing awesome fun on YouTube, and we'll put links in the podcast notes.

But anything you could do to humanize it I think is what's important, which I think is why this visual content is becoming incredibly important and of course we're not going to drone on and on about COVID, but coming out of this as a communications professional owning an agency, it is literally going to be video or nothing else I think. People are just completely tethered to their browsers, and I know that it's going to change consumer behavior, how we research products and how we join communities online. So, how long have you had your YouTube channel? Let's talk a little bit about how you've seen that evolving.

Jayson: It's about five years. I started the channel not long after I started the website, and that has really been, it's been pretty frustrating trying to grow the subscriber base. I'm sure you know yourself. But that point aside, it's gradually gotten a following and people recognize, I'd like to think, that I do genuine reviews. None of my reviews are paid for. I've got no advertising [inaudible 00:35:30] coming in for this bike. I don't believe in that sort of stuff.

Like I said, I think they're pretty genuine. I try and be very honest, and I've given grief many times in my videos to some of the bikes I've had. I don't want to name any names, but there's some dumb features I've seen on some of these bikes and I usually call them out. But I try and be honest in reviews so it's not a complete slam fest, because people are also thinking outside the box for some of these bikes, and I encourage that.

Kristin: Yeah.

Jayson: Because a lot of bikes are so boring. Like, all these manufacturers jump on the bandwagon, it's like okay, let's get a right bike, give it bigger tire clearance and then slap a bloody label on it. It's like, man, that's just a bogus cross bike with another name. Come on.

So I really like some of the bikes I've seen. I'll plug one real quick. Niner have got this full suspension bike, the NCR. I'm reviewing it right now. The bike's bloody amazing. It's not for everybody, but that sort of - outside the box. It's full suspension. It gets people into the sport who may not be so comfortable riding bumpy roads or going down crazy [inaudible 00:36:30] descents. So I really like those sorts of designs.

There's no rules in gravel and I hope that stays. They haven't got the UCI clamping down on what bikes you can ride or USA cycling as well. In fact, I did a video about that. I should link it to you. I called it the ultimate end to UCI gravel bike. [inaudible 00:36:52] I made fun of the UCI basically.

Kristin: Well, we'll definitely put the links to that in the show notes, and I think that that brings my next question up perfectly is, looking at the evolution of the bike, we don't need to go into Captain Hindsight on everybody's viewpoint on this, but we're now seeing I think, basically, people coming in from road or cross side, or people coming in from a mountain bike side influence. I feel like we're going to have more choice than ever, and people might identify with their past identities as a roadie or a cross person or a mountain biker and think, "This is more for me." But really, it's more about looking at where you're going to be riding the bike and the type of experience that you want to have.

So for me personally, I would like to have one bike that does it all. Even though I love bikes and would love to have five, that's just not my reality. Especially now going through what we're going through. But what are the things people can look at, instead of looking at this came from this side or this came from this side, how would you approach this if you were a person who just was like I'm really curious about joining the gravel cycling community, I want to do more of these events, where do I even start? That's where I'm looking.

Jayson: That's a good question, because there are so many choices and it can be pretty daunting to be honest. Well, there's some guys out there I guess have been written about what bike to choose. But I have, well you can contact me through the website, I've got two ways of doing that, and I get asked a lot of questions about how to choose a bike. I try not to name brands and whatnot, but I try and advise people on what sort of ride are you trying to do. Are you going to ride or you're going to race? Also, your locality depends a lot about the bike. What needs you might have in Colorado are very different from, say, Northern California. So those are sort of the things you have to look at.

You turn back the clock, say four years, so much has changed with the development of the bike. It's staggering the amount of bikes now. It almost hurts my head thinking about it. But yeah, I don't know. There's no ultimate do-it-all bike I don't think, and all I can say to that question, Kristin, if anyone wants to ask me a question about what bike they should buy, you can ask me, but I'm not going to name a brand. I'm going to just mention some as guidelines, like I suggested. Because I don't really want to shoehorn myself into one brand.

Kristin: Well, it's so interesting, because if you look at how the bike shops have served this consumer that I'm describing, now this consumer comes in with a lot of YouTube content or a lot of, they've done their homework, they've been watching things. Then they go to a shop, and honestly, sometimes you can't find bikes to test, and there are very few place outside of these events that might be incredibly intimidating for people to go to a demo or an expo to see this, so my hope is that as we're becoming more consumer-friendly in cycling through all the changes that are happening right now that

we will have a way to potentially enable consumers to test this product, because it's a big investment. So I always go back to my sister-in-law, Carter, and she's in her mid-50s, super fit from doing all her spin classes and everything like that. She lives in Houston and watched all of my crazy shenanigans last year doing Leadville and Steamboat and all these other things, and literally she called me one day. She's like, "I really am wanting to do this. I want to get off the road. I want to get outside of the gym."

She just went down to four different shops in Houston. Three of them treated her like she was an idiot. Then, she went to the one that was just fantastic and spent two days with somebody there, like in the afternoon for a couple hours, testing bikes. She ended up getting a BMC URS and loves it. They fit her, and she will not buy anything from any store, any other store, than that place. That's how much it meant to her to be treated like that, so I just want to put a shout out there because I have a lot of small specialty brands and retailers that listen to this. I really believe that, as we're able to come back from this, that experience is going to really win the day, especially in something like gravel. People just want to be part of it and that shop experience is a big part of that.

If you feel like you're being turned away at the door of a bike shop, you don't feel like you can join a community like gravel and experience being part of that. So I just want to emphasize that again. I put that out there as often as I can because I really think it's a powerful story.

But yeah, I love that you brought up, I know we aren't supposed to mention brand names, but what you mentioned about the Niner I think is super interesting. I do know there's more bikes than ever and that you are testing them throughout the year, right?

Jayson: I test about 12-13 a year. Usually stage them out once a month, if everything goes to plan on the YouTube channel. I've got I think about three or four right now. I've got more inbound, so it's a big first-world problem. But the one thing I want to mention is that you don't need a fancy bike if you want to dip your feet into this sport.

There's no bike rules. So I think it's important for people to realize you don't have to spend a lot of money to start off and try it and see if you like it. Then, maybe go from there.

With my reviews, like I said, I try and review lots of different bikes. I reviewed a budget bike last year, it was \$600. I also review a lot of high-end bikes. So, I try and keep things varied. People, like I said, are very blessed with choices right now, so that's a good problem to have because just, I remember 2011 when I mentioned earlier this race I doing in North Carolina, we had a ghetto tubeless setup. That's what that was.

Kristin: That's awesome. We're not going to again look at where we are in Q1 of 2020, so let's just remove that from my next question. Where do you see gravel evolving to? You pretty much have seen fire and rain here, Jayson, so I'm sure you've developed a gut instinct. You're starting to really embed with a lot of the players on these press trips. You've gotten to know a lot of the race promoters. Where is it going and how can we keep it special?

Jayson: Like I alluded to earlier, I see this line forming of these really big events and it's going to draw a different type of crowd. There's going to be people who want to race hard at the front. There's no problem with that. And there's going to be a lot of people there for the fun experience, hopefully.

We're also going to see, I think 90% of the gravel events, in my mind, are going to stay the same. They're going to be smaller grassroots, Facebook-type events, whatever. There's no prize money. None of us are doing this for prize money, I think. Or maybe 99% of us aren't. I think as soon as you bring money in, it kind of changes things a little bit. So hopefully that mostly stays out of it.

But I really do think that's going to be the thing. Hopefully USA Cycling stays away, UCI stays away, and keeps the 90% going. Because most people, we're just here to have a good time and finish the ride. I don't care about my bloody time. I don't. I'm to worried about that at all. In fact, I rode Steamboat Gravel as a tour last year. I stopped about 30 times, filmed a lot of it, took a bunch of photographs. That's how I race.

Kristin: I bet you still beat my time.

Jayson: I don't know about that. You know what was funny, if Mark is watching this, Mark Satkiewicz, g'day, Mark, most guys hammered me on the day before. I interviewed a bunch of riders, and every good cyclist has a bunch of excuses. I got a ton of excuses. So, when race day came around, I was supposed to do the 140 and my legs felt like absolute garbage. Living in Florida, I'm at sea level. 135 feet. I can't train for 8,000 feet. So I said, "Okay, ruined the tour Steamboat Springs today and I had a lovely, lovely time."

Kristin: That's awesome, and no one really cared. They were just happy you were there.

Jayson: Yeah. No, no, I met a lot of really cool people out there and that race, the scenery alone is a reason to do it. Oh my god, yeah.

Kristin: It's so beautiful. I know. It's like a hidden gem. Wait til you see what we might pull out of Durango here in the next couple years. I do think that there's going to be some sort of awesome event emerging from here. There's a lot out there, but we will do it in the style that will keep things weird. That's the number one thing.

Even before all this mess that happened, I saw this incredibly funny thing on Instagram the other day that was like, "Attention," it was like a fake press release announcing that 2020 was going to just be like skipped. It was perfect. I was like, yes, that sounds good. But at the same time, even before all this happened, I have been talking a lot about how people don't want to follow institutions anymore and they're really self-identifying with brands or things that they do in their free time with their passion.

That has been true forever, I realize, but the idea of people forming communities around religion or government or USA Cycling or whatever, I feel like the more that people can get away from that and fly their own flag and join their people, that to me has already been in process and my sense is that's what's happening right now with this

paradigm shift is it's going to make it even more powerful to just break away from the herd mentality, frankly, and we don't need to have institutions to identify who we are anymore. It's more just getting together with people who like the same thing you do and go have fun.

Jayson: Exactly. Spot on. Actually, one thing I want to mention real quick, and it's going back to talking about events. The one thing I like about a lot of these smaller events is how they all bring their own unique kind of style of doing things.

There's a race out in California, it's called Rock Cobbler. I've never done this race but I want to do it, it's on my list. The promoter, Sam Ames, he's a pretty nice bloke, he's like a drill sergeant on course, you get to the top of some climb and you have to drop and do 20 pushups. I'm thinking this is madness, man. You're running through some guy's house. That sort of stuff.

I have an event down here in Gainesville, [inaudible 00:46:54] it's on Facebook. It's completely free and it's called the Heartbreaker. It's a homage to Tom Petty. He's originally from Gainesville. Unfortunately, he's no longer with us. But my event, it starts off as a neutral roll out, and if you want to ride hard, that's up to you. It's not a race, but people ride hard. When we cross the finish line, so to speak, we all regroup and one of my friends rides the course toting bob trailer full of beer. So we have the beer wagon, and everyone has nice beers after the ride, and we ride back into town together and have even more beers.

So a lot of these events are getting a few things like that, which I think is awesome. Which you don't see at the big races. So that's one of the reasons I want to see that sort of stuff stick around.

Kristin: Right. Did you say beer wagon or wagon?

Jayson: That's what it's called, the beer wagon. Yeah. Yeah.

Kristin: Awesome. That's a perfect way to reuse a bob trailer as well, and I might have one of those stuffed in my garage somewhere. So, I might pull out my own beer wagon.

Jayson: Yeah, just need to lash a cord to it, chuck in some really crap beer and meet some people for a ride. Awesome time. And it's great training.

Kristin: As he takes a pull of his Jolt cola. I think that's a perfect way for us to close today, everybody. Jayson, it's been awesome having you here. I needed this boost of just laughing in this whole moment that we're living through. I can't wait to see how your channel and your community continue to evolve. Thank you for all you've done to help build where we are today. I know you're one of the people who will keep it sacred and special, so thank you so much for your time today.

Jayson: My pleasure. Thank you for having me.

