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Back to the drawing board

Canadian designs innovative road frame

It's pretty tough to get your product noticed in a sea of artistic and creative bike designs, but Lou Tortola was able to garner plenty of attention at the 2011 San Diego Custom Bicycle Show. Tortola, who was born in Italy but now calls Windsor, Ontario home, has invented a new bike frame design called the Roundtail.

You'll either love or hate the way it looks. The bike frame has a traditional toptube, downtube and headtube, but instead of a typical rear triangle consisting of a seattube and seat and chainstays, the Roundtail uses two parallel rings. The front and rear derailleur mounts, as well as the rear dropouts and rear brake mount are all attached directly to the rings.

The benefit of the design, said Tortola, is greatly improved ride comfort. "What I've done is removed the direct path of travel from the bottom bracket to the seat. All of the stresses that occur at the bottom have to travel the circle and the vibrations that would normally make it to your back are lost," he said. "When you get off the bike you just feel better, and that was the whole idea with the design."

The timeline from original concept to the bike's unveiling

in San Diego was surprisingly short. Tortola, who rode about 5,000 km last year, said it was on one of his longer rides that he came up with the idea. "I saw something on the bike that I thought I could change. I had some tooling built in Windsor and sent them to [custom frame builder Paul Taylor in] Montana," he said, adding that the whole process took less than five months.

Tortola wanted to stick to his Italian roots, so he dealt directly with Campagnolo to provide the prototype's Super Record groupset and is using Italian steel for the front triangle. To be able to shape the rings, he's using 4130 chromoly.

The Roundtail is now in production and is being built one at a time by Taylor, considered to be among the top frame builders in North America. The custom-built frames cost \$2,150. The plan is to add a titanium version built by Lynskey Performance in Tennessee in time for the September Interbike show, and Tortola is also in talks to have a carbon fibre model produced.

In order to make the Roundtail design more accessible to less serious riders, a lower-priced, mass-produced hybrid and mountain bike version, made in Taiwan, should be available this fall for \$1,000. **G**