

Portability, novel design are a winning combination for Ottolock

By Val Vanderpool

PORTLAND, Ore. — Road cyclists typically don't ride with a bulky lock stuffed into a jersey pocket, which can make impromptu stops along the way difficult. This bothered pro road racer Jacob Rathe, who came up with an idea for a lock that was



The Ottolock is available in three sizes and three colors online and through distributors and shops.

light and easy to carry. But he had trouble bringing his concept from a prototype into production.

That is until he met Jake VanderZanden one day at Portland's iconic Stumptown Coffee Roasters. VanderZanden, also a longtime road racer, owned Otto, a brand under which he initially launched an app for tuning rear derailleurs.



Pro cyclist Jacob Rathe conceived the zip tie-style cinch lock to make spontaneous stops during long rides possible.

"I started Otto with the goal of creating purposeful new products. The Tuning System is the foundation of the company, but it was a commercial flop," said VanderZanden, president of Ottolock. "So as someone who has trained and raced for 30 years but has never bought a bike lock, I thought Jacob's lock was a

good concept. And maybe I could help launch it through Otto."

So VanderZanden and Rathe worked with engineer Ryan Hall to fine-tune the design, using strip steel to create a locking zip tie-style cinch lock. They took a sample and some sketches to Interbike in 2015, and based on positive feedback they received there, VanderZanden and Rathe made additional improvements, including nixing an early version with a plastic lock head and adding Kevlar to the band for extra reinforcement. All told, there were eight major revisions to get the Ottolock to its current production specs.

The Ottolock launched on Kickstarter in August 2016, and by the end of the 30-day campaign 4,000 backers had raised just over \$352,000, allowing the company to bring the lock into production.

So far, the company has sold more than 30,000 locks, which are made in the U.S.

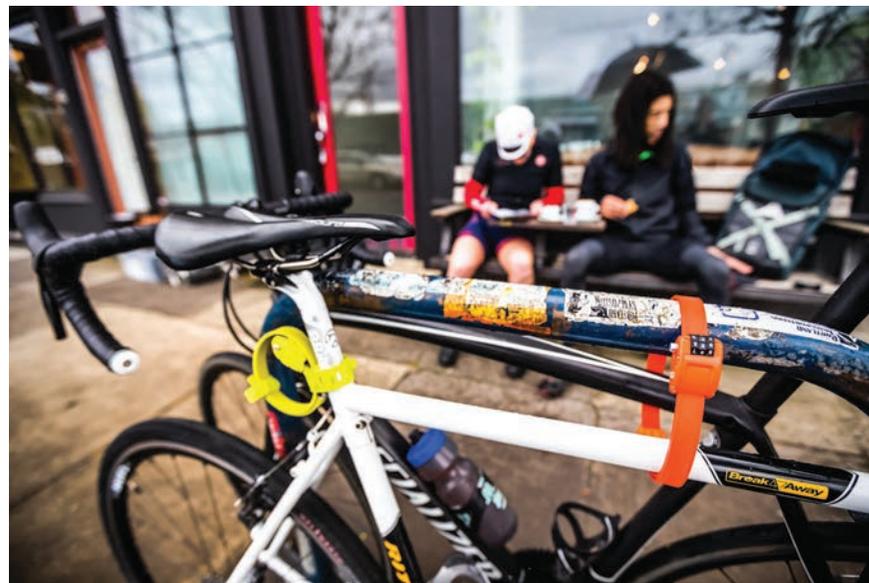
"Ten different companies contribute to it being built. We source our steel in Connecticut and our Kevlar in Pennsylvania," VanderZanden said. "The band comes from Wisconsin, our paint from Medford, Oregon, small parts are all put together in Portland, and casting is done in Vancouver, Washington. We have rivets coming from California and other parts from Arizona. It's a U.S.-made supply chain, and it's working."

The Ottolock is cut-resistant due to a design that uses multiple layers of high-temper, 18-millimeter-wide stainless steel bands that are coated in highly durable plastic and Kevlar. For anyone locking their bike for extended periods of time, VanderZanden said he recommends redundant locking, but that the Ottolock is ideal for short-stay stops along a ride route or for running quick errands.

The lock is available in 18-, 30- and 60-inch lengths in three colors. The Ottolock's aluminum head has three resettable combination wheels. The 18-inch model retails for \$55, the 30-inch lock for \$65, and the 60-inch for \$65.

"We've had zero resistance on pricing. But that's why we did it on Kickstarter — to feel it out," VanderZanden said. "I think there isn't that much comparison to be made, because we created this new category of the zip tie or cinch lock."

The 30-inch lock weighs 115 grams and coils to less than 3 inches, making it easy to stow in jersey or backpack pockets, on the bike or in a seat bag. This size



Made 100 percent in the U.S., Ottolock was designed for short-stay stops.



The Ottolock is lightweight and stows into a jersey pocket or seatbag.

in black accounts for more than half of the company's sales.

"I think like a traditional old roadie. We thought the smallest and lightest 18-inch size would be the most popular, but the 30-inch is what we sell the majority of," VanderZanden said. "You can do two bikes, a wheel, a post and part of the bike with that length. But our 60-inch lock sales are growing too, because you can lock multiple bikes in the back of a truck or top of a car. And more people are using them to lock bikes while bikepacking or touring, where weight is a big deal."

But the company is also seeing sales grow in other markets, including outdoor.

"We get inquiries every day from some new vertical sector. Contractors are using them for locking up ladders, we're getting orders for corporate gifts and people want to use them to lock up canoes, kayaks or stuff on the back of their quad when they go for a hike," VanderZanden said.

Ottolocks are currently sold through J&B Importers and KHS, on Amazon and dealer direct through about two dozen bike shops.

"I'm really big, as our whole company is, on user-centric design and feedback, and we really appreciate being able to get dealer and consumer feedback directly," VanderZanden said. "We want our feelers close to the market, even in a small way."

VanderZanden predicts the company will quadruple or quintuple its growth in 2018. Ottolock has seven full-time employees and 10 contract employees who assemble the locks, and works with other contractors for design and social media. More than 400 locks are made each day in one shift — and though the founders didn't necessarily anticipate it, they're prepared to scale production.

"We honestly didn't plan for so much success, I think the market figured it out almost faster than me," VanderZanden said. "I think there was an unmet need for this type of lock, and Ottolock changed the paradigm. People got it immediately. I'm a 54-year-old guy who raced for 30 years and never owned a bike lock. But now that I've done it, stopping on rides is possible. You can always carry it, for just in case." **BRAIN**