

Hitting Guide Gnarly Trails

Gnarly, with its unconventional approach to mountain biking, specifically in races, training, and athlete support, is making waves in the sport.

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Mountain biking, as we know it, is transforming into a mainstream activity. To build on this momentum, two avid cyclists have brought forth the idea of harnessing leisure cycling, races, and training into what has manifested as Gnarly MTB.

It all started in early 2015 from a tiny storeroom with damp walls, dungeon-like lighting, and iffy phone signal. The lair in Patan was what would be called Gnarly headquarters. It came into existence with a simple idea: to nurture biking through a comprehensive approach. It stemmed out of the budding cycling scene not merely for utility and recreation, but equally in competitive sport and tourism. Two years on, Gnarly is picking up dust and has moved from a storeroom to a kitchen, and is now fully virtual.

Evolving their strategy with changing biking trends and technology at their disposal, the company fuses races, youth training, and athlete support. Gnarly is now working round the clock to bring to Nepal a series of high-end races in 2017. While the races are intended to raise the standard of mountain biking in the country, a robust ecosystem around the sport is equally crucial. With this in mind, Gnarly conducts regular skill training camps to usher in the next generation of bikers, and provide athlete support to groom promising ones. In addition to organizing five successful races thus far, it has provided skills training to almost 200 school kids, and regularly supports several local athletes in national and international race participation. Rest assured, Gnarly is striving to overhaul races in Nepal, and put the fun between the legs.

MTB Races

Race director and co-founder of Gnarly, Shyam Limbu, says, "Each race Gnarly has organized has been a learning opportunity, and we've always made a point of listening to participants and volunteers to improve further." Having taken off with XC and DH events, Gnarly is now zeroing in on the hottest style of biking that's taken the biking world by storm—Enduro.

It comes as no surprise why enduro has gained popularity in Nepal, because trails with gradual ups and steep downs are a dime a dozen. In fact, the biggest race they've organized so far has been Asian Enduro Series, the first edition of which took place in Nagarkot's hills, east of Kathmandu, in April 2016. More than 50 riders showed up, half of them being international mountain bikers, among whom were the likes of national champions of Belgium and Taiwan. "The race had seven stages, which means it was equivalent to organizing seven downhill races. It was draining, and the team was spent by the end of the day. But the event was a roaring success, with demands to organize more enduro races."

Keeping this in mind, Gnarly has now come up with its latest program, Nepal Enduro, which will seek enduro trails in different parts of the country for races. "Nepal has amazing trails, no doubt, and many frequent these within Kathmandu and outside," says Limbu. "But, in order to really promote biking, races are important, and they definitely have to be innovative," he adds.

These mountain biking events have come in different forms, and for the most part, Gnarly has been testing the waters to see what works and what doesn't. With changing technology at its disposal, along with race techniques and riding trends, Gnarly has constantly evolved its own strategy in order to bring the best to domestic as well as international racers, professional races and aficionados, alike.

Past

Showdown Dharan, January 2015

100 participants from six countries, including Bhutan's racing team. Highest cash prize till date in any mountain biking race for individual winners for a one-day event.

Nakhipot Urban XC, August 2015

First urban cross-country race of Nepal, with more than 150 participants. Also introduced kids' category (including participants as young as four years old). Around 5,000 spectators.

Tansen Ultra, December 2015

More than 85 participants from 11 countries. Largest ever race in Nepal, with more than 12,000 spectators. The event was a mega success, despite the crippling economic blockade.

Training

“We firmly believe that the next generation of mountain bikers needs to be bred, and encouraging kids from a young age is imperative. This is the reason why we have actively conducted training programs in various schools, as well as child shelters. We recently held these basic training and orientation programs in RIBS, Triyog, and Himalayan Children’s Foundation. We are looking to collaborate with more schools and colleges in the near future.”

“We’re quite pleased to take the initiative to encourage cycling among women,” says Shyam. “In fact, we’re providing cycling workshops to ladies, focusing mainly on basic riding skills like shifting gear, braking, and pedaling uphill. We want to ensure safety among newcomers.” Conducted by professional cyclists at Gnarly, such brief workshops are free for female riders who are interested in the sport. Among a handful of trainees preparing rigorously for their biking career are Nishma Shrestha, 18, Saria Sato, 16, homemaker Hama Shyam, 23, and Juria Bajracharya, 14. “They’re all doing quite well, and we hope to have more ladies train with us.”

In order to redouble their efforts, Gnarly organizes regular group rides to various parts of the valley through Squadron, which is an open community of bikers. “There are several rides each week, longer ones being over the weekends. We welcome



anyone who wants to join, regardless of their experience level. In fact, we encourage newcomers to join. It’s a great opportunity to meet and learn from seasoned riders. These rides are casual, and designed to be a learning opportunity for beginners.”

Athletes

As heartbreaking as it is true, many Nepali elite athletes – cyclists no exception – have had to give up sports and emigrate for labor work. “This is a forgone talent and wasted potential of our nation,” says Limbu. So as to help athletes sustain themselves through sponsorships and endorsements, Gnarly mobilizes its resources and marketing channels to manage several downhill, cross-country and enduro riders.” Developing and maintaining athletes’ websites,

videos and promotional collaterals; grooming them to handle sponsors and media queries; and funding athletes in national and international races are some of the major tasks Gnarly is involved in. Very recently, Gnarly sponsored Prachit Thapa Magar in the 7-stage XC Mustang Madness race, and Suman Tamang for a DH race in Nagaland, India. These are but few of the athletes Gnarly is directly supporting.

Join Gnarly Squadron - Free group rides

Tranquil hills come alive in the evening as squads mounted on sturdy mountain bikes put their skills and courage to test on uneven trails. Let every jump, turn and swerve along pristine villages, farmlands and ridgelines become the highlight of your day with Evening Rides, hosted by Gnarly. “Everyone is welcome to join, irrespective of biking skills. And of course, it’s free!” exclaims Shyam, who organizes such regular rides. “Spend the evenings wheeling around the capital valley riding across mud trails while surrounded by picturesque beauty of nature. Moreover, this is also an opportunity for our trainees to practice their guiding skills,” he adds.

Traditional houses, smelly chicken coop, snotty kids and a vast paddy fields mark the pleasant countryside rides. The sight of white herons flying overhead as the cool fall breeze hits your sweaty face will be quite an experience. Splash some water as you traverse muddy streams and brooklets whence undulating trails take you over a wobbly suspension bridge to little known villages tucked away from guide books. In these rides you get to spend quality time socializing, sharing ideas experiences, in the company of like-minded people and make timeless friends.

For updates on Squadron rides, visit www.gnarlymtb.com/squadron

