

SAVING THE WORLD, ONE CAKE AT A TIME

Riding bikes makes people happy — fact. Now mountain bikers in Inverness are using a bike cafe to bring smiles to their community

Lee Craigie believes in the power of mountain biking, and she's determined to spread the love.

Lee has seen that power with her own eyes. As well as being British Cross-Country Series champion, she's also a trained psychotherapist. She established 'Cycletherapy' in 2009, a project which uses mountain biking as a tool to help young people with troubled backgrounds boost their self-esteem and improve their general outlook.

"I ride every day, so I take for granted the emotion-regulating effects of riding flowing singletrack," says the 34-year-old Cannondale rider. "To see a 15-year-old lad who has been excluded from school for behavioural reasons grinning like a toddler at the end of a ride is extremely rewarding."

At the same time, local riders Laura Nicolson and Penny Philips from the Moray Firth Cycling Club had an idea to set up a hub for all things cycling in the Inverness area, a meeting place to nurture the sport for everyone. Together with Ferga Perry, the momentum increased until the four women were ready to make a move.

"It's one thing to have great ideas, but it takes a special group of people to make them happen," Lee smiles now.

By the time they opened the Velocity Cafe and Bicycle Workshop in October 2012, their vision had developed — the workshop is a place where riders can congregate to use the facilities and learn more about maintaining their own bikes, but also somewhere Lee can bring her clients to learn more about the bikes they're riding.

"That same lad can learn to strip and rebuild



Lee's happy whether she's frothing up a latte or fixing up a Trigger...

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a bike in eight weeks with us in the Velocity workshop, providing him with a sense of accomplishment and his own bike to ride away at the end," she says.

A fully kitted out workshop opens onto a home baking-stuffed cafe where riders can grab coffee and cake while wrenching their bike on one of the stands. With regular sessions on bike maintenance, the hope is that riders will take advantage of the cheap workshop rates for their own DIY work (only £2 for 30 minutes to hire a stand and use tools, or £7.50 per month for unlimited use). Qualified mechanics are on hand to give advice, tuition (£5 for 30 minutes) or even to service your bike for you.

This inclusive attitude is designed to bring every level of rider into the hub, so that gnarly mountain bikers there to bleed their brakes and sip an espresso sit round the same big table as the little old lady in for her regular cuppa. "A cafe seemed like a good way of giving everyone the chance to come in through the door in a neutral space," says Ferga.

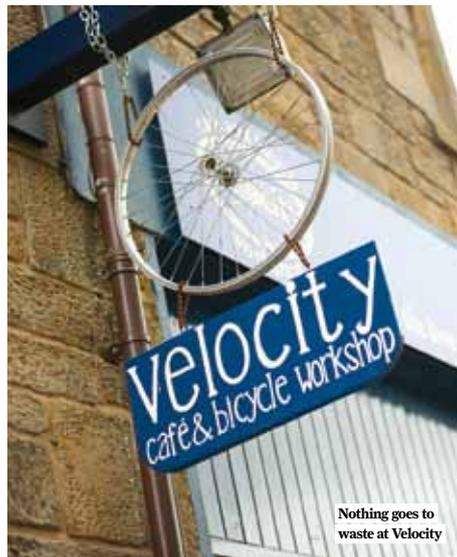
It seems to be working. Workshops are regularly booked out, and plenty of formal and informal rides are centred on the cafe. In the evenings there are bike jumbles, talks and



We won't argue when it comes to Pam's scones...



...nor will we with any woman wielding a spanner this large



Nothing goes to waste at Velocity

story-telling nights. A non-profit business model means the ultimate goal is to promote cycling rather than make cash. "The workshop is funded by the Climate Challenge Fund, but the hope is that the cafe — already self-sustaining — will ultimately support the workshop too," says Lee. "Any profits will always be put straight back into the business for the greater good." velocitylove.co.uk