

Craftworx Wheels

BY PETER MANIATY | SPONSORED CONTENT

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AUSTRALIAN DESIGNED, BRISBANE BUILT AND MERCKX INSPIRED AS PETER MANIATY DISCOVERS.

A LOT CAN CHANGE IN SEVEN years. Just ask Mark Kirby, co-founder and owner of Brisbane-based Craftworx Wheels. What intentionally began as a small-scale start up back in 2012 is now expanding into global markets and, based on their current growth trajectory, the sky really is the limit.

Back in the early days, Craftworx was focused solely on custom wheel building and repairs. In 2015 things went up a notch, when they started manufacturing their own alloy rims for both road and mountain bikes. The following year saw the launch of their bespoke 'Ultima' carbon wheelset through a Kickstarter campaign and the business has continued to expand ever since, culminating with the move to their current Fortitude Valley premises in the middle of last year.

"We are a long way from our humble beginnings, operating in the back corner of a warehouse," laughs Kirby, who traces his love of cycling back to a red and blue Madison Taipan BMX bike that caught his eye (and his parents subsequently bought) at the local bike and mower shop when he was still in primary school. "We're proud to be 'The Australian Wheel Company' and 2020 will see us release 30 new Craftworx wheelsets globally – 15 road, 4 gravel and 11 MTB models – all designed, hand-built and tested right here in Australia."



ABOVE: A selection of the many hoops on display in the showroom of Craftworx Wheels. A chance meeting with none other than Eddy Merckx was one of the driving forces behind the success of the Brisbane-based company.

In order to understand the forces shaping the future for Craftworx, it's worth reflecting on the past, for this is where Kirby's business philosophy was formed. "I was born on the land, a third generation farmer – at least I would have been if it wasn't for my obsession with cycling. In my teens, I dreamt of working with bikes. When I was 18, I built my first wheel. In 1989, at 21, I sold my house, my car and started my first business, a bike shop."

Then a brush with cycling royalty changed everything. "The opportunity to distribute Eddy Merckx frames presented itself, that was a significant turning point," Kirby reflects. "Meeting Eddy Merckx was a personal highlight, but more than that, he changed the way I looked at riding dynamics. Eddy was obsessed with frame design, geometry and riding position. Not a sentimental man, he embraced new technologies and materials, always looking for ways to improve."



LEFT: Intricate attention to detail and perfectionism is key at Craftworx.

BELOW: The company has launched a number of new models for 2019/20 with a common theme being wider as well as lighter 36 & 38mm wheelsets.

a great wheel design and you cannot achieve this without the correct level of compliance built into the wheel. Compliance has always been a critical dynamic factor in our wheel designs and something our customers continually comment on. It still baffles me why the big brands aren't giving it more attention."

That all sounds great. But with a plethora of wheels to choose from nowadays, why Craftworx? "If you're going to shell out your hard earned money on a new set of wheels, you really need to talk to a specialist, someone with proven knowledge and experience. At Craftworx we are genuine wheel experts," says Kirby. "Australian owned, designed and built. Your wheels are designed just for you – a fully tailored service matching the ideal wheels to rider and bike – and they tick all the boxes of performance, handling, comfort, weight, looks and, of course, price."

"Do you know the definition of 'bespoke'?" Kirby quickly adds with a smile. "Making and selling products, or providing services, especially for a particular person, organisation, or purpose. Craftworx is the very definition of a bespoke wheel company. We're a one-stop wheel shop that caters, personally, to all riders across all genres from weekend warriors to professional athletes." **BA**

When we started Craftworx in 2012, I thought back to my Eddy Merckx days and his modern approach to design, material choice, development, testing and, most importantly, achieving dynamic balance. This is what we try to emulate every day."

There's a real energy and depth to what the Craftworx team are doing and the philosophy that goes into every wheel that carries their decals. "Never do something simply for the exercise," says Kirby. "Do it with purpose and do it with passion. That's something I apply to business, and to life. We're proud of what we do and what we've achieved to date. We're very passionate about creating dynamically balanced and responsive wheels and we use the very latest materials and manufacturing technologies to create them."

To ensure Craftworx stays at the front of the peloton when it comes to innovation and quality, Kirby and his team keep a constant eye on emerging wheel trends. One of the biggest continues to be the shift towards

wider tyres and rims, although as Kirby points out there's far more to it than simply widening existing rim designs. "Disc braking has really opened the market for manufacturers, building in greater frame clearances without compromising stiffness levels," he says. "That opens the door for more tyre width options. Of course, going wider adds more material mass – so we're investing a lot of time testing new carbon resin blends to ensure our wheels still achieve the right dynamic balance between compliance, strength and weight for our customers."

The other major focus for Kirby's design team is compliance. "Twenty to thirty years ago, all wheels were compliant. But in the last 10 to 15 years, compliance has progressively been removed in preference for stiffness, strength, weight and visual appearance," he explains. "Compliance is effectively suspension. It increases speed, improves handling and stability and enhances rider comfort. Dynamic balance is the key to

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