

Merlyn Mechanics picks up U.S. distribution of French brand Victoire

By Matt Wiebe

CHATTANOOGA, TN—When Merlyn Townley wheels his beat-up Pelican case over to neutral race support to set up, there is a whiff of Western gunslinger to his swagger. Like the enforcer of yore, his job is to bring order to the chaos.

Townley is a licensed Cat 1 mechanic whose résumé includes wrenching at more than 1,000 races around the globe, as well as representing Mavic, Shimano, Pedro's, Campagnolo and SRAM. He is used to dealing with the impossible and getting it tuned in time for the start in 10 minutes.

So when it comes to bikes and parts, he's a bit jaded.

"When I first saw Victoire's hubs, they were just drop dead gorgeous," said Townley, owner of Merlyn Mechanics. So much for being a jaded mechanic who's seen it all.

"And it only got better when I picked them up—the finish and quality of machining is unbelievable, and the anodizing is so deep," added the smitten Townley.

That was at last fall's Eurobike. Today, Merlyn Mechanics is the U.S. distributor for Victoire components.

Victoire Cycles is a French company making high-end hubs, cogs, lockrings and stems largely for fixie, polo, track and urban bikes. All products are manufactured in Clermont-Ferrand, France, and then hand polished before anodizing and laser etching.

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Though Townley is still a wrench for hire, his main business is servicing bikes and building custom wheels for a variety of racers, bike shops and anyone coming in off the street. Distributing Victoire parts is his first foray into the wholesale side of the business.

"Beauty is more than skin deep here. Seventy to 80 percent of bearing drag is related to seal drag, and a lot of seal drag is caused

by things pushing on seals," he said.

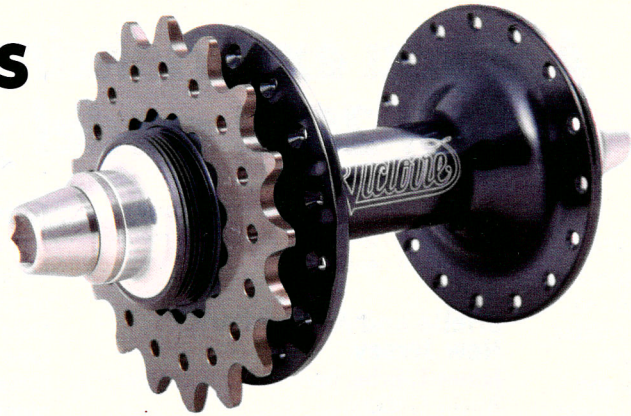
"Victoire machines a little lip to keep the axle end-cap from putting pressure on the seal. And axles and nuts are 6/4 titanium. Hub shells are 7075-T6 aluminum," he said.

Track hubs come in high- and low-flange versions with Victoire's unique 16-point splined interface for cogs. A threaded flip-flop hub is available for polo.

"Threads are great, but few hubs these days have their threads rolled into them; most are cut threads, which a strong rider can strip pretty easily. The splined cogs are secured with a normal lockring, and are easy to swap without needing a chain- whip," Townley said.

Eight colors are available: black, silver, gold, orange, purple, green, red and blue. Victoire's polo hubs are drilled for 48 spokes, both for strength and to keep balls and mallets out of the wheel.

Merlyn Mechanics only sells hub pairs, but any of the eight available colors can be mixed. Low-flange track hubs are \$410; high-flange are a few dollars more. Cogs run \$35 and a Victoire lockring is \$25. He also sells wheel display fixtures of his



The Marathon Grip.

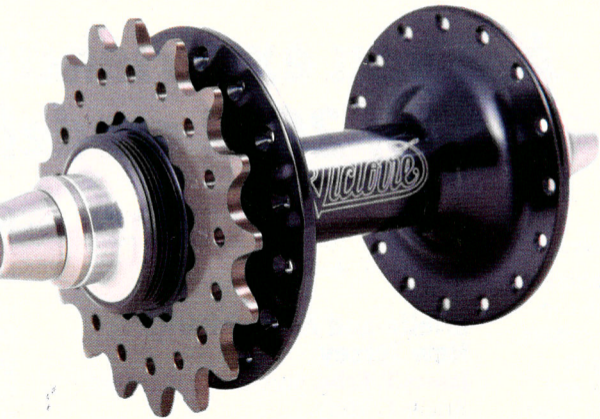
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own design, which hold the wheel out where it can be seen.

Of course Townley also offers dealers the option of wheelsets built around Victoire's hubs. Not only can he provide a wide variety of rims and spokes in any color, and mixed spoke colors, but Victoire also offers custom drilling options for its hubs as well. **BRAIN**