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#ISSUE74

#APR2021

#interview #mickhannah

#gravity #scene #india

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125mm	31.6mm	390mm	530g	07541
150mm	30.9mm	440mm	552g	07560
150mm	31.6mm	440mm	573g	07561

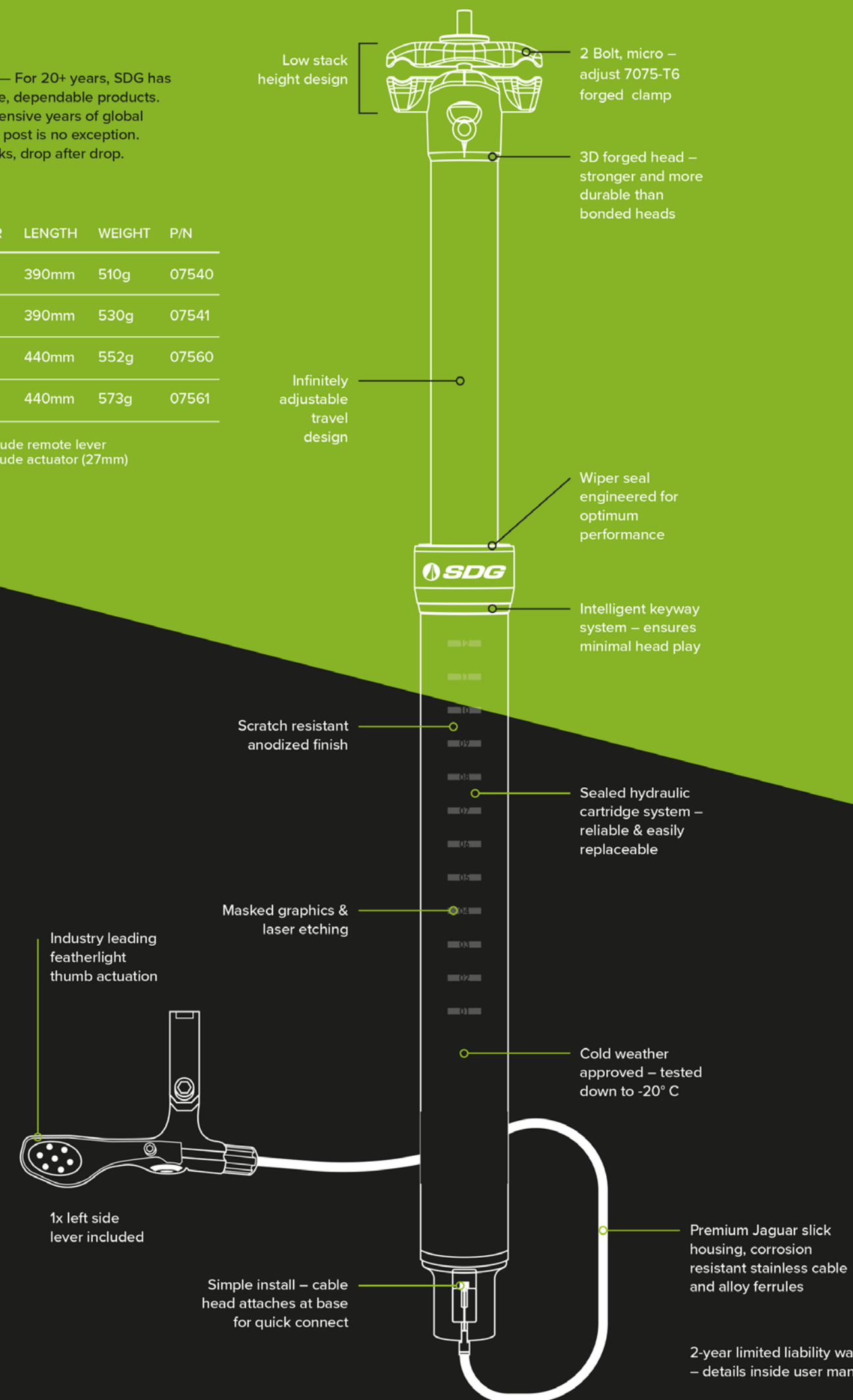
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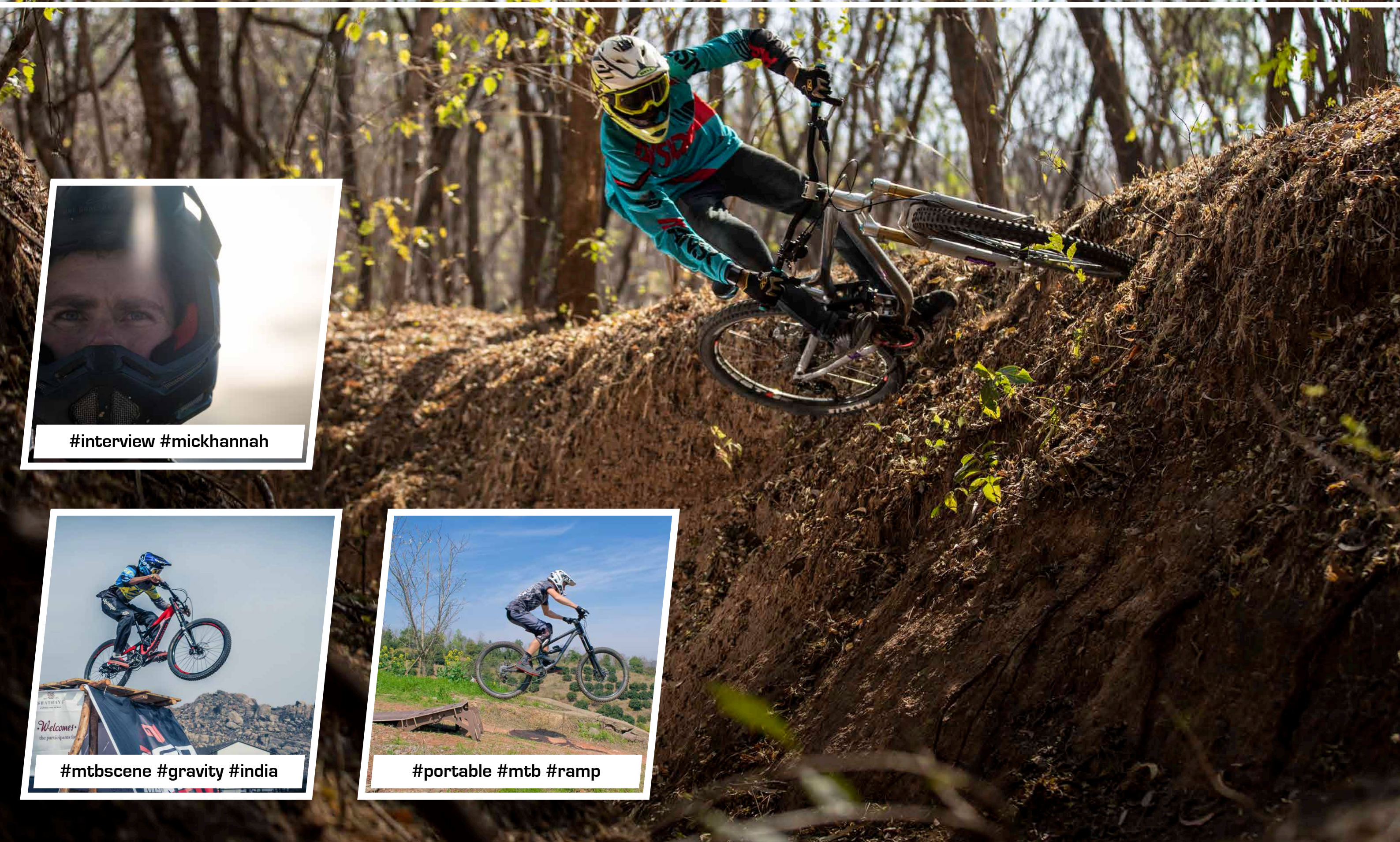
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 - o Large Ramp: 181 cm x 60 cm x 67 cm
- Weights: Basic Ramp: 7.5 kg; Large Ramp: 13.5 kg
- Material: CNC milled Russian Birch Plywood

 Joe Parkin, Mesum Verma

 Mesum Verma

'SIK MIK' MICK HANNAH INTERVIEW





Hi Mick, certainly a lot of riders know you, the rider who's not shy at all to pull a big suicide no-hander in a world cup race run. But tell us a bit more about you for those who aren't familiar with you.

Well, firstly I really love to ride my bike, which is why I enjoy the suicide no-handers. When I'm riding my bike I am completely in the moment and that's a very peaceful place to be.

I was born in Swan Hill in Victoria, Australia in 1983. I am the oldest of 4 siblings. I have 1 brother and 2 sisters. I loved riding bikes from as long as I can remember. I have been racing for over 30 years. I have been a professional downhiller for 20 years. I have 4 kids. My 2 boys are 10 and 12 years old. My 2 daughters are 1 and 3 years old. I love spear fishing and riding my

moto as well as any type of bicycle.

How did everything begin, why did you pick a mountain bike in the first place and not something else? When did you decide to be a professional downhiller?

I started racing BMX when I was 6 years old. I had some national level success with 3 Australian championships and when I was 10 years old I got the silver medal at the world championships. Then when I was 12 or 13 I went on a christian mountain bike camp with my BMX. I became close friends with Stephen Foley and he and his dad took me to some MTB races. I fell in love with it! The people were all so friendly and we had so much fun riding crazy lines in the woods together. My parents also





have always supported myself and my siblings in whatever we wanted to pursue as long as we worked hard for it.

When I was 10 or 11 years old I was interviewed and the guy asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up. I answered that I will make money racing bikes. That was before I knew what a mountain bike was. So I guess it was always my dream to become a professional.

Do you like to do other sports besides those that involve two wheels? How many times do you ride the bike for training during the week, and do you do some special training sessions like for example, try to ride a technically difficult section really fast and smooth?

I do love spear fishing! I don't get to do that much though because I spend a lot of time in Colorado and traveling. I also really enjoy riding enduro moto. I have found that the moto gives me great training for downhill. It makes me strong and it's a much easier way to get lots of riding time. It really depends on the stage of my training program, but I ride a lot and when it starts getting close to the season I will ride most days. I always like to have a rest on Sunday, so at the moment I am doing some kind of training 6 days per week.

You are very long in the game - it's your 20th pro season. Do you have a secret, how to stay motivated all the time, and to keep going even injury hits you back? What's your goal for the 2021 world cup season?





It is difficult to answer the question of how to stay motivated, but I can say that it is really 1 day at a time. It definitely doesn't feel the way I expected 20 years to feel. It has gone by very quickly! I have had times where I was not motivated at all and it was really hard work, Right now though I'm training harder than ever and I feel fresh every morning ready to work hard. My goals are to be consistently back in the top 10 and to be competitive for the win at world championships. I am training hard and I haven't missed any sessions yet so everything is on track.

Injuries are a whole other point. There are 2 main points with injury. One is that an injury is a solvable problem that takes focus and hard work. That part is natural for an athlete. We enjoy a challenge and having something to focus on really motivates us.

The 2nd point which is the hard part of injuries is the frustration I feel when I'm not riding at my best. It is an amazing feeling to be at top world cup level and when that is taken away by an injury it is really frustrating!

One thing for sure is, when you get a new bike, like this year, it helps you to stay highly motivated. The UR - Team has NS-Bikes on board. Can you tell us what are the first steps when you have the bike in your hand, what do you do first? How do you get the bike dialed in with your mechanic, so that it will perform best with your riding style?

Yes I am really excited to be working with NS Bikes! It is refreshing to have a change. I want to say that I





was happy on the Polygon and I'm very thankful for 8 years of great support from them!

Now we have an exciting new sponsor and so far the product is amazing! It is a very different suspension system than the Polygon so we are learning a lot. The most important thing is to get time on the bike so once the snow melts here in Colorado I will be putting as much time as possible on it. I have had some time on it already and I felt great on it right from the beginning.

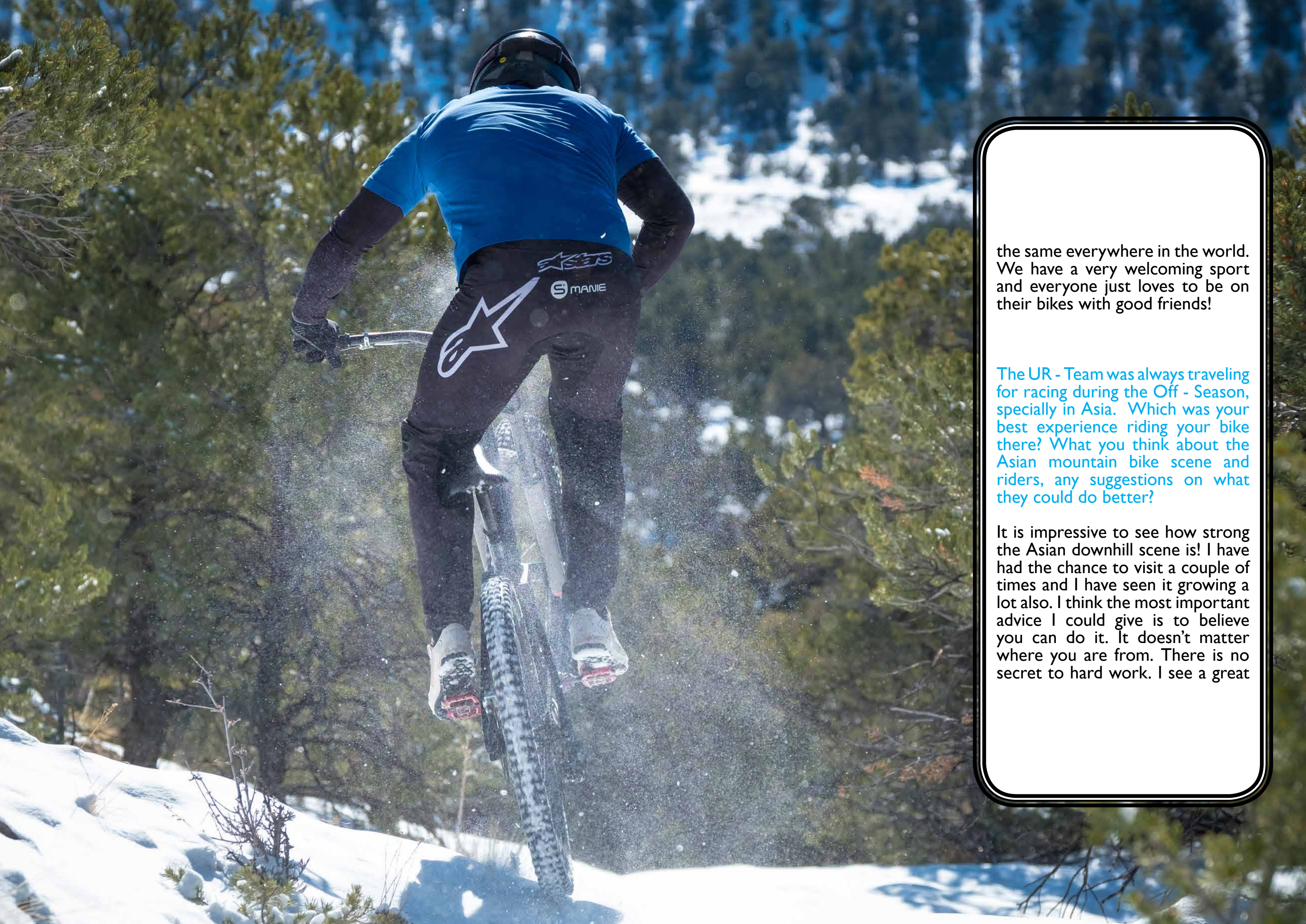
Getting the setup correct is a long process with lots of small changes to see what works best. My goal is to have it set up well before the first world cup then refine it as we move through the season. We have a great list of sponsors who provide amazing parts so I know

we have a very competitive bike this year!

I met you in China at the Zhongshan Race near Guangdong. What impression did you take home from China! Besides the really slow chairlift to get you up, do you have something to say about the downhill track?

Yes that was a fun trip! It was a crazy experience coming to that race. We were treated very well! The hill there wasn't very big, but they did a great job building a fun race track! The lift was directly above the track which is really nice for watching the other riders. It was really impressive to see the local culture and get to experience the Asian downhill scene. I love the way that mountain bike culture is





the same everywhere in the world. We have a very welcoming sport and everyone just loves to be on their bikes with good friends!

The UR - Team was always traveling for racing during the Off - Season, specially in Asia. Which was your best experience riding your bike there? What you think about the Asian mountain bike scene and riders, any suggestions on what they could do better?

It is impressive to see how strong the Asian downhill scene is! I have had the chance to visit a couple of times and I have seen it growing a lot also. I think the most important advice I could give is to believe you can do it. It doesn't matter where you are from. There is no secret to hard work. I see a great

work ethic in Asian culture and I am seeing stronger and stronger riders developing.

Traveling last year was not so easy. How was traveling in Europe for the few world cups during the Covid-19 restriction? How do you manage traveling with your family during a „normal“ season?

Yes traveling has changed a lot! It is actually not too bad. There are less people traveling which is nice. We have to get tested a lot and follow more strict procedures, but overall it is ok. It is more of a stress on the team budget which is hard.

My family most often stays home when I'm traveling for racing. With Covid I have less freedom to travel home between races which is really tough.





Here in Asia, it's not easy to pick up mountain biking, but it's slowly rising. Racing is very difficult, as there are not many UCI events for riding downhill, to later attend some world cups. Can you give a tip on what a young rider in Asia could do to take up riding as professional?

This is a difficult question for me because it was very different 20 years ago haha. I do know what it is like to have to travel long distances for racing, though, as Australia is very big and we lived a long way from most of the racing. When I was a teenager we chose to invest more into training than racing. I will say that it is important to be patient and really work hard every day and then when your chance comes you will be ready!

Last words are yours! Thank you very much for your time! And we wish you all the best for your upcoming world cup races. Hopefully see you on the track!

Thank you very much for the support! I feel very strong support from all over Asia and I am very thankful for that. I am working very hard with my trainer (SPBInternational.co) and following our process is giving me a lot of confidence. I am more motivated than ever to race to the best of my ability.





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Sandip Sakharkar

Anissa Lamare



an overview of india's mountain biking scene




Mountain biking in India has been an integral part of cycling as a sport for over a decade. What once started as a lifestyle has eventually picked its pace as a competitive sport today. If you're reading this, I'm going to assume you already know the varied disciplines in mountain biking. Enduro, Downhill, XC, Slopestyle, and Freeride are races that happen all over the world.

Mountain biking and its landscape in other countries offer a different perspective altogether. Pretty much the scene is fifty times bigger than what is in India. However, other Asian countries like China, Japan, Thailand, and Nepal are showing notable growth in terms of riders, infrastructure, communities, races, government support, private sponsors, and so on.

So, while we are updated about other countries and what's happening with mountain biking through social media, let's delve into India and its own riding landscape.

It's 2021, and there is a growth in the number of riders taking mountain biking beyond a lifestyle in India. But what is the





scene in a country of billions? Is it stable? Is it growing the way it's supposed to? This is not a gateway to a mountain biking 101 workshop. Rather, it is different perspectives summed together as one so you can get the bigger picture of the relationship India and its riders have built over the years.

So here goes, four states, five experienced riders willing to offer their very own POV into mountain biking or downhill as a sport in India.

Virendra Mali, Abhijeet Gharad, Ridor Niangti, Atoba Longkumer, and Abhishek Saikia are riders from centers of Indian mountainbiking: Pune, Shillong, Nagaland, and Assam. They all have a minimum experience of three to ten years in mountain biking and are important contributors to the life of the sport in abounding ways.

So, sit back while we take you for a ride through different aspects of mountain biking as a sport across four states of India.

Let's start with the number of races



hosted by different regions in India over the past ten years. Fact check: There are more XC, track, and cross-country races in India compared to Downhill mountain biking.

Here is a list of notable races that have happened in India over a period of nearly ten years:

1. Northeast CycloBhp, Shillong 2012, 2013, 2014
2. Himachal Downhill Mountain Bike Race, Manali – 2014, 2015
3. Kohima Downhill Race, Nagaland, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
4. Mokokchung Mountain Bike Festival, Nagaland, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
5. Assam Downhill Championships, 2018, 2019, 2020
6. Mechuka Downhill Championship, Arunachal Pradesh
7. Shirui Lily Mountain Bike Downhill Championship, Manipur, 2017, 2018, 2019





8. Bangalore Bicycle Championships, 2018, 2019

9. Temghar MTB Challenge, 2019, 2020, 2021

10. Bangalore Mountain Festival, Bangalore 2017

11. Ladakh MTB Festival, Ladakh 2020

12. National DH Championship, Pune, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, 2019, 2020, 2021

Over the many races that have taken place, a maximum of thirty riders participate from all over India, while a few races have international riders as well. However, the question must be asked: is mountain biking too expensive a sport, or is a local mindset inhibiting Indian riders? Well, the four states have spoken and most of them echoed pretty much the same answer but there are always two sides to a coin. Some said mountain biking is expensive but it is a luxury for a non-competitor. Those who race will either find a way to get support or work hard to get proper equipment that is “not prone to failure”

as Gharad puts it. On the other side of the coin, some feel like the sport is meant for riders “with financial abilities at the current stage in India,” adding on by saying that “if there were more participation and awareness of the sport, there would be better opportunities for the ones who cannot afford.”

The geographical spread of mountain biking in India is an impressive scene to witness as the years pass. However, most of the races are organized by private bodies, cycling clubs, and in the Northeast are a part of a bigger festival. From Pune, Shillong, and Assam, the support from the government remains “scarce” and as Niantti puts it, “private organizers can only do so much.” However Nagaland has received support from above to organise races, but Longkumer says the “focus should also shift to creating mountain bike infrastructures like bike parks, pump tracks, and sustainable trail networks.” But XC in a bigger picture has definitely seen better opportunities in a “handful of states,” yet “the most important sector, which is training, has been lacking in all biking disciplines.”





Over the years, the mountain biking community has seen an increase in the number of riders each year in each race. However, there are those who race for the love of the sport, while there are riders who race for their lives. If you've witnessed a DH race, you can probably segregate the two. So, what is the catch? Is mountain biking a dependable career in India? Well, the answer is bleak for riders in its entirety, but there are those like Longkumer who are seeking to hopefully create a platform for professional mountain biking in the future. Others find the option of actually earning a living from riding bikes in India a little far from the "current situation in India." But a touch of fairy dust from Mali says, "the sport is growing alongside opportunities and maybe someday it could be enough to earn a living" Gharad who has been riding DH for over three years also feels that with the right "direction" and "support," Indian riders can fare well on international platforms, and hence earn enough for a living.


With the uncertainties in mountain biking as a career in India especially because of "financial constraint," there are mixed



responses from these riders who speak from their own life experiences. While Gharad is positive about racing in the Asian region, others like Longkumer, Niangti and Saikia resonate with an understanding that a privateer's journey may be short-lived because of the technicalities the sport demands. However, on the brighter side, the passion for racing is not lost in searching for a career in biking; rather, these riders are hopeful for the upcoming generation in the field of DH mountain biking in India.

It would be a controversial statement if I said, DH mountain biking is still in its infancy in India. However, if we're talking about bridging the gap with the consistency of other Asian countries, we are lagging in numerous ways. We're talking about lack of organizers, funds, infrastructure, sport officials, and government recognition which is the need of the hour. So, I asked the riders about the adjustments the sport needs and the answer came from years of observing and learning. Since DH mountain biking is a nationally recognised sport today, the riders are hopeful for more races with "standardization," "regularity," "professionalism," "transparency" in





timings,” “mountain bike infrastructure,” “financial aid for athletes,” and “a shift from monetary benefits to opportunities like exposure to international races.” While all the changes may sound vague at the moment, as riders, the community can agree on the lack of systemic organisation of DH races all over the country.

Regarding the transition that the sport begs, the generation of riders from the four states remain positive in their own way. While some see themselves racing internationally, others are more focused on creating better platforms, and imparting the knowledge of the “essence of mountain biking to the younger generation.”

“In the future, I’d like to see myself as a part of the foundation for future riders and hopefully motivate them with a podium in the Asian Games,” says Saikia, a very humble rider from the DH community.

So, while there is a new generation working its way up the sport, the older generation of riders remains the base of where the sport will be in the next ten years. “The vision to see beyond state boundaries and the level of patriotism and

unbiased officiation is important to mould future world champions,” Saikia asserts as he looks forward to connecting with the sport at the deeper and personal level. Meanwhile, Longkumer, a Technology Consultant for Smart Cities, Mission Kohima and founder of Trails Hounds Cycling Club in Mokokchung, sees himself organising more races in the northeast region.

The future doesn't seem so bleak after all. The torch only becomes brighter with the passing of time and with riders like Gharad, who just started but is already going big. The sport's potential is definitely growing, raising the bar higher and higher.

So, here is an overview of what riding in India actually is. The entire landscape is filled with defects, but with time, the community is joining the dots one rider at a time.

Saikia ends the chapter with “no matter what you ride, where you ride, the most important thing is our confluence with nature... ride with love, zeal and passion.”





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PORTABLE MTB Ramp



Where can you ride MTB, when the nearest local trails are 30 kilometres or more away and can only be reached by car! Where can you do proper jumps, when there is no bike park around the corner, not even a good Skate or BMX park? This was the situation I found myself 2 years ago, shortly after I came to live in China. At that time I also got to know many of the local MTB riders, and found lots of them have actually stopped riding due to a lack of nearby places.

When I expressed my disappointment to one of them, he said: Why not build a transportable jump ramp that we can just put where we are, within the city, at any urban or natural down-slope? Basically there is a variety of rideable terrain in the city, but with a lack of a jump or ramp for takeoffs. With a ramp we could at least have some fun with jumps and would ride a bit more often than without it.



I began to do pen and paper sketches of possible ways of construction and send them to Zhiqiang. One week later he came up with a design on computer. It looked good. We discussed it, overthought the construction, made some changes to make it more stable and more lightweight. He had the idea to use a wood split-block structure and let it cut out by a CNC milling in a professional factory.

It wasn't 2 weeks later that we drove to the factory and watched how the machine cut out all the parts of the prototype. Excitedly we assembled the freshly cut parts to see how our first test version look like. We spotted the first unprecise points where the wood blocks didn't smoothly fit and put it onto our improvement plan. When the factory offered us a lower production cost if we would let produce twenty ramps we immediately decided to sell these within the local Chinese mountain biking scene, so our business plan was almost complete. But before we changed and improved the design and reduced a bit of weight. Then the first version of the ramps entered production.



The next weeks and month we tried out our new toy in different spots: at a push bike club inside a shopping hall by landing just into the flat; in a small city park where we did the first proper jumps with Dirtjump and DH bikes on a slight grass slope; and later on a sunny autumn day in Oct 2019 we finally got so used to the ramp that we went full speed over the ramp and jumped about 5m far into a stairway as landing. Also we received the first photos and videos of MTB friends who had bought our ramp. One of them near Beijing almost succeeded in a back flip into snow. Another BMX rider in Ningbo did nice 360s and tail whips using the ramp.

We had a ton of fun, but over the time we found the ramp with its 23 kg is still quite heavy and we should try to reduce even more of the weight. Also we felt that the procedure to adapt the ramp to the terrain was poor; in fact, the adaptability was OK, but the way of adjustment troublesome.

Another important insight we had was that the ramp in its full size and height often scared riders to jump it all and that we might make the whole thing a bit smaller. Thus we could also reduce production cost and the price to purchase it. Meanwhile another MTB friend helped us to store the not-yet-sold ramps and make them ready to send. He helped to develop a good method to pack them. So, we became a team of three and started calling us “NB Riders”, where NB stands for Ningbo, the city where we live and ride in.

2020 was the year of the second version of our ramp. Since our first design based basically on the design of another western ramp project (MTB Hopper) we were eager give it new different, more convenient and real lightweight design. After optimizing the design and proofing again and again, Zhiqiang finally came up with an innovative fresh-looking design idea. Now we had a completely original design of the second-generation, so the “Jet Pack” ramp was born. Shortly after the prototype and test jumping, we produced 30 units of it that were sold out by the end of the year.





We had a new fun season of jumping the new ramp on different spots and terrains. Zhiqiang finally was able to learn one handers and no-footers with it in a city park. Zhiqiang said: after all the practice with the ramp in the city he feels way more confident about the bigger MTB jumps in the bike park. Interesting for me was when we once took the ramp to the Ningbo Dirtpark. There I could do even higher jumps than with the park's own jumps. The most fun is definitely taking the ramp outside the city, somewhere in a natural mountainous area.

The advantages of our new current model of the ramp are: It actually includes two ramp sizes, a small one for beginners and big one for intermediates. It's portable, and not only by car, but even can be picked up as a backpack and taken to new terrain when you get bored with one place in a city. It is easy to fold and assemble. The most important feature is its terrain adaptability. With its free turning point, you can put the ramp on flat ground, a slope, or stairs without any complicated adjustment. It is still very stable with six legs to ground. Some friends of ours use it even with their heavy E-MTBs and E-bikes.



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