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वाराणसी

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वाराणसी की अनंत विविधता

Every letter of the Indian City Varanasi has a thread of history that prevailed even before culture came into being. Also known as the oldest living city in the world, the place is believed to hold eternal peace because of its spiritual chronicles. Literature, trade, religion, music, and colours are part and parcel of what makes Varanasi a destination to visit once in our lives.



सत्यमेव जयते



While the city greets the world with its temples and culture, there is one missing piece of art often overlooked by many. For those on the same page, this art is more than an ordinary work of expression. It is a collective effort of sculpting each trick and each performance

with flair.

This is a story you may have heard or not heard at all especially from a place with an enriching past. It tells of a team from Varanasi who share a passion for practicing and perfecting every trick on a mountain

bike. Founded in 2012, Team VRz, (uppercase VR and lowercase z), is a “collective team of professional MTB Freestyle athletes, BMX Flatland athletes, and other creative artists” aged twenty to twenty-seven.

The riding community in India is diverse across different cities of the country. However, what sets Team VRz distinct, is how the team represents the riding community. The group is in itself as rich as Varanasi's culture because of the variety of performing artists. "Live

performances, online promotion, commercials, brand promotions, event guesting, and much more", are essential elements that make the iconic team another living tradition.

"Our mission is to legalise MTB Freestyle Riding in India and start

our legal MTB Freestyle Academy", says Abhishek Upadhyay, one of the founders of the group. The intention is to mobilise the riders with a proper guide to every step in learning freestyle riding and keeping all safety aspects in check. With this, riders and artists can avail many





opportunities to showcase their talent and gain significant exposure with better future prospects.

Giving us a little more insight into MTB Freestyle Riding, Abhishek highlights the fact that the sport is “lesser-known” as a discipline

of mountain biking in the country. But in reality, the sole of the sport involves performing simple to sophisticated tricks on a mountain bike itself. “It is a discipline where you can see athletes introducing new tricks every other day because of the style.”

The core intention behind making a collective team of riders and artists is to find like-minded people and to provide an open space for such talents to grow in unity. To make ends meet, the group puts in a well-grounded and unending effort. But the group stumbles across





many issues. The biggest the team addresses is the lack of a proper training spot. Abhishek points out the need for a bigger arena so riders can practice and collaborate for different shows and events. Another struggle faced by all Indian riders is procuring bike parts. The

team practices regularly and such level demands different bike parts be readily available in case of a technical failure. But because of the lack of good parts in the country, some of the team's performances are compromised to a certain extent.

When we talk about cycling disciplines as professional sports in India, the question of "society" always seeps in. While some people have basic knowledge of the discipline, many see the sport as a bane for society, and disapproval creates hardships for riders. These





hardships are often rooted within one's family and spread across every nook and corner of the country. But the team turns black-and-white conditions like societal pressure into beaming opportunities for its riders and artists. Team VRz has performed for over ten thousand

people in "topmost colleges, huge brands" and has been featured by prominent media houses in the country and abroad. Since India has not yet identified MTB freestyle riding as a competitive sport, the team creates its own gateway to push riders and artists in pursuing

their passion as a profession. But are these events enough to earn a living in India? The answer is bleak and has resulted in many athletes quitting after a certain age because of the unstable future ahead.

This would usually be the end of

a story while another generation takes over and tries the sport. However, Team VRz is not done yet. As mentioned earlier, continuous efforts are made to create something more solid, prominent, and different. The team started a movement called “United

By Passion”, “where we organise different meet-ups, where we invite artists and athletes from different genres and create something together.” In conversation with Abhishek, he points out that the main motto is “to gather different individuals” and “create unity among

artists, athletes, and other talents”.

To strengthen the sport as a profession, to enable riders and artists to follow their dreams, Team VRz also has its own website: www.teamvrz.com, a YouTube Channel, a podcast series called





“VRz Talks”, and prominent social media accounts. These platforms showcase and educate the masses about the sport, its riders, and artists.

Team VRz believes in dedication, training, educating, and developing

tricks to help the sport grow. “Giving up on the sport isn’t going to help you in any way because we athletes have invested more than our time in this sport....., financially, mentally and physically”. Holding their heads high, the team reminds cyclists, artists, and people alike that “we

need to keep working,” in order to “create better opportunities for every other athlete and pave a path for the upcoming generation.” This is the only way we can introduce the sport as a profession in our country.





Fun Trivia:

* Team VRz was founded by Bhavesh Yadav (Jai) and Abhishek Upadhyay in 2012.

* The team comprises 4 MTB Freestyle athletes, 1 BMX Flatland

Athlete, and 3 members of the management team.

* The group has a prominent following on all social media accounts like Instagram, Facebook, Linked In, and Twitter.





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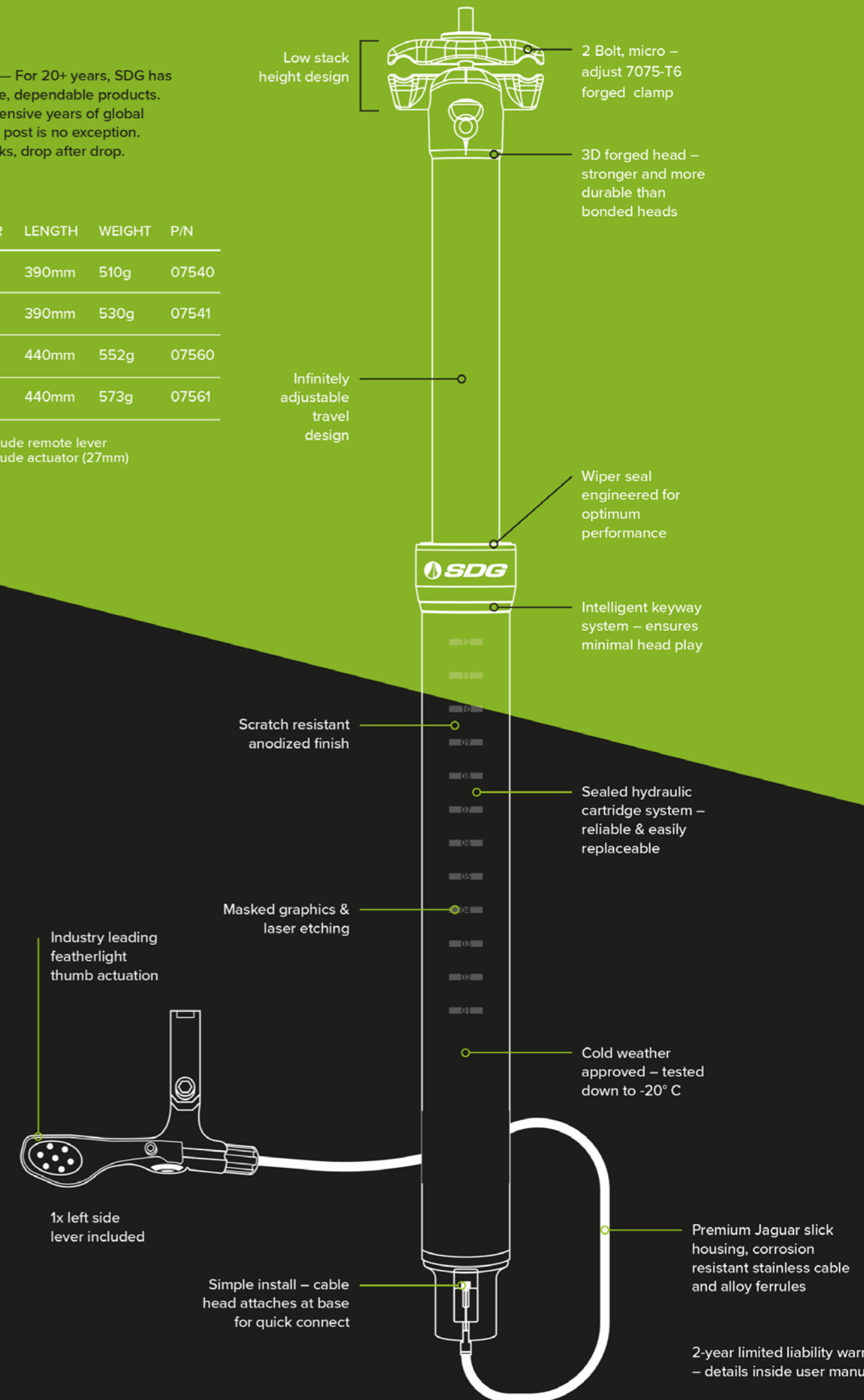
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سمیه فراهانی

Someyeh Farahani

interview



Hi Somayeh, could you please introduce yourself a little? Where in Iran are you? What you are doing for a living?

I am from Karaj, a city in Alborz province, and I was born in this city. As I mentioned before, my education was in the field of air conditioning and refrigeration systems and mechanical engineering. Before I started cycling, I worked in various companies. I was responsible for designing and controlling the maintenance system of flour mill equipment. I designed car parts. I also designed air conditioning and sales systems. I've published several articles on renewable energy, solar power systems, aerodynamic design for a new type of wind turbine.... I have also coached sports such as kung fu, swimming and bodybuilding in various gyms.

At the moment, I do not have any activity in any field of work except sports, and I do full-time professional sports. My focus is on participating in competitions.





You practiced Kung Fu for 15 years. How did you get into the sport? How many times did you train per week? Did you do also compete in Kung Fu Events?

In fact, I practiced karate and got into Kung Fu to improve my jumping, but I became so interested that I gave up karate and continued doing Kung Fu professionally. I did 8 hours of continuous training a day and I made a lot of progress in this field. Then I started coaching and judging. I reached coaching level 1. I trained many students who are also active in Kung Fu and other sports. I have not been active in Kung Fu since 2016.

Now for the last 4 years, you've been riding mountain bikes. Why did you get into this sport? And there are many girls in Iran riding a downhill bike?

Since I am interested in extreme sports, I started cycling with a lot of fun at my sister's

suggestion and with my dad's bike. From the beginning, I became very interested in mountain biking. And the next year I bought a cross country bike. It took me two years to decide to buy an enduro bike because the tracks we rode were more technical and professional. My ride started with buying an enduro bike. I started riding all the way to Downhill and jumping.

In fact, many girls in Iran do not ride in this field, but recently the importance that the officials, especially the national team coach Mr. Rahnama and the new officials of the federation, have given to the advancement of women, is expanding.

What's fascinating to you about mountain biking? Can you tell us why you ride a bike down the mountain?

What is attractive to me in cycling is that it is done in the mountains, forests and open





environment, even the pressure in cross country is attractive and lovable to me. I followed downhill professionally because there is a lot of focus and concentration that is needed. In the moment of coming down from the mountain, in addition to the physical abilities that you should have, you need a strong mind. Speed of thinking and choosing the best path and necessary reaction.

I think downhill is our way of life. To be able to overcome fears, where to brake and where not to, to stop your inner conversation and live in the moment, to believe in yourself and your abilities, to be able to get up after failure and falls.

Beside mountain biking you do also other sports! Which are this? How much time per week do you spend on the bike? How much time do you spend doing other sports?

Currently, in addition to cycling, I only do downhill complementary sports, such as crossfit and bodybuilding, mountaineering, motorcycling and swimming (before the Coronavirus).

I ride at least 25 hours a week, which includes cross country and downhill.

When you go for a ride, where are you going? With whom do you go mostly riding? What would be your dream destination for putting your tires in the dirt?

Basically, I go cycling in the morning, depending on the temperature and weather conditions. Tracks and mountains around the city, Tehran mountains (Darabad, Latman, Chitgar and Sorkheh Hesar) and Qazvin Barajin mountains. For forest tracks, northern Iran is the best choice, such as Derazno, Balajirkuh and Garasmasar.





I usually ride alone or with my coach who is one of the champions of Iranian National downhill Team, Taha Ghabeli.

My first goal and dream is to participate in Asian championships and win Asian medals.

You told us also, you want to participate in mountain biking races. In which category you want to compete? Enduro or downhill? What feelings do you have, when you attend a race? What's going on in your mind and body?

Yes, I participate in downhill competitions as before. I participated in the last two National Leagues that took place and went on the podium.

In fact, the feeling of excitement and stress is mixed because you have to show the results of your efforts in the competition.



But the moment the competition starts, you think of nothing except the track and you want to show your best.

Are there many girls riding mountain bikes in Iran? How is the scene in general for mountain biking there?

Yes, in recent years, many girls have become interested in mountain biking. Their number is relatively high in Iran, although in the past there were few interested girls in downhill, but in recent years, their number is increasing.

If you need to tell a girl why to do sports or mountain biking, what would you say to them, to get them fascinated like you?

What makes girls and women mentally and physically improve is daily and regular exercise in today's world, even if they do not do it professionally or to the extent of

participating in competitions. In addition to regular exercise, it promotes good health and prevents depression in today's advanced digital world.

The last words are yours! Feel free, to say something to the world what you would like to say ;-).

My main goal is not just to participate in competitions and championships. The ultimate goal of exercising is to develop body and mind and self-awareness.

Demonstrate the power of women in society like men in downhill and mountain biking.





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