

The Ironman Store: Tampa's Only Triathlon Stop

By Rory Crump

Triathlon season is in full swing, and The Ironman Store bills itself as the premiere destination for one of America's fastest-growing sports.

Every weekend this summer Tampa triathletes will be swimming, biking, and running their way to glory somewhere in Florida. Chances are these athletes have passed through The Ironman Store for specialized equipment and expert advice.

Technically, [The Ironman Store](#) - which sits on the New Tampa/Wesley Chapel border of County Line Road - is a thoughtful mix of high-end triathlon products from industry leaders like Quintana Roo, Timex and Mizuno. But the inventory is broad and calculated, catering to both professionals and beginners. And pure cyclists, swimmers and runners will find products not available in mainstream sporting goods stores.

"You don't have to be an Ironman to shop at Ironman," said shop owner Hunter Jewett.

Premium knowledge and cutting-edge technology also differentiate Ironman from the run-of-the-mill bike shop. The store is staffed with veteran triathletes and certified, industry specialists, each with their own expertise in the multi-disciplinary sport.

Ironman can prepare newcomers for their first event, or help shave seconds off a champion's personal best.

"When people walk in here, we give them what they want," said Jon Leino, Ironman employee and triathlon enthusiast. "I like it when new athletes walk in because I've had their exact same questions."

This is not your father's bike store.

The Ironman Store is the brainchild of Jewett. He's a New Tampa resident and felt the area's demographics and median income would support a boutique store for triathletes.

“You have to have a community that can support it, and New Tampa can support it,” said Jewett, whose shop offers bikes whose pricetags can reach upwards of \$9,000. “We’re ahead of projections.”

His exclusive licensing agreement with Ironman - the most prestigious brand name in the sport – doesn’t hurt, either.

“We’re the only retail store that can hang the Ironman sign on the door,” Jewett said.

Also a long-time triathlete, Jewett positioned his one-of-a-kind retail store on prime real estate for both triathletes and training. Triathlon has enjoyed explosive growth, and sunny Florida, leveraging ocean access and year-round training conditions, is one of the sport’s hotbeds. According to USA Triathlon, Florida is the second-largest market in the U.S. for triathlon memberships.

New Tampa is especially triathlon friendly, with easy access to Suncoast Trail and Flatwoods Park. And San Antonio’s legendary cycling routes, both scenic and hilly, can be reached - by bike - from The Ironman Store parking lot.

Swimming? The Ironman Store recommends Tampa Bay Aquatics in Arbor Greene. Aligning with TBAY introduces Ironman customers to world-class swim training.

The Ironman Store opened in March 2010 and quickly became a global destination for competition triathlon bikes, clothing and nutrition. A savvy online presence has boosted Internet sales, and customers have traveled from Brazil, Mexico, and Canada to personally shop the unique mix of top manufacturers and professional service.

Members of the Royal Danish Navy hopped off a boat, bought bikes from Ironman, and shipped them back to their cycling mad country.

Seems you can’t just get this stuff, anywhere.

Are you an out-of-state customer? Ironman will include a hotel room at the Hampton Inn & Suites in Wesley Chapel with the purchase of a new bike – close enough for a warm-up ride on your new ride. They call it the Fly N’ Tri special.

Dave Schindler, resident bike technician and accomplished cyclist, relocated from St. Louis to help open the store. He’s a seasoned mechanic and certified Retul Fit System specialist.

Retul is a 3-D fitting system providing a dynamic evaluation of a cyclist's personal measurements and biomechanics.

"Everybody that buys a bike here gets the Retul fitting as part of the package," said Schindler.

Retul, gathering real-time data from eight different body parts, delivers the best bike set-up available, maximizing performance while minimizing discomfort.

"Retul is a very sophisticated data collection tool. It allows me, as the fitter, to do my job better," said Schindler.

With the events, the training and the competition, triathlon builds a unique bond between athletes – a fraternity based on sweat and commitment. The Ironman Store doubles as a social hub for like-minded athletes. Crowds gather around the store's flat-screen TVs during popular endurance events.

And with July's Tour De France approaching, Ironman anticipates an uptick in store traffic. A residual boost not lost on the store's marketing gurus.

"The Tour gets people motivated," said Schindler. "We run different sales each week of the tour to match the exposure of the event. It's the Super Bowl of cycling."

Expansion plans are in Ironman's future, but Jewett wants to keep things within striking distance of Tampa's fertile market. "A hundred-mile radius," said Jewett.

He's looking forward to building another grand junction for triathletes swimming, biking and running across Florida.