

people:

Inspiring mountain bikers

KEEP YOUR WHEELS ON

IF NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION, FRUSTRATION IS HER OLDER SISTER

Picture this. You're having a quiet pint in a Sheffield pub with your riding buddy when the conversation turns, inevitably, to bikes. Pens and beer mats are produced, and just half an hour later the Hartlett is born. Five years later and you're on the cusp of signing deals with several major players in the industry, which will potentially see your humble product become a household name. But what is it and what does it do? More importantly, what's it got to do with New Zealand?

Meet Charlie Bartlett and Nick Hart, two Englishmen with an inventive, practical bent. Together they have come up with a better way to keep your wheels attached to your forks. "I had an old pair of Manitou Shermans with the 20 mm axle," says Charlie, "and it used to frustrate me how long it took to change wheels. I loved the stiffness of the bolt-thru, especially in the slow sections, but it was a hassle to get on and off."

The pair felt it was important to retain the stiffness of a thru-axle while retaining the ease of a quick-release. What they've ended up with, in simple terms, can best be compared with a bayonet-style light bulb. In the non-disk side of the fork, a pin goes across the diameter of the axle hole, which then engages with a slot on the axle. When the axle is twisted, the assembly is tightened, then secured with a quick-release.

"It's compatible with everything," says Charlie, "from a 10 mm axle up to a 24 mm, including Shimano's proposed 15 mm industry standard. We've managed to secure a UK patent – and a US patent is pending for the product – and have formed a partnership with White Brothers who will have the rights to the US patent. We have worked on development and refinement with Fox in the past. The exciting thing now is we're potentially very close to a major deal with several companies. But one thing we've learned in the past is not to count our chickens."

Charlie moved to New Zealand 18 months ago in an effort to cure his wanderlust. After stints in Canada, the European Alps and Spain, he's currently holed up in Christchurch, right at the bottom of the famous Repaki track.

"Christchurch is a good fit for me, there's good riding and good weather. The Port Hills are great, but to be honest there's some brilliant beech forest riding around the place and I'm really getting into the Kiwi-style missions people round here seem keen on." Fortunately, Charlie and Nick have found that the Internet and Skype enable them to run a business together while living on opposite sides of the globe.

"We're under no illusions as to the potential success of the Hartlett – sure it could make us some money, but we've both said a number of times that the ultimate goal would be just to see it in a bike shop, on the shelf." **MICHAEL FLYGGER**

More information about the Hartlett system can be found at www.hartlett.co.uk

