

GoDaddy Founder Bob Parsons - Easy Rider

Written by Interview by Hayley Mitchell

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Bob Parsons is a guy's guy. He loves motorcycles, sports and the Wild West. The spirited founder of GoDaddy and owner of the new Scottsdale Ducati dealership that opened in late September, sat down with us in his new North Scottsdale showroom to talk about what he loves best about Arizona and his Ducati venture, and why now is a great time to expand his business.



AFM: On your website a cartoon diagram shows your brain divided in to 1/3 technology, 1/3 motorcycles and 1/3 other stuff. What is the other stuff?

BP: Well, I'm a big game hunter and I like firearms. I like the arts?only in moderation. I like sports, particularly football. My favorite team is the Baltimore Ravens. And I like fitness and to keep in shape. I used to be an avid runner but I lost my knee and now I do bicycling.

AFM: I read you have 18 bikes in your collection. Is that still accurate?

BP: I'm down to about a dozen, it might even be less than that...no it's about a dozen.

AFM: Do you play favorites or love them all equally?

BP: Nope, I like them all. Probably I like the BMWs and Ducatis the most, which is the majority of them. But any time I ride any one of them I think, "I should ride this one more." But it's kind of like somebody asking you which of your three children is your favorite.

AFM: What do you think your next bike is going to be? Do you have our eye on anything?

BP: Ducati has got a couple of new ones they're coming out; one's like a sport touring bike. We're also looking to them to do a cruiser, which might be just a concept, but its code name is Viper. And BMW has their S1000RR, which is a race replica, and they'll be coming out with that in December. So I've got three I've got my eye on.

AFM: I've read that your had a couple of motorcycle accidents - what's it like getting back on the bike after that?

BP: It's like anything where you get hurt. I was just in Africa, for example, in early august and I got attacked by a leopard. I got bit in the ass pretty hard, a couple time and the camera man with me got bit too. It's on Youtube.com; you should look it up. Search "Bob Parsons, Leopard." But you know we just kept going. I've been hit now three times and I'd say every time has made me a better rider. Right now when I ride I ride like a scared rabbit. There's a lot of room in front of me, I'm never next to anybody, when I stop at a light I'm always watching the guy in back.

AFM: The new dealership looks great, but not a lot of people in this economy are expanding their business, but you are. Why now?

BP: Well according to Fox Business, which I was listening to this morning, they're saying that nationally motorcycle sales are down 60 percent, so they're saying business is bad. I'm saying, no business isn't bad; business is terrible. But GoDaddy's genesis really was born during the dotcom crash, so a time to start businesses and break into any industry is a time when the barriers to entry are the lowest. This is a perfect time for getting into the motorcycle business for purposes of acquiring a facility—you'll never get them cheaper. For acquiring the franchises—they're available and you can purchase them at a more reasonable price. And also, things are winding down and businesses are cutting costs and cutting promotions, so if you come in with a new energy and a new enthusiasm, you're really going to get noticed. I think it's a perfect time.

AFM: What is something unique about this dealership that you want people to know about?

BP: It's the enthusiasm; all our sales people are enthusiasts for the particular brand that they sell. They know it backward and forward, so they're not somebody that doesn't ride who is just there to turn a paycheck. If somebody comes in and they're interested in a particular bike they'll have someone who can tell them whatever they need to know about it, but also someone who believes in it enough to ride it. That's the one thing. The other thing is that I use here the same combination that I've used in other businesses (this is my fourth business that I've started) and that is to be successful you have to have the combination of good prices, coupled with very high customer service and a great selection. Now you bring that to any business and you're going to be a tall hog against the trough, and that's what we're doing here.

AFM: How do you define success?

BP: I'd say if you're happy doing what you're doing, you're incredibly successful. That's how I do it. I don't have a number or anything like that. If you wake up in the morning and you're looking forward to running through your day, you're a very successful man or woman.

AFM: You could live and work anywhere you wanted. Why the Valley?

BP: I moved here after I sold my first business back in 1994. I moved out here and I did it to play golf and I just fell in love with the area. I like it for a lot of reasons. I like the fact that the weather is good. It gets a little hot in the summer, but life's short, you might as well be where the weather is good. I like the fact that its pretty much wide open here. I like the people. I know there a lot of Arizona natives, but I like the fact that usually everybody's from someplace else. It's an eclectic group. I mean we're still the Wild West. I like the labor laws, I like the gun laws, I like everything about this place. I like the open roads, I like the blue skies, I like the sunsets. I love it and I believe in it, and you're right: I can live anywhere, but this is home.

AFM: Where would you like to take a bike trip that you haven't been yet?

BP: Well I'm going to be doing that starting this Saturday. Tomorrow morning I leave on a 5,300-mile trip, unless we take some segues and then it will be longer. But I've never take a trip up to the middle East Coast. We're going to see all kinds of stuff. The tallest handmade cross in the Western hemisphere, the biggest well ever dug, the biggest helium producer, the building in Oklahoma city that was blown up. We're going to see Cadillac Ranch, probably the biggest ball of twine. I'm sure you wanna go.

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AFM: Helmet or no helmet?

BP: I wear a helmet. I believe in two things: first that it makes a lot of sense to wear a helmet, but I believe a helmet law is wrong. I believe it should always be the biker's choice.

AFM: Do you have a favorite bike bar or bike event here in town?

BP: Your going to find that there are two types of bikers and both are great. First you have the lifestyle bikers, which is kind of like the Harley crowd. And then you have the sport biker. The sport bike crowd is kind of like the geeks and nerds of motorcycling and that's where I fit in. We don't really have bars, we have coffee shops and my favorite is the Cave Creek Coffee Company and in Cave Creek they call it C4.

AFM: Do you prefer to ride alone or with company?

BP: I like to do both, but I tend to ride mostly alone because my riding hours are so eclectic. I sometimes get up at 4:30 in the morning and go for a ride and at that time of day sometimes you're a little hard pressed to find a friend. In fact you've got no friends at 4:30 in the morning. But when I go on a trip, I go with at least another person.