



Dual interests in one-wheel rides and five-string instruments led Amy and John Drummond into intriguing businesses.

Pickin' and Spinnin'

PHOTOGRAPHS: RALPH ANDERSON

A fun-loving Marietta family comes full circle by peddling unicycles and banjos.

Holding hands, trusting God, and making a leap: That's how John and Amy Drummond got into first the unicycle business and later the banjo trade. Now a typical day for the ambitious Marietta pair and their energetic sons—Casey, 17; Zach, 14; and Sawyer, 11—involves spinning merrily on one kind of round object and picking jaunty tunes on another.

Wheels Turning

“Riding started as a hobby when I was 12,” John says. “It’s an interesting challenge, pedaling something

with no brakes, no handlebars, and only one contact point—the bottom of the tire—touching the ground. A good sense of balance is the key. Our boys took to it naturally and before long could do all kinds of tricks. I had to hold Amy’s hand for a while, but now the whole family rides together.”

In a small warehouse stacked high with rims, tires, seats, and pedals, the Drummonds assemble unicycles bound for all over. “We’ve shipped to Hawaii and Russia,” Amy says, amazed at how global their kitchen-table concept has grown. “We sent



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John Drummond

one to a soldier in Iraq. We even shipped to Yellowknife, a town way up north in Canada.”

Not bad for an operation that started out merely to track down a few parts. “I couldn’t find certain pieces I needed to upgrade my own cycles,” John recalls. “I figured others must have the same problem. So I put together a Web-based business, a sort of clearinghouse for unicycle parts. The response was phenomenal. The first month, in 1999, we sold maybe \$1,000 worth. The second month it jumped to \$10,000, and we thought we might be onto something big.”

High in the Saddle

The couple started their enterprise while John worked at IBM in technical support and sales. A downsizing there

abruptly ended his 23-year tenure but gave him more time to focus on unicycles. “It’s one thing to have a little sideline; maybe it works out, maybe not. It’s something else to make a commitment where, if things don’t go so well, you have no backup.”

Annual sales at Unicycle.com in 2005 topped \$1 million, involving approximately 10,000 whole unicycles and countless spare parts. Amy, a stay-at-home mom when the business launched, joined in immediately and helped.

right: Most Unicycle.com orders come via the Internet, but a few customers seek out the well-hidden Marietta operation. **below:** The Drummonds (from left), Zack, Sawyer, John, and Amy (not shown: Casey), ride unicycles every day.

“It’s fun for all of us,” Amy says. “Casey likes to handle the phones, talk to customers, and hear about different kinds of unicycles and new stunts to try. Zach is our computer guy. Sawyer mostly likes to ride and ride and ride.”

All three boys appear in how-to videos, demonstrating everything from beginners’ moves to fancy tricks. They put on elaborate shows for scout troops, summer camps, and vacation





Bible schools, introducing kids to the world of unicycles.

Ready, Willing, Able

“Our biggest market for new riders is 10-year-olds,” John says, “the same age group that gets into skateboarding. They see a unicycle in a cartoon or at a circus, and they’re drawn to it. Some people start as adults, but

Casey executes a curb hop, one of the simpler tricks he and his brothers frequently demonstrate.

it takes a lot longer to learn.”

More than 100 models clutter the halls and hang from the walls at the home of Unicycle.com. Beginner versions sport wheels ranging from 16 to 24 inches in diameter. Giraffe-style variations stand 5 feet tall or higher. Mountain versions boast knobby tires designed for hopping on rocks and fallen trees. Prices range from just over \$100 to around \$1,500.

A Different Tune

John recently turned his entrepreneurial attention to another hobby. “I pick banjo with some guys at our church, Eastside Baptist,” he says. “We call ourselves The Garage Dads, playing banjo, guitar, bass, and drums, mostly in each others’ homes but also during the children’s Sunday worship service.”

Aware that music stores far

outnumber unicycle dealers, he launched Banjo.com anyway. “I figured it wouldn’t take up much room,” he says. But orders rolled in, and banjos soon overflowed their designated corner. “Both of my hobbies have become thriving businesses, and I’m having the time of my life,” he adds.

Whereas nearly all of the unicycle orders arrive via the Internet, banjo buyers tend to walk in to test-drive instruments. “Once in a while someone will ask about unicycles,” Amy says, “but more often it’s the local musicians who seek us out.”

“We’ve learned from all this to trust our instincts and not be afraid to try new things,” John says. “We jump in and hope for the best. We work like every-

John gets a little extra muscle power from Barry Collins as they assemble a new vehicle in the Unicycle.com workshop.

thing is up to us, and pray like everything is up to God.” One thing’s for sure: Anytime they ride off into a sunset, a single wheel under each Drummond, they always have some spunky tunes plunking away in the background as their happy-go-lucky theme music. JOE RADA

Unicycle.com: 1-800-864-2925 or www.unicycle.com. **Banjo.com:** toll-free 1-877-253-9948 or www.banjo.com.

Ride on Over

The headquarters of Unicycle.com and Banjo.com isn’t easy to find, but you’re welcome to drop in. From I-75 northwest of Atlanta, take Exit 267-A, and go north on Canton Road NE. (also called State 5) for 6 miles. Turn right on Shallowford Road NE., and, after one long block, turn right on JVL Industrial Park Drive NE. Go a quarter mile, and turn left on JVL Court. Then look for unicycles, and listen for banjos. *1148 JVL Court, Suite 170, Marietta, GA 30066.*

