

## California's Wine Hooligans Assembles Premium Stable Led By Cycles Gladiator

After forming new company Wine Hooligans, former BevMo and Purple Wine Co. executive Dennis Carroll is attacking at the premium-and-above tier with a growing portfolio of both new and familiar California brands.

While its Cycles Gladiator brand, acquired from Hahn Family Wines about a year ago, is currently the largest of Wine Hooligans' labels, the fastest-growing is Broadside, led by a Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon retailing around \$15 a bottle. In total, Carroll tells SND the Wine Hooligans range—also including the Stephen Vincent, Goyette, Sea Monster and 3-Ball brands—will be between 125,000-150,000 cases this year. Within five to seven years, the veteran wine executive is targeting 500,000-700,000 cases.

"We specialize in the \$12-\$25 price segment," Carroll says. The Broadside brand, which also includes a Margarita Vineyard Cabernet at \$25, straddles that range, and is riding a wave of interest in Paso Robles Cab. "For a big category, I've been shocked at the growth in Cabernet over the last few years. Some retailers will tell you they're actually under-SKU-ed on Cabernet at this point," says Carroll. "Pinot Noir now often has about the same lineal footage at retail as Cabernet. Pinot's growth over the past 10 years has been phenomenal, but it's still only 30% or 40% the size of the Cab category."

While Broadside is providing momentum in Cabernet, Cycles Gladiator is in turnaround mode. After falling 31% to 100,000 cases in 2014, according to Impact Databank, the brand has been moved to a Central Coast appellation under Wine Hooligans, and has brought back its original labeling and winemaker, Adam LaZarre. Cycles has also moved up in price by about a dollar, to \$10.99, since the changes, which were implemented earlier this year. A similar rejuvenation project has been conducted on the Stephen Vincent brand, made by La Crema founder Bob Goyette, which has been reconfigured and changed to a Sonoma appellation.

Rounding out the Wine Hooligans stable are two new brands developed with Christian Tietje, who sold his Four Vines label to Purple Wine in 2010. The first, Sea Monster (\$25), includes a Santa Barbara-sourced Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, as well as a dry white blend from the Central Coast called Octopussy. Sea Monster has done well at the \$13-\$15 by-the-glass level on-premise, Carroll notes. The second Tietje project, 3-Ball, is a tri-appellated Zinfandel blending fruit from Sonoma, Paso Robles and Amador County. Zinfandel consumption has remained roughly flat since 2010, according to Impact Databank, and Carroll acknowledges that the segment represents "a tough game" currently. Still, he says, the varietal isn't really suffering in the market, "it's just that they call it a 'red blend' now."

