



In the frame

As the capital makes a case for better provisions for commuters who cycle, there has been a rise in popularity for custom-built bikes among riders looking for their own set of bespoke spokes

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If an expensive pair of shoes can last a lifetime then the same applies to a good bike. Just as Savile Row tailoring has hardly flinched in the face of fast fashion fads, the demand for hand-made, beautiful bespoke steel bikes is thriving in London despite the rise of off-the-peg carbon frames from factories in the Far East.

'If you absolutely love the bike and it gives you a pleasure that is almost indescribable – like that of a made-to-measure suit with its superior cut, line, detail and feel – then bespoke is the way forward,' says Liz Colebrook of Beaumont Bicycles (beaumontbicycles.com). With more than 30 years' experience as a bike mechanic and occupational therapist, Colebrook now makes around 18 frames per year – including her classic Flying Gate model – from her south Shropshire workshop and counts discerning London cyclists among her clients, who are willing to pay north of £2,500 for a handmade Beaumont.

And with a 56 per cent increase in cyclists on some London roads since 2014, covering more than half a million collective kilometres per day, it's not hard to see why cyclists would want to invest in a custom-made ride. Transport for London (TfL) attributes the rise to the redeveloped Cycle Superhighways, but it could be partly down to the improved provisions for cyclists in City offices as well as the significant mental and physical health benefits.

While the nationwide Cycle to Work scheme continues to offer tax-free benefits and rebates on bikes, companies such as Deloitte, Swiss Re and Time Inc all boast facilities such as secure storage, showers, lockers and changing rooms – taking inspiration from high-end gyms. Huckletree, a network of co-working spaces for start-ups,

entrepreneurs and creatives throws in on-site mechanics, plus its Shoreditch Alphabeta outpost is London's first cycle-in office, all thanks to a pioneering ride-in bike ramp.

It's not just provisions that attract cyclists to the two-wheeled commute. Professor Chris Oliver of the Physical Activity for Health Research Centre at Edinburgh University believes that the health benefits of cycling to work are profound and can increase productivity and life expectancy by up to seven years. 'Depression, stress and anxiety can be reduced by regular cycling,' says Oliver. 'This is due to the euphoric effects of the exercise, which produces endorphins, and because riding a bike can bring great enjoyment. Hence the phrase: you are only one bike ride away from a good mood.'

It's something London Mayor Sadiq Khan realises could make a huge difference, which is why he is bent on increasing the 34 per cent of Londoners who currently walk or cycle at least 20 minutes daily. If everyone followed suit, Khan claims it would save the NHS £1.7bn over 25 years and reduce cases of depression by 18,800.

As more people cotton on to the benefits of cycling, so too do the number looking to do it in style. Fold-up Bromptons and the ubiquitous Santander Bicycles may be a central part of London's cycling arsenal but, for the discerning cyclist making a regular commute, nothing beats a ride that fits like the proverbial glove.

'There are more people looking at bespoke bikes than there were five or 10 years ago. The awareness is there now,' says Caren Hartley, founder of the award-winning Hartley Cycles (hartleycycles.com). Having trained as a jeweller and silversmith, Hartley now makes around 12



This page from top Liz Colebrook of Beaumont Bicycles; Colebrook's famous Flying Gate model



bikes per year from her south London workshop – including her ‘dream’ gravel road bike – on sale for £8,677 – which featured in the Design Museum’s *Cycle Revolution* exhibition in 2015.

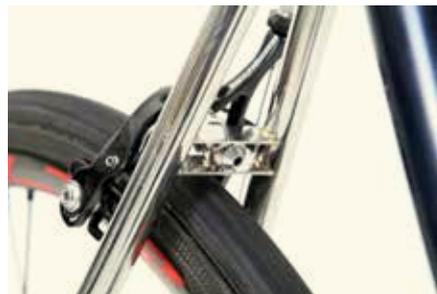
Hartley caters for people who ‘want a fast bike but with all the functionality of a commuter bike’. Proving it’s not merely passion, but also practicality that has fuelled the commuter drive for custom-made steel – whether it’s simple single-speeds, traditional butcher’s bikes with racks, heritage cycles, or road bikes with dropped handlebars. ‘If you’re making the same journey everyday then it’s all about comfort,’ says Colebrook. ‘Does your bike fit you? Is it a joy to ride? Is it easy to handle? To have everything in harmony, every component needs to be made in consideration of your body and what you need.’

Steel’s superior ride quality and longevity give custom-made bikes the edge over carbon ones, whose lighter frames take a battering on the unforgiving London roads. ‘Steel springs back and enhances your ride programme, like running on an athletics track,’ says Colebrook.

To ensure optimum comfort in the saddle, many of London’s bike makers use the acclaimed Retül 3D system, which uses LEDs to gather data and figure out a rider’s body geometry. ‘It provides incredibly accurate data and allows the bike to be set up to optimise the rider’s position and pedal stroke,’ says Jon Reid of Swift Cycles, a store in Spitalfields offering the £200 service.

High demand means there can be a long waiting list to join the bespoke revolution. ‘But it’s worth waiting for,’ Colebrook vouches. ‘You’re supporting British craftspeople and you’re supporting our history – and what you’re getting is a personal touch and a bike for life.’ ●

Above Huckletree’s innovative ride-in office ramp **Below from top gold leaf on one of Caren Hartley’s handmade bikes; the rear brake of a bespoke Hartley**



TOP GEAR

MOONRIDER GILET, £155, HUEZ

The most reflective gilet on the market: lightweight, waterproof and slick in silver, with unique quick-burst zip function. huez.co.uk

LEATHER CARRY HOLDER, £24, TEMPLE

Attach this nifty handle – in tan or brown leather – to your bike frame, to make it easier to carry. templecycles.co.uk

GLISSOLD BOMBER JACKET, £200, LUMO

LED strips illuminate this men’s black water-resistant garment inspired by a military flight jacket. There’s also a similar version for women. lumo.cc

FLY 12 HD CAMERA AND LIGHT, £275, CYCLIQ

A front-facing all-in-one safety light and full HD camera with audio. It’s USB-chargeable and with full Strava integration. cycliq.com

FOLDING HELMET, £115, MORPHER

Award-winning helmet which, through a system of clever seams, folders completely flat. morpherhelmet.com

ELEMNT BOLT GPS BIKE COMPUTER, £199.99, WAHOO

Easy-to-use aerodynamic compact GPS with long battery life, and smart-phone connectivity. uk.wahoofitness.com

URSA BICYCLE SADDLE BAG, £120, MICHAUX

This chic leather saddlebag in black, red or navy sits neatly behind the saddle and doubles as a handbag or backpack. michauxclub.com

CITY-BIKER PANNIER BAG, £98.99, ORTLIEB

Waterproof rear pannier in a range of colours that can be carried over the shoulder and fits A4 files and 13” laptops. cyclestore.co.uk

CAMBIUN C17 SADDLE, £120, BROOKS ENGLAND

This unisex saddle made from vulcanized natural rubber and organic cotton canvas has a cut-out section for added comfort. brooksendland.com