



THE ART OF CYCLING

More and more people are taking heed of the imperative 'On yer bike'. *Marxism Today* considers why and offers some hints to two-wheeled aspirants.

Transports of delight

Paul Weller and Eric Clapton do it. Norman Tebbit urged it on the unemployed. Duncan Campbell does it in pursuit of the truth, while Billy Connolly gets unexpectedly lyrical about it. Lord Longford and the Dutch royal family are well known for it. Alexei Sayle and Michael Palin do it. Just about everyone in China does it. Three-quarters of the children in Britain have learned to do it before the age of seven, and, although lots of people do it on their own, most people seem to like doing it best in groups. *Marxism Today* people do it, of course.

Cycling. It's undergone an amazing transformation in the last ten years or so, to become not only one of the fastest growing outdoor activities in Britain (28,000 people entered the London to Brighton Bike Run last year and raised £0.5m for the British Heart Foundation) but also a very stylish pursuit. A cult even. Cheap, chic, ecologically sound, good for your health *and* politically right-on, cycling has just about everything going for it - except an immensely powerful road lobby and current government transport policy. Cycling is an activity which bears out the truth of the adage 'the personal is political'. It's both a personal affair and a political statement - not that there's anything inherently political about riding a bike, of course, but efforts to discriminate against it have the inevitable effect of turning cycling into a political activity. Getting 'on your bike' these days is just a little bit subversive.

It has taken a decade for cycling to shake off its baggy-shorts-and-hairy-



Billy Connolly's a cycling addict. He does 20 miles around Richmond Park every day and takes his bike on top of his car when he's touring. Cycling's even found its way into his stage act and you can hear his thoughts on such arcane subjects as 'penile numbness' (scourge of serious male cyclists, apparently) on his LP Wreck on Tour. He can be quite lyrical about cycling as well as rude: 'When I ride my bike something happens to my soul. . . Something dances in me.'

(Courtesy Bicycle Magazine)

knees image. Today, however, top fashion houses vie with one another to incorporate the cycling 'look' and leading pop groups - like Madness, Queen and Style Council - have made it part of their image. Cycling clothes and accessories have a sharp functional elegance (and real street-cred) which is

both dateless and bang up-to-date.

The hey-day of cycling was in the 1930s, but after the war the bottom dropped out of the market as Britain became more and more a nation of car fanatics; today we have the dubious distinction of being the world leader in terms of numbers of cars per mile of road. Although the number of bikes being sold has increased dramatically since 1972, paradoxically, the number of people actually riding them has fallen, as more and more cyclists are literally squeezed off the roads by more powerful road users.

Today's machines are products of the latest developments in technological wizardry, ergonomics and aerodynamic design. And there are models for all seasons - bikes for shopping and commuting, folding bikes, bikes for touring, track-racing and road-racing, and mountain bikes with romantic names like 'Muddy Fox' for covering the roughest terrain.

Research is going forward to refine and market a recumbent bike with a streamlined body shell to improve aerodynamic efficiency and give speeds up to 50 miles per hour. But the classic safety bike, the basic shape of which has scarcely changed this century, goes on and on - perhaps the most perfect combination of people and machinery ever invented.

The cycle of today is faster, door-to-door, than a bus or a train or a car in urban areas. Above all it's under your own control. Cycling is something *you* do, not something that gets done to you.

Ina Myatt



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Examples abound of instances of discrimination against people using bicycles. Sir George Young MP recently remarked that had his old departmental officials known that he was transporting government files around by bike, he would have been asked to stop such a risky and unseemly habit. He also caused security headaches at a recent Tory Party conference by shackling his bike up to the railings outside the hall.

Similarly, cycling only gets a mention in the press when the story is bizarre. A minister on a bike? That's pretty wacky. Celebrities who cycle - how peculiar. Yet everyone knows that cycling has been booming since the mid-70s, and that cycling is basically a 'good thing'. However, people do not stop to consider just *how good* cycling is - socially, economically, and environmentally.

FoE have published a new policy document emphasising the importance of cycling. More than three quarters of all trips made by people in this country are less than five miles



long - a distance that the vast majority of the population could easily achieve on a bike. Imagine the savings in oil consumption that would result if just a small proportion of the trips currently made by private car were to be made by bike. Imagine the reduction this would make to the deadly car fumes currently killing forests, lakes and people throughout Europe.

Imagine also the savings on

new roads, which at the moment are said to be required to reduce congestion. In addition the cost of one cycle parking stand is only £100 - car parking spaces can cost several thousand pounds.

Central government remains reluctant to spend money to promote cycling, arguing that it is the responsibility of local authorities. They, of course, no longer have the money or freedom to do what many of them

would like. There are, however, a number of councils leading the way. Manchester boasts the unique Greater Manchester Cycling Project, a team working to bridge the gap between council and cyclist, providing technical advice and a focus for promotional work. The city council has allocated up to 3% of its capital transport budget to cycling measures - more, even, than the GLC during the heady days of the Cycling Project Team.

Cities such as Southampton, Nottingham, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Oxford and Bristol are also responding to the needs of cyclists in a variety of ways. They have clearly recognised the enormous benefits to be derived from encouraging people out of their cars and onto bikes. Perhaps even more importantly, they are making cycling safer and more attractive for the huge section of the population who do not own cars, and who are presently heavily penalised by Conservative transport policies.

Andy Clarke



Cycling gear is sharp and functionally elegant: this Mondrian-inspired shorts and top - the Art of Politics meets the art of cycling? - is available from Bike, Floral Street, London WC2.

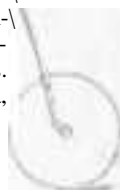
Recently the Milan city authorities placed 500 new bicycles at the public's disposal, to ride around and leave for each other wherever they stopped. Unfortunately the scheme collapsed within 2 days with only 50 bikes left intact! However this well-intentioned initiative had at least shown a recognition that the promotion of cycling was of benefit to the city¹.

The GLC, when it existed, was working in different ways to the same end. Its Cycling Project Team spent 1% of the transport budget (some £2m a year) on cycle schemes. In the post-abolition chaos, there is no longer a statutory authority with an overview of transport policy in London. There is certainly no commitment to cyclists. The Department of Transport has said that cycling should be encouraged, but it is clear that its planning priorities are dictated by an overwhelming commitment to motorised traffic. Its policy of road building and 'improvements' designed to reduce congestion has merely encouraged more commuter cars into the city. Its adverts on hoardings cautioning us to 'Be Bright at Night', imply that it is usually the fault of cyclists if we're involved in accidents.

The London Cycling Campaign has views on what action should be taken by local authorities to facilitate cycling. New traffic management schemes could be planned with cyclists, pedestrians and residents in mind, avoiding solutions which are only of benefit to motorists. One way systems, for example, increase car speeds and create detours and hazards for pedestrians and cyclists. Further measures would include: cycle parking facilities in all shopping areas and near community facilities; lockable sheds on council estates; secure parking for bikes at workplaces, and where possible changing facilities.

Figures show that while Londoners own 1.2 million bicycles, only 250,000 are used regularly, indicating that a huge number of people would cycle if conditions were more favourable. Many of these measures would benefit pedestrians as well as cyclists, and facilities for bikes such as carriage space on trains or storage arrangements would also improve mobility for people using wheelchairs and prams. This may sound like Utopia, but it is a reality already found in European cities.

Jo Child



Me and my bike

My most enduring love affair has lasted for over a quarter of a century. It's not just a sexual thing - that seductive feel of cold tubular steel and warm leather. No, this goes deeper than that. This relationship was born to go places.

Ever since my parents bought me a three-wheel 'Gresham Flyer' when I was eight, I've had an unbroken chain of two-wheel lovers cycling through my life.

From rusty 1930s sit-up-and-begs to fancy French flyweights you can lift with your pinky, I've ridden 'em all, kid.

My current bike is a solid 12-gear Raleigh town bike which I saw advertised in the local paper for seventy quid, and I must say it's served me well. It got me to Brighton for the sponsored Heart Foundation run, and recently to Oxford for Nicaragua. Cycling against the Contra-flow. Right on.

A word for the uninitiated: I used to think that while you couldn't drink and drive, cycling in a pie-eyed state would prove no problem. Wrong.

Some eighteen months ago, after imbibing more than six pints of Scudworth's Headbanger I attempted cycling home. Half a mile from my house I blacked-out, regaining consciousness several hours later in a hospital bed to find I had acquired a broken nose, black eye and generally stitched-up face.

Did it stop me cycling? Hell no. Just like ol' Duke Wayne after his horse has thrown him I was straight back in the saddle. But from now on, kids, biking-and-boozing gets the Golden No-No.

Curb Your Drinking - Don't Kerb Your Face!

I guess the humble bicycle isn't ready yet to take its place as the twentieth century sexual icon, but it does provide a great way of getting about, it's a good source of exercise, and the technology of this beast is comprehensible to even the simplest of minds.

Cyclists of the world unite - you have nothing to lose but your chains. Or in the words of dear old PC George Dixon, 'If you're on your bike - wear white. Evenin' all.'

Tony de Meur

CYCLOPEDIA

Safety

- Plan your route before you set out.
- Keep your fingers on the brakes near dangerous spots.
- Keep at least a metre away from parked cars.
- Remember that most accidents happen near junctions or when changing lanes.
- At roundabouts get in the right lane and move out when clear. Don't dither. Be positive.
- Be seen. Proper lighting is mandatory at night and reflective gear is essential at all times.

Legal matters

You must not ride On footpaths parallel to the road or any path where there is a 'No Cycling' sign, *or* along motorways, *or* if under the influence of drink or drugs, *or* while holding onto another vehicle, without lights or carrying a passenger. You *can* ride along roads reserved for buses or taxis and in with-flow bus lanes.

Insurance: Knocking down a pedestrian or scraping a car's paintwork could cost you a lot of money unless you are covered by third party insurance.

If you or your bike is damaged because of bad road surfaces you can usually claim compensation from the body responsible (usually the relevant local council).

Take legal advice if you are involved in an accident. Most cycling organisations can refer you to a 'user-friendly' solicitor.

(From *On Your Bike* published by the London Cycling Campaign £1.35)

Some relevant (and not so relevant) facts

- A cycle can be pedalled for 1600 miles using the same amount of energy as is contained in one gallon of fuel.
- Seven cycles can be parked comfortably in the same space as one car.
- A recent study commissioned by BR showed that bikes on trains could generate £10 million more revenue.
- If 10% of journeys to work by car were made by bike, a saving of 14 million barrels of oil a year would result.
- 15 people are killed every day by motor vehicles in Britain.
- Car congestion on roads costs an estimated £3 billion every year in Britain.

Organisations

The Cyclists' Touring Club, 69 Meadow, Godalming, Surrey (04868 7217). The largest British cycling organisation. Offers legal aid, insurance, touring advice etc.

Friends of the Earth, 377 City Road, London EC1 (01 837 0731).

London Cycling Campaign, 3 Stamford St, London SE1 (01 928 7220).

National Bike Club, c/o RoSPA, Cannon House, The Priory, Birmingham.

British Cycling Federation, 16 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1 (01 387 9320).

British Triathlon Association, 3 Porters Drive, Dagenham, Essex. The sport that combines running, swimming and cycling.

Bike Events, PO Box 75, Bath, Avon. Organisers of the London-to-Brighton cycle ride and many other events, including cycle holidays.

Some useful books

Cycling: A Source Book, Philip Ennis, Pelham Books £5.95

Cyclists Britain, John Ray, Pan/Ordnance Survey £5.95

Richard's Bicycle Book, Richard Ballantine, Pan £2.95

Cycling in Europe, Nicholas Crane, Haynes £7.95

On Your Bike, London Cycling Campaign £1.35

Penguin Book of the Bicycle, R Watson and M Gray £2.95

Calendar of events

2-26 July The most spectacular sporting event in the world. From Berlin to Paris. Britain is entering a team for the first time in 20 years. And it's being televised on C4.

12 July London to Cambridge Bike Ride in Aid of WWF.

19 July Variety Club Bikeathon. Battersea Park.

26 July-8 August The Great British Bike Ride (London to the Isle of Skye). Organised by Bike Events.

12-16 August The Kelloggs Professional Tour of Britain, finishing in central London and covered by television.

15-30 August The End to End, John O'Groats to Lands End. Bike Events.

23, 30 August, 6, 13, 20 September City Centre Cycling. Held in different cities each Sunday and culminating in a race around central London.

6 September Four Corners Around the World Bike Ride arrives in London from Amsterdam.

