MY BIKE

MADE IT MYSELF

CTC MEMBER DAVE RAMSDEN BUILT HIS OWN BIKE FROM SCRATCH: A STURDY SINGLESPEED THAT HE'S USED TO EXPLORE THE CANAL NETWORK

After 40 years of building and riding motorcycles, I decided to switch to bicycles as my only means of transport. Before selling all my workshop equipment, I made my own bicycle. The techniques I used were those I learned making motorcycle frames, which hasn't resulted in a particularly light bike, but it felt right as soon as I got on it.

I had intended to build a bicycle using no cycle parts. But I soon discovered that bicycle wheels are in fact the best wheels for bicycles! The front one cost £3.25 on an internet auction site, and came with a tyre and a disc rotor. I built the rear on my own home-made hub. I fitted a cheap but effective mechanical disc calliper to the front and a pretty feeble old sidepull calliper to the rear.

The main frame of the bike is off-the-shelf 30mm box-section steel tubing. The rear stays are round steel tube, with horizontal dropouts and chain tugs. The head tube and bottom bracket are also square section but with machined round inserts for the bearings. The fork is light steel tubing, braced for strength and style. I used a combination of MIG and TIG welding. Handlebars and bar clamps are motorcycle ones.

The bike has a single fixed gear, using a modified motorcycle sprocket up front and a rear one I bought from my local bearing shop and machined up. I have no idea what the gearing is because I guessed it. I was lucky and it allows me to achieve a reasonable cruising speed and also to attack a modest hill standing up; steep hills mean walking. The home-made crank runs on two universal sealed bearings, also from the bearing shop. The home-made pedals use plastic bushes made from pieces of pop bottle.

> **"The home-made pedals use plastic bushes made from pieces of pop bottle"**

West Yorkshire is hilly for a singlespeed bike, but I am lucky to live two minutes from the Spen Valley Greenway, an old railway line that gives me easy access to two canals. On towpaths or the Greenway, a single gear is fine. And the canal network goes all over. Last June, I undertook my longest trip on the bike so far – from Cleckheaton to Carrog near Llangollen in North Wales. Armed with only a basic drawing of the canal system, I travelled via the Huddersfield Broad, Huddersfield Narrow, Peak Forest, Macclesfield, Trent and Mersey, Shropshire Union and Llangollen canals. I arrived at Carrog two-and-a-half days later, having spent two nights in my bivvy bag at the canal-side.

I discovered that some of the canal network is hard going by bike. I have done the trip since with my partner on our Rohloff-equipped Thorns, and it didn't get any easier. Having said that, the Llangollen canal is reward enough, with two big aqueducts and two long unlit tunnels. I'm planning more long-distance trips.

TECH SPEC

Dave Ramsden's DIY bike

Frame: Steel. A combination of square and round tubing, MIG welded.

Fork: Steel, braced and TIG welded, tapered-roller steering head.

Wheels: 26-inch Schwalbe Marathons on alloy rims, rear hub home made.

Transmission: Single fixed-gear

Brakes: Cable disc front, sidepull rear.

Handlebar: Chromed steel motorcycle.

Saddle: Brooks.

Luggage: Carradice saddlebag. Elasticated net to hold my sleeping bag to the fork.