



# Patrick Trainor's Parabike

*With an interest in military vehicles and cycling, it was inevitable that journalist **Patrick Trainor** would acquire a BSA Airborne Bicycle*



**E**ver since I was a child listening to my father's tales about driving army surplus wagons after the Second World War, I've had an interest in military vehicles. That's about the same length of time I've been into bikes. After purchasing a 1943 Willys jeep a few years ago, I've wanted a period bike to go with it.

The most iconic WW2 bike available is the BSA Airborne Bicycle, more commonly known as a Parabike. After several failed attempts, I managed to find one in original and excellent condition from a guy in the jeep club in Hampshire this year.

Like most things military, these bikes were built out of necessity, and as a result are brutally simple but effective. They are full-size 26-inch wheeled bikes, designed to be folded so they could be strapped onto a paratrooper while he jumped from a plane, then assembled on the ground to provide a means of transport. The one-size-fits-

all 21in steel frame has wingnut-fastening hinge joints on the top and down tubes to allow the bike to fold in two. A more simple-looking wingnut on the top of the handlebar stem allows the one-piece bar and stem to turn sideways for folding as well. The pedals are just spindles on bearings that slide in and out, allowing them to push inwards when bike is folded to keep it flat.

Gearing is a 48-tooth BSA stamped cotterpin chainring with an 18-tooth singlespeed freewheel. BSA front and rear centrepull calliper brakes do a good job of stopping the bike, and the leather BSA saddle is more comfortable than it looks.

**“It's debatable if any were parachuted into combat, but land forces did use them”**

From 1942-1945, around 70,000 of the bikes were built. It's debatable if any were actually parachuted into combat. Land forces did use them, especially commandos, and there are many pictures of British and Canadian forces coming ashore on D-Day carrying them.

I love riding this bike. The bolt upright riding position, coupled with the back sweeping handlebars, means I can't be in a hurry to get anywhere on it. It goes okay when you eventually get the gear turning – thankfully it's not fixed. Cornering is fun but climbing is difficult as you can't get forward for leverage. I ride it most to the pub at my local WW2 airfield about a mile from home, where everyone has had a go on it. It's been to a few shows on the jeep and proves a great talking point.

The bike's longest and best outing was this year's L'Eroica Britannia event in Derbyshire, which was for pre-1987 bikes. I rode the 30-mile route in full WW2 British military uniform, the result of a bet (I won). The bike performed perfectly. I did have to walk some of the hills but it was an amazing event and everyone loved the bike. I was impressed that so many people knew what kind of bike it was and how many people came to talk about it. Those of a certain age had them as kids, when they could be bought for £5 new from surplus yards. They said they wished that were still the case. ●

## Tech spec: BSA Airborne Bicycle

**FRAME & FORK:** BSA 2nd pattern steel frame and fork with folding pivots on top and down tubes, tightened by wingnuts **WHEELS:** 26x1 3/8in steel, 32 spoke front, 40 spoke rear with singlespeed hub **TRANSMISSION:** BSA pattern cotterpin 48T chainset with singlespeed 18T freewheel and sliding peg pedals **BRAKING:** BSA centrepull calliper front and rear **STEERING & SEATING:** BSA leather saddle. One piece handlebar & stem with Bakelite grips and wingnut fastening on top of the stem to allow for easy folding. **ACCESSORIES:** Pump, saddle bag, light bracket on headset. Everest carrier for Bergen rucksack on handlebars available. Rifle holders were a unit modification depending on needs.

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