

Opinion Letters

THIS MONTH EASY TYRE REMOVAL, ALDI'S CYCLING GEAR, BIKES ON TRAINS, 1980s' MOUNTAIN BIKES, AND MORE



Letter of the month

Training wheels

I built this bike (pictured above) to help teach adults to ride, using my experience as a Bikeability instructor and a professional mechanical engineer.

Bicycle cranks are designed for efficient pedalling for confident cyclists. Learners like pedals lower to the ground and with a reduced crank length. But adult chainsets are between 160mm and 175mm, which can be a problem for a beginner. They may have difficulty rotating their legs through a large circular movement. People who are heavily built may have difficulty lifting their legs up. Shorter cranks can be the answer – and 130mm chainsets aimed at children are readily available. If you simply reduce the crank length by 30mm, you would need to increase the saddle height from the ground to pedal properly. So the bike needs adapting.

A steel bike with 24-inch wheels is good start. A step-through frame is best. Remove the gear mechanisms; gears get in the way at this stage. Ensure the brakes work. Fit a long seat post so a wide range of riders will fit the bike. Find another steel bike and remove the bottom bracket shell, complete with the original bottom bracket.

Now lower the height of the bottom bracket – 80-100mm works well – while ensuring the chain does not catch on the chainstay. To do this, weld the new bottom bracket shell into place. I used 20x3mm strips of mild steel. (To stop any distortion it helps to keep an old steel-shelled bottom bracket unit in place.)

The result is a bike that's really easy to learn to ride on.

Peter Howe

Win a Green Oil bike care kit worth £64.99

The letter of the month wins an Eco Rider Deluxe set, courtesy of Green Oil. Green Oil's plant-based lubes and cleaners are fully biodegradable and contain no PTFE. The kit comprises: Green Oil Wet Chain Lube; Ecogrease; Green Clean Bike Cleaner; Clean Chain Degreaser; FSC Drive Chain Brush; two Bike Armour cable-rub protectors; an EcoRag; a reusable plastic tub for water or storage; and some seeds to grow your own food! For details, or to order Green Oil products, visit green-oil.net



Get in touch

LETTERS are edited for space, clarity and, if necessary, legality. The editor reads and acknowledges all members' letters but publishes only a selection and doesn't enter into correspondence. Feedback for the next issue must arrive by 30 June. Please include your membership number.

WRITE TO: Cycle, PO Box 313, Scarborough, YO12 6WZ or email editor@cyclingsuk.org



Tight tyre tip

I have a method that works for me for very tight Schwalbe Double D tyres. It uses two cheap plastic clamps from hardware stores.

Place the clamps so that the beads are held on the rim. Keep fitting one side of the tyre onto the rim, using a lever if needed, moving the adjacent clamp along until the last few inches of bead remain to be seated (pictured). Using a couple of levers, the last bit can be levered over the rim easily as the beads on either side are held in place by the clamps.

Obviously you take the usual care not to trap the innertube between the bead and rim or with the lever.

Robert Grange



Space for cyclists

I found your article 'A new code' very interesting. Since December a friend and I have been wearing these hi-viz tops (pictured). They have made a huge difference to the number of near misses we have. Drivers are used to reading signs and generally obeying them. It's noticeable the extra space we are being given. We even have queues behind us waiting for space to overtake.

Elaine Wright

Cheap and cheerful

I was pleased to see 'Gear Up' in the latest mag make reference to more modestly priced clothing. In the past I've been horrified by the cost of some of the clothing items reported.

As the Welfare Officer of the Coventry group, warm weatherproof clothing is essential to keep us cycling through the winter. The solution for many of us is the cycling kit from Aldi (like the jacket pictured). The prices are much lower than average, and from my experience the quality is very good. With the forthcoming increases in the cost of living, value for money will become all important.

Mike Thomas



Thirty years of Dr Bike

Along with other volunteers, I run the Dr Bike service in Lewes (drbikelewes.com) which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. I became involved 15 years ago. Every Saturday morning we fix people's bikes for a donation (plus any parts used). The location and volunteers have changed over the years but the service has not.

The story goes that in 1992 some enthusiasts turned up to an environmental action day to fix bikes. They didn't get through all of them on the day so they came back next week. Thirty years on we are still here!

We use donations to buy tools, insurance and coffee. Spare money is given to local charities. Are we the longest-running Dr Bike in the country?

Mike Bray



Obituaries

Are published online at cyclinguk.org/obituaries. Contact publicity@cyclinguk.org



Left: Alarmy

Bikes on trains

It's a bit late for Tom Culver to complain about the lack of carrying capacity for bicycles on modern trains. We got free transport for bikes in 1977 when all long-distance trains had a guard's van for carrying mail. The real killer of the guard's van was that Royal Mail stopped carrying mailbags on passenger trains and mostly went over to road transport.

Passenger numbers rose after privatisation in 1997 so new trains required more seats. Space for carrying bicycles reduced and restrictions increased. There's no case for long-distance trains to provide more capacity for an irregular usage by cyclists so we have to book in advance.

Adrian Williams

We'll have to agree to differ on "no case". Some services in mainland northern Europe manage it. See above.



Built to last

I bought a new Ridgeback 603 SIS (pictured) in the mid '80s, one of the first MTBs in the UK. I've been riding it ever since, including years exploring the narrow streets of Marrakech.

When the drivetrain began to wear out I bought a Ridgeback 604 SIS to cannibalise the parts. But my wizard bike mechanic friend came up with a better idea: restore and rejuvenate both bikes, making one great off-road (with thick tyres) and the other great on-road (with thinner tyres). I use one or the other nearly every day.

Alan Weaver

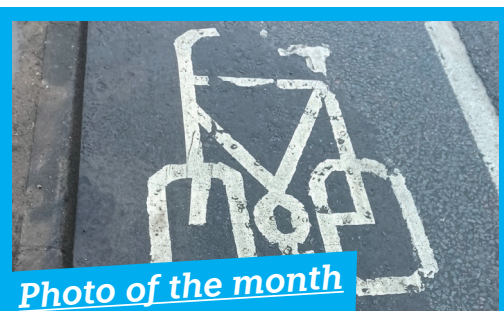


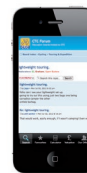
Photo of the month

Yeah, but it doesn't roll backwards...

Colchester (Camulodunum) boasts that it is Britain's oldest town, recorded in letters in AD77. But nearby Ipswich (Gippeswic) can boast Britain's oldest cycle route – so old, in fact, it predates the invention of the wheel! Coincidentally it is on Colchester Road in Ipswich. **Andy Tricker**

CYCLING UK FORUM

Get immediate feedback from other members at forum.cyclinguk.org. Here's an abridged extract from a recent thread: cyclinguk.org/forum-towpath



CANAL TOWPATH MAP? ratherbeintobago:

Is there such a thing as an online route planner that uses canal towpaths?

Cowsham: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/notices#form>. 'Menu', 'Enjoy the waterways', 'Canal and river maps'. Choose which you want.

Sweep: <https://canalplan.org.uk/index.html>. Aimed primarily at those on the water, and I think lots of canal users use it for plotting journey times/checking facilities/locks etc, but has its uses for cyclists.

Nearholmer: CycleStreets is quirky about towpaths. I think the issue is that most towpaths are indeed footpaths in right of way terms, but are unusual because the landowner, C&RT, has granted universal permission to cycle on them.

millimole: It's actually the other way round. Very few towpaths are

rights of way and C&RT allows them to be used as permissive paths, including cycling. There was an understanding with the DEFRA grant that has kept C&RT afloat (!) that C&RT would encourage 'access for all' – hence the removal of cycle permits.

Richard Fairhurst: cycle.travel does like towpaths if the surface is good enough (and tagged as such in OSM), but it'll choose a quiet country lane in preference to a bumpy towpath. The map on the Canal & River Trust website shows towpaths, though with no indication of their suitability for cycling.

ione: This may be useful: opencanalmap.uk/2017/08/05/view-the-map-in-google-maps-on-your-phone/ It's a Google Maps overlay of the canal network. It may need some double checking on sections.