

LIGHTWEIGHT NEWS - 16

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It seems that my details of women's cycling attire from the pre-war era got several of our older (and some of the not-so-old) readers quite excited, and all for the wrong reasons. If this carries on then *Lightweight News* will only be available from the top shelves of newsagents. If you want something more interesting – say about bikes for a change - please send some copy in for the next edition.

However in for a penny, in for a pound. I was recently leafing through the Coronation Year (1953) edition of *Kuklos Annual* – no not about men running about with white sheets over their heads! On the contrary it was for 'Cyclists and All Road Users'.

After the first advert showing an ecstatic couple looking like the cats that had the cream, I noticed the male had a bottle of Ovaltine tablets tucked into his shirt pocket, need I say more.

It was good to see though that after fighting the second world war and living in real austerity for some eight years since the finish that the cycling world hadn't let its obsession with women's clothing diminish and carried on where they left off before the war (come to think of it, through the war as well!). The annual says "Women on tour may wear shorts and carry a skirt or slacks in the bag for off-cycle use; or they may wear a divided skirt on all occasions (no nightdress then!). For the upper half there are many types of zipp-fastened shirt, blouse, jacket or jersey."

"Women who prefer to make their own cycling clothes should send for a pattern to the *Woman Pattern* Department, 12-14 Macklin Street, London WC2. The following are available: Shorts alone, No. 2017, waists 25 to 34", 1/5d post free. Simplicity suit, with slacks, shorts, and short sleeved blouse, busts 30 – 38", No. 3223, 1/5d post free. Give number and size only."

Interesting to see that waist sizes stop at 34".

Kuklos goes on to point out that puncture patches should not overlap. If they do, rub down the edge with sandpaper. This reminds me that I have heard of people buying a wheel or machine and finding 20 or so patches on the inner tube. *Kuklos* carries on in another vein, "that if a man has a wound which suppurates, any defective gland or tooth, any digestive or bronchial trouble or superfluous fat then he can't be fit". He goes on, "don't tell me that this or that man won championships while suffering with abscesses, tonsillitis or tuberculosis – I know! It doesn't affect the principle I have laid down." At least they told it as it was in Coronation Year when we all supposed to be waving our little paper Union Jacks.

I do remember that most of the towns and villages held special Coronation events, often including grass-track racing. Before the sports in King's Lynn I rode in a parade on a really old machine with pedals which went backwards and forwards treadle-style. This was after I failed to master the art of getting off an ordinary without clinging to a tree or lamp post. As a rehearsal, I ended riding around Peterborough on one of Cyril Mundy's ordinaries on which he had pushed me off. He went into his shop and left me to it, forgetting I would have to stop some time. Eventually I ended up hanging from a lamp post by one hand with the ordinary in the other. Not very dignified I'm afraid. Cyril Mundy, who owned a bike shop in Peterborough, was also an avid collector of old machines.

Later on in 1958 it was interesting to read in *Sporting Cyclist* what was to be handed up to the Tour riders in their musette. 2 Bananas, 2 Gateaux, 2 tarts (cherry and apricot), sugar, plums, 2 peaches, 1 orange, coffee, lemon juice, tea and water. I'm sure that pre-war there would have been at least a couple of thick steaks in there. When we rode the L'Eroica event in Tuscany, at the 40's/50's style feeding station there were giant cheeses and meats with sharp knives with which to help yourselves. Another tasty item was bread soaked in Chianti Classico and sprinkled with sugar. Back here in the UK at the same time we thought we were living it up with a bag of chips and a Lyons fruit pie.

When we meet up with our friend John Spooner on V-CC rides we always have some lighthearted fun at the lunch stops when he goes over our bikes and gives us marks for correct equipment and set-up. John was in the cycle trade for years, built frames and was an active racer as well, so his is an opinion we value. If we have tubs I always have to re-fold them so that the tread is always on the outside to avoid damage – I have a mental block on this in just the same way I do about folding HP or ‘clincher’ tyres. If I had a bike shop I would have to offer to fit all tyres free rather than admit I couldn’t fold them for the journey home.

The last bike I built up was a 25” Rotrax with 4-speed Osgear. Everything seemed fine when I tested it before we set off for the Odiham ride but I guess that in transit the striker fork must have been nudged a little. Luckily we arrived early and I had time to make adjustments. I had initially used a modern chain to set the gear up with and then fitted a period Reynolds thinking the older, stiffer chain may work better with the Osgear. I ended up with gears which would change when not under load but with pressure applied the chain baulked at the biggest sprocket and then came to rest between it and the next (three-tooth difference 24-21) which meant I was spinning the pedals but going nowhere as the chain rode around in the gap. Luckily the ride was not too hilly so I just got away with it by changing very early. The next day’s ride was hilly but I had a spare Rotrax (pretentious – moi!) with me fitted with a Sturmey FM. Although this ride had some stiff climbs the low gear never slipped as FM’s sometimes do. These two rides were both in Hampshire (UK) and this is the home of the Rotrax marque, built in Southampton. As no Rotrax turned up for last year’s Rotrax ride organised by the Hampshire section of the V-CC we thought we would shame the locals by bringing two all the way from Cambridge.

Anyway back to the Osgear. I thought maybe it would work better with a two-tooth difference between the cogs and a slightly smaller large sprocket say 22-20-18-16. The problem seems to be finding a suitably spaced freewheel. The existing one is a five-speed (14-24) with the smaller 14T sprocket removed leaving a 16-tooth high gear. All of my 5-speed freewheels with 22T low gear have 18T as the second highest gear – they are fairly close-ratio. Time to catalogue all my freewheels again as I spent half the morning counting teeth like an overworked dentist.

In spite of the gear problems on Saturday we had a great weekend doing two rides, one on the Hampshire border on the Saturday and then on Sunday in the depths of this beautiful county. Both rides took us along some of the very quiet narrow lanes that abound in this area and were very relaxing. On the second ride we bought a bottle of the local Somborne Valley white wine and were very pleasantly surprised when we drank it. If only we had bought more. The organiser of this ride, Bob Damper, had a combination Sturmey/Cyclo gear which was popular amongst tourists of the 50’s – those that weren’t still fixed-wheel stalwarts! This set-up gave Bob gears from 32 – 86”. My Conventional Sturmey FM with 18T sprocket gave me 48 – 81” which, as I said, coped very well.

The following weekend we did the North Road Section’s Hilly Ride. In view of the nature of the ride we both rode our Pennines (what else for a hilly ride?), mine an ‘Italia’, Patricia a ‘Richmond’, which are fitted with fairly low gears. I just made it up the steepest hill so may need to go lower still some time. As each year passes so I try to sneak a slightly lower gear without spoiling the lines of the machine. Most of these 50’s racing machines would have had a close-ratio 5-speed block with maybe even 20 tooth for the lowest gear. Having said that the 14 – 24 block seems to have been very popular, used I guess with a double chainring with about 3 tooth difference, e.g.47/50.

We followed this with the Cambridge 50 (a 50-miler) organised every year by Tom Culver and a Classic in the V-CC calendar. We only have one pre-war machine between us and it is Patricia’s 1937 Macleans so this is what she used. As the ride is a flat one I opted for my fixed-wheel Maclean. We seem to be having “his and hers” bikes at a lot of rides this year. After writing this last sentence I just checked if it was Maclean or Macleans. It seems it is Maclean but Maclean’s Featherweight with the apostrophe – Lynn Truss would be delighted.

Our next lightweight event is the Hetchins Weekend so the bikes select themselves for this one.

Steve Griffiths on re-chroming:

Until fairly recently I have been very keen on chroming and have generally been good business for my plater. However, after a couple of problems I am now reviewing what to chrome. I had a Major Taylor stem done which looked great when it came back but when I came to fit it the modern chrome was

somewhat thinner than the original with the result I could not tighten the diamond shape clamp. Foolishly I used a shim and the first time I pulled hard on the bars (fortunately going up hill at slow speed) they started to rotate! I also had a similar problem with a Cinelli stem that wouldn't tighten in the frame - this can be solved safely with a shim. Reflecting on rechroming I have had generally good experience with cranks, hub centres, lamp brackets small brake and gear bits (especially the steel parts on Mafac brakes). Rims never come out quite right and as of now I'll steer clear of handlebar stems . Another disadvantage is that often you lose the maker's name, a particular problem with Williams and Chater cranks. There are alternatives to chroming, e.g. painting with metal paint. Maybe I need to give more specific instructions to the chromers . I'd be interested in other experiences .

Robin Walker tells us that he recently acquired a very original bike, built up during the early part of the war. It is a typical mass-start or "Leaguer" bike of the time.

The frame was made by Jack Green Cycles of Bilston Street Wolverhampton probably in 1938. Components include 4-speed Osgear, lovely Simplex Ekla chainset, Italian sprint rims on pre-war Airlite hubs, Maes Kint bars, mix of Gloria and Lam brakes (levers are post war). The previous owner, Gerald Tredwell of Wolverhampton, still alive and strong at 84 yrs old, was a founder member of the BLRC. He competed in many war-time and early post-war races in the Shropshire and Midland areas.

Below are some notes and memories he gave Robin with the bike. They make interesting and nostalgic reading:

"The frame was bought off Jack Green (Bilston St) circa 1941 and was probably one of his last pre-war frames. Bits were hard to come by and my first HP rims were bought off Ben Flavell at a "sort of auction" at Percy Stallard's in Broad Street. They were prone to breaking spokes and I always had spares taped to my frame! The bike was used for going to work, touring (several years in the Lake District) and for racing.

Percy Stallard rode it once for a short stint after breaking down on Jiggers Bank (Ironbridge, Shropshire). I had to limp his bike to the pits at the top. He did not like my toe clip settings and left it at the pits where he took off on a spare bike. I was rarely a front runner and was what the French called an "ouvrier" – a worker, in other words disposable! We were usually expected to attack right from the start to unsettle the opposition! The longest training run was with Percy Stallard, two others and myself, to Llandudno and back via Llangollen. Percy did his well known dying act on the Horseshoe Pass saying – "carry on lads I'll be OK" – just as you had settled down to a nice easy climb he would go past like a rocket!

I stopped racing in 1946 when the lads coming back from the Forces proved to be too fit for us "civvies". Percy Stallard was a fairly ruthless team boss and was obsessed with the idea that if you are suffering then to attack makes the opposition feel even worse! On one or two occasions we ignored team orders (because we were dying!) and had our b***s chewed off at Percy's shop later. I worked for Percy on Saturday mornings for a while, often hand drilling the forks on old bikes to take calliper brakes instead of pull-ups. My last job was to put new tubs on a pair of wheels, sadly when the owner came to collect that afternoon one had deflated. P S's blood pressure shot up and I was out of a job!

I have no precise memory from any of the races I competed in, which include:- Circuit of the Wrekin; Circuit of the Clees; Shrewsbury Hospital Road Race; Whitchurch 50 mile TT; 25 mile time trial on the A5, my first race. I can recall the well known one armed rider, W. Greaves, passing me like I was dead! Midland Championships – in Shropshire. There were many others I cannot recall, mostly in Shropshire.

Most of the principal riders of the day are mentioned in the (Wolverhampton) Express and Star account of the 1944 Circuit of the Clees, won by Ernie Clements with Ron Kitching 2nd and Geoff Clark 3rd. I did finish this race!!

johngc@netbay.com.au (Australia) writes:

"I am seeking some help with identification of frame and wonder if you could put the question into one of the newsletters. The frame is Italian, probably made from Falk tubing. It is longish wheelbase with Campagnolo ends, short reach brakes at the front and medium at the back. The lugs have a cut-out in

them in the shape of a horizontal B and the fork crown was formed with that same B on the sides. The bottom head lug has a long reinforcing point under the down tube, and there are reinforcements/stiffeners on the inside of the front forks. Angles are upright, i.e. about 73, and the fronts are quite short. It handles beautifully. When in Italy once I saw a few like this but was unable to stop and enquire further. One of your many knowledgeable readers may well recognise the lug pattern. Unfortunately, the original fork crown is gone because it cracked just under the brake bolt hole. (I used it for my daily commute for many years). It was rebuilt with a new crown but unfortunately not to the standard of the original.” He goes on:

“I was interested to read the piece about Leach Marathon on the web page. I remember the shop in Stratford. The frames were indeed built in or at the Stratford shop. That was where all of the good lightweight stuff was. He usually kept a bike in the window but there was never much of a display. The shop in Leytonstone Road was also there in the early 50's, possibly late 40's even. It was what I call a bread and butter shop and sold all of the general cycling requirements and several brands. A good and useful shop, never too expensive and always well stocked. In a manner of speaking that shop had all of the competition because Reid's and Rivett's were opposite each other in the same street a couple of miles up the road in Leyton. I have always been confused with the boundaries between Leyton and Leytonstone so it may have been Leytonstone.

The road outside the Stratford shop at the time was cobbled, as was virtually the whole of the Mile End Road. This used to play havoc with poorly built frames. I never heard of a L M breaking. I cannot remember the lugs he used but most of the ones I saw had the standard plain lug of the day whose name/manufacturer I cannot recall but it was similar to what you would see on a Holdsworth. The standard of finish was always very high. I seriously contemplated owning one but alas shekels or lack of interfered. Also, we were spoiled for choice, with Ephgrave, Bates (of London), E G Bates, Hobbs, and Hetchins, Paris and Rensch all within cycling distance.

Also from Melbourne Australia, David tells us:

“The (Ex-Reg Harris track) Plattner bike will go to my painter this week, wheels built and all parts ready to go so about a month IF everything goes to plan. The only ‘wrong’ part may be the head stem as Plattner always used an adjustable Cinelli and these are hard to come by, as you would know. The Hillman/Frejus a long way down the list unfortunately. I have Paris Galibier, Vade Mecum, Lugless Claud, Malvern Star, Daccordi, and a couple of Australians, all done bar assembly and a bit of a storage problem. Maybe the Hillman/Frejus could jump the line. I will have a think about this. It seems with your bike's history and the Hillman story Frejus were pretty flexible in their supply.

(David had been with touch with us via the website to explain that he had an ex-Reg Harris track machine which had been used by Oscar Plattner when he won the worlds. Oscar then did a post-championship tour of the tracks round Australia with the same machine and sold it before he left for home. Many visiting riders would do this as there was shortage of top-grade racing machines which resulted in very high prices being paid for class machines in Australia at this time.)

His research also showed that one of his machines had originally been sold as a ‘Hillman’ which was the name of a well-known shop in Melbourne. This machine had all the hallmarks of a Frejus. It seems that Hillman had been hit by this shortage of machines and had negotiated a deal with Frejus to supply un-badged machines which they then had sprayed up locally and decalled as Williams. My own Frejus has a head transfer Frejus/Singapore and it appears that the Singapore importer of Frejus had his own transfers made although the Frejus name was sacrosanct in this case.

Although Patricia and I are very involved in the world of classic lightweights, both of us have modern (well fairly modern) machines which we have updated with carbon forks and accessories, etc.. We use these at weekends when we do faster longer rides and for group rides at a fastish speed. We also have a couple of folding bikes, Airnimals, which seem to be the nearest of this genre one can get to a conventional machine. We shall be taking them to Bodensee in southern Germany soon. From Wasserburg, the village we stay in, it is possible to ride to Austria and Switzerland using the cycle path around the lake. There is some great cycling ‘inland’ as well with hills up to smaller lakes and beautiful rural rides.

We also follow the contemporary racing scene as much as possible without lining Rupert Murdoch's pockets.

In view of this interest I recently acquired a copy of 'Roadie – the misunderstood world of a bike racer'. I was very impressed as it gives a well-written and informative insight into the world of road racing. Although it is written by an American, Jamie Smith, all of the content can be read as if it was describing European races. There is one chapter about the governance of cycle racing in the States, but apart from this the book travels very well. As the blurb on the back says, "Bike racing? If you want to understand the complexities of this sport, you could pore through a small library on the equipment, training, strategy, race formats and lifestyle – or you can read Roadie." I really agree with this and found I couldn't bear to put it down for long.

A veteran race announcer and long-time racing cyclist, Jamie Smith sets out to explain the sport he loves and the road racers who live for it in his new book from VeloPress, *Roadie: The Misunderstood World of a Bike Racer*. With help from the pen of cartoonist Jef Mallett, Roadie celebrates cycling as it explains the neurotic tendencies of the sport and its lifestyle, from shaved legs and garish jerseys, to garages full of bikes worth more than cars. Perfect for racing cyclists and their confused friends, family, and co-workers, Roadie puts an end to the head scratching and leaves cyclists laughing out loud as they revel in their misunderstood world. Roadie is now available in the U.K. at good bookshops or direct from www.cordee.co.uk.

Roadie begins by explaining the lifestyle of a roadie, or bike racer, through the staples of a roadie's life: devotion to the sport, the bike, the training ride, nutrition and bonking, and more. Smith moves on to "classroom sessions" about drafting and the breakaway, sprints and temporary alliances, and crashes. He explains the rituals of race day, the referee and race rules, and the tenuous relationship between rider and sponsor. Finally, Roadie explores cycling's race formats and how friends and family can get involved in their Roadie's favourite pastime.

A natural interest – Alvin Smith

Our Editor, in *Lightweight News* –15, aired some of the historic angst that ladies' attire has given the red blooded clubman over the years. In reading some 1948 copies of *Cycling* I discovered the following exchange which I thought might divert, having interest for those with a certain obsession and for those with an interest in cycling dialects which we have touched upon in the past.

The photograph below appeared in *Cycling* for 25 February 1948, it shows the belles from a ladies clothing for Health and All sports held in London that year, and was given a caption that demonstrated one particular, arguably male view!

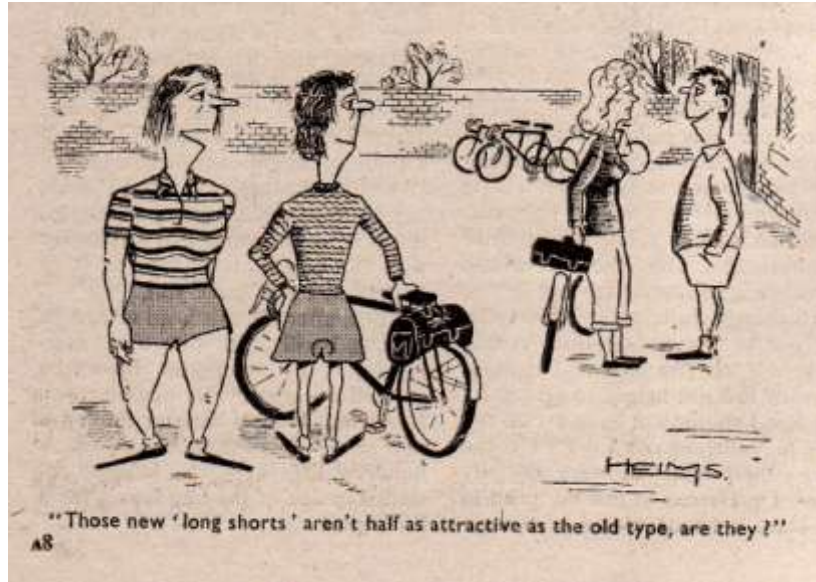


Then in Letters to the Editor in 17 March came this inevitable response from Eva Cumming :- "Those long shorts are far from impossible, and keep the thighs and knees warm, without the hot stickiness of

plus fours". Eva went on, "I certainly got a tousing from my own club at first but changes are accepted quickly –even peculiar pants! Many cyclists who come across me immediately think 'tuggo' or as the Northerners say 'chip-holder.' Unorthodox –Yes, but Impossible ? –No!"

Eva's letter itself drew a reply on 28 April when G Liston Young wrote to the Editor noting Eva's comment "Unorthodox, Yes – Impossible, No!" and stating that she should have added :- "Eyesores, assuredly."

The subject was ended on 23 June 1948 by a rather naughty but completely of its time BaZ cartoon by HELMS



On a ride this Sunday we visited the V-CC library. I picked out a bound copy of *The Bicycle* for 1950 and randomly opened a page – no prizes as to what the subject was!!!!.....*Peter Underwood*