

## CAMBRIDGE LIGHTWEIGHT NEWS - 29

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**For a few years** it has seemed that the use of tubular tyres was on the wane with many HP rim/tyre combinations allowing pressures up to 10bar (140lb) and makers such as Vredestein producing light 'hand-made' tyres giving the comfortable feel of a tub. Several professional team riders started using wired-on HP tyres.

In the last edition we looked at how the new wave of modern fixed riders had given fresh life to fixed-wheel riding; so it is today with carbon rims in relation to tubs. The new carbon wheels can be ultra light when built for tubs and top riders really go for lightness at the circumference of the rim, especially on hills. Carbon can be built for wired-on wheels but the construction makes them heavier as the walls have to be able to withstand the very high pressures used today. I think the difference is greater with carbon than it was with alloy rims where the walls could be relatively thinner.

In Italy they are still making wood rims (Cercio Ghisallo, <http://www.cerchiinlegnohisallo.com> available from Mick Madgett at Diss) and the sprint rims don't look that different to the ones we loved all those years ago where they were reckoned to be the bee's knees for grass-track racing. Strangely, they were also used on the road for time trials and one was able to get cork brake blocks to use with usually the one brake as most were double-fixed. What surprises me is that the Italians are now producing a wood rim for HP tyres; again the walls have to be thicker, as with carbon. These rims are used by cyclists with a disposition for posing amongst the fixed brigade and I have seen customised bikes in Italy with special paint jobs along with wood rims and matching laminated wooden mudguards. Nowadays a firm called Swisstop makes special (yellow) brake blocks for carbon rims as well as high performance blocks for alloy and ceramic rims. They are good.

I had some wood sprints as a youth and still hanker after a pair built on Airlite large-flange or small-flange hubs with 15/17G spokes tied and soldered. These wheels appear from time to time but sometimes show signs of de-lamination on the rims and often the spokes are very, very rusty. I do possess two wood sprint-rimmed wheels but they are both fronts, one 27" (700) and the other, the even older 26", sprints so I suppose I just need a rear really. By the way, it is just possible to get a present-day 650 tub on the old 26" rims with a lot of pre stretching and hard work. One cosmetic problem is that they look rather narrow on the wider wood rim. Some people use grass track tubs to get the wider old-style look but I don't know if they do them in the 650 size.

I mentioned de-lamination because the sprints were often called "canes" whereas in fact they were made with thin strips of laminated maple fixed round a circular former and then shaped to the rim section. The older glues used pre-war didn't have the life span of the newer glues in use today – the big step forward in wood adhesives came when they started building fighter planes from wood in the second world war. The last thing you want in a wooden aeroplane is for it to start to delaminate in mid-flight on a rainy day!

A friend of mine was struggling to **remove a freewheel** from one of his wheels. The freewheel remover kept slipping and he was in danger of losing the locating slots on the freewheel. What he hadn't done is to use a tracknut (or QR if fitted) to retain the remover firmly in place whilst applying

leverage on it. The tracknut can be only just about finger tight and as soon as the freewheel moves the slightest bit the nut must be freed by an equal amount or else the freewheel is locked in place by the nut as it moves out on the threads. Once the freewheel is freely moving, the tracknut can be removed and the remover can be used alone.

We had to use another ruse as the freewheel was really tight and the spanner wouldn't budge it. The answer was to fix the remover (secured by the aforementioned tracknut) in the vice and turn the wheel, make sure it is the right way! I have to do a mental removal to visualise which way is correct. Using this method the wheel exerts long leverage on the remover and the tyre is easier on the hands than a hard spanner.

**In July**, we rented a van and set off for Southern Germany with four bikes inside. Two were modern, my Van Nicholas with compact chainset and Patricia's Airnimal folder which has a triple chainset as we knew the holiday would involve a lot of hill climbing! The other two we took were a Hetchins and a Pennine as we intended to do a classic ride from Oberammergau on 24<sup>th</sup>. The first 14 days were sunny with temperatures around 30 – 35 degrees C. We started off with 6 days in the Black Forest - our first visit to the area - which we found beautiful though very hilly. Lucky in a way as we had to burn off the calories from the genuine Black Forest gateaux. Stage two was based on the Bodensee (Lake Constance) where we had the option of flat lakeside riding or heading inland to the hills and smaller lakes where Patricia went swimming just to show what a softie I was. Well someone had to keep an eye on the bikes.

We then moved on to Garmisch-Partenkirchen, a beautiful ski-town in Bavaria tucked in under the Alps, an area we know very well having visited many times. After three days of testing our legs on the roads towards Austria we met up for lunch with Michael Schmid, the ride organiser, and talked about the coming event. Sadly the weather forecast was a bit iffy and true to form it rained for the next two days as the clouds got trapped in by the mountains. On the first wet day we took the train to Munich and avoided most of the rain, Munich has long been a favourite city of ours and there is plenty to do on a wet day.

Come the morning of the ride it was pouring but we set off in the van to Oberammergau to the start at Michael's family's hotel. Luckily, Michael had a plan B which was put in place and we took all the bikes into the dining room for an impromptu classic bike show. Some of the 20+ riders had bought along interesting components for a 'show and tell' and we happened to have a Chossy saddlebag, a vintage jersey and a pair of new (old style) cycling shoes as well as the Hetchins and Pennine. Tea and coffee was served in the morning and later in the day we had a very enjoyable lunch. Most of the machines were of a later period than we are used to and the specifications took account of the fact that riding regularly in the Alps is a bit different to a 20 mile doddle in the UK.



Something we don't see here in the UK was a machine built using a Zunow frame from a highly respected frame builder in Japan. This had Delta brakes and several interesting details such as topeyes and seat stay bridge cast with the maker's name and logo and a top tube with a special section to allow the rear brake cable to sit flush in a groove along the top.

*The topeye had a 'Z' under a humming bird hovering over a flower. (see left)*

Zunow is also known for his elaborate artwork and the owner, from Munich, explained that he had been very lucky to get hold of one of these rare frames that had found its way to Germany.

Another example on show at Oberammergau was of a beautiful Colnago Master Olympic, which is truly a classic frame in its own right and has been for many years right up to today. It was fitted with Campag Delta brakes and, interestingly, modern Shimano top-of-the-range Dura-Ace gears and STI changers with sprint wheels. The overall effect was stunning and the bike was used regularly for hard rides in the mountains. Maybe not for some purists but at least the owner had a splendid classic machine that he could use regularly.

There were also several examples of frames built in Germany such as 'RUFA' from Cologne. What could have been a washout turned out to be a very enjoyable day in the end and we were sorry to leave.



*Zunow brake bridge on seat stays  
'Just look at the dust on that brake'*

**A good friend from the States** has generously given us a subscription to Jan Heine's *Bicycle Quarterly* and I was intrigued by the cover photograph of a lonely Tour de France (1910) rider wheeling his bike up a hill with his left hand on the stem steering the bike and the obligatory spare tubes around his shoulders. I was minded to compare this with the scene as it would be today. First would come the cavalcade of advertising vehicles throwing samples to the crowd as they passed by, all with loudspeakers blaring out music. Soon it would be possible to see the filming helicopters hovering in the distance indicating the imminent arrival of the peloton. First, however, would be another cavalcade of police, photographers and marshals on motor bikes followed by the cars of the race organisers and officials. Eventually the peloton of 140 plus riders would thunder by led out by the top climbers. Behind this another parade of motor bikes, team cars and officials. Compare this with the lonely figure walking up the hill past literally a handful of spectators who could well have a wait of half-hour or so before the next rider walked by pushing his bike.

An item inside the journal related the adventures of a woman who did a cycle tour of the Indian subcontinent using a very standard Indian roadster fitted out with locally supplied touring equipment. As you can imagine much of this was very primitive by today's standards and I was interested how some of it harked back to my experiences some 60 years ago.

I have related my tale of bike maintenance with virtually no tools apart from an odd spanner and a hammer and nail to deal with the links in a chain. I cannot for the life of me imagine how this was possible but Jada Van Vliet tells of trouble with the chain on her machine and how it was repaired by an Indian using a hammer, a nail and a stone. Maybe in an after-life I turn up in India as a bike mechanic!

I have also told of travelling miles taking pace from lorries which were governed to 30mph in those days. Jada also explained how she was struggling along battling into a head wind when her mobile phone went off (didn't have them 60 years ago!). It was her partner, who had dropped some way behind, warning her that he was catching up and was tucked in behind a tractor piled high with hay and telling her to pick up speed in order to be able to join him as the convoy passed by. She explained that they often did this in India, once travelling this way for some 20 kilometres. They did, however, forgo the chance to tuck in behind the tractors carrying loads of manure!

**Hobbs Ride and the exploding Simplex gears!** We recently went down to Somerset for Peter Lowry's first Hobbs of Barbican Ride which saw a good turnout of 24 riders with a nice selection of machines. I took my 1951 Hobbs Raceweight and Patricia took her 1948 Hobbs Superbe. We had a great day out on the Levels (not all level I may say) and during the morning there was a slight hold-up due to a Simplex Tour de France exploding, sending the parts all over the road. I did wonder how this could have happened but thought no more about it. We carried on to the lunch stop and then did the optional extra loop which took us to the tea stop. Luckily this was only some 4 – 5 miles from the start/finish point as about half-mile into the last leg we heard a noise which sounded as if Patricia had dropped some small item. When we stopped the riders following behind came up to us with handfuls of Simplex parts – hers had exploded in just the same way. Thanks to help by others picking up the various parts along the road we recovered all but one piece.

I soon realised why this had happened as I have always worried about tightening the nut which holds the pulley cage on to the push/pull operating rod. The rod is round and shiny, about 5mm diameter and encased by the return spring plus a coiled outer cover, making it very difficult to get a grip on the rod in order to tighten the nut. I am told that thin-nose pliers help but it is still difficult to grip the shiny rod with enough purchase to resist the tightening of the nut. Another problem is holding the rod in the extended position in order to fit the cage/pulley assembly over the threads before being able to fit and secure the nut.

I hope to re-assemble the gear but will always worry about this Achilles Heel. John Spooner suggested trying Loctite this time as it is not easy to punch mark the nut as you cannot fix it securely enough to create a solid base to hit with a hammer and punch.

The outcome of all this is that we are looking for a new-old-stock 5-speed Simplex T de F but there aren't many about now. We may have to settle for a V G C one that has never been dismantled and with good chrome, etc. If you have one to sell please contact us. We would of course do a swap with something else but find that it doesn't often happen that we have what the owner wants to exchange.

**Brian Willcocks.** Tel 01635 248564 Email [jb.rookery@virgin.net](mailto:jb.rookery@virgin.net)

Hanging up in my garage is the bike I assembled in about 1956-8. The frame is a Ted Gerrard Professional; I was advised to go to Ted as at the time the renowned builder of Condor frames had joined him. Can't recall the name. (Bryan Clarke says could be Vic Braysher Ed.)

Frame information:

Size 26", with a high bottom bracket and shortish wheelbase, for fast street work. Kromo double-butted tubing, with Nervex Professional lugs. Originally had a pale blue colour scheme, with Ted's autograph, but was returned, after a crash repair, with an entirely different scheme which I thought was vulgar and less attractive. I lent the bike years later to a brother-in-law who worked for British Nylon Coatings and he had the frame nylon-coated. In a way this was fortunate because when it got nicked the thief chucked it over a hedge later, not realising its quality, so it was recovered. And of course the plastic will have preserved the frame well, but it will have to be removed (blowlamp? sandblast? – any ideas?).

Fittings: GB World Champ alloy bends, with chrome Cinelli extension; A la Tete headset; Williams C34 chainset; Campag gears, GB brake levers; Weinmann brakes - I think; Weinmann rims (not tubs)/Airlite hubs/double-butted spokes, Brooks Champion Narrow saddle (now gone)

This is the machine I was riding when flagged-down by a policeman on a silent Velocette on the London North Circular Road. I was prosecuted for 'Riding furiously and to the public danger' ... the copper had been doing the 40 mph limit when Ron (on a Bates) and I passed him. As a cyclist does not require a speedo they invoked the above charge and I was duly done in court. Many times when I got off this bike I had a severe crick in the back (the old, old story) and the damage haunts me painfully today, at 73. I suppose in a way I was following a family tendency; Eugene Bennett, my giant cousin, was always my hero for his list of honours with the North Road Club. I haven't decided yet what to do with the beast, but would be interested to know how to remove the nylon, and whether anyone can organise an authentic paint job.

Brian Willcocks. Tel 01635 248564 Email [jb.rookery@virgin.net](mailto:jb.rookery@virgin.net)

**Steve Griffith** asks for information about Mansfield, Leatheries, Lycett and other British saddle makers. He would like some good images of the saddles and copies of catalogues etc for his VCC research.

He has wheels and rims for sale, a long list - 27", 700c HP, sprints and 26's contact him on [steve.y.griffith@royalmail.com](mailto:steve.y.griffith@royalmail.com) for a list

**Peter Beaven** at [peter.beaven@bbc.co.uk](mailto:peter.beaven@bbc.co.uk) is asking anyone with a Condor or Hurlow Superb to contact him to assist with research on Bill Hurlow.

**Tony Clarke, Tel (Cambridge) 01223 440399** has a Higgins double gents tandem, 23/22½inch, frame number 448. He thinks it is Reynolds 531 DB tubing built using lugs. It has Chater Lea bottom brackets and headset, Williams steel cottered chainsets with crossover drive, Front wheel Airlite LF tandem hub on Weinmann 26x1¼" 32 hole rim, Rear wheel Campag Record LF hub on 26x1¼ 36 hole rim, Weinmann centre pull brakes. It is in reasonable condition but would benefit from some tlc. Free to a good home. Recipient to collect from just outside Cambridge.

**Roger Daniels**, 4 Hillcrest Road, South Woodford E18 2JL. Tel: 020 8491 1343 or 07886 437902 (mobile) has an Ephgrave frame, no.1311, for sale: Wheels Shimano 600; Chainset Shimano; Gears Shimano Exage 500; Brakes Acor; Pedals MKS. Email: [rogerdaniels@ntlworld.com](mailto:rogerdaniels@ntlworld.com)

**Bernard Howard aka 'Bean'** ex Avenue CRC asks, have you any idea what happened to Len Thorpe's folio of photo's after his demise?

Believe he had a son Phillip, lately heard of in Kent. I have an ulterior motive, have been trying to get hold of a certain one for last 60 years. Email [bernfromben@ntlworld.com](mailto:bernfromben@ntlworld.com)