

CYCLE DOC



Your cycling problems solved by Tim Dawson

Q I want a women's coat that is good for cycling and yet does not make me look like a fluorescent canary. Does anybody make one?

WH, Reigate, Surrey

A Water off a Duck's Back makes a nice macintosh in a coated microfibre (£130, wateroffaducksback.co.uk). It is breathable, waterproof and has clever reflective patches that can be revealed while cycling and hidden when off the bike. Whether you like the style and colour — black or stone — will come down to taste, but it is an ingenious solution to your problem.

The similar but shorter Angel women's coat (£129, shop.tfl.gov.uk) features more pockets and can be ordered in "stucco" (off-white).

The Dutch company Madame de Pé makes La Maitresse, a far longer coat (€218 — £186 — from madamedepe.com), but it can be bought only in euros and is shipped from Amsterdam.

Q I am fed up with my brakes not working in the rain, so I would like to fit hub brakes. Is this feasible?

KP, Belfast

A Hub brakes are a marvel in the wet. Unlike the caliper and cantilever brakes most bikes have, their stopping mechanism is enclosed in a hub around which the wheel turns and is unaffected by rain. They can be costly and a challenge to retro-fit, though.

Sturmey Archer's basic front hub brake is £46 (sjscycles.co.uk) but rear brakes are dearer and fitting one may cost £40. A better choice would be the SRAM Spectro, which includes a seven-speed hub gear (£173, wiggles.co.uk). But why not buy a bike that has hub brakes already fitted, such as the Pashley Roadster (£525, www.pashley.co.uk)?

Need some bike advice?
Email cycledoc@sunday-times.co.uk

CYCLE GUY

Mark Harris

The first time I rented a bike in New York, I asked the goateed guy behind the counter whether I could ride on the pavement.

"Sure," he said with a quizzical look. Ten minutes later, I'm getting shouted at by a fat cop. Pavement in America refers to asphalt — or road. What we understand as pavement is called sidewalk. D'oh.

Ten minutes after that, I'm nearly sandwiched between a yellow cab and a steaming grate in the aforementioned pavement. It turns out that American bikes also have their brakes wired the other way round — snatching the left lever is the perfect recipe for a dramatic handlebar moment.

That Britain and America are two countries divided by a

Coddled in a city ruled by bikes

common language is hardly an original observation, but even George Bernard Shaw might have been surprised at the divergence of cycling cultures across the Pond.

In my new home town of Seattle, Washington, cyclists are a coddled and pampered population. Under a succession of bike-friendly mayors, dedicated lanes and trails have spread throughout the city. On arterial roads, sharrow — huge chevrons with bicycle logos — remind drivers to give us 3ft of room when passing.

There is gratifyingly little friction between drivers and cyclists. Cars almost always give way to bikes at intersections, and some even stop on through roads to let them pull out. The few traffic fatalities that do occur are met with righteous fury and headlines in the local paper.

Consider Seattle's latest

buzzword: greenways. These priority routes for pedestrians and cyclists aim to encourage novice riders and families onto two wheels with a combination of helpful signs, traffic islands and bike-only boxes marked out at junctions, which waiting cars cannot enter. Seattle's first greenway is being built, at a cost of \$110,000 (£70,000), on a leafy street where no one can even recall the last collision.

Compare that with Britain, where a

succession of collisions is usually required to spur local authorities into improving a dangerous junction or adding a bike filter to a traffic light.

It seems that Seattle's cycling infrastructure is no longer primarily about safety but lifestyle. In a city where cyclists represent the establishment, the local cycle club isn't just a collection of bike geeks: it's a major political force whose endorsement can swing elections.

But it's important not to get too carried away with the idea of a cycling utopia. Away from America's big, northern coastal cities, the car still rules supreme. LA, as the song, observed, remains a great big freeway.

Meanwhile, I'm still getting used to the contrast with Britain. I recently discovered that if a cyclist in front shows me his raised fist, he's not threatening me. Nor is he expressing solidarity with his two-wheeled comrades.

Disappointingly, he just wants to turn right.



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