



THE GOLDEN AGE OF HANDBUILT BICYCLES

By Jan Heine & Jean-Pierre Pradères
Vintage Bicycle Press, 2005, 168 pages, \$60

REVIEWED BY MARTIN (HOOPDRIVER) NEALE

THE BICYCLE INDUSTRY is finally beginning to respond to the needs of non-racing cyclists after many decades of selling us the same impractical equipment that professional racers use. Formerly, most bike shop fare was modelled after designs and technology derived from racing machines unsuited to city riding, hauling goods, or touring.

A similar observation might have been made in Europe during the first decades of the 20th century. Fixed-gear racing bikes did not work for the practitioners of the burgeoning randonneur and cyclo-touring movements, who wanted to ride up mountains rather than walk, expected their machines to be durable, and needed a certain degree of comfort.

In France a cottage industry of fine craftsmen – known as *constructeurs* – emerged, devoted to developing lightweight, reliable, and integrated bicycles with derailleur gears, reliable brakes, aluminum components, and often custom made.

Jean-Pierre Pradères has captured 50 examples of this craft with a *constructeur's* skill. His photos, even though the colours are understated (partly due to the nature of the bikes themselves), are sumptuous and rich. There are many close-ups of components and frame details as well as the full bikes, all perfectly lit against clear white backgrounds.

Jan Heine, a stickler for historical and technical accuracy, provides the economical text. After a preface and introductory page, each bike gets two



Two René Herse bikes.
◀ Camping, 1948
Porteur, 1950 ▶
Photos by
Jean-Pierre Pradères

to four pages, each with two to five paragraphs of description. Those who crave more information on history, design considerations, ride quality, or equipment tests should read his excellent magazine, *Bicycle Quarterly*, which he has produced since 2002 (available from VBP).

The bikes were chosen for their original condition: well-maintained or restored but generally not re-painted or re-plated. The beauty of age is evident in the lovely patina and well-worn but never abused surfaces. There are also bikes from the 1970s, 1980s, and as late as 2003, built in the same tradition.

It is revealing to see all the examples of “what’s old is new again,” in cartridge bottom brackets, linear-pull brakes, and clamp-on stems, to name a few. Interspersed with the new portraits are historical shots of the bikes in action, and the virtually unchanged workshop of Cycles Alex Singer, still in operation after over 60 years.

This integration of frame, components, and custom bicycle design is experiencing a resurgence in North America (witness the success of the North American Handmade Bicycle Show). A new “Golden Age” is upon us and credit is due to Seattle’s Jan Heine, among others, for inspiring the movement.

This gorgeous book will appeal to bike connoisseurs and enthusiastic newcomers alike, especially those with an interest in appropriate technology and industrial art and design.

www.bikequarterly.com

BICYCLING BLISS

By Portia H. Masterson
Self-Propulsion Publishing, 2008, 459 pages, \$29.95

REVIEWED BY DENISE WRATHALL

SIMPLY PUT: This is a lovely book. The subtitle is *Riding to Improve Your Wellness*, and the book does cover that theme from every angle. Do you want to improve your fitness through cycling? Make sure the time

you spend on your bike is comfortable? Prevent injury through good technique? This book has the information that you need, including sections on almost everything you can think of that relates to non-competitive cycling and wellness: stretches; fitting and adjusting your bike; how to align your feet when you ride; how to keep your shoulders relaxed; what clothing to wear; food and hydration to increase stamina; riding in urban areas, and even recipes... It is that complete.

If you recognize yourself in the description of what happens to cyclists who don’t stretch – don’t worry – this book will help you figure out what to do about it.

