

**T**he Slow Bicycle Movement comes from a desire to promote the unhurried mass cycling cultures of Northern Europe. The movement is virtual in more than one sense of the word, with its home at [theslowbicycle.blogspot.com](http://theslowbicycle.blogspot.com) and a group on facebook. It's apparent that the movement was born out of [copenhagenize.com](http://copenhagenize.com) (Copenhagen hosted the first actual Slow Bicycle Ride), has given birth to [amsterdamize.com](http://amsterdamize.com) and will no doubt spawn a few more.

There are links with other manifestations of Slow. Maybe you've heard of Slow Food, or that Ludlow (apparently) is Britain's foremost Slow City! Visit [slowplanet.com](http://slowplanet.com) for more information about how the Slow Revolution challenges the notion infecting so many aspects of modern life, that faster is necessarily better. That's where I found this deft definition: 'Slow is not about doing everything at a snail's pace; it's about working, playing and living better by doing everything at the right speed.'

### **How slow is slow?**

But what is the right speed for cycling? Ask any two cyclists and you'll get two different speeds, perhaps differing by as much as a factor of two! The answer is that each of them could be right. The right speed is whatever feels comfortable for you and your purpose. But note the emphasis on comfortable. If you can't easily ride at that pace all day long, or hold a conversation with the person next to you, you're probably going too fast.

Some members of the Slow Bicycle Movement would like to be more prescriptive, stating that the average speed of cycle traffic in Copenhagen is 15.3 km/h and that nobody should go faster – except downhill whilst shouting 'Wheeeeeee!' Other suggestions for the SBM 'manifesto' include: 'If you break a sweat, you're pedalling too hard – coast!'; 'Wave at passing trains or boats'; 'Yawn at traffic lights' ... and then there's what I think best sums it up: 'Please ride the bike you have, in the clothes you like, at the speed you enjoy.'



# **GLIDE TO WORK**

Racing around the streets like a sweaty cycle courier isn't the only way to commute by bike. **Chris Juden** presents an alternative: slow cycling





## MORE ROADSTERS



### Raleigh Elegance £299

It lacks some of the extras but has the main city bike features including a nice chaincase – plus a basket. The alloy frame perhaps saves some weight whilst providing a really low step-over, and you get all this for only £299 – [www.raleigh.co.uk](http://www.raleigh.co.uk), tel: 01773 532 600



### Halfords Real Classic £250

Any doubts about this trend should be removed by the news that Halfords' version of a Slow Bicycle is coming soon! The big H's relaxed geometry 'Real Classic' will be available in two sizes for both sexes and has 3-speed gears, a luggage carrier and full chaincase, for only £250 – [www.halfords.com](http://www.halfords.com), tel: 08450 579 000.



### Dutch Priest Bike £665

This is the most distinctive and distinguished model imported by Cambridge Dutchbikes – [www.dutchbike.co.uk](http://www.dutchbike.co.uk) or tel: 07772 738 899. The Priest has a very upright position (of course) with an unusual frame design that may be more rigid or

allegedly preserves his modesty. Prices start at £665 with 3-speeds and rim brakes, up to £900 with 8-speeds and roller brakes.



### Trek L300 £700

Trek's 'L' series brings tradition up-to-date with light alloy frames and components. For £700 the middle-of-the-range L300 also provides suspension, with twin LED headlamps built into the fork and connected directly to the hub dynamo. That's neat! Information from [www.trekbikes.co.uk](http://www.trekbikes.co.uk)



### Bobbin Glorie £420

A high quality Dutch ladies' bicycle complete with all the usual equipment, including 3 gears, for £420. Exclusive to Bobbin Bicycles, London – [www.bobbinbicycles.co.uk](http://www.bobbinbicycles.co.uk), tel: 02078 373 370.



### Koga Miyata Citylite £1199

Aluminium tubing, rim brakes and battery LED lights make Koga's Citylite lighter than most roadsters, at around 15kg. Quite pricy – [www.amba-marketing.com](http://www.amba-marketing.com), tel: 01392 829903.

## Like walking, not running

Slow cycling exploits the facility of a bicycle to go further than you could walk. The bicycle is such a wonderful invention that you'll generally go even faster than running (except uphill), but speed is not the object. It's about distance with ease, in comfort and conviviality.

Urban slow cycling is like walking to work or the shops – with the bonus of wheels to carry your briefcase or shopping. (Anyone slow-cycling with a backpack is missing a trick!) Slow cycling conjures images of people riding to their jobs and schools in cities like Copenhagen and Amsterdam, but it's for pleasure as much as for work and the countryside as well as the town.

Think of going for a country walk, but on a bike, and you have the essence of cycle touring as practiced by CTC members ever since the invention of the safety bicycle. Slow cycling, on or off-road, is like rambling; and the minute you feel that you're doing something akin to jogging or a cross-country run, I'm afraid you're losing the plot. Slow down, smell the flowers, listen to the birds, take in the view – and share the wonder of it all with the person riding next to you. The true worth of a cycle ride is measured not in miles, but in smiles!

## Travel and transport, not sport

Walking is obviously transport, whereas running is sport. The boundary between comfortable, sustainable cycling on the one hand and on the other hand cycle sport, is not conveniently demarcated by a change in gait. One slides imperceptibly into the other and the pressure is all one way: to go faster and further.

Riding on your own ('at the speed you enjoy in the clothes you like'), it shouldn't be too difficult to let the speed freaks pass. Resist the temptation to give chase and show a clean back wheel to those you could. Nobody is handing out prizes, and cycling at walking pace is actually just as good for burning fat and maintaining a healthy heart.

It is much harder when riding in company to resist the speed-up devil. Who has not been on a 'touring' ride where others have progressively wound up the pace until it kills conversation and the enjoyment of all except a few at the front! Rambling isn't like that and cycling doesn't have to be. Dig in your heels, do not even try to keep up, and when you get the chance, gently inform the show-offs that their idea of fun is spoiling other peoples' day.

In much of Britain (and other English-speaking countries) you almost need to be some kind of bike enthusiast to ride at all. There are many reasons to be enthusiastic about bicycles, but cycle sport has all of the glamour, so that other reasons to cycle tend to be viewed through a sporting lens. Perceptions of touring and transport cycling accordingly lack focus. These are seen as poor reasons to cycle, insufficient in themselves, useful merely as a training ground and retirement home for racing. See page 56 of the last issue of Cycle for an example of how the pursuit of sporting excellence can transform your ride to work into a sophisticated form of torture!

All of the social cues point to the only smart way to cycle being on some kind of racing bike (mountain, road or track, according to the fashion of the moment) wearing all the appropriate gear.

## Normal clothing, normal activity

Whilst you or I may be happy to cycle dressed (to quote the boss of Cycling England) 'like a b\*\*\*\*y spaceman!' it's not a look that many wish to copy. 'Beware of all enterprises that require new clothes' wrote Henry Thoreau, and although most people won't have read his philosophy, they unconsciously act on it. People are happy to wear strange clothing whilst participating in sport or doing a dangerous job, but not for normal activities. If cycling is ever to become a credible means of mass travel and transport, as popular as walking or travelling by car, it must be perceived as normal and the apparel of cyclists is no small part of how the activity is perceived.

Another slogan of the Slow Bicycle Movement is that if you wouldn't wear it off the bike, don't wear it! This, after all, is how most people ride in

## ACCESSORISE YOUR BIKE

with **Victoria Hazael**

Most panniers are designed to be practical not pretty, but because, in my opinion, you can never have enough bags, I've searched out the most stylish bags for your bicycle. All are designed in Holland and available in the UK from [www.bobbinbicycles.co.uk](http://www.bobbinbicycles.co.uk)



### New Look Single Grey Patterned Pannier £35

This is the perfect bag for students or those who carry lots of papers. It's waterproof and converts to a shoulderbag off the bike.



### Fast Rider Straw Shopping Pannier £35

This straw pannier is roomy, with two pockets – one for a mobile and the other with a zip. It wouldn't be waterproof in heavy rain.



### Basil Mirte Pannier Flower Print White & Black £35

This waterproof polyester bag is perfect for taking to the office or shops. Off the bike, non-cyclists have commented on my nice handbag.

Copenhagen and Amsterdam, and the good news is that an increasing number of people are doing the same in British cities – and not just in Cambridge and York. It's now becoming quite the thing to pedal sedately around central London, dressed for the office or for the evening, on a classic roadster bicycle. Every person doing so is a mobile advertisement that cycling is a normal thing to do – whereas every dayglo road-warrior advertises that this is a danger sport only for the fit and fearless! Both stand to gain from safety in numbers, but not many people want to be warriors. Only slow cycling can produce the numbers.

You don't have to practice slow cycling all of the time, but every keen cyclist ought to have one bike they can jump onto and pop down the shops, wearing whatever they have on at the time. Just because you race, don't pretend that's the *only* way you can ride. A few of those Dutch and Danish commuters, cruising at 15.3km/h midweek, will be mountain biking or speeding along the road on Sunday, just like you.

Slow cycling is practical cycling. Do you need a shower after walking to work? Could there be enough for everyone? How do you shower at the supermarket, the restaurant, the cinema? Mass cycling for all these purposes obviously has to be slow cycling, no more energetic than walking, and in most cases it doesn't save any time overall to ride faster, get in a muck sweat, then shower and change. I know: I've timed it both ways.

Slow cycling is also safer and less stressful. There's more time to react to traffic, plus you get more space from drivers. It really helps to look like them, rather than a creature from another planet.

### And the bike is wearing ...

Although you don't really need a special bicycle in order to join the Slow Bicycle Movement ('ride the bike you have, in the clothes you like' remember?) there's an association between a Slow City style of cycling and the traditional style of roadsters once common in Britain and still used in their millions abroad. It's not just fashion but functional too, since this sort of bike has all of the attributes for you to get on and ride, just as you are, any time of the day or night.

We've picked a couple of archetypal roadsters to review for this article: one British the other Danish. But before getting into the road test I'll list their easy access attributes: the things that these bikes have already, but that you could probably add to the bike you already have.

**Mudguards** – to catch water and worse thrown up by the tyres. But beware of imitations. Only full-length, full-width, fully fitted mudguards equipped with mudflaps will catch it all.

**Flat pedals** – that you can press with any shoes. Yes, even high heels. You don't pedal with your heels so riding in them is no big deal – much better than walking, in fact!

**Chainguard** – to keep loose clothing out of the chain. This must cover at least the top and outside of the chain above the chainstay and likewise the chainwheel teeth. Believe it or not, you can get chainguards like that for bikes with derailleur gears and triple chainsets that also cover the front mech, e.g. the SKS Chainboard reviewed in the last issue. However a fully enclosing chaincase is even better, and those work only with hub gears (or single-speed).



If the bike is equipped with mudguards, a chaincase, and a comfortable upright riding position, you can wear whatever clothing you like



Courtesy of Velobis

If you can walk to work wearing it, you can ride to work in it

## “The Slow Bicycle Movement says: ‘If you wouldn’t wear it off the bike, don’t wear it!’”

**Skirtguards** – fitted either side of the rear mudguard will (obviously) keep a skirt or (less obviously) a long winter coat out of the spokes. Hence they’re also called coatguards.

So that’s what the bike will be wearing, in order that you can wear what you like. Meanwhile, here are a few more things that make a bike more convenient to use: things for the bike to take care of, so you don’t have to.

**Dynamo lighting** – built into the bike, so you need not fret about flat batteries or theft. Avoids carrying lights around when not cycling and the fiddle of removing them when you park.

**Kickstand** – so you don’t even have to look for a place to prop your bike when you stop. Don’t go to the wall, just kick the stand!

**Wheel lock** – merely inhibits joy-riding, not determined theft, but is so quick and convenient to use that you’ll never be tempted to leave the bike unlocked.

Last but not least, for slow cycling you’ll want an upright riding position, which means handgrips as high or higher than the saddle and much closer to it than on bikes designed for speed. Most bikes can be adapted, using a steeper stem or with headset extender and a change of handlebar shape to flat, riser, butterfly or swept-back (like on the bikes reviewed).

### British roadster: Pashley

There was a time when factories had hooters that blew and gates that opened to release a tide of men on bicycles onto the streets of Britain. Those bicycles looked very much like the Pashley Roadster Sovereign, still assembled here in a West Midlands factory, albeit mostly with foreign-made parts. Many of these parts also differ in material from those of yore and offer a distinctly higher level of performance. In fact, this class of bike would rather have carried the vicar on his rounds or a solicitor to his office than a factory worker.

Modern quality features include a 3W dynamo and 5-speed gears inside the Sturmey-Archer front and rear hubs, which also contain drum brakes within their alloy shells. In addition to this extra power (the original ‘Dynohub’ was only 2W), the lights benefit from the efficiency of a halogen bulb and LEDs. Only the front lamp runs off the dynamo, by the way, the rear being battery powered. I was pleased to see that the Sovereign’s fully enclosing chaincase is tough plastic rather than the heavy, rattling and rusting steel of yore. The wheel lock is also a good modern design, but you’ll want something more secure for long-term parking.

A few things do not change however and it’s hard to beat the strength and durability of a lugged steel frame. The Brooks leather saddle – still made in Britain – is also a classic. Everything about this bike speaks of quality, from the shiny black paint to the sonorous bell. There’s also a ladies’ ‘Princess Sovereign’ version, which is essentially similar but comes with a front basket and in a choice of colours. Don’t get too excited though: the colour options

## PASHLEY ROADSTER SOVEREIGN £565

[www.pashley.co.uk](http://www.pashley.co.uk), tel: 01789 292 263

Reviewed by Chris Peck

I took a fixed-wheel road bike to the Netherlands last year and felt desperately out of place. The laid-back everyday nature of Dutch cycling was inspiring and made me re-evaluate the way I behaved on a bike. When I returned to Britain, I decided that I would stop frantically racing around London, battling with the lycra-clad road warriors and motorbikes for space at the traffic lights. I fitted a high stem and moustache bars to an old touring bike, but within a couple of months that bike was destroyed in a crash and I was back to square one. I looked at several Dutch-made bikes but a paucity of gears and the rather crude retrofitting of a front brake turned me off.

Instead I looked to Pashley, choosing the top of the line Roadster Sovereign – a solid beast of a bike which makes you feel like you are the 4x4 driver of the cycling world, towering above all other riders. This bike comes equipped with dynamo, stand, wheel-lock (fantastic!), chain and coat guards and a rack large enough to carry at least two. It also comes with a cunningly disguised frame-fit pump.

There are downsides: the bottom bracket is unnecessarily high, not helped by the 28x1 1/2in (40-635) wheels, which greatly reduces tyre-selection, at least in the UK. The Brooks saddle is awful and will soon be removed. I’m a big fan of Brooks – I’ve had three on different bikes – but this vast, heavy, squeaking menace does not improve the ride, even if it does look the part.

I wouldn’t ride this bike more than 15km at a time: the upright position, weight, and saddle do not encourage distance. But for short pootles round town – the reason I bought it – it’s pure joy. On a slow bike you see more of the city, people stop and admire you, and you often find yourself giving way unnecessarily to other road users with a smile. Even traffic lights don’t seem as vindictive as when you are trying to hurtle through town at 30 km/h.



While it looks very traditional with its Brooks saddle, the Roadster Sovereign also uses modern Sturmey-Archer hubs, a 21st century headlamp, and Schwalbe Marathon Plus tyres



## VELORBIS DANNEBROG

£899.95

www.velorbis.co.uk, tel: +45 31 11 00 30

Reviewed by Victoria Hazael

Perhaps it's because I've been cycling a bit slower or maybe it's the bright red paint, but I've never ridden a bicycle that's attracted so much attention. From being stopped in the street by an eight-year-old girl to being offered money to sell it on the spot in London, the Velorbis Dannebrog with its white tyres is designed to be a conversation starter. The bike looks good and, honestly, that's the main reason I like it.

Fashion is a valid reason for choosing a bike. Everyone wants to look good, and few of us would feel that we did so while dressed head to toe in lycra – an outfit I don't want to be seen in on or off the bike. Having a stylish bike will hopefully encourage more women to cycle more and feel good, not self-conscious, on their bikes. On a bike like this you can wear what you want, so I've liberated my skirts and dresses from the back of the wardrobe. I'd not really acknowledged that commuting every day by bike had such an effect on the clothes I choose. Previously I would automatically opt for black trousers, which would hide any stray oil from my chain.

The upright position of the bike makes a huge difference in traffic and means it's far easier to get that all-important eye contact with drivers. Something I wasn't expecting was the reaction from motorists: they gave me more room and waited a bit more patiently at junctions, as the big red bike told them I wasn't going to be cycling at speed.

It's a heavy bike, weighing in at 21kg. I did manage to lug it on and off busy commuter trains a couple of times, but with this weight and only three gears, hills were obviously harder. Coming down: these drum brakes didn't stop me as quickly or easily as I'd like.

Overall, it's not the best value bike in the world, but it is one of the prettiest I've seen. If that gets more people cycling it will be well worth the possible embarrassment of being mistaken for a very stylish postwoman!



The Dannebrog has all the practical features you want in a roadster but it's expensive



Summer dress and high-heels? Beats neon cycling gear



Courtesy of Velorbis

are black or dark green.

Weight is not the primary consideration with this style of bike, since they're mostly used in flat places and since the places where most of the population cycles are also mostly flat. But if you don't live in such a place, you may find 21.7kg a burden up the hills, and drum brakes a little lacking in bite on the way down. For whilst it's good that bad weather does not affect them, drum brakes are not a match for most modern rim brakes, in most conditions. Rest assured that the Pashley Sovereign can nevertheless be stopped safely.

CTC's Chris Peck had recently bought a Pashley Roadster Sovereign, so we borrowed it for this review and I'll leave him to describe what it's like to own and ride. I'd say that this is a well-designed and well-built example of this type of bike, which at £565 also represents good value for money. Pashley cycles are available from many retailers, including the CTC shop.

### Danish roadster: Velorbis

This bike is designed in Denmark, made in Germany, two of the countries that never lost their everyday cycling culture, so you'd expect Velorbis to get it just right – especially at a price of almost £900! Well, they certainly know how to put on the style. This model takes its name, its bright red frame and contrasting white wall tyres from the Danish flag. Such an eye-catching colour scheme is one reason we picked this bike. The other is that it comes with all of the technical features.

Many of these features involve the same or very similar equipment to that on the Pashley bike reviewed above. Comparisons with the Princess Sovereign are inevitable and I'm sorry to say that the more expensive bike generally comes off worse. Its hubs are identical except for having only 3-speed gears. The chainguard protects clothing all right, but doesn't fully enclose the chain and is steel. The tyres are 26x1 3/8in: a size that used to be the roadster standard but is now hard to get, especially in white. The wheel lock is a poor quality model that was very stiff to operate. Likewise the brakes!

Drum brakes lack the sharpness of a modern rim brake – as I've already noted – but they should be more effective than these. A close look at the brake levers revealed the problem. Velorbis have fitted levers for V-brakes, rather than those that provide the necessary leverage to work other designs of brake, including drum brakes. It's a serious error, which actually made this bike quite dangerous to ride.

Some nice extra features include the Brooks leather handgrips and stainless steel rims. The bag clip on the right side of the luggage carrier beats hanging your shopping from the handlebars, but is a mixed blessing. It means you can't hang a bike pannier on that side at all, or use the parcel clip at the same time, since this must be fully down or else the shopping bag can jump off. Plus there's a steering damper. Why? I guess to stop the wheel swinging around when the bike is parked on its stand. This we liked better than the stand on the Pashley, but almost everything else (except the colour) we didn't like as much.

In their blurb, Velorbis claim to have reduced weight. Complete with the optional skirtguards our Dannebrog weighed 20.8kg. Less than the Sovereign, but allowing for the difference in frame size, not much.

Despite its eye-catching looks, it's hard to find shops actually selling this model in the UK. Try [www.cyclechic.co.uk](http://www.cyclechic.co.uk) (0207 613 7316) or ask the importer: Moore Large & Co: [www.moorelarge.co.uk](http://www.moorelarge.co.uk), 01332 274200.