



THE GUV'NORS

Best known for its classic roadsters and post office bikes, Pashley Cycles is the oldest cycle manufacturer in Britain, founded way back in 1926. **Dave Barter** visited the factory

Even the cycling world is increasingly a throwaway society; if something breaks, you're more likely to be sold a replacement than a spare part. But not from Pashley. 'Pashley has provided spare parts for its products for 80 years,' Managing Director Adrian Williams tells me, 'and will continue to do so for another 80 years.'

Nestled in the heart of Stratford Upon Avon, Pashley handcrafts a unique range of cycles that defy categorisation within the niches pushed by the major brands. A good example of this is the Guv'nor, an echo back to the racing bikes of the 1930s, fashioned in Reynolds 531 tubing and geared via a Sturmey Archer hub. The Guv'nor is definitely a conversation starter, seeping heritage and making no concession to modern cycling fads.

This is typical of Pashley's range of cycles, which stretches from work bikes to children's tricycles. Every time you a postman or woman cycles past you, it's more than likely that they're riding a Pashley Mailstar; more than 25,000 of them have left the Pashley factory. It's not the only work bike manufactured by Pashley either – there's also the Courier and the Delibike, both designed for deliveries, and the Classic 33 Ice Cream vending tricycle, complete with sunshade.

(Above) One of Pashley's classic roadsters – a Princess Sovereign

(Below) Pashley's Guv'nor, based on a Path Racer model made by the company in the 1930s

Pashley has been making bikes since the company was founded by William Rathbone Pashley in 1926. William set out to manufacture 'every type of cycle' and over the years Pashley has remained committed to this aim with over 150 different product lines currently manufactured in house.

Last of the Patriots

Pashley grew and diversified as the cycle industry gained momentum. The company manufactured motorised rickshaws, powered tricycles and more – until the growth in mass-produced motor transport forced a retreat back to leg-powered machines.

In 1984 Pashley launched the Patriot, a conventional sports light roadster design that was to be the last 'all British' bicycle, with all components sourced from the UK. Sadly, components became unavailable and the Patriot is no longer made.

The Pashley family are no longer involved within the company, but Adrian steers a firm rudder, ensuring that the Pashley brand remains firmly tethered to its roots. Pashley continues to manufacture 'classic' bikes, fashioned from steel and hand assembled from





components sourced as close to home as possible. You won't find any carbon frames in the range but you will find a mixture of other British names such as Brooks saddles and Reynolds tubing.

Riding out the recession

It's not all roses, though: the recession and fluctuating exchange rates impact upon the bottom line and Pashley has had to fight hard to maintain its patriotic stance. But Adrian is not tempted: he is clear that Pashley is there to get it right, a mission that would be lost were they to outsource abroad. So Pashley remains in Stratford-upon-Avon and remains loyal to its workforce.

A tour of the factory gives further insight into the Pashley ethos. Adrian knows his entire workforce of 48 by name and each of them is clearly engaged with the task at hand. The factory is staffed by craftsmen, hand brazing, hand welding and hand assembling the Pashley bikes. There's no automation and the only

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computer in evidence is for printing out the despatch labels. Many of the staff have been at Pashley for over 10 years. John Kerby became Factory Manager in 1968 and remains in the same job at Pashley nearly 42 years later.

The bikes are all made under the same roof: tubes, raw materials and components come in one end; packaged bikes fly out the other. The entire production

process is maintained in house and the attention to detail is evident, with each stage of manufacture carried out and checked by hand. The Pashley frame numbers adhere to a 40-year-old format putting each bike on a clear timeline stretching back to the '60s.

This is even more impressive given the diversity of products and the fact that Pashley manufactures a Moulton full-suspension design – the TSR – under license. The staff take this all within their stride and have clearly honed their operation over many years to cope with the varying needs of their distributors and dealers. Try doing that on an automated production line.

Whilst Pashley is focused upon its British roots, the customer base isn't. Export trade is growing significantly and making up over 20% of all orders. Adrian sees this increasing further in the near future.

Design classics

Above the production area sits Dan Farrell, Group Technical Director, with a desk full of shiny components and a head full of new ideas. He tells me that the company is always looking for new openings, as long as they make the most of the Pashley strengths and distinctive capabilities. Pashley is by no means stuck in the past, but equally no one in the company is prepared simply to forget their heritage. They see no reason why proven design and classic geometry should be abandoned in the name of progress.

Dan hands me the user manual for the Roadster and Princess cycles. It's quintessentially Pashley, designed to the same level of detail as the bikes. It's 20 pages long, written in plain English, well illustrated, and full of all of the information required to own and ride the bike. It even has the classic retro look of the bikes themselves.

There's an evident pride that the bikes are hand built, that they're as British as they can be, and that the heritage that comes with each bike is something that's worth retaining.

Pashley builds rather than assembles bikes, including some models from another iconic UK bike brand: Moulton

