



# Striking oil

Cleaning and lubricating your bike doesn't have to mean coating it in petro-chemicals. **Dominic Bliss** spoke to Simon Nash of Green Oil

**A** British manufacturer selling bike products to China: it sounds topsy-turvy but it's true. Green Oil, who make bike lubricants and cleaning fluids, have bucked global manufacturing trends. Instead of moving production to the Far East, they are making their products in a factory in little old Blighty. And they've just taken their first order from a distributor in China.

Being a very small operation (two employees, one of them part-time), economies of scale aren't such an issue. The reason they've chosen a British factory (in South Wales) is because of environmental and ethical concerns.

'Our main market is in the UK so this means less pollution from freight,' says Simon Nash, the

26-year-old owner and founder of Green Oil. 'Also, I wouldn't be happy manufacturing in China because of the human rights issue.'

## Refining the oil business

Sitting in his small south London office, having struggled to commute in through the snow on his mountain bike, Nash explains how every part of his business is driven by his desire to be both environmentally and ethically responsible. All his products use plant-based ingredients such as orange peel, coconut oil, beeswax, vinegar extract and bio-ethanol from sugar. He's careful not to reveal his secret recipes – for fear that rivals might steal them – but he eschews all petro-chemical ingredients and other non-biodegradable nasties such as

*Simon Nash set out to brew an environmentally-friendly lubricant after a ride through a stream on his mountain bike made him think. Green Oil is the result*

Teflon or PTFE. Even palm oil, which is plant-based but whose cultivation requires rainforest clearance, is off the menu.

The packaging, too, is recycled and ecologically sound, right down to the finest detail. Customers are offered a 10 or 20p deposit if they refill their old containers. Corporate social responsibility is important, too. The reclaimed display cases he supplies to retailers, for example, are assembled by a company that takes affirmative action in employing disabled people.

Nash runs his business by a very strict ethos, known in business circles as the 'triple bottom line'. This means that environmental and social responsibilities are just as important as financial profit. 'It's good motivation for us to know that every bottle we sell means less >>>



Photography by Dominic Bliss & Green Oil

» petro-chemicals are going into the environment. And that we have fair trade principles.'

### Oil spillage origins

It began in 2006 when Nash was riding his mountain bike down a shallow stream near his home in south-east London. He had a moment of epiphany. 'I could see the stream water splashing over my chain. This made me think how bike lubricant all ends up in the water supply eventually. I immediately went looking for a "green" chain oil, but there was nothing on the market. All the products I saw in the bike shops said they were dangerous for the environment. None had recycling symbols on their containers. Many were imported.'

So Nash set himself the mission of producing an environmentally-friendly chain lubricant himself. Using A-level chemistry, and a lot of determination, he experimented by mashing up various plants and attacking them with a Bunsen burner. 'A lot of research and experimentation,' he says. The result: Green Oil.

Working first out of his bedroom, and then from a cabin in his parents' back garden, he had soon developed his product into a fully-fledged business. He now sells seven products in all: chain oil, chain wax, grease, a degreaser, cleaning fluid, a sponge, and a brush. Two years on, he has increased sales from 50 bottles a week to 500. He now sells to around 200 retailers in the UK, and via distributors to mainland Europe, USA, Australia and now China.

### Shrewd oil

The five lubricants and cleaning products are all manufactured at an outsourcing factory near Newport in South Wales. Nash says it never even crossed his mind to look for a cheaper factory overseas. 'It probably would be cheaper to manufacture abroad,' he admits. 'But my products are liquid, therefore quite heavy and expensive to transport. From an environmental point of view, it's best to have the factory in the UK.'

The South Wales factory has the added bonus of being convenient for quality control. Lead times in Chinese factories are obviously much longer, which means Nash would have to invest in ingredients and packaging at least four months in advance – not great

(Clockwise from top left) Just some of the 500 bottles a week. Green Oil is made in Newport and shipped to shops directly, to reduce road freight. Nash has already won industry awards. The Green Oil collection: almost everything you need to clean and lube your bike

for a small business's cash flow.

While there are biodegradable bike cleaners on the market, Nash says he's not aware of environmentally-friendly bike lubricants made anywhere else in Europe. It gives him a unique selling point. Without this, he knows it's unlikely he could survive the competition from the bike lube big boys such as Finish Line, White Lightning and Weldtite.

But he stresses how this advantage would be worth nothing if his products didn't perform just as well as the others on the market. 'Cyclists will buy a product that's green, but only if it performs as well as other products,' he says, insisting that Green Oil products contain long-chain molecules similar to the ones in petro-chemical lubricants – but deriving from plants instead.

### The oil market

With very low overheads, a great image within the bicycle industry, and those 500-odd bottles being sold every week, the future looks bright for Green Oil. Nash hopes to launch new products soon, including a spray lubricant, and increase his share of the British market. 'There are around 2,000 bike shops in the UK, and so far we're in only 10 per cent of those.'

But he has no plans to lubricate the cogs of machines other than bicycles. Selling to the motor trade would increase turnover massively, and Nash knows that. It may satisfy the financial aspect of his triple bottom line, but it wouldn't chime with the social and environmental responsibilities. 'I think I'd be uncomfortable working for the car industry,' he says.

*Find out more about Green Oil at [green-oil.net](http://green-oil.net)*