

## LIGHTWEIGHT NEWS - 12

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**'also incorporating news from the Lightweight Group of the V-CC'**

For the first time we are half-way through the 2-month period between editions without any copy so you will have to put up with my ramblings yet again. In L News 11 I gave a personal overview of the lightweight scene and was pleasantly surprised when several readers, whose opinion I really value because they were there, agreed with what I said.

Carrying on from that piece, there are still a few frame builders in the UK who build to order rather than import Taiwanese frames and badge them up. We were pleased to see the current Mercian Vincitore on our Mercian Ride at the end of September. I think they are the only builders producing a current model with fancy lugs apart from one or two concerns who are carrying on with 'retro' production of classic frames from the UK such as Hetchins, Paris, Bates and Baines. I haven't heard much about these recently but assume they are quietly plugging away in their small niche markets. I had my 1954 ex-Dave Keeler bike on the Mercian Ride. This was built with what were then the Vigorelli track-frame lugs, which later on were used on road frames as the Vincitore right through to this day. AVT had his 1958 version of Dave's bikes complete with Paris/Roubaix gear but we didn't get to see him changing it for a hill. I think we just about covered the entire span of the Vincitore/Vigorelli production on this ride.

What is surprising is that there are probably more classic frames being built in both the States and Australia than here in the UK. In the USA many collectors of classic bikes go for French machines which often come complete with mudguards, front and rear carriers, dynamos, etc and in the States it is possible to read reams about the correct way for a builder to attach a front carrier. There are some builders over there who produce modern versions of the French audax/tourist machines. Classic Italian racing bikes are another favourite across the pond – and who can blame them. I think some collectors there opt for the newer classic Italian machines and Campagnolo is a must. There are however also collectors who go for British frames and machines, some in a big way. I am often amazed when a collector sends me details of his collection which holds just about everything on the UK enthusiast's wish list. I guess these collections must have been built up over the years and surely must pre-date eBay as a source.

A spin-off from this is a core of builders in the States who now produce stunning classic frames built to a standard which would not have been commercially viable here in the UK in the austere post-war years. Some cut, build, and shape their own exquisite lugs and the frames are finished with an attention to detail unheard of before. They do not line the lugs to hide the edges of the paint but instead go in for masking of such a high quality that when the frame is completed the paint is crisp and clean edged, even within the trickiest of lug cut-outs. <http://www.witcombcycles.co.uk/aboutpages/timeline.htm> is a page on the website of Witcomb

**Cycles and in their timeline it states:-**

*1972 American frame builders, Richard Sachs and Peter Wiegler start training with Barrie. Witcomb opens a clothing boutique and a junior bicycles department.*

*1973 Witcomb USA opens its workshop in East Haddam, CT. The Witcomb USA racing team competes in the Tour de L'Estrie, Canada.*

Richard Sachs and Peter Wiegler are two of the builders involved in this revival of classic machines in the States.

Another feature in the States is the use of very expensive Silver-brazing. The ubiquitous Nervex Professional lugs are also very popular and there is an almost identical lug currently manufactured over there under the name of Newvex made by the above-mentioned Richard Sachs.

If you wish to view some American lugwork for yourselves, check out <http://www.bikelugs.com>. One noticeable fact is that many of the top headlugs have an extension to cater for the American style of mounting bars much higher than is common in the UK.

Meanwhile, in Australia there is a frame builder Darryl McCulloch, trading under the name of Llewellyn, who is also producing some stunning frames using, I believe, stainless steel lugs cut to intricate and artistic patterns, some details of which are asymmetric, which is both new and aesthetically daring. Keith Hellon from Chicago owns one of these frames, the only one I have seen, and told me:



“You are absolutely right. The lugs were supplied to Darryl McCulloch (Llewellyn) who then reconfigured them for his own design. The frame I have was built for his own consumption. He took it to the U.S. for the Classic Rendezvous "Cirque du Cyclisme" and since it was my size, I convinced him not to bother carting it back to Australia. There are so many details on this frame I wouldn't know where to begin. Inside the BB and seat tube are clubs and diamonds cut inside; the rear drop-out has stainless replaceable surfaces for the nut seat damage; decorative stainless pads on the seat stay closures to void rubbing the paint by the brake cable (*see above left*); a carved stainless bridge between the seat stays etc. He also made the stem with lugs to match (*above right*). You can find some details on the CR Cirque photos from 2005 of the frame. There is no chrome anywhere, it is probably the most exquisite frame that I have ever seen.”

Chris Barbour recently visited us from the States and was telling us of some research done using early editions of *Cycling*. Thinking about this I realised that it would be easy to get a false view of cycling in the 50's, especially if using the advertising material as a guide to what cyclists were buying and /or using. I guess the only builders who could afford the advertising rates for decent sized adverts in this popular periodical were the major manufacturers. Ironically, they were producing cycles which any half-serious cyclist of the day wouldn't be seen dead on. I can only assume that they hoped to pick up business from newcomers to the sport. It was unfortunate for research purposes that Jock Wadley didn't produce his *Coureur* and *Sporting Cyclist* magazines until well into the 50's. Being a publication with much smaller circulation, his advertising rates were obviously much lower, and as a result he attracted the smaller builders of the day. These were the type of businesses which the club cyclists would patronise with a great sense of loyalty. Jack Wadley covered the Continental racing scene and reported on League racing in the UK as well as the time-trial

scene. *Cycling*, on the other hand, refused to acknowledge that the League existed unless there was some completely negative aspect to report. Sadly, Jack's publications eventually went the way of most small magazines as they struggled against the cartel of the bigger fish.

One edition of *Sporting Cyclist* in 1958 had adverts for Rory O'Brien, Witcomb, Allins of Croydon, Carlton, Condor, Lipscombe, Gillott, Mercian, Holmes of Welling, Southern Cycles, Mal Rees, Carpenter, Meridian as well as Fiorelli, Urago and many component manufacturers.

I was recently reading an item in *Sporting Cyclist* written by a top rider of the day who was describing his training methods. It was interesting that he always rode a stripped down machine and took his 'belongings' in a musette. He describes 'upping the mileage' in the spring by doing a long ride on Saturday with B & B that night and then returning on the Sunday. His toothbrush, razor and spare garments were in the musette. I can remember doing long two-day (or longer) trips but cannot remember ever owning a saddlebag and can recall night training in the snow with no guards either – just an Ever Ready front and rear lamp. We would be riding fixed and there was an eerie silence as we rode along in an inch or so of snow – you have to ride on snow to get this feeling. There is of course the opposite view of training which entails riding on a heavy machine and feeling the benefit when changing to a lighter one for racing.

There was another interesting photo-montage in the May 1962 edition showing some London riders cycling down on Saturday to their Hampshire B & B, The Copper Kettle, in order to compete early on Sunday morning in the 1960 Bournemouth Jubilee Wheelers "25" on the P2. No doubt the first riders would have been off at 6am. There is a photograph of them complete with sprints mounted on sprint carriers, saddlebags and mudguards on the journey down from London through the New Forest and the inevitable ponies. The big attraction it seems was a 'double breakfast' at the B & B. This puzzled me for a while as I couldn't imagine racing with so much food in the stomach. Reading on, I realised that they had the first breakfast at 4.30 – 5am before riding to the start of the event, then returning afterwards, probably 8 – 9am and downing their second breakfast, a 'full English' and gallons of Rosie Lee (tea) before changing the wheels back, putting the mudguards on, fixing the sprints on their carriers and loading up, presumably to take a long route home. The event was won by Alf Engers. What is interesting is that all of the 12 or so machines shown are still in the classic 50's mode of fixed-wheel and a front brake, even though respectable (for the time) gears had been out for several years. It is obvious that the dread of any resistance or friction caused by gears was to be avoided at all costs. This dread of friction was behind the Campagnolo Paris/Roubaix gear, which looked at objectively was an absurd design for a gear, especially considering where the derailleur development was at the time and no doubt could have been improved on to great effect. The Gran Sport was eventually of course the logical step forward.

Dave Keeler once told me that he saw the Paris/Roubaix gear being used in Italy when he was in Milan for the World Track Championship in the early 50s. He decided there and then that this was the answer to low-friction geared transmission as it gave him, in effect, a selection of gears without any extra friction from tension on additional pulleys. He managed to purchase one when he was cycling round after the event and brought it back to England where Mercian built it into a frame for him. My guess is though that in spite of having this gear to hand he probably still used single-speed fixed for most events. Dave did tell me that that he had fixed hubs with flats filed on the axles so they would slide into the Paris/Roubaix ends when he rode fixed. It is well documented that Dave did in fact use the Paris/Roubaix for his successful attack on the Land's End to John O' Groats end-to-end record in 1958 and A V T has beautifully restored this machine – it can be seen on Classic Lightweight website under Readers' Bikes.

On the recent Mercian Ride we were discussing the use of fixed-wheels on hills and we decided that gear-for-gear one could push a higher gear up a hill on fixed so maybe there was something in it the fear of friction after all. Of course, weight comes into the equation as well.

**John Barringer** sent in some reminiscences of the 50's and his links with "Dan Genner", Cycle Builder of Excel Cycles, Colliers Wood, South London:

"I grew up in Colliers Wood, having been born there in 1943. I joined the cubs, and then the scouts, and enjoyed taking part in the Scouts "Bob-a Job-Week". This was a yearly event where we raised scout group funds by going round the neighbourhood doing odd jobs for a "bob" (a shilling, now the equivalent of 5p). This was how I came to work in Dan Genner's shop. I had called in there on my Bob-a-Job round and Mrs Genner gave me some shopping to do. She was obviously quite pleased as she then said I could go back every Saturday morning from 9.00 till 12.00. and earn Half a crown- two shillings and sixpence (twelve and a half pence in today's money). Along with the four shillings pocket money from my dad, and the shilling my elder sister gave me, the total, in today's money, thirty-seven and a half pence, was a small fortune to a 12-year-old lad in 1955. The average weekly wage for a manual worker then would have been about £12 a week. Dan's wife, Rosemary was really one of the most kind and generous ladies you could hope to meet.

Dan was by now in his late 50's and was an absolute wreck of a man. He chain-smoked Capstan full strength cigarettes, getting through about 60 a day. On the counter was an ashtray overflowing with wet dog ends, the smell of them pervaded the shop. He also spent most of his time seemingly coughing his lungs up, to no avail, his face becoming redder and redder, the more he coughed. On one wall of the shop customers would pin up photos of themselves on their Dan Genner bikes. In the middle was a large framed picture of Dan, taken at a cycle race meeting just before the First World War. I vaguely remember that it was taken when he had set some record for a race. The man in the photo was very handsome, very slim, upright and athletic, with sleeked back hair a far cry from what he was like then.

Although the shop was known by all and sundry as "Dan Genners", in fact the name of the business was the XL Cycle Co, and the company logo was "XLCR", a play on the word "Excelsior", meaning very superior. The shop, at 80/98, High Street Colliers wood, was in fact two shops, with a short passageway between them. Above the shop were two flats, with their own front doors. The cycle side of the business was mainly carried out in the right hand shop, viewed from the road, and the glass topped counters displayed all sorts of accessories. At the back was a workshop, where the hand built bikes were assembled. A Dan Genner Bike was a much-coveted item in those days. What set them apart were the very thin chain and seat stays and also the angle of the end of the seat stay where it met the seat tube- it was very oblique. I don't know why, they just looked fast, even when they were stationary. The down tube had a "Dan Genner" logo in script style (i.e. not block capitals, but "joined up writing"). I seem to remember that this was hand painted on. The headstock had a metal badge on it with the XL logo. They were made with Reynolds 531 tubing and then custom built.

Gear options were Simplex, Cyclo-Benelux, Huret or Campagnolo, Shimano was a word unheard of then. Anything could be under construction and seen in the shop: track bikes with fixed wheels, sports bikes and touring bikes with up to, but no more than 10 gears, and occasionally a tandem. They also sold Phillips brand bikes and dealt with the odd second hand bike. My cousin, Doreen, bought a second hand lime green Dan Genner ladies model, with a four speed Sturmey Archer Hub gear, for £15. The lovely Rosemary Jenner gave me a generous £2 commission/ tip for introducing the sale, I suspect that was most of the shop's profit, but as already said, she was a kind, generous lady. The other half of the shop was devoted to cycle clothing, Meccano sets and Dinky toys, with the Phillips bikes and second hand bikes for sale displayed in this area. A gas fire was lit for all of the winter to heat the shop - I used to toast myself in front of it between the shopping errands that I was sent out to do. This involved going to the little grocers shop next door - no supermarkets in those days - the greengrocers, the butchers, the chemists, and of course the tobacconists, for Dan's cigarettes. I recall taking some wood cycle wheel rims to be posted at the local post office. They were not wrapped, just the bare rims with an address label tied to each. I can remember the post office clerk trying to balance these rims, with difficulty, on the scales to ascertain how much postage was due. I always wondered if they arrived intact at their destination, and even if wooden wheel rims are ever seen anywhere today, apart from in a museum.

In one corner of the shop window was a vertical tube, about 7 foot high, with every type of handlebar displayed that the shop sold, about 15 different types. Some frames would be on display in the window, work in progress ones, and occasionally a finished bike would be displayed in the window awaiting collection by a customer. What you never saw for sale was a complete new bike with a price ticket on it; they were all strictly made to measure and made to order. I also had to bring in half a pound of Quality Street sweets every Saturday morning, from my dad's shop. Mrs Genner paid me the two shillings and sixpence (twelve and a half pence) for these, to give to my dad, and she would then start to work her way through them.

Saturday mornings were very busy in the shop with enthusiasts dropping in for a chat, cup of tea or to purchase some new goodies for their bike. On one occasion about 8 of us, with Dan, went to Herne Hill cycle track, about 6 miles away by train, and watched the racing. I went to look at the track recently, unfortunately it was closed, but is due to open at Easter for a Good Friday meeting. It's future is uncertain, for more very interesting information about Herne Hill, have a look at <http://www.londonvelodrome.org> and <http://www.goodfridaymeeting.org.uk>

For my fourteenth birthday I was given a Phillips, single speed bike priced at £13.19 shillings and 6 pence, in "Flamboyant Blue". My mother, bless her, thought that the colour was "awfully common". The bike was a reward from my Dad for considerably improving my exam results at school. In my first year, I had come 49th out of the 90 in our year- very much average. With the promise of a new bike if I made any reasonable improvement, I worked hard, and the following year I came 35th out of 90. My Dad was particularly pleased and the promised bike was forthcoming. Unfortunately, my teachers failed to notice this improvement, by saying in my report that "I was not trying hard enough", and I just lost interest in school after that. My Dad could not afford a new Dan Genner bike and no second-hand ones with a 19" frame ever seemed to be available. With my vast amount of pocket money I was soon able to have 5 gears fitted, 28 teeth down to 14 teeth. I then put the new gearing to the acid test. About 2 miles away was a steep hill leading from the centre of Wimbledon, up to Wimbledon Village. It was rather posh up there and quite close to the All England Tennis Club. Previously with my single speed, I would be out of the saddle and thrusting hard with my legs to make it to the top. This time it was different, I did have to use that 28 tooth bottom gear as I got near the top, legs wind milling round, but I managed to stay in the saddle all the way up. The bike drew a lot of attention the next day at my school, where incidentally one of my classmates was John Major. (*Later to become Prime Minister – Ed.*)

Over the next few months the bike was equipped with twin drinking bottles, double chain wheel, dynamo lighting and a rear pannier and bags. Then, a few years later, I went minimalist and took everything off and even converted to a fixed wheel, with just a front brake and short mudguards. a craze that was spreading through the cycle enthusiasts at the school at the time.

About the time I was 15, I was very unhappy at school and got in with a bad crowd. An incident where the police apprehended me whilst throwing stones through some coach windows at a breakers yard resulted in a home visit, and luckily just a ticking off by the police. My parents were horrified to even have a police car parked outside of our house and I was "grounded". My parents thought that I had too much money and was not devoting enough time to school work, and so I was not allowed to continue with my Saturday job.

So, in the summer of 1958 I said goodbye to Rosemary and Dan Genner for the last time. I think that the shop closed down some time in the late 1960's. Recently, I went to where the shop used to be, intending to take a photograph to include with this article, but sadly, what was once a thriving, diverse, parade of shops has degenerated into a motley selection of fast food outlets, betting shops, a launderette and mini cab offices. As it was early on a Sunday morning, the metal shutters were all down – taking a photograph seemed absolutely pointless – I decided to keep my memories of the shop as it was.

The punishment, and the hurt that I had caused to my parents, certainly did the trick, I've very much kept to the straight and narrow ever since.

Two other items of interest have just occurred to me. Do you remember "Chossy" saddlebags? They were made out of leather, as far as I can remember, but the leather was recycled after being used in some print proofing process. As a consequence they often had an image on them, which was on the outside of the bag. They were very tough and heavy, are they still made today?

The other item that sprang to mind was that during the late 1950's and 1960's enthusiasts used to carry their spare tubular tyres, or tubs as we called them, strapped to the seat pillar, usually with toe clip straps, wrapped up in a white plastic sheet. These sheets were obtained from outside of shops selling ice cream, where they were usually tied or clipped to a display board. They were very easy to "liberate", and were either "Walls", "Lyons" or "Neilsons", and the desirability of them was in that order simply because Walls was the most common, Lyon's the next with Neilsons being the most coveted. My father's shop sold Neilsons ice cream and as a consequence had to have a continual supply from the ice cream supplier to keep pace with the passing cyclists who helped themselves. Was this just a London thing, or does anyone remember whether this craze was nationwide? *John Barringer*

John is looking for a Dan Genner Excel 21½ /22". His phone number is 01582 768592 and he would like to here from anyone with one to sell or who knows of one.

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Meanwhile, **Irvine Saunders** [big.irtv@ukgateway.net](mailto:big.irtv@ukgateway.net) – has an Excel cycle he wishes to sell, 24" frame, No.005, made in Colliers Wood, London. From the info on your site it may have been made in the early 50's. He has taken the following details from the various parts on the bike: Hiduminium front brake (fixed wheel setup), Strata brake lever, 27x1.25 Weinmann wheels, Harden(drilled) hubs. The cranks read Competition Marque Deposee Stronglight. The bike also has a French (JOS) front wheel operated dynamo with a Swiss Lucifer front lamp with a switch for "dipping" the main beam.

**Bottom Bracket** – I (*Peter Underwood, Ed.*) recently bought a Chater Lea 5/16" bottom bracket set by mistake. It consists of cups 1350 and 1349 plus lockring. The axle is 125mm number 1240, there is a set of 5/16" balls. I have no use for this oversize BB and would be pleased to swap for a regular ¼" Chater Lea BB.....Peter Underwood

**John Mist** ( [jmist@basan.co.uk](mailto:jmist@basan.co.uk) ) asks:- I have just restored a Rick Powell road bike and have been trying to find out more about the frame maker. I have been told he may have been a cycle shop owner in the North of the UK who like may others built frames out the back in the workshop. I would be most grateful if you or any of your members could shed any light on this.

**Tod Kapke** has sent me some images of an interesting track frame he is trying to identify. They are on view at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/8457325@N03/sets/72157600642347931/>  
It had distictive lugs and chainstay tops – any ideas? His email is [tod@tkopix.com](mailto:tod@tkopix.com) please copy me in if you know the answer.