

FEATURE

CLASSIC

REVIVA

Reid's passion for the bikes of yesteryear has ridden the rise of retro

With the popularity of vintage cycling gear on the rise, **Tom Thewlis** went looking for bargains in Oxfordshire's Golden Age Cycles



Five minutes with Reid shows you that he clearly knows his stuff, something Chris Hoy no doubt discovered when he got hold of a bike through the Golden Age Cycles owner last year. Reid explains that it was a 1959 Condor, belonging to his father, which first drew him to vintage bicycles in what would become a lifelong love affair.

"My father had this beautiful 1959 Condor, which lived in the hall. It had this superb lugwork which I passed every day from the moment I was born," Reid says. "I always thought it was lovely. I've been teaching now for 25 years and have always wondered whether there's something else out there for me. So I thought why not? Took a year out of work, bought a few second-hand bikes and went from there.

"That was 10 years ago now and I'm still going strong," he adds. "So I must be doing something right, I guess. When I started out, the retro cycling movement was kind of taking off. One of my friends in Berlin helped set up some of the Eroica rides which take place around the world now, so talking to him I thought why not jump into this and give it a try. It's not been as smooth as I'd have hoped at times, but that's business."

Marques of time

Nowadays Reid stocks a variety of iconic Italian bicycle makers including the big-hitters, Colnago and Pinarello, but partly sparked by his father's Condor, homegrown British brands played a central role when he opened the doors at Golden Age Cycles for the first time.

"When I first set this place up it was mainly classic British lightweights that we had in. Makers like Hetchins, Bates and Claud Butler. Then it just evolved since then and expanded out," Reid explains. "I've got Penny Farthings now,

If Indiana Jones was more into bikes than crystal skulls, arks of the covenant or dials of destiny, then Golden Age Cycles in Oxfordshire is where you'd find him.

The shop's warehouse is a literal treasure trove, packed to the rafters with bikes from across the ages, all with their own little quirks and stories to tell. There are bikes from a bygone age, the sort you'd see being ridden in a costume drama, as well as elite-level machines that wouldn't have looked out of place starring in some of cycle racing's most celebrated moments.

All of this is the work of an Oxfordshire-based teacher, Brian Reid (who does not wear a fedora), who summed up his raft of experience in all things two-wheels perfectly when *Cycling Weekly* arrived on site. "I'm warning you, once I get started on bikes I can't stop," he jokes. "You'll have me here for hours."

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Golden Age Cycles is an Aladdin's cave of vintage delights



CLAUD BUTLER
A very
brief history

Claud Butler was a London-based frame-builder making bikes in Britain during the inter-war period.

He formerly worked for the Halford Cycle Company before opening his first bike shop in Clapham Junction and others soon followed across the capital, including in Lewisham. His bikes were known for their bronze weld construction and decorative lugwork and were raced at the 1931 World Championships in Copenhagen and Los Angeles Olympics in 1932.

He would come to be known as 'King of the lightweights' although business would soon be prematurely curtailed by the beginning of the Second World War.

Butler died in 1978, although his legacy in cycling and bicycle manufacture lives on.

Raleigh Choppers, Colnagos and some of the early carbon monocoque frames before the UCI went on to ban them.

"Generally the mantra is if it's got two wheels, and there's a profit to be made, I'm interested! So my life is just bikes, bikes, bikes," he adds. "Although nobody buys tandems. People just aren't interested."

With the array of modern technology in the bike industry now, to some the attraction of a vintage bike may have

dipped. However, Reid insists that there has always been a market for Italian steel frames, particularly amongst the older generations.

"There's always been a market. People seem to want now what they couldn't get hold of as kids," Reid says. "So anything in the range of 30-40 years old is popular. People love old British bikes with ornate lugs and Italian steel frames with garish paintwork.

"My customer base is very diverse. It's usually people that have a fair few bikes at home already and have the disposable income to go after something different. Middle-aged men like having a bike that they can show off and don't need to be fast on."

Even with customers being mad for British brands, Reid explains that the moment a Colnago Master comes through the door, he knows it will be gone again within days – especially when he gets hold of a particular bike associated with a key moment in British cycling history.

"Colnago Masters are the most popular we get in. The ones with the fluted tubing," he says. "I cannot believe that the design of the tubing, which is so close to

the Colnago motif, is the best mechanical shape but they are lovely.

"I've just sold one of the Chris Boardman Lotus 110 bikes actually, to a guy from Texas who flew over for it," Reid says. "I also had a Giant TCR which went recently. Mike Burrows really was a genius."

When discussing the appeal of owning a vintage bike, "it's simple" according to the part-time teacher, vintage bikes are

just "pure jewellery on two wheels".

"Modern carbon bikes just don't have the character and the romance of old bikes from a different era, and that time will never

come back," he says. "There are still a few people making handmade bikes. One maker in the States, Columbine bikes, their stuff is just gorgeous."

Reid's view is echoed by Alan Brenton, the man behind 'Velo Retro', a vintage cycling event held in the Lake District, who says that there is a real sense of romanticism to the scene.

"If they see a nicely restored Colnago or Hetchins, there are very few people who won't stop and admire them," Brenton says. "They are works of art compared to modern bikes which are becoming more

"Colnago Masters are the most popular"

A classic Colnago is the perennial connoisseur's dream



aggressive in their design, like stealth fighters.”

Vintage classics

For anyone new to the scene looking to start a vintage bicycle collection of their own, Reid explains that there’s only one place to start, with bikes made by people who “took pride” in what they were making.

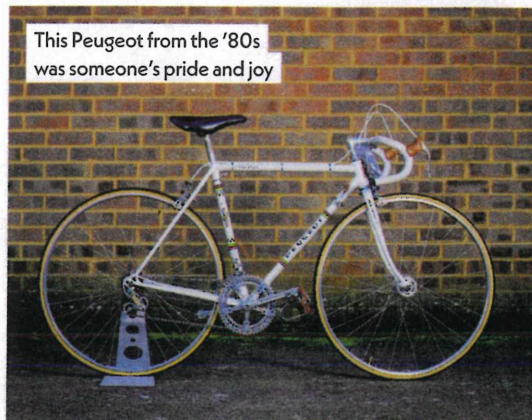
“Claud Butler and Holdsworth are good solid makers that hold their value,” he says. “They’re both definitely ones to go for. They were made by people who took pride in what they were making and are a good place to begin.”

Although Reid says that a particular Italian brand are the “Ferraris” of the vintage world.

“Hetchins have always been like the Rolls-Royce of vintage bikes but Colnago are the Ferraris. They’re just classic, they’re sporty and they’re pure bling,” he jokes. “Vintage Colnago is just the epitome of Italian style, speed, class and quality.”

In Reid’s line of work, there is a small element of risk. Once in a while a bike goes on the cheap before the painstaking realisation that it was worth far more.

This Peugeot from the ‘80s was someone’s pride and joy



Raleigh Centenary, 1987



1970s Condor track bike with wooden wheels



A Giant monocoque embodies Mike Burrows’ visionary flair



“It’s usually the old 1930s gear systems that are worth far more than you realise. Campagnolo once made an old steel rear neck called a ‘Sport’ which is really valuable because they’re so rare and I’ve previously had one,” he says.

“On the other hand I have occasionally underpriced things or thrown stuff away

“When they drop them off they can be crying”

by mistake. Hopefully I’m getting better at it nowadays.”

Reid explains that once in a while he visits one of the many vintage fairs around Britain to catch up with like-minded people. Furthermore, he believes that preserving the quality of past craftsmanship is a valuable legacy.

“Bikes can be lovely, but cyclists are just lovely people as well,” he says. “When people drop them off they can be crying because they’ve had this bike for 50 years and it’s got so many stories behind it. Bikes are personal things and the vintage bike community is great to be a part of. It’s important it continues.

“I don’t know whether it’s the fact that nice people ride bikes, or riding bikes makes you nice, but that’s what I enjoy most about all of this. I like meeting new people and hearing all the stories behind where their bikes have taken them in their lives.”

VELO RETRO

The only vintage bicycle fair in the Lake District

Now in its ninth year, Velo Retro is the only vintage bicycle and retro fair in the Lake District, and is far more than just a festival of bikes and cycling.

Inspired by the Eroica, Italy vintage rides, the organisers of Velo Retro say that first and foremost it’s a “festival of friendship” where “beer and pies take priority instead of chianti and ribollita”.

“We’ve worked really hard to create

a bit of magic in the whole thing,” organiser Alan Brenton says. “Our magic is that we add camaraderie and friendship to vintage bikes and our fair. There’s no timing to the rides or anything like that. I’ve had people say to me, ‘Am I the first one back?’ and I’ve replied, ‘No idea! I’m not remotely interested. I’d rather you had gone for a paddle in Coniston water then stopped at the pub for a beer and had a lovely time.”