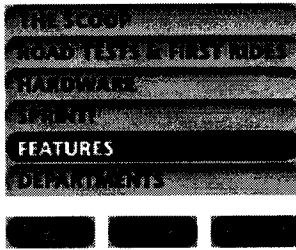


**bicyclist**


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# features

## City Bikes

### Cafe Cruisers

By By Garrett Lai

As cyclists, all of us know how to have fun on bikes. We train on them, we live for our weekend rides, we work on them and keep them shiny and fresh for the next jaunt. But ironically, very few of us actually use them for transportation--the thing bicycles were conceived for in the first place. In nearly any other civilized country in the world, the bicycle is the king of the short errand. Take a gander at almost any street corner in Europe or Asia and you'll find fleets of utility bikes, parked and waiting for their owners to return for the ride home. Contrast that with the situation here in the U.S., where bicycles are recreational toys and cars are the errand vehicle of choice--despite the fact that most errands take place within a couple-mile radius of home. But that mentality may be changing, as sales of city bikes--primarily Shimano Nexus-equipped bikes (more on that later)--have been slowly gaining momentum here.

Call them what you want, but city bikes, coffee bikes, utility bikes or urban cruisers are fun and perfectly suited for the plethora of short-hop errands that make up most of our days. We gathered up three good, representative examples of errand bikes to see what's what in the world of the java-getter.

**The Euro Pro** Talk to someone about a utility bike, and what most of us envision is an English three-speed: basic black, upright seating position, a basket and a bell, just like Julie Andrews' ride in *Mary Poppins* (or Margaret Hamilton's rig as the Wicked Witch of the West, if you tend toward the dark side). There are millions of three-speeds in England, and they're the standard by which all other city bikes are judged.

At \$899, the Pashley Princess isn't cheap or especially beautiful, but it is the very essence of what a utility bike should be: stalwart, sturdy, reliable and comfortable. The Pashley is equipped with a genuine Sturmey Archer 3-speed hub, Brooks stretched-leather saddle, a fully enclosed chainguard, wicker basket and the coolest two-tone dingdong bell.

The sturdy steel frame isn't pretty by anyone's standards, but its lines are graceful in a utilitarian fashion (and should riding a step-through frame offend masculine sensibilities, there's the matching Prospero with a proper

pro.

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Joseph Magnani raced the pro ranks in Europe-- 50 years ago

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Our buyer's guide to thermal jackets

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Your comfort and speed depend on it

### City Bikes

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### Online Cyclocross Special

top tube). The black gloss paint speaks of purposeful tradition, like a butler's uniform. The matching fenders, rack and chainguard are must-haves for commuting duty in the Pashley's wet homeland and were very much appreciated on midday coffee runs or trips to the library.

With only three speeds to choose from (low, moderate and way too high), you can't stomp around on a Pashley in a hurry. The bike's weight (45 pounds) and gearing mean you simply proceed at a stately pace, picking up speed slowly from a stop and winding up to only a moderate velocity. But you'd be hard-pressed to find a drivetrain that's as proven, reliable or maintenance-free as a Sturmey Archer 3-speed.

The handling possessed the stability expected of an ocean liner (appropriate for a bike that weighs as much as the Queen Elizabeth II cruise ship), which made sidewalk navigation a breeze. The smallish Brooks saddle was surprisingly comfortable, and that two-tone bell was worth a hundred style points (although the staff was divided as to whether the bell's tendency to sound off on its own over bumps was endearing or annoying).

The Pashley is a bit of a time machine, having undergone precious little evolution in its 60-plus-year production run. And while it's more than capable of being a faithful commuting companion, it also shows how much better a modern bike is than its elders. The rod brakes, though quaint, are amazingly weak. The rear brake didn't do a heck of a lot, despite my most earnest squeeze of the lever. The front brake worked well, but I'd hate to count on it for any unplanned stops like that pedestrian who steps off the curb into your path.

The Pashley may be a rather expensive anachronism, but it's a thoroughly charming one. It's a bike that looks as properly suited for its duties as Alfred the butler in Batman, only more so. Take it to the coffeehouse, and you'll get looks and questions from passersby, waves from kids (to which you can respond with a ring of the bell), even smiles from pretty girls or handsome gentlemen. It is a single-minded vehicle, suited only for errands and slow commutes, but what it lacks in versatility it more than makes up for with reliability and style. Contact Dekker Service at (206)641-9639, [mdekker@eskimo.com](mailto:mdekker@eskimo.com), [www.eskimo.com/~mdekker](http://www.eskimo.com/~mdekker).

**The Fancy Bomber** Let's say you're the consummate bike fiend, maybe even a bit of a velosnob. You have an Italian racing frame with Campy Record hung on it, a Shimano XTR-equipped mountain bike in the stable, a track bike hanging from the rafters and have plans to get a tandem. You want a city bike, something built for bombing around town that you can hang panniers on and lock up without worry, but can't stand the idea of riding a \$500 bike around town. Enter the Rivendell

All-Rounder. At \$1100 (for Rivendell members, \$1500 if you're not, but membership only costs \$15 and you get all sorts of good reading material mailed to you so just join and save \$400) for the frame and fork (about \$2250 as equipped), this is as pricey as you can get for a city bike. But it's also about as fancy and hand built as you can find without commissioning a custom. The All-Rounder was designed by Grant Petersen (Rivendell's proprietor and former Bridgestone product manager) to be a do-everything bicycle, so its complement of fender and rack braze-ons, 26-inch wheels and long, rangy wheelbase makes it the perfect foundation for an urban-assault vehicle.



The lug work is exquisitely detailed, a collection of crisply defined curlicues expertly brazed by Waterford Precision Cycles. But those delicate, wispy-looking lugs bookend Reynolds' robust 753 tubes, proven stuff able to take the rigors of curb hops, pothole smashes and scrapes and dings from being chained to parking meters. This is a bike with style and brawn, a la Range Rover.

You could outfit the bike with anything you want, but I'd definitely keep that moustache bar and leather saddle, which garnered more compliments and double takes in our completely unscientific coffeehouse poll. Aside from its looks, the moustache bar works wonderfully for a city bike: With your hands at the ends, you sit bolt upright for a commanding view; grab the bar at its foremost points and you're in a low crouch suitable for downhills or sprinting through a yellow light.

As city bikes go, the All-Rounder's handling is a little quick, but that's the fun of it. You can glide easily around corners like granny going to market, or scorch around the bends like a downhill mountain biker. It's stable, but quick to take direction, which makes it easy to place the tires on that 2-inch strip of good asphalt between the tire-catching sewer grate and wheel-bending pothole on Main Street.

The long chainstays make for a pleasant ride, soaking up bumps in a cushier fashion than our other two city subjects. The fact this bike had a full 14-speed drivetrain made it far more versatile than a city bike needs to be. With a rack and panniers, this would be just as adept at touring as it is schlepping a month's worth of library books and groceries.

It's more boutique bike than utility rig, but Rivendell's All-Rounder would make a handsome addition to any die-hard cyclist's stable. It'll get you around in style, turn

knowledgeable cyclists' heads and maybe garner a few glances from pedestrians. Buy it because you want something unique, ride it because it works (and works well), and you'll be a happy guy in the city--or anywhere else you'd care to ride. Contact Rivendell Bicycle Works at (510)933-7304, [www.veloworks.com/rivendell/](http://www.veloworks.com/rivendell/).

**The Nexus Advantage** Perhaps the biggest reason for the sudden interest in city bikes has been Shimano's Nexus components. These are parts designed for the urban environment with 4- and 7-speed internally geared rear hubs, generator front hubs, hub brakes and stylish shifters intended to look more friendly and less techie than your usual mountain bike parts. Combine Nexus parts with the plethora of low-cost quality aluminum frames available and you have a bunch great of city bikes.

Bianchi's Milano is, perhaps, one of the nicest of this new generation of city bikes. It's a pleasing blend of old and new--the old represented by that time-honored Celeste green paint, the vintage-look Bianchi graphics and that artfully curved top tube and matching arc handlebar; the new by its fat aluminum tubes and TIG welds, the low-maintenance Nexus components and wide saddle with the look-at-me flashing LEDs in back.

At 26 pounds, this is about as light as a modern city bike gets if it's carrying a Nexus 7-speed rear hub. And it feels light and nimble, with quick steering that made it easy to thread my way down the pedestrian- and inline skater-strewn beach path.

The fat, thick-skinned Cheng Shin tires glide quietly over the asphalt with a faint hiss, make short work of driveway lips and curb-hopping antics and are slender enough to tuck neatly under a fender if you wish (not included, but there are braze-on mounts for them, as well as rack braze-ons, a kickstand mount and chainguard mount).

The Nexus seven-speed has a broad gearing range. I found the low gear to be more than sufficiently low, rarely used the top gear and spent most of my time in third or fourth gear. The shifter is a natty little chrome job that could pass for a bell, except for the telltale cable sticking out of it, and you can work it while the bike's sitting still--a nice touch, since you can roll up to the light in fifth, stop, click down to first and when the light says go, you're ready to do just that. The Milano is striking, a pretty bike that had no trouble attracting more than its share of attention at the local coffee brewhouse. I liked the quick-release front wheel and seatpost, but worried about having the saddle stolen so I'd pass a cable through it when I went to the movies.

At \$599, the Milano is right in the ballpark for a 7-speed

Nexus bike. It has a lot of style and flair and enough character to stand out from the crowd. It's friendly enough for me to let my mother (who has logged maybe two hours of saddle time her entire life) ride, it's handsome enough for my neighbors to cross the street to ask about it and it's just plain fun to kick around on. The best part is, for about the same money there are a bunch of similarly stylish--but unique--Nexus bikes to choose from, so you won't see yourself coming and going if Nexus catches on in your neighborhood. Contact Bianchi at (510)264-1001, [bianchius@aol.com](mailto:bianchius@aol.com), [www.bianchi.it](http://www.bianchi.it).

**Go Ahead, Cruise!** City commuting makes tons of sense. When we go out for office lunches, it's pretty much a given that those of us who ride will get there sooner, have more fun and arrive with more style than our driving counterparts (who not only get there later but have to hunt up a parking spot, walk a couple of blocks to the restaurant and then pay to park, too).

Ride a city bike because it makes ecological sense, because it's convenient, because it makes a statement about who you are or simply because it's cheaper than driving a car. Whatever your reasons, you're going to have fun. And isn't that why you ride in the first place?