

# POSITIVE ATTITUDE

The Klein Attitude. Karin Zellvogel falls in love and elopes to the hills.

Love at first sight exists. It hits you when you least expect it, standing in a bus queue, shuffling to a cinema seat, any seemingly innocuous situation. It's like being punched in the stomach. Hard. Then you black out. And when you come to, you realise you've lost control of a part of your life.

It happened to me on a gorgeous spring day in London. Setting: Olympia Exhibition Hall. Reason for being there: Cyclex was on and I'd made a foray to London to check out the wares on offer. After a couple of hours walking round, whiling away the time, it hit me. The proverbial black-out. Smaller than I usually like them, I thought. But flamboyant. Distinctive looking. Had a lively appearance about it, a joie de vivre.

Which was odd, because it was a bike. A Klein Attitude, to be precise. I was in love.

I tried to walk away, but that's the thing about love at first sight. You can't. I had to go back and see the bike again. I organised my wanderings around Olympia so I passed by the Chainsport stand several hundred times per hour just to look at the Attitude. Then, I finally plucked up the courage to ask it out.

Well, ask its owner if the bike is up for a test ride. The wistful look in my eyes must have been irresistible, because the man from Chainsport, he say yes. The next weekend, Attitude and I headed off to suitable terrain.

The first thing you notice about the Klein - besides its unique appearance - is what appears to be a stiff headset. Many visitors to Cyclex who picked up the Attitude made suitably daft comments like: 'I'd say your mechanic has over-tightened that headset, you know.' This really annoyed the Chainsport gang, and a few people at Cyclex were lucky to walk away without aluminium forks wrapped around their heads. The headset is not

overtight and comes into its own when you ride the bike.

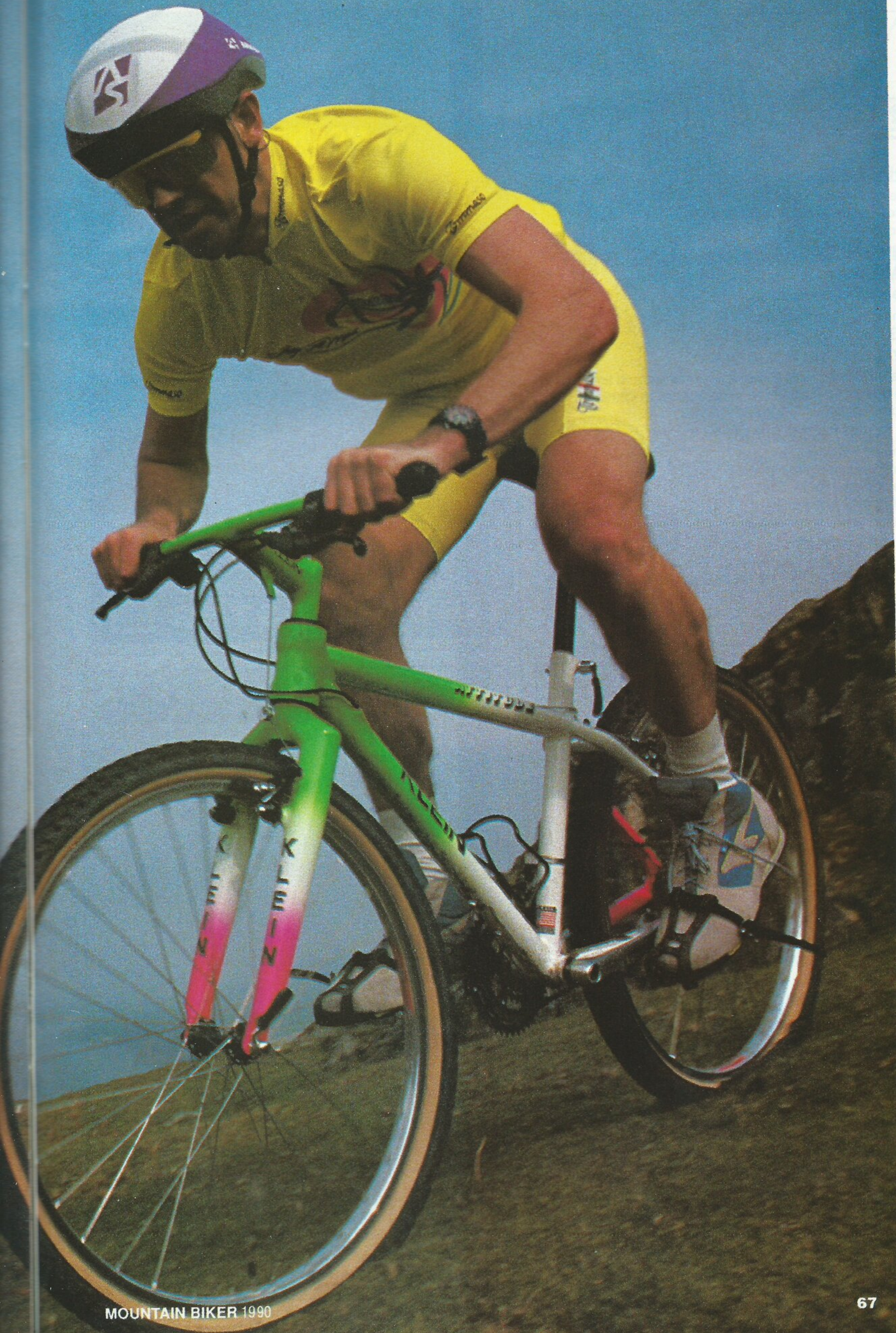
The second thing you notice on picking up the Attitude is its incredible lightness. One roadie walked away in a huff because he thought it weighed less than his road bike. Probably does. Made of fat aluminium tubing throughout, and with a pair of sexy Campag rims, the complete 18" Attitude tips the scales at 22 lbs. Pretty damn good for a mountain bike.

Again, the Chainsport gang got a bit of verbal from Joe Cyclist about how his mountain bike - a Siberian gas pipe job with steel rims - felt lighter than the Klein. Delusion. This bike is light. And that becomes a big factor when you ride it.

Critics levelled at the Klein by people at Cyclex seemed sour grapes, because the Attitude is way out of most cyclists' reach. A frame will set you back around £1,000. A complete bike - with Campag rims and the Shimano Deore XT STI gruppo, say - is a chat-with-the-bank-manager job: £2000. You can buy a car for that. But you probably wouldn't derive as much enjoyment from four wheels and a motor as from the Attitude.

I chose a varied and testing course in the Lake District, rapidly becoming a hot favourite with me, for the Attitude tests. The first thing you notice when you actually get on the bike is how effortless riding it feels. If you're used to a 26 lb. bike, pushing 22 lbs over hill and dale is going to be a lot easier. The alternative is to drop 4 lbs in weight yourself, but that isn't half as much fun as riding the Attitude.

Handling is the next major difference. Here some of the Klein's distinctive looks come into play. When you first look at it, you notice its chunky, dead straight forks, its very fat headset and a one-piece stem like you've never seen before. A closer look at the bike and you see the





▷ chainstays - progressing from square to round. All the while, you're wondering why. And you're also wondering if - as in many a lesser bike with odd-shaped bits - all this stuff isn't just a gimmick.

Well, I don't think so. For a start, I had to guard the bike with my life to make sure no one absconded with it. Friends came round at ungodly hours of the morning to have a go. They all came back converts to this lovely, lovely bike.

The bike delivers everything you want in a ride: good handling, speed and comfort. Me telling you that is one thing. Me telling you why is another. For the whys and wherefores, I went straight to the top - to Gary Klein in Washington state, in the U.S. of A.

Gary Klein knows his stuff. He also loves his stuff, and as the brains behind something as superb as the Attitude, he deserves to. Klein used to ride on the road himself and now rides mountain bikes - 'But just for fun,' he hastens to add.

I had a lot of questions to put to Klein about the workings of the Attitude, and he answered at length. What became apparent after we'd worked our way through the torque-2 aircraft type bearings in the headset that take an oscillating action and onto the square-to-round chainstays was that everything on the bike is there and looks the way it does for specific, very valid reasons.

'What I didn't like in a lot of steel forks is torsional and lateral flex,' Klein explained, starting from the ground and working up. 'So I went for large diameter aluminium and tubular crown. I didn't want a steel steerer either, so again I went for aluminium.' To increase aluminium's impact resistance and fatigue strength, the diameter of the metal is increased, giving the fat-tube look

that is a characteristic of the Klein and other successful aluminium frames.

The fork blades and steerer aren't round, however. Both are elliptical in shape; the forks a uniform diameter throughout and the steerer widening from its welded attachment to the stem to its welded attachment to the handlebars.

When you take the handlebars out to sneak a peek at the headset, you find yourself looking down a metal tube, with no evidence of aerospace technology. The bearings are moved up into the headset and pressed into sockets. This means there are no threaded nuts. And the bearings look to be well out of mischief's way. They come with a limited lifetime guarantee.

The headset measures just over 1.5 inches in diameter, making it 50% bigger than an average headset. It's beefed up to cope with the bigger forks. But it's accomplished without adding excessive weight to the bike.

Now, why aluminium? Well, Klein explains, there are several reasons. It's easily workable, it machines well, '... it's not real expensive...', it's heat treatable, it's weldable. The metal's low density is the key, that is, it's a third of the density of steel.

If aluminium is 'not real expensive', you wonder why the Attitude costs the same as some of the used cars in the local showroom. Go back a few paragraphs and re-read the bit about the fork assembly. That's a labour-intensive process, and there's a fair degree of capital expenditure in the machinery needed to build the Attitude's front end. In fact, Klein said many framebuilders had expressed an interest in adopting the Attitude's headset configuration, but Klein had

to explain to them there's a lot of custom tooling involved.

So the front end of the bike looks the way it does for a reason, and it also serves its purpose nobly. In spite of the dead straight forks, the Attitude is not twitchy. What appears at first to be a stiff headset becomes unapparent except at low speeds.

The chainstays aren't an aesthetic gimmick either. They go from square to round because it's easier to make bends in a square tube and, with a 3/4" square tube is stiffer than its round equivalent. If you look at the square end of the chainstays, there certainly isn't a lot of room to mess about with. Klein had to bear in mind the existence of wheels and chainrings when he was fashioning the chainstays. In fact, the big chainring comes so close to the chainstay, a gnat sneezing on it might well knacker your paintwork. 'The shape of the chainstays is a mechanical space consideration. Where space isn't tight, we let it go round. Round is optimal.'

Riding the Klein was a dream come true. The bike climbs well, gets good air and descends brilliantly. The frame didn't feel like it moved a centimetre when stressed. The acid test of this is braking hard and feeling those front forks bend. Couldn't feel it on the Klein.

The Attitude is also very comfortable, due to aluminium's absorption qualities. With such straight forks, you'd be forgiven for worrying you were in for a tough, twitchy ride, but you can put your fears away. This bike was smooth as silk.

Commenting on the groupset on this particular bike is probably irrelevant, because it was a bit of a hodge-podge, with mainly Shimano Deore XTII, but a SunTour rear cantilever brake. Rims were Campag and get rave reviews. I'd imagine anyone buying a Klein in Britain will probably buy a frame only and build up the bike of their own fantasy. The only advice I'd have to offer is: go for the best. This bike deserves it.

It's not a bike we're likely to see vast numbers of, commuting through London, hammering down bridleways, manoeuvring through the local bush. Even Gary Klein was dumbstruck when I told him how much Attitudes cost over here. Still, I feel certain that if we were all on the per capita income of people in Brunei, we'd have two Attitudes each in our garages, nestling next to the Porsche and Ferrari.

*The Klein Attitude is built of welded 6061-T6 Aluminium. It's distributed in the UK by Chainsport, 595 Wandsworth Rd, London SW8 3JD*