

# DAVE LLOYD - CARRYING THE OFF-ROAD TORCH!

Olympic cyclist and perfectionist frame builder Dave Lloyd has gone right off road. Dave has been eating, sleeping and riding mountain bikes for years, now he's building them. Next year he'll be racing them.

JOHN STEVENSON welcomes a new committed British MTB custom builder.

As the mountain bike market grows and more riders decide that off-the-peg bikes don't quite match their needs, gaps open for small-scale British custom builders. Unfortunately most custom bike builders in the UK come from a background entirely in road racing or time trialling, many of them have never ridden a mountain bike in their lives and, frankly their hearts are just not in it. Despite an incredibly successful road, track and time trial record as long as your arm, Dave Lloyd is a happy exception to this rule.

## A BRILLIANT CAREER

Dave's racing career spanned almost two decades including representing Britain in the 1972 Olympics, then four years as a pro for **Raleigh** in the UK and in Holland, until a suspected heart condition forced his premature retirement.

"I've got like an odd beat. A lot of people have it but I could feel it and it started to really worry me."

Three years later he was back racing as an amateur.

"I wanted to get back into it so I just started training and forgot about the heart. For six years I was almost unbeaten." By this time in his mid thirties, Dave turned pro again for **Raleigh** and then **Birmingham Executive Airways** finally retiring for good from the road in 1987. He recently turned forty, which puts him into the veteran category, and intends to race off-road next season.

## GOING OFF THE ROAD

So how long had he been into mountain bikes?

"I first wanted to get a mountain bike when the first **Raleigh's** came out (1985) but **Raleigh** wouldn't give me one at the time. I guess about two and a





Page 11 - Dave's personal pink climbing machine. Left: Innovation, a Lloyd bent top tube for better frame clearance. The surface table for high precision. Dave Lloyd and his team surrounded by bikes and the man himself, carrying a torch for mountain bikes.





half years now doddering around, a year and a half serious. I'm not doing anything else now. I hardly ever ride the road."

Like many roadies Dave has re-discovered the pleasure of riding a bike through mountain biking.

"I loved racing - well, I loved winning, let's get our facts right here. It was the winning that I enjoyed and being successful. That was the kick really for me. I hated training. I used to train like an absolute bastard don't forget that; five or six hours a day even when I was an amateur. I hadn't enjoyed riding a bike for so long that to actually go out and find pleasure riding again is great, I love it, I enjoy training on the mountain bike. It's good fun, it's different.

I don't know why people ride on the road, I hate it now. I get really nervous. The first time I rode a mountain bike in north Wales I thought 'This is what it's all about'! It was the first time I'd enjoyed myself on a bike for twenty years, I'd been out on the road slogging my guts out, hating every minute of it."

Racing does seem to be the fastest way of destroying your enjoyment of riding on the road. How come this doesn't seem to happen to mountain bikers?

"Well, it's a different thing isn't it? There's more skill attached to it, it isn't just brute strength and people do mountain bike racing for the participation not just the competition."

### THE FRAMESHOP

Dave's premises are located in an industrial park in the heart of the Wirral, not far from the end of the M56, in an unimpressive roll-up door factory unit. Inside is one of the cleanest and tidiest workshops around. Dave insists he didn't tidy up especially for my visit, he can only work in an ordered environment.

The frame building workshop contains the usual assortment of frame jig, brazing torch, tables for tube layout and mitering and racks for tubes, lugs and braze-on bits. The walls are ornamented with pictures of the man himself, taken during his racing days and usually going very fast.

### FLATTER THAN HOLLAND!

One unusual piece of workshop kit is a surface table, a steel table flatter than Holland which is used for checking frame alignment to a fraction of a millimetre. This is, as far as I know, unique among British

framebuilders. It allows the frame to be exactly aligned, exactly straight so that it tracks perfectly. A surface table is incredibly expensive (like, £5,000 to £6,000 for a new one) but Dave feels that it is the best way to ensure a perfectly aligned frame.

At the back of the framebuilding shop a doorway leads to the sand blasting chamber, oven and spray booth where sprayer Kevin Jones lays down some of the most immaculate paint jobs around.

A staircase leads up to a mezzanine floor which houses a small stock of parts for building bikes up and a drawing table and fully adjustable frame design jig. This allows an exact, comfortable fit and provides Dave with the tube length numbers which go into a true custom frame.

### PERFECTIONISM

As a frame builder, Dave got his start in the seventies, building for Harry Quinn. He recognises that in an industry which suffers from severe over capacity the only way to succeed is to do it right from the outset. When he set up his current workshop there were some who felt he should start producing as fast as possible, but he wanted to get it right first.

"If you produce a bad frame and word gets round you can forget it for a year. So we decided to take our time and we spent between £30,000 and £40,000 setting up properly."

This caution over quality doesn't mean he's cautious over trying out new ideas in frame design. Dave has built bikes with straight forks, (he says he can't tell the difference from curved forks), as well as wishbone seatstay frames. He proudly showed off his latest idea, a bent top tube to increase frame clearance.

He'd like to be able to build a uniform 1in blade fork like the **Yeti** and **Kona** forks. Unfortunately the right tubes are not available in the UK and Dave echoes a common complaint that **Reynolds**, whose tubes still dominate the UK custom bike market, do not respond quickly to changes in mountain bike design.

"Why can't **Reynolds** do it...how long did they spend trying to get a wishbone out? We were waiting yonks for that."

### ALTERNATIVELY...

What about alternative materials like aluminium?

"You've got to keep your finger on the pulse...If aluminium turns out to be the way to go then we'll have to set up for it. You can't beat the old steel tube; though. I'm not just saying that because I'm living in the past but some of this stuff is really nice to work with; it produces a lovely bike and you can repair it, you can put a new top tube in..."

We talked about the conservatism of road cyclists and their resistance to things like fat tube frames.

"Things are changing though. People are getting into the aesthetics of the mountain bike. I like the look of **Cannondales** and I come from pure road stock".

### THE PINK MACHINE

The bike Dave lent us to test was his own personal machine, designed primarily as a climbing bike at the expense of downhill performance.

"I tend to take it easy on the downhills at the moment" he says.

A fillet brazed frame in **Reynolds 753AT** tubing with a wishbone seatstay arrangement, steep 74° seat and 72° head angles. 1 3/8in fork rake a 12in bottom bracket and short 16in chainstays certainly suggested that this was a bike which would be better uphill than down.

Riding bore this out, although the performance of the frame was somewhat inhibited by the near-indestructible but rather heavy **Mavic Energy-7** rims fitted. Dave plans to switch to **MA40s** now we've given him back his bike.

As usual with custom bikes there's very little point going into the fine detail of the bike's performance. Every one of Dave's mountain bikes so far has been a one-off special; he has no fixed angles or lengths, preferring to fit each bike to the customer and to the eventual use. This is the real meaning of the term custom bike.

### FRAME DESIGN

To Dave mountain bike design is more complicated than road bike design.

"There are more things to take into account," he says. "The geometry is determined much more by the end use of the bike than by the rider. The geometry of a road bike makes much less difference."

He goes for fillet brazing rather than the lugged construction used for road bikes because it allows a greater

choice of geometries.

"Most lugged mountain bikes are no more than commuting bikes," he comments, citing the very small range of lugs available as the limiting factor. "Also many road bike builders are making mountain bike frames that are much too big. I reckon a sloping top tube is essential for clearance and to get the seat down for descending."

The Pink Machine featured unusual internal cable routing for the rear brake. This looks clean and neat but creates problems when it comes to lubing the cables, since the whole cable has to be removed from the frame. Dave says he's prepared to put up with this but is happy to run cables between slotted stops and this is the way the gear cables run on the bike.

### GROUPSET AND BITS

The equipment on Dave's bike is **SunTour's** best, **XC9000**.

"I've always liked **SunTour's** stuff, and you can get it easily."

Certainly the group worked well and looked good. Standout parts include the Self-Energising rear brake, which gives unrivalled stopping power in dry conditions and the ultra-light cartridge bearing pedals. Gear shifting was fast and accurate, though not quite as smooth as Sh...you know who's system. We've had a lot of orders for **Campag's Centaur** too. People like the look of it and it's available easily." Dave has trouble getting **Shimano** systems.

The combination of a steep head angle and short stem on Dave's bike, built to enhance his ferocious climbing power, made the Pink Machine a bit of a handful downhill, for me. A custom builder makes what suits the abilities and style of his customer. It was beautifully built. The **Shimano** and **Campag** equipped bikes waiting to be collected at his workshop were all very different from the Pink Machine. What tied them all together was Dave's immaculate torch and file work, his dedication to producing the best bikes possible and the superb, glowing, tough paintwork from his back room spray booth.

If you want a real custom mountain bike and are prepared to be guided by one of the most experienced and enthusiastic riders around, Dave Lloyd's is one name you should be considering.

• **Dave Lloyd Bikesport** is at 37, Clayhill Industrial Park, Wirral, L64 3UG. Tel: (051) 36 8797.