



BRAND PROFILE: RAPHA CYCLING

Born to ride

Rapha Cycling is a London-based company established in 2003 by two passionate road cyclists, Simon Mottram and Luke Scheybeler. Its product range officially launched on July 4, 2004, at a month-long exhibition of cycling memorabilia and events called 'Kings of Pain'.

According to the company, road racing is the both the toughest sport in the world and the most beautiful. As a result, its products are designed to alleviate the hardships, and enhance the pleasure of, road riding for everyone taking part. The company is small, but claims to be growing rapidly. Its main headquarters are in London, but it also has an office in Portland, Oregon, and a growing presence in Japan.

Getting the products right

Because of the tough demands associated with road racing, Rapha's apparel and accessories have to offer advanced performance as well as up-to-date styles. It certainly helps here that every Rapha product is conceived and developed by active road riders.

Its Touring Shorts, for example, have a slim, tailored cut to give them a contemporary look and are extremely light and breathable. They are versatile enough to be used for both urban commuting and longer rides and can be worn on their own or over bib shorts. Made from stretch polyamide (94% nylon, 4% spandex), the company claims the fabric is so light the racer will barely know they are wearing them.

Furthermore, the shorts are breathable and offer a wicking finish to ensure quick moisture

Rapha Condor is now the number one professional team in the UK and several big names have been added to the team for 2009.

 Rapha

transfer. The company uses a knitted panel in the rear waistband to maintain a good fit on the bike, while satin tapes inside the hems stop them from catching. A full-length, inside gusset eliminates bulky seams that can cause chafing, and a zipped pocket at the front is cut deliberately shallow to prevent objects digging into the upper leg when riding. Reflective piping on the back of the legs offers improved visibility.

The company also offers a range of jackets and gilets for all weather conditions. Its Stowaway jacket is a three-season jacket designed for temperate conditions. According to the firm, it is "ideal" for cool morning starts, summer descents and sudden showers. It is made from a high-stretch fabric and weighs just 165g (medium size) so it can also pack down small enough to fit into a jersey pocket. The jacket is said to be windproof, water resistant and breathable.

Its high neck features a bonded tricot fleece section to help the collar retain its shape and guarantee comfort, while a chin guard made from a soft tricot fleece helps prevent chafing. Classic styling elements include a long-cut back and a shaped or 'canted' hem, which has been ergonomically stitched to prevent the jacket flapping in the wind. Friction locks on the waist cord allow for easy adjustment, while wear-resistant Lycra cuffs provide a windproof seal and shoulder seams are taped for improved protection. Reflective stripes on both the front and back of the sleeves offer increased visibility and the large Rapha logo on the lower back, along with the smaller collar detail, is also reflective to protect the rider.

Complete package

However, the Rapha Cycling ethos is not simply about selling products. The company also provides information about major events so that racing fans can keep up-to-date with what is happening in the cycling world. One of the recent events it covered was the Smithfield Nocturne, which took place in London in early June. The event, now in its third year, attracted a record 10,000 spectators. Special guests included Belgian cycling legend, Johan Museeuw.

According to the firm, one of the Nocturne events, the Folding Bike race, was the "most keenly contested yet", with the top 20 riders from each of the two heats going forward to the 40-rider final. After a 30-metre sprint, competitors raced around the five laps of the course before Keith Henderson took first place, having already won the 2008 event. According to Mr Henderson, the standard at the 2009 edition was "much higher" than at the previous year's event and the final was raced at "a very high pace".



A number of amateur cyclists took part in the Cycling Weekly Support Race, while Dani King (Vision 1 Racing), Lucy Garner (Leicestershire Road Club) and Hannah Barnes (CandiTV) fiercely contested the Elite Women's race. Hannah Barnes was first to cross the line. According to Rapha, the "climax" of the Nocturne event was the Men's Elite Criterium, where speeds reached 45 mph. Russell Downing, who won seven of the Premier Calendar events in 2008 as well as the overall crown, won the five-lap race.

The increasing popularity of these events shows that the cycling community is eager to take up new challenges, and that more people are becoming interested in watching the sport. And, while these are extremely important issues for Rapha, the company also has a vested interest in such events. In 2006, it joined forces with London-based Condor Cycles to create Rapha Condor, which is now the number one pro team in the UK.

At the Smithfield Nocturne—established by Rapha Condor and Face Partnership—several Rapha racers took part. These included: Graeme Raeburn, who came second in the Folding Bike race (on his Brompton bike autographed by Olympic Gold medallist Bradley Wiggins) and won the Edinburgh Nocturne two weeks before; and John Cannings, whose team won the CitiHub Team Challenge. Nocturne series director, James Pope, said: "Our spectator base just keeps growing and growing [and is] a real testament to how cycling is growing in London and the rest of the UK."

The Stowaway jacket is made from a high-stretch fabric and weighs just 165g.



Coming up

In 2009, the team will take part in a number of events in the UK and overseas. As well as building on its success in the UK's Premier Calendar and Circuit Race series, the team will tackle the Tour of Ireland, Tour de New York, Giro del Capo, Tour de Qinghai Lake and the Tour of Britain. Having retained the services of Olympic bronze medallist Chris Newton, National Criterium champion Dean Downing and Tour of Britain star Kristian House, the Rapha Condor team has added a number of new faces to the squad.

These include: Simon Richardson, who came fourth in last year's Premier Calendar; Ben Greenwood, who has raced for the Great Britain U-23 team; Tom Southam, two-time Silver medallist at the Great Britain National Road Race Championship; former Australian road racing champion Darren Lapthorne; and Namibian rider Dan Craven, who, in addition to being the reigning African Champion, is currently leading the UCI's (Union Cycliste International's) Africa Tour.

According to Rapha, the aim of everything it does is "to celebrate the glory and suffering unique to road riders". It recognises that road racing requires stamina, strength, focus and fortitude, and its products are designed to support these specific needs. However, it also seeks to reinforce the fact that, in a society that is obsessed with quick fixes, the rewards of dedicated training and gruelling competitions include real, and lasting, satisfaction.

Furthermore, while major road rides are high points of the year for many cyclists, the company also seeks to make cycling an integral part of a "rich and rewarding" daily life. All Rapha employees are active cyclists and most ride to work every day. A passion for road racing is at the heart of its company culture, and it aims to spread this excitement to amateur and professional cyclists across the globe as well as to fans of the sport, who are growing in number. 



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