



Looking good on a bicycle

*Cyclists making their way past Misty Cliffs, near Scarborough, Cape Town.
Courtesy Independent Newspapers Cape. Picture: Andrew October*

Cycling could be described as being both energy-efficient and big business. The cost of providing the power is all down to you, and theoretically free, but you still need to splash out on the right equipment and clothing to enjoy this outdoor sport, whether in the stunning surroundings of the Cape Peninsula or crossing the awesome heights of the Himalayas.



In early March, one of the world's largest international cycle races (if not the largest) was pedalled round a 109 kilometre course (just under 68 miles). It definitely must lay claim to being the world's most beautiful cycle tour. The winning time of 2:31:58 - at approximately 43 kilometres an hour - took some doing, considering that the cyclists started at sea level alongside Cape Town's vibrant waterfront and then rollercoasted up and down the mountainous terrain which makes up the Cape Peninsula at the furthest, most southerly tip of South Africa. First started in 1978, the statistics that the tour now generates are quite astonishing: over 35,000 cyclists, the oldest man to complete the course was 88-years-old, the oldest woman was a youthful 81, the youngest was just nine-years-old (next year the minimum age for riders will be raised to ten years as a result of a suggestion from the country's Sports Science Institute). The race, not just a fun cycle because there were professionals as well as an army of amateurs, was a celebration of the attraction of cycling.

The top riders set off at 6.15am; other starters were still just mounting their bikes some four hours later. After sixteen attempts at winning the event, Douglas Ryder (an appropriate surname if ever there was) riding for the IBM Lotus Team set the new course record, coming in just three seconds ahead of Polish rider Lubor Tessar. A German rider, Karsten Schaeffer, triumphed in the race for mountain bikes with a time of 2:51:44.

The event underlined the importance and effectiveness of proper safety equipment. With so many thousands of cyclists, only six people had to be airlifted to hospital for head injuries or fractures. The tour, run jointly by the Rotary Club of Claremont (a suburb of Cape Town) and the Pedal Power Association, who collectively form the Cape Town Cycle Tours Trust, is staged to raise money for charities. With that number of participants, the benefit would run into many millions of South African Rand.

If proof were needed, an event such as the Cape Argus Pick 'n Pay Cycle Tour - to give it its full title - also underlines the commercial importance of the market. There was probably some \$30 million worth of equipment riding around Cape Town that day.

made for one or two...

Moving across the world, another event could be considered the very antithesis of the Cape Town fiesta on wheels. Four weeks on the top of the world - in the Himalayas, no less - with one's bike, may not be everyone's cup of yak's milk, but a team sponsored and equipped by Odlo of Switzerland has done just that. An expedition team from Engiadina and Himalaya Tours setting off to cross the highest mountain range in the world was the ultimate test for man, machine and equipment.

What the locals will have made of it may never be known, but the expedition members reported the experience of a lifetime, and brought back the knowledge that the Odlo supplies of sports underwear, fleece and outer shell jacket lived up to expectations.

Although the tour took place in the most stable climatic conditions possible, weather conditions in this part of the world are changeable and often wintry. Mountain biking in winter is catered for throughout the bikewear ranges and the latest models for the next colder season will be in the shops by this autumn. One does not have to be a competition rider to take advantage of the latest developments in design and fabric technology.

In 1994, experiments took place involving fibre combinations specifically designed for the cycling market. The results led to Sportwool which earned its place in the competitive sportswear scene, first of all in Australia. The Cyclones, as the Australian cycling team is known, wore Sportwool to championship success in 1999. [Manchester United, the world's biggest football

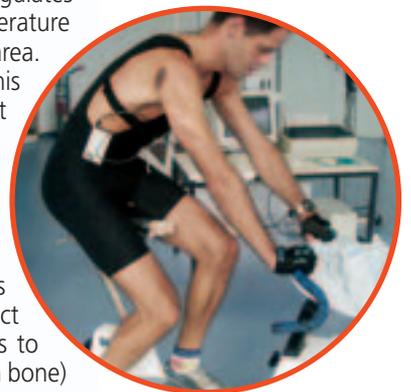
club and one which can afford the best, has, on the success of this product, teamed up with the Woolmark Company and Umbro to develop new football kits using Sportwool.

Swiss fabric manufacturer Eschler has recently run physiological tests in conjunction with the Institute for Sports Science at the University of Bayreuth, Germany, to determine just how effective their Cool-Pads for bike pants are.

The results from the physiological side proved conclusively that these pads, equipped with ComforTemp - a material that actively regulates temperature - helped keep the temperature down below 37.8°C in the male genital area. It was proven that the temperature in this area using a H.A.P. seat pad without ComforTemp rose by 2-5°C over this level which is the limit for the development of sperm in the male testes.

The ten candidates subjected to these tests under identical conditions had temperature sensors sewn into both types of seat pads which had direct skin contact to the scrotum at testicle level as well as to the dorsal connection of the ilium (haunch bone) to them.

The resulting information showed a clear maximum temperature difference between the two seat pad materials with the Cool-Pad demonstrating its ability to keep hot seats considerably cooler. Speaking for the company, Peter Eschler stated: "It is not only for this reason that Cool-Pad has convinced us as manufacturers of biker seat pads, but also because it 





supports a very important physiological function."

Putting its faith in a wide variety of the latest high-tech materials for winter biking for winter 2001/2 is the German manufacturer Gonso. Tricots and sweatshirts in Clima-Soft-Pro (Trevira), Thermofleece (87%polyamide/13% Elastane), Eschler of Switzerland's Husky Fleece (100% polyester and Windmaster) jacket - all in black and prime colours - in anatomically different styles for men and women, team with a range of active tights and bib-fronted pants, all in Thermofleece. The bike pants have four different preformed seat pads, cut differently for men and women for a sportier design, and all without middle seams for more comfort. Legs are longer, Sympatex Windmaster panels keep in the warmth or disperse it as necessary.

In their biking accessory ranges, Gonso includes arm and leg extensions with anti-slip rubber ends on the upper arms and thigh ends, flat seams and retro-reflecting Gonso logos added for safety. Knee warmers and biking gloves in Windstopper fleece, as well as a series of kidney warmers, facial masks, headbands, under helmet caps, and socks, all with Windmaster protection, round out their comprehensive list of accessories.

Of special interest is the Gonso Junior range of bikewear. These are as up-to-date fabric-wise as anything in adult wear and designed specifically for the younger enthusiasts, not just smaller sizes of the same products.

A new product for biking and cross country skiing has been developed by the Italian company, Pontetorto Sportssystem. Their No Wind microfleece for bikewear is a stretch membrane that offers total protection against the wind while guaranteeing the best 'breathability and moisture vapour transmission'. Sandwiched between a knit or fleece inner life and by a microfleece outer shell, the No Wind layer is used for lining jackets and is possible on all types of wool and nylon yarns and in different weights. This product has revolutionised winter bikewear by Austrian manufacturer Bretschneider in its Riffraff range.

This company has also changed its flat-lock-seam positioning on bikewear to give added comfort and reduce chafing, particularly on the inner leg, where the seams have been removed altogether. Shoulder straps are wider on the shoulders than at front or back which, together with the new bib-front design, reduces slipping. The six-panel construction of the bib bike-pants does away with thick crossover seams adding to comfort. Seat pads are anti-bacterial, Lycra Isofilm wards off wind and water, and knee areas and legs are given added support through elastic bands. Prime colours dominate here for tops and a Zebra print relieves the block effect, appearing on whole garments or as touches of fashion for both outdoor and indoor biking, spinning and running. At the top end of the range Riffraff is using Sympatex High2Out specifically for its latest bikewear with its high breathability, durability and comfort.

Flexibility is a keyword in the bikewear ranges

from most companies. Garments that can serve a dual purpose or can be detached or added with changing weather situations are certainly among the most popular. The 'Amiens', a 5-in-1 Lycra jacket from Jeantex - which has an inner gilet which can be taken out when not needed and sleeves which can also be detached and stored in the zippable back pocket - ably illustrates this trend. Its 'Rambouillet' model in rip-stop nylon has a fleece inner jacket which can worn when extra warmth is needed. Practical extras are two-way zips, back pocket with integrated belt bag and a longer tail.

Scandinavian company Craft is used to dealing with winter weather and its latest range of bikewear is in a silent, supple, three-layer material using Gore-Tex Windstopper for front and sleeves - in some styles these are detachable. An extended ventilated back section in stretch polyester comes with anti-slip elastic and reflective braiding for safety. Craft's women's lines have all the same features but are cut more to the figure for a better fit.

Jeantex also features a Microfleece in a range of Windstopper bike shirts with Lycra panels at back and lower sleeves. And its Shift fleece collection has been extended to include a highly functional over vest in 100% polyester which conforms to the Ökotex standard 100, guaranteeing the product's freedom from chemicals and allergy producing substances.

Its water repellent pants have high wind protection properties with ventilation at waist front and rear and in the knees. These are adjustable at waist and shin, and a side zipper reaches the knee. Winter tights in stretch polyester, especially for the colder months, have zippers at leg ends and reflectors.

Fleece from Malden Mills, particularly its Power Stretch product, is used for garments which permit freedom of movement while providing superior breathing and wicking properties through the Power Dry process. This is particularly necessary with biking where uphill perspiration must not be allowed to cool on the skin on the way downhill. The fabric's four-way stretch, durable nylon outer surface is wind and abrasion resistant, while the soft polyester inner surface keeps you warm and comfortable. Cannondale Corp., from the USA, was an APEX Award 2001 winner with a slim line zip-top in Malden's Oslo Fleece, a Polartex Power Stretch special edition for bikers.

Rono Innovations put a lot of store in the three layer sportswear cover-up. As producer of all three layers, it is in a position to combine each layer with another so that the performance characteristics are fully achieved. Over its Bodymesh functional sports underwear, which warms or cools as necessary, they advocate a variety of products such as Nordic - a bi-elastic winter fabric with a fleecy innerside and PY10



Gonso Junior range of bikewear



X-Country jacket from Craft of Scandinavia



Bogner's High Tech Windstopper Ripstop range provides permanent waterproofing with high breathability



microfibre - a rough-surfaced windproof shell, Outlast with its thermo-active properties, Softsensor - a featherweight soft functional fleece in PES fibres and a Biomesh two-layer construction of different yarns for the inner and outer sides through which a capillary effect develops, aiding moisture transport.

The third and outer layer needs to give wind and water protection and here the company uses Sympatex Windmaster for its 100% wind-tight property. Moisture created inside the garment can pass through this membrane leaving the skin warm and dry. Also in demand from this company is Outlast combined with Windmaster for running and biking garments.

The latest in ultra thin and lightweight tops which can be worn directly on the skin is the Windmaster 5µm membrane blouson from Rono - a three-layer membrane offering performance breathability and 50% less weight than previous fibres making it particularly suitable for jackets and pants for running and biking. Also using this revolutionary new product are Scott USA and Gonso bike.

When High Tech meets High Touch with the added experience that one of Germany's top sportswear manufacturers can bring to the idea, you get a collection such as that presented by Bogner. Its latest venture is a bike collection produced by W L Gore, whereby Bogner lives up to its reputation of producing extravagant, but functional, sportswear. Jackets and bike pants in Gore's High Tech Windstopper Rippstop provide permanent waterproofing with high breathability, and forms the basis of this collection with styles for winter dominating.

The High Touch tag defines the styles cut close to the figure, with seams often accentuated by contrasting white pipings and edgings. Eighty-

two different styles - half of them for the ladies - have been designed to give 26 sporty but fashionable silhouettes. This collection comprises styles for both professional and hobby bikers, some with detachable inner microfleece jackets, and featuring adjustable cuffs, fly-fronted fastening for added weather protection, fold-away narrow hoods which do not hinder sight and are easily adjustable with just a pull tag, underarm zippers for extra ventilation and an unfoldable tail for extra seat protection. The placing of pockets, and their number, has been thought through and designed and placed for easy accessibility, and the seam lines have been used to create a slimmer silhouette - particularly for the ladies' outfits.

Safety is an important feature of the collection and light reflecting edgings are used throughout as an integral part of optical design which also includes the embroidered or printed company logo. Colour plays its part, as is to be expected from Bogner, and set against black or standing alone are stone, planet blue, plum and red where contrast piping underlines the movement of the body.

Pant styles come with bibs and braces in both six and eight section styles, with or without seat inserts, and incorporating preformed knee areas for optimum freedom of movement. Extra wind protection is given to those parts of the body where it is needed and extra strengthening around the kidneys keeps them warm too. Not a collection that everybody can afford, but an indication of a development which underlines the growing interest in all-year-round biking and in biking as a leisure time pursuit, all the way through to being an extreme competition sport. 🌐

David Buirski/Kay Turtle

Not sitting easy

According to a recent women's cycling issues survey, a major frustration for women is the design of bike saddles. More than a fifth (21%) reported 'saddle fit' as their No. 1 problem. Poorly designed clothing constituted 14% and 13% cited 'frame fit'.

In addition to the physiological factor, social comfort was also a major issue with 9% of respondents noting that finding another woman for a riding partner was a problem.



Cyclist Jaco Cronje takes a tumble on his way round the Cape Peninsula, proving the value of proper protective headgear.

Courtesy Independent Newspapers Cape. Picture: Denzil Maregele.