

# Peddling an expensive green idea, the £3,000 bamboo bike

Daisy Dumas  
and Jonathan Prynn

IT IS the ultimate green statement for commuters worried that even their cycling damages the planet.

For the first time eco-conscious (but wealthy) Londoners can buy an organic, biodegradable bike – made from bamboo.

The frame of the Calfee, which will set you back at least £3,000, is made from stems hand-picked in the remote mountains of Taiwan's Yushan national park, home to wildlife such as the Formosan black bear and rock monkey.

The bamboo is shipped – not flown – to California, where stems are smoked and heat-treated to prevent splitting, and assembled into a frame, the pieces connected with lugs made of hemp fibre.

They are then coated in a satin polyurethane sealant.

The finished product is transported to Chiswick, where it is being sold in the Eco Age shop owned by actor Colin Firth, his Italian wife Livia Giuggioli, and her brother Nicola.

Five have been sold in Britain so far, including two in London.

The bike – available in racing or mountain format – weighs roughly the same as its metal equivalent but has none of the environmental baggage that comes with the manufacturing process. About 60 per cent of the finished product is made of sustainable materials.

Bamboo is stronger than mild steel and more elastic than carbon fibre – meaning it absorbs shock exceptionally well. Rachel Hammond, founder of British distributor RAW Bamboo Bikes,

## THE BEAUTY OF BAMBOO



■ Bamboo absorbs about five times as much greenhouse gas as a "conventional" tree plantation.

■ It does not fatigue like metal. But it does have to be coated with a waterproof sealant.

■ It supports a greater load than mild steel can without breaking.

■ In the Far East it is often used as scaffolding during skyscraper construction.

■ It is the fastest growing plant: some species can grow 1.5 metres a day. The bamboo used for the bikes takes four to five years to grow.

■ Each bike needs 2.7 metres of bamboo to make.

■ Each bike frame weighs only 4-5lb, but the finished product weighs 18-19lb.

said: "Because bamboo is a natural material it takes a lot of the vibration out of the ride."

The Evening Standard gave the Calfee a road-test. It is a thing of natural beauty, pared-down and sleek – although the lack of mudguards is not an advantage when biking in London. Lightweight, durable and highly



ALEX LEWIS

manoeuvrable, it turned on a pin. The ethical benefits are obvious. Bamboo is sustainable – the fastest growing woody plant.

The co-operatives that chop and sort it in Taiwan are involved in a social project helping local people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Company founder Craig Calfee is also

**Recycling: 60 per cent of the Calfee bike is made of sustainable materials**

involved in a project in Africa to help local entrepreneurs make bamboo bikes. But a vehicle of such political correctness comes at a price. The basic frame costs £2,175 and customers must buy the other pieces as add-ons – meaning the finished machine costs from £3,000 to £3,500, depending on the specification.

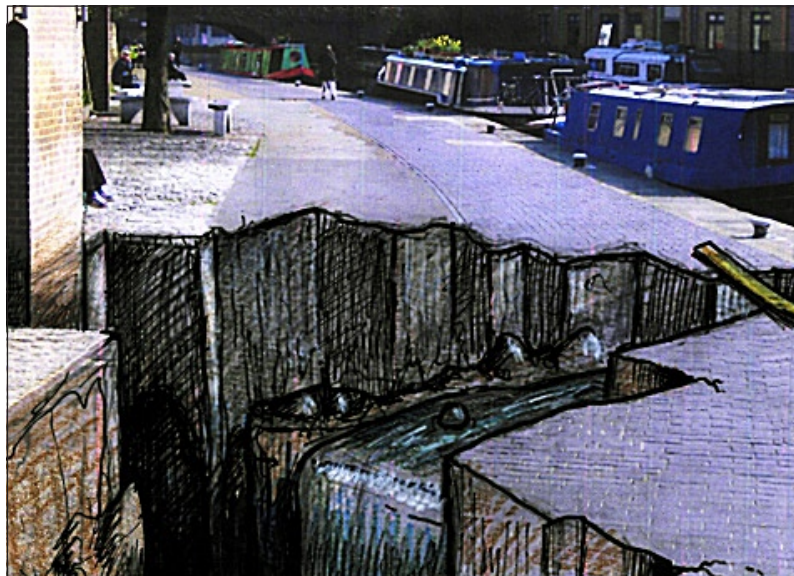


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## Cyclists beware, highly realistic painting of hole ahead

**Fear factor:** a painting of a canyon on canvas has been placed on the towpath of Regent's Canal to make cyclists stop



Ruth Bloomfield

CYCLISTS speeding along the side of Regent's Canal are being forced to slow down by the sight of a gaping hole in the towpath.

British Waterways has commissioned an image of a canyon to place on the path by the canal in Islington as part of national Bike Week this week.

Staff had reported that some cyclists were riding carelessly and endangering pedestrians.

They hope that the image will make riders slow down for fear of falling.

Today two canyons painted on canvas will be laid on the towpath, edged in chalk to blend in with its surroundings.

The work is by Joe Hill and Max Lowry, street artists who specialise in three-dimensional images.

The pair painted Gordon Brown and

Alistair Darling falling down a black hole outside the Treasury before the Budget was announced in April.

British Waterways will keep the new painting to use in other areas.

Joseph Young, its towpath manager, said: "The majority of cyclists share the space amicably.

"However, there are a handful who refuse to slow down. That's why we commissioned this art – we hope it will shock."

Waterways staff will wait by the canvas to talk to cyclists who stop, and advise them on how to ride safely.

Mr Young said: "The towpaths are narrow and full of low bridges, lock landings and bollards, all of which are part of the charm of the canal, but aren't ideal for cyclists who need to get somewhere in a hurry."

British Waterways said there were a record number of cyclists using the Regent's Canal towpath.