

...Carlton Reid takes his regular look at the British ATB scene

# Off-Road Reid

*The abominable snowman on a Mountain Bike? Or is it just Carlton Reid in a fluffy Balaclava? Read on!*



All Terrain Bike - well not quite! Maybe a better epithet would be the NATB - Nearly All Terrain Bike. A lot of the time is spent humping the bike over obstacles, through deep mud and up very steep inclines. The ATB certainly has its limitations but builders and designers are rapidly breaking down barriers, and ground that looked impossible for an ATB a few years ago is now possible. One such designer who claims to have the most go-anywhere bicycle in Britain is Geoff Apps.

Over the last 15 years Apps has designed and redesigned his idea of the perfect cross-country bicycle. One of his best attempts was the English Cycles Range Rider - a well loved bike bought by the knowledgeable who saw the Range Rider as the British answer to American fair-weather designs.

App's new baby is the Dingbat - a strange name for a strange bike. Finished in virginal white, that is filthy five seconds after hitting dirt, the Dingbat is a mould breaking bicycle. The frame has taken many metamorphizations before it reached its present state and has many unusual design features. For a start it is very small - a huge seat post compensates for this. The top tube is low at the seat to protect the crotch in a fall and is sloped up at the front to enable the handlebars to be very high and gives a very upright cycling position. Apps has fitted BMX bars which are high but quite narrow. I prefer slightly wider bars but maybe

that's just taste because Apps feels totally happy about the leverage and stability. One feature I do dislike is the twist grip gear changer. I thought this to be superfluous mostly because I could never get the hang of it. I couldn't help accidentally twisting it because I frequently vary my position on the grips. There did not seem to be any real advantage to it and for me spoiled the whole feel of the bike.

The tyres fitted are the Hakka studded ones from Finland. On the back is a 2 1/2 in. moped Hakka which soaks up the knocks beautifully and gives marvellous traction. The Mavic rims are surprisingly narrow but are strong and are used to reduce pinch punctures. Incorporated into the wheels are Cleland hub brakes. These are heavy but work superbly. Unlike the strongest of cantilevers, hub brakes stop the bike at all speeds and in all conditions. There are no wet rim problems so when aquaplaning the bike can still brake!

With the tyres and hubs the weight of the Dingbat comes up to a chunky 34lbs which makes it a trifle difficult to carry but downhill it rides like a dream. You feel totally safe especially with the improved stopping power. Uphill is not so good as the front wheel tends to lift and it's hard to transfer body-weight over the tall handlebars.

The Dingbat will not suit everybody and at over £700 only the committed mountain-biker would consider it. It's a machine no beginner would usually buy.

The Dingbat is by no means perfect but it's going in the right direction!

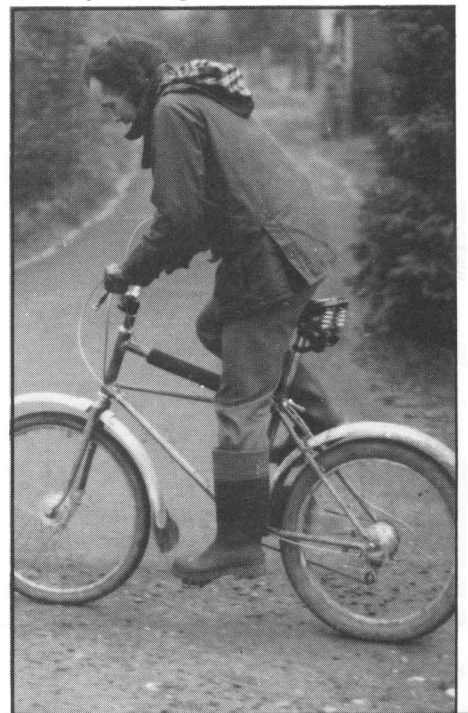
A true off-road bike normally isn't fitted with mudguards. You will get filthy even if they are fitted because mud, or other such slimy sling-ups, is splurged around from all angles. The simplest of falls is enough to coat the whole body with filth. There's not a lot you can do about this and anyway you won't be wearing your Sunday best for Mountain-Biking, will you!

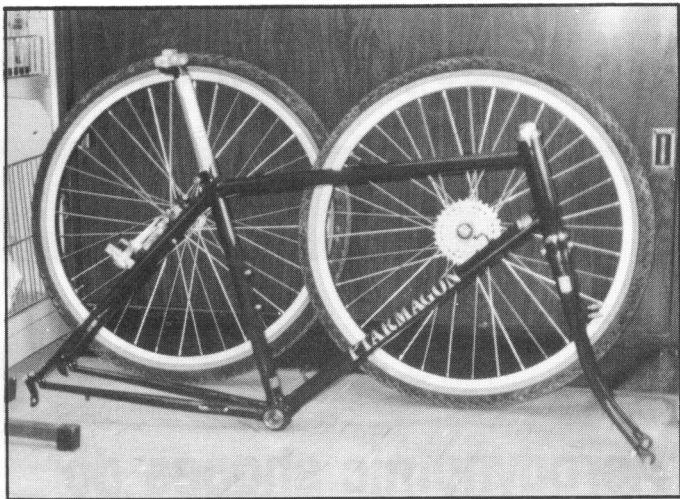
City ATB's are different though. Very often they are used for everyday commuting so you don't want muddy water splattered all over your interview suit! In my experience the fitting of mud-guards to a City ATB is almost counter productive. The front guard invariably still allows water to shoot up. The addition of mud-flaps helps but they always rub on the tyre and make the most infuriating of noises. The rear guard is not terribly efficient either and is prone to clogging from sticky mud or snow.

I've solved half of this problem for my city ATB, a Dawes Ranger. Onto my rear carrier - a Blackburn MTN rack with an integral platform top - I've attached a ten inch piece of plywood (the best thing I had lying about in the garage, a flexible bit of plastic would be better). The wood projects out at a high angle from the back of the carrier and is impressively protective - since it has been fitted I've had no more tell-tale mud smears up the back of my jacket. The front guard problem could be alleviated by an idea I've lifted from America. For bicycles in the States there is a front "splash-fender" that attaches to the frame rather than the forks and eliminates clogging problems. When I get the time I intend to fashion a guard such as this and see how it copes. I'll keep you in touch.

If you've any inventive ideas for making mountain biking better (or any cycle for that matter) then drop me a line.

*Father of the Dingbat*





*A spelling mistake on the frame? - The Ptarmigon - What's your dictionary for, then?*

-20 degrees centigrade, taking into account wind chill factors:

Helly-Hansen thermal underwear  
 MOAC woollen shirt  
 Levi 501's - my only exception to fashion rather than practability  
 Damart thermal socks and walkers woollen speckled socks  
 Scarpa walking boots  
 Sanctuary gaiters  
 Helly-Hansen "Helly-Tech" breathable jacket  
 Damart inner gloves  
 Helly-Hansen Polar-mitts  
 Thick woollen balaclava  
 Acrylic scarf

At no time was I ever cold; all the perspiration was sent safely to the exterior of my garments. When I cycle on snow-clad hills or in freezing cities I know my choice of clothing will be keeping me safe, warm and dry. It doesn't matter what the weather is doing if you've got the inclination, the clothes and the bike...nothing can stop you!



*Simon Reid, expertly riding where no man has ridden before - no, not the ski-slopes at Crans-Montana but Jesmond Dene - a Newcastle beautyspot*

*...and next month Carlton Reid delves into the world of ATB expedition planning...*

**E**very time I ride an All Terrain Bike my estimation of them rises. Not only are they perfect for deserts, as I've described on another page, they are also great for snow-riding. During that incredibly cold and snowy period back in January I cycled to and from work every day (three miles on tarmac and two on dirt). All the cars, buses and trains were being abandoned and absenteeism was commonplace but on my bike I braved the elements and continued pedalling. Not even deep drifts could stop my ATB. Any snow that lay above a hard surface such as concrete presented no problems: good traction was easy with low-pressure knobblys. It was only when I slogged my way through virgin snow lightly layered over frozen dirt-track ruts that I had difficulty in keeping upright.

The looks on commuters faces as I cycled past them, my wheels half-obsured in whiteness, was worth every drop of sweat. Maybe it was partly my balaclava that startled people but even without it mouths were still agape. I'm a natural exhibitionist so the attention was wonderfully gratifying. Even when all the snow had been salted to extinction on the roads I went out of my way to cycle through deep city-snow just to prove that the Mountain Bike is invincible. Well, almost...the odd stumble bruised my pride but not my faith in the ATB concept - a more skilful rider could continue much longer without a fall.

A lot more effort is required to ride in snow. When I mentioned sweat before I meant it. The body pumps out pints of the stuff and because of the low temperatures it doesn't evaporate efficiently so hangs around on the body and clothing which can be quite dangerous. The most sensible apparel for winter rough-stuff cyclists comes from the outdoor leisure world ie wickable thermal underwear and breathable middle and outer skin fabrics such as wool and Gore-Tex or it's equivalents.

This is a list of the clothes that enabled me to carry on cycling in temperatures dropping to

**F**ancy a 14in ATB with a seat post as long as your arm? Well look no further because here is the very thing - the Ptarmigan, (shurely a shpelling mishtake on the frame transhfer?), a flighty Mountain Bike hatched from the nest of Peter Bird at Swallow Cycles. The bike is certainly very striking and will undoubtably ruffle a few feathers when displayed at the Cyclex Bicycle Trade Show in March.(Trade only I'm afraid!).

The bike is constructed from Columbus OR tubes throughout and has a lugless oversize headtube. You'll notice from the photograph that the braking system is the highly capable Sun Tour Power-Cam. Instead of the rear brake being positioned underneath the chain-stays, where the Californians put them, Swallow Cycles have adopted the traditional brake position. The strength of these brakes is such that under certain conditions the seat stays on many American bikes have been irretrievably bent. Rim deformation has also been known to occur but obviously Swallow Cycles are confident that their stays and wheels are strong enough to cope!

The two most obvious things about the Ptarmigan must be the sloping top-tube and the extra large seat post. This latter item is individually manufactured by Swallow Cycles, just one out of nearly two-hundred custom products that they make. Many of these items are simply not cost-effective for the larger companies to produce and so if Peter Bird needs an oversize seat post he fashions it himself.

The production bike will be partly Swallow and partly SunTour equipped. The gearing system is likely to be the SunTour indexed version, which Peter Bird considers superior to the original Shimano. The Ptarmigan will be available in sizes from 14in upwards and will cost £220 for the frame and around £700 for the whole set up.

**STOP PRESS - see page 7**