

# Bikes of burden: London Green Cycles is offering a clean, green and cheap way to transport goods



[VIEW GALLERY](#)

Will Coldwell visits the country's first dedicated cargo-bike store, which opened this spring and could transform London's roads

**WILL COLDWELL** Wednesday 24 July 2013

[f SHARE](#) [TWEET](#) [g+ SHARE](#) [REDDIT](#) [in SHARE](#) [SHARE](#) | Shares: 456

The first thing you notice when you walk into the London Green Cycles shop is the space. While most bike shops are brimming with parts and gear, frames and wheels hanging from the ceiling, London Green Cycles boasts a clean, square room, with just a handful of bicycles on display. But then again, its bikes are much, much bigger.

Ads by Google

You Could Be Owed £2400  
If You've Ever Had A  
Credit Card You Could Be

Opened this spring, after a year spent trading from the owner's kitchen, the shop is the country's first dedicated cargo-bike store. Essentially bikes with big boxes or



**VIDEO**  
'She's a hero' hails cat that saved him from vicious dog attack

credit card you could be  
Owed A Refund  
[barclaycard.bankrefunds.net](http://barclaycard.bankrefunds.net)

Electric Bike Kit - £399  
Electric Bike Kits with UK  
Warranty Fitting Service  
Available  
[www.electric-bike-conversion  
s.co.uk](http://www.electric-bike-conversion<br/>s.co.uk)

JOULE - Electric Bikes  
Revolutionary nuvinci  
gear system. Amazing  
60km range. Free  
delivery.  
[www.joulebikes.co.uk](http://www.joulebikes.co.uk)

working to raise the profile of cargo bikes across cities in Europe, they are becoming an increasingly frequent sight on the road. In Copenhagen, it is estimated one in four families with two children own one, while everyone from the Danish postal service to family run businesses make use of them.

In the UK, retailers have been reporting a steady increase in sales as the bikes are snapped up by parents doing the school run, while street coffee vendors and ice-cream sellers are also using them to trade from. For one day at least, I'm hoping to add to this presence. I'm due to make a delivery and need to borrow a ride.

"In an urban environment they become a real alternative to cars," Chandra Southall, the shop manager, says as she shows me the models on offer. "Most of London is pretty flat so it can be quicker, door-to-door and makes the city a more pleasant place. In central London, up to five miles you could beat a van, especially on a two-wheeler. You also help get rid of another motor vehicle and so it's nicer for pedestrians too."

Since opening, business has been brisk. "Customers range from families to individuals who want to use it for fun, transport their dog, or for shopping," Southall says. "If you go to the supermarket you can really load up."

A lifelong cyclist and marketing manager for the shop, Jacqui Shannon actually managed to move house by bike. "I did it in four runs," she says. "Luckily I didn't need a bed or mattress, but I did bring a bookshelf, four dismantled bikes, a TV and a ton of clothes. It was quite a lot of stuff... I was knackered afterwards."

The range of styles that cargo bikes come in is impressive. From 9ft

platforms on the front, they offer a clean, green and cheap alternative to the traditional means of transporting goods, or, as is often the case, children.

Last week London Green Cycles announced partnerships with four London boroughs to encourage more businesses to trial them, with Hackney, Brentford, Camden and Lambeth all seeing the potential of the bikes to transform the city.

Thanks to schemes such as the EU-funded CycleLogistics project, which has been



**PEOPLE**  
**Cambridge s  
get a lesson  
sexism - fro  
Hopkins**



**TV**  
**Lily Allen tu  
down Game  
Thrones role  
because of "  
much incest  
brother**



**PEOPLE**  
**Superfluous  
impenetrabl  
pretentious  
weird**

... no, not Morr  
biography aga  
Twitter debut



**VIDEO**  
**"The British a  
the  
Handsomest  
the Best  
Shaped, the  
Best Natured  
People in the  
World" -  
George II**

two-wheeled limo-type machines capable of carrying 400kg to three-wheeled pram-like rides, it seems there is a bike fit for every purpose, with prices starting at about £1,000 and going up to nearer £2,500. Roman Magula, the shop owner and mechanic, spends a lot of time customising them for specific uses. As I arrive he's busy finding a way to incorporate a detachable box with a touch-screen computer on it for the RSPB to cycle around parks this summer.

"With normal bikes there's not so much you can do," he says. "With these it's much more creative, someone could come to you and say 'I want a fridge on this'."

Hoping very much that I won't need to deliver a fridge, I head out to an alleyway behind the shop for a test ride.

"Take it gentle on the corners," Southall warns as I hop on a three-wheel Christiania Classic, a smart, black outfit with a capacity big enough to fit several large sacks of potatoes, two children or a coffee table. Unprepared for the specially designed seat post, which tilts as you turn, the wide turning circle nearly throws me as I lunge round a bend.

"The two wheels are popular with more aggressive riders, the three wheels are better for carrying kids," Southall says. Taking that as somewhat of a challenge and having no current plans to procreate, I opt for a two-wheeled, Dutch-made Bakfiets, which measures up a long, yet still manageable, 6ft in length, as my transport for the day.

Feet on pedals and bum in seat, I wobble out on to the road, swerving to avoid a bus, before joining the busy flow of central London traffic. After a shaky start I begin to adjust and after realising that the possibilities of weaving through the traffic are more limited than with a normal bike, I settle into an altogether slower and more relaxed pace. Just 10 minutes in, a speeding car driver calls me something nasty, so the experience isn't that different than usual.

Soon after, I pull into the depot of Control Couriers. The delivery company is the first co-operatively run courier firm in London and has made cargo bikes an integral part of its business. "We set up in March last year and cargo bikes were there from the start," the co-owner Jacob Larson tells me. "We saw the potential of what we can do with them and we make around 50 per cent of our deliveries on cargo bikes. We have a lot of regular clients who probably wouldn't use us if we didn't have them."

One of their regular clients is Ozone Coffee Roasters. Larson leads

(Historic Royal Palaces)



Michael Kors Event in Shanghai



Twin girls bonding holding hands



City Race for Blindness - London Live

Recommend



Searching for Man director his own life'

INDYBEST



Save face th

the way as we cycle over to its address in east London to collect a package. One of the owners, Lizzie Bain, is waiting on arrival. "We used to deliver with a Landrover and we got a lot of hate mail," she says. "The pricing with bikes is so much cheaper than DHL, it ticks a sustainability box and gets a Landrover off the road."

With that, we load up, both comfortably fitting a crate of coffee on the front of our bikes. Zipping through the traffic on a sunny day it is an altogether more pleasurable experience than being stuck in a stuffy van. And, as we reach our destination no time is lost searching for a space; we leave our bikes on the pavement and unload right outside the door.

Delivery complete and afraid of slowing Larson down, I leave him to get on with his day's work while I ride back across town to Covent Garden to meet the owner of another business that has been using cargo bikes to its advantage.

The sandwich chain Pure started using cargo bikes two years ago when the owners invested in a pair of second-hand ones. Since then it has expanded its fleet, making daily use of 10 bikes with more on order.

"There's not much we can't deliver on our bikes," says co-owner Ed Bentley. "We can fit almost £1,000 worth of food on at a time, around 35 kilos. As London becomes busier by the year, bikes are pretty much the only thing left with no restrictions. Even if a van was free, I wouldn't take it. It's all the associated costs. We can park the bikes on the pavement and keep them in the store at night. There's no other option really."

As the day draws to a close, I make my way back to London Green Cycles to return my Bakfiets. Wheeling it into the shop I'm beginning to understand something that Roman said to me that morning: "Even if you're doing long distances and it's not faster, you spend all day with a smile on your face. You don't need a destination, you can just go out and ride it for fun."

It's true. Next time I need to move flat, I know how I'll be doing it.

summer: 10  
facial sunscr

FILM



**Tom Hardy,  
Slayer**

British actor to  
murderer in K  
Bigelow's True  
American

FILM



**Is Mike Leigh  
best film at**

Review: Mr Tu  
rich character  
worthy of the F  
D'Or, says Ge  
Macnab

MUSIC



**Russia must  
Eurovision  
'immediatel  
Conchita W  
victory, says**

TECH



**'An incentiv  
against thef**

f SHARE

t TWEET

g+ SHARE

REDDIT

in SHARE