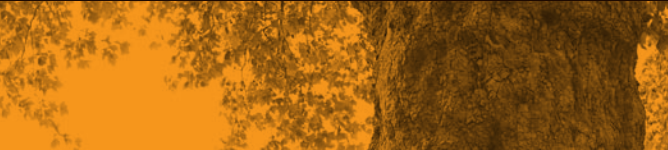




If you know you want a particular sort of bike, e.g. a Dutch bike or a fixed gear model, seek out a shop specializing in these sorts of machines.



OTHER KINDS OF BIKES

SHOPPERS (AKA GRANNY BIKES)

These dainty numbers have a step-through frame and tiny wheels, and are usually accessorized with a basket on the front and a little bike box on the back. You almost never see them new any more, but they can be picked up very cheaply secondhand or, just as often, out of a skip. They are fine for pootling around town and are unlikely to get stolen, as they are wholly unattractive to bike thieves. But if you want to upgrade or replace bits, you'll have a job finding components to fit.

STREET BIKES

Essentially racing bikes with flat handlebars, allowing a more upright riding position, which is helpful in traffic. They also often have stronger wheels than your classic racer, and are designed to be able to fit mudguards and luggage racks.

TOURING BIKES

Built for comfort and strength, tourers are designed to carry a lot of luggage over long distances. They look like racers, but generally come with pannier rack and mudguards as standard and have sturdier tyres and wheels, should you go off-road, as well as a much comfier saddle. Audax bikes are very similar to tourers. They are used for Audax events – long distance rides in which competitors have to cycle to checkpoints by certain times.

RECUMBENT BIKES

Popular among people with bad backs, recumbent riders sit near the ground in a go-karting sort of position, pounding the pedals with their legs almost horizontal. These machines are surprisingly speedy, because they encounter less air resistance, though they are not ideal for riding in traffic and are not great for going uphill, as you can't press your body weight on the pedals.

BMX

Very popular in the eighties, a little more niche these days, BMX bikes are designed for performing tricks and riding on special circuits rather than for everyday cycling.

CYCLOCROSS

Ridden by mad people who like competing in events which combine cross-country running and cycling, these bikes look a bit like racers but have knobbly tyres for going off-road. They are very light, as they are designed to be slung over the shoulder.

TRIATHLON

Lightweight, aerodynamic road bikes with special 'tri-bar' handlebars fitted at the front on which the rider can lean their elbows when going fast. These are often fitted with a disc wheel, which has solid sides instead of spokes. Note that you can fit tri-bars to most normal racers if you do a triathlon and don't want to buy a whole new bike especially.

ELECTRIC BIKES

Electric bikes are becoming ever more popular, and the designs have improved massively of late. They're very handy if you live somewhere hilly or if your knees aren't quite what they used to be. Or, of course, if you're just a lazy so-and-so. E-bikes can be ridden as an ordinary bike and usually have a switch or button on the handlebars that starts the electric-assist when your legs get tired or you can't be bothered pedalling. They are often very heavy, so not great if you have to carry them up stairs; and check carefully how long the battery lasts and how easy it is to recharge. The other downer – for the more superficial aesthetes, at least – is that most of them look really ugly. This is changing, with space-agey models such as the GoCycle, however. Note: in the UK, legally, you have to be fourteen to ride an electric bike. Again, A to B magazine is a great source of information on e-bikes (www.atob.org.uk).

HANDCYCLES

Handcycles are ridden by wheelchair users or other people with limited use of their legs. They can be easily mounted and are powered by the upper body.

TANDEMS

A bicycle made for two. They are expensive, and a nightmare to store, but enormous fun to use. Generally, the stronger rider goes at the front (in tandem speak, this is being the Captain) and does all the steering. If you don't want to buy a new tandem, scour the classifieds in cycling magazines for secondhand models.