



HEY BIG SPENDER!

What makes some people spend thousands of pounds on a bike build up? And are the real super bikes worth the dosh?

Words: Matt Skinner Photos: Steve Bardens & Paul Smith

Your bike is your statement of who you are. Its dents, scrapes and dirt testament to the abuse that you put it through, and through which it doggedly carries you, trustfully, faithfully. But every now and again you see crazily priced 'super' bikes splashed across the pages of magazines, gleaming pieces of pure bike exotica with enough sex appeal that they demand to be drooled over, distracting you away from your own workhorse. With carbon fibre this and that, space grade titanium whatsits, über rare thingimbobs, and all plated in 24 carat gold. Far fetched? Gauche?

Bikes of this calibre exist – at a price – but they do exist. Sure, they're a talking point for most, but they always beg the question, "Yes, it's lovely, but why the hell does it cost so much?" Is the carbon fibre spun from the

regolith of the moon? Is the titanium extracted from a passing asteroid? Well, no, they're not. Then why do they cost so much? We took this question to the purveyors of the most excruciatingly exotic bikes in the world that we know of: Britain's own Poshbikes.

Out of this world

Poshbikes is a family business run by father and son team, Wally and Andy, with dedicated support from Wally's wife, Sandra. Together they have put together some out of this world bikes in their time – from a 24 carat gold plated De Rosa King Carbon road bike all the way to a Colnago Ferrari bike costing a whopping £15,500. For most of us this is the stuff of dreams (or nightmares, depending on your point of view), and we felt sure that the answers we were looking for would be found with them...

So why do the bikes cost so much? In the case of Poshbikes, a bespoke bike company, the answer is more convoluted and drawn out compared to an off-the-peg bike company. With most off-the-peg bikes you have very little choice: you can have this model, or that one. You can have suspension, but only this brand. You can only have that colour on that frame, but not on that one. No, you can't swap. They come as they come, and you'll be lucky to change bits at the discretion of your local bike shop... and that'll be about as far as you can go.

With Poshbikes you make the choices. You spec the bike however you like, you have the frame you want with the bits you want, how you want, in whatever colour or finish you desire. How about custom anodising or nitriding? Whatever you want. You call the shots. ▶



The faces of Poshbikes:
Wally (left) and son Andy (right)

WHO ARE POSHBIKES?

Poshbikes are father and son team, Wally and Andy, with Wally's wife, Sandra. Back in 1925, Wally's dad owned his own bike shop in Maidstone, Kent, manufacturing high quality racing bikes, and this is where at just 13, Wally made his first ever bike frame, setting him on the course of engineering that he has followed ever since. Wally has designed and built world championship winning Speedway and Grasstrack bikes, along with frame parts for the late, great Barry Sheene. He has also manufactured components for world championship winning powerboats and built a record breaking drag bike – in fact his high performance engineering company probably has more world champions under one roof than any we know of. Andy is a qualified industrial designer and has designed everything from a highly acclaimed, award winning power boat, GP motorcycle and race car livery, to Italian stainless steel coffee makers (even though he doesn't drink coffee... go figure!). In the cycling world he designed the custom painted Giro Mad Max helmets of the Giant DH team, and the Schwinn/Bikehut team truck.

Together Wally and Andy designed and produced the Filthy Products range, which was used by the majority of professional DH riders as well as providing Saracen bikes with OE equipment. They also designed and produced the bash guards used by Martin Hawyes as seen on his limited edition signature bikes. Filthy Products are probably the only company to score top marks on every product tested in our sister mag *MBUK*. That's engineering and design excellence for you, and no fluke.

For more information contact Wally and Andy on 01622 762055 or visit www.poshbikes.com

Dream believers

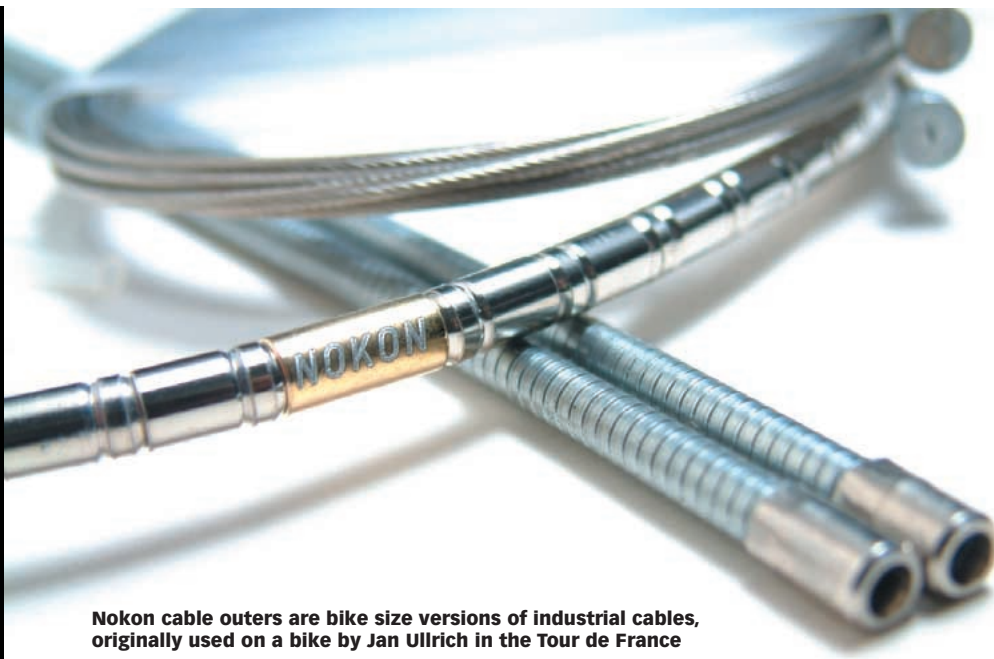
But this custom tuned approach is only one reason why the bikes cost so much – they don't *have* to cost all that much relative to off-the-peg bikes. The most modest build Poshbikes have done so far was for £1,800 – but the only limits are the depths of your coffers and your imagination. One customer had everything on his bike anodised green and red, fitted to a custom £3,000 frame. It looked a bit like a Christmas tree on two wheels, but to the owner he had his dream bike, and that's what Poshbikes do, make dreams come true. Every bike that Wally and Andy have designed and assembled is unique – you may see the same frame or colour somewhere else, but there'll never be an identical build up. From the crank bolts through to the frame itself, everything is considered and personalised for the customer. No compromise.

The Poshbikes philosophy stems way back to that of the classic (pre-1995) Klein era, when design and engineering excellence were the driving force: to be the absolute best and to push the boundaries back that much further than anyone else to produce the highest quality and most functional and innovative products. And also by the fact that Wally and Andy share this philosophy with all the companies that they work with – people like Tune, AX Lightness, Storck, Schmolke, Teschner and many others; companies pushing back the boundaries by using cutting-edge materials and manufacturing.

This philosophy impacts on the products that they make, and of course, their cost. Whether it's carbon fibre screws and bolts manufactured using a process that allows the orientation of separate carbon fibres within the component to be controlled, producing a product that is stronger than those used in Formula One and

AX Lightness saddles are a carbon fetishist's dream come true: each fibre is hand laid to make a unique custom perch





Nokon cable outers are bike size versions of industrial cables, originally used on a bike by Jan Ullrich in the Tour de France

fighter planes, to a custom air shock that is almost half the weight of a Fox shock – everything that Poshbikes do, and every company that they work with, is at the leading edge of bike technology.

Probably some of the most beautifully and expertly crafted components available through Poshbikes are the carbon fibre road brakes and AX Lightness saddles – the brakes take six weeks a pair to manufacture, and the saddles are custom made for each rider, whose weight and riding style affect the thickness of the carbon fibre weave used and each strand is hand laid. But as well as hand-crafting its products, AX Lightness also works in conjunction with the suppliers of composites, including leading F1 constructors, to develop state of the art materials for the production of their carbon fibre parts – you cannot get more bespoke or crafted than that. Not surprisingly, the brakes have a price tag

to match (£600 a pair), and are produced in very limited numbers, as are the saddles.

Perfecting the art

But what about the frames? Both Wally and Andy stand by the Storck range (which they are the sole UK importer for), as Storck continue the original classic Klein philosophy of materials, engineering and design perfection – even surpassing the levels reached by pre 1995 Klein bikes in performance, design, stiffness, weight and construction. As Wally says “When you purchase a Storck frame you’re not paying for a brand name or kudos but for the actual design and engineering that’s gone into it.”

Storcks feature multi-buttet and eccentric head tubes for a stronger weld zone at the rear of the tube, and to save weight at the front. Their frames are a 7005 T6 series aluminium, triple or quadruple butted, dedicated to each size, and in

“When you purchase a Storck frame you’re not paying for a brand name but for the design and engineering”

SILLY MONEY BIKES

BRAND BUILDING

Poshbikes bring in a wealth of cutting-edge products from a range of small, specialist companies

AX Lightness: Axel Schnura started making super lightweight carbon saddles in his attic, but has now moved into a university for R&D. Each saddle is custom made for every customer taking into account their weight and the sort of riding they do, which affects the density of the weave.

Langerbein: Bernhard Langerbein is a carbon fanatic and an absolute weight freak. His custom made seatpost clamp weighs a total of 7g – lighter than any bolt. All clamps are one-offs with no production sets at all, and all are made with a hand woven carbon body with a custom made Ti bolt.

Nokon: Industrial cable manufacturer who slimmed down the technology to make bike cable outers. The cables give you 40% less weight compared to a normal Shimano spiral wound cable, and the Nokon is fibre glass reinforced with Teflon tubing giving 60% less cable friction, eliminating brake pump, ghost shifts or cable steer.

Steinbach: Actually a snowblower manufacturer, but the owner’s mad about mountain bikes and makes a few bits now and again. It makes the lightest pair of V brake levers in the world at just 64g a pair (XTR levers weigh 114g each) and only make about 20 pairs a year.

Storck: Owned by Marcus Storck, an ex-Klein racer, a very good friend of Gary Klein and a very knowledgeable engineer, Marcus is fanatical about design and function and it shows in his frames. The Adrenalin Carbon and Organic Light full suspension frames have the highest ever stiffness to weight ratio of any manufacturer.

Tufo: Czechoslovakian company specialising in handmade tubular tyres (one-piece tyre and tube combination). Established in 1991, it produced the first compact tubular road or track tyres at 88g (half the weight of any other manufacturer).

Tune: Ulrich Fahl started making bits for himself and then friends wanted to buy them from him, and it grew from there. Tune makes gorgeous components from cranks, bottom brackets, quick releases, stems, hubs and seatposts and all are superbly engineered to incredibly high tolerances.



The Storck Adrenalin Pro with a carbon fibre linkage plate, custom made air shock, one-piece CNC'd aluminium billet cassette, and a host of top draw bits

COOL CUSTOMERS



Iain is a race car engine development engineer who races mountain bikes and got a custom build Specialized S-Works Epic from Poshbikes. He values reliable and functional high performance kit that can stand up to the rigours of enduro racing.

How did you hear about Poshbikes? "Wally was doing some work for us and I saw some bike bits in the workshop and asked about them, and it went from there really."

What's the strength of Poshbikes' service? "Outstanding product knowledge."

What factors are important to you when buying a bike or component? "Engineering quality, function and performance, and technical support."

Where do you consider your money to be going? "I am buying a component best suited to my application."

Are Poshbikes' bikes any better in your opinion than an off-the-peg model? "Yes, no upgrades are required as it's already to your specification."

some cases 'each side' of the frame. The frames are assembled, welded, fully annealed (heated and cooled), and then artificially age hardened for a unified and fine grain structure so that they are the same strength throughout to disperse any loads equally. This process produces a super strong, super light and super stiff aluminium frame and allows Storck to calculate exactly how strong the frame is to the millimetre, so it can manipulate accurately the diameters and gauges of the tubing to control different ride characteristics. As Wally says, "Marcus Storck is

Tune makes a range of slobberingly beautiful and exceptionally engineered products guaranteed to go down on your wish list



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Carbon fibre chainrings are a silly light option for the really serious racer or bike porn aficionado

One customer has 150 Colnago C40 road bikes at £2,000 per frame cos he couldn't decide on the colour

a fanatic – he'll go into so much depth to produce the best ever frames possible."

Wally and Andy are building up a Storck Adrenalin Pro frame to what they hope to be 17.2lb (so far they've got it down to 17.6lb before cutting the steerer down and with a few extras to finalise) as a way of pushing themselves further (their previous effort was 22lb). It features a custom air shock, the latest World Cup SIDs with carbon crown, Power Arm Pro carbon cranks and chainrings with a Tune titanium granny ring, Tune bottom bracket, Moc Superlight V brakes, Uberrad rims with Tune Skyline hubs and skewers and Marwi titanium tie-dye coloured spokes, one-piece hard anodised billet cassette, Schmolke bars, V-brake levers, 2003 XTR rear mech, front mech and rapidfire shifters, Nokon cables, Maxxis Flyweight tyres, and AX Lightness saddle and seatpost. Of course, it's cost a lot of wonga to put together.

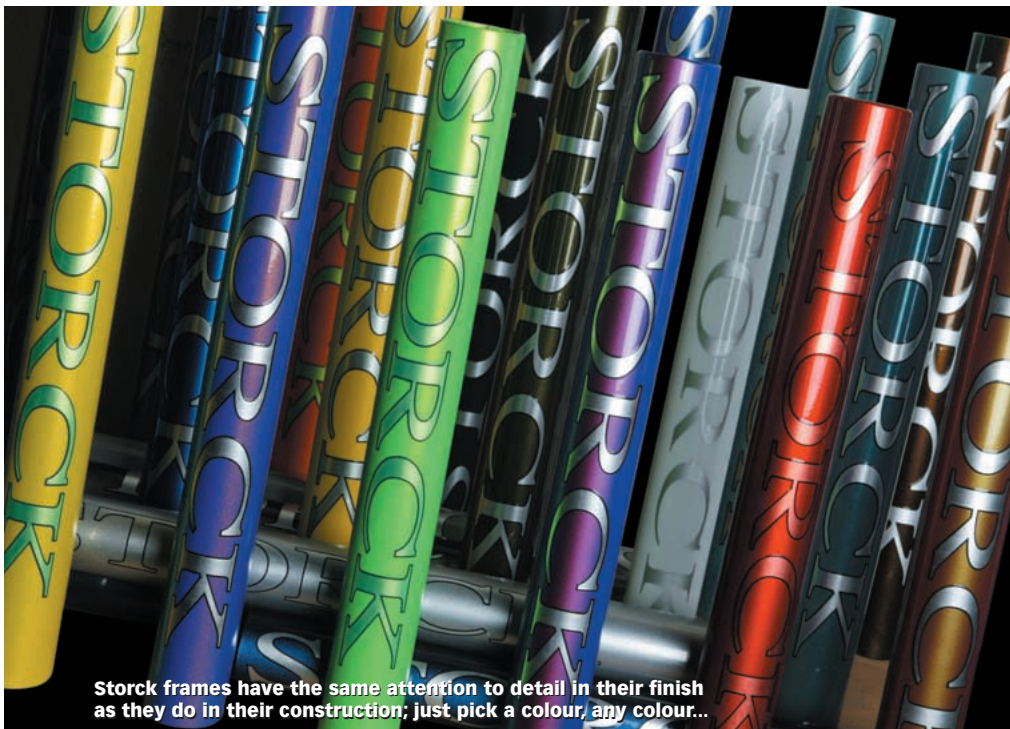
The massive prices of these super bikes

seems to make more sense when you consider them from the point of view of all the tooling, labour, R&D, and raw material costs that have gone into producing some of the world's lightest, best and most functional bike components. You can't compare directly the prices of say, a Tune hub with that of another, mainstream brand as the machining and engineering that's gone into the Tune is exceptional. To ensure that the grain structure is running in the direction Tune wants it to be, the hub body is machined from a solid 900g billet of 7075 T6 aluminium to produce a hub body that weighs just 56 grams. And it has the only hubs which guarantee 100 per cent four-pawl engagement with one click of the freehub body due to the exceptionally high tolerances that they work to – literally to within microns. Same galaxy as mass produced hubs, only Tune is on a different planet...

Healthy obsession

Many, if not all, of Poshbikes' customers are absolute bike obsessives – one American customer who runs a specialist business importing fine foods says that two things in life are important to him: bikes and women, describing himself as "Sick. I'm a bike freak." He has over 100 bikes, 40 of them MTBs, and buys anything new to keep his collection up to date. Another customer has 150 Colnago C40 road bikes at £2,000 per frame because he couldn't decide on the colour, so he bought one of each, and then purchased a flat to house them all in, alongside his four Ferrari bikes.

Such obsessive behaviour seems the norm among Poshbikes customers who go to extreme lengths in the pursuit of a lighter, faster, more functional bike: a weight freak NASA engineer contacted Shimano to find out its safety margin



Storck frames have the same attention to detail in their finish as they do in their construction; just pick a colour, any colour...

in their cranks, levers and derailleurs, and promptly laser digitised, and machined the excess mass off the components. Not surprisingly he is the owner of the lightest road bike on clincher wheels in the world, at just 4kg.

No compromise

To put it simply, the company is a Mecca for gear freaks and real bike geeks, although asking the question, "Why are you so into bikes?" is like asking a stamp collector to justify his collection. To the outsider it could seem a pointless waste of time, effort and in some cases, a hell of a lot of money, but to the initiated it all makes sense. Somehow. You could say that these are people with too much money and not enough sense, but to them – especially the collectors among them – this is their form of art appreciation. Whether they purchase according to brand allegiance or to aesthetic or engineering appreciation, they all

adhere to the same uncompromising approach to bikes as Poshbikes do themselves.

Whether or not you could justify spending so much cash on what is after all a bike is a personal choice. Certainly the bikes and components are gorgeous and it's relatively easy to understand and appreciate the process that has gone into developing and producing them, but when you're talking about bikes that would swallow up the average rider's annual salary this debate becomes purely academic, save for the affluent or incredibly hard saving few.

There are those out there who feel justified in splashing the cash, but there are many more out there who could never dream of spending so much on a bike, no matter how much technology has gone into it. You either dig it or you don't, and it's all relative to what you are prepared to pay for and what you expect for the money. The choice, as they say, is yours. **WMB**

SILLY MONEY BIKES

COOL CUSTOMERS



Mark is an importer of fine foods into the USA, is 38 years old and is a bike fiend through and through of both road and mountain bike persuasions.

How would you describe the service that Poshbikes offer? "Incredible. Wally is a gas – I love that man, he's awesome! They're incredible, phenomenal people – they really go the extra distance to make you happy. I trust them – they're the best, and extremely well schooled in bikes and they're really precise – they won't let you get a bike that's not 100 per cent perfect."

What factors are important to you when buying? "Custom, one-off exclusive price tag, engineering quality, aesthetic appreciation, function and performance. I know engineering – those two guys (Wally and Andy) are bike geeks; Andy knows everything about all the bikes and Wally knows engineering."

How do you rationalise the cost of the bikes and components to someone who would say they could never spend that sort of money on a bike? "I'm a rider – most serious riders don't really care about the money, they'd rather make the investment in something that's going to be right rather than having to keep on replacing things further down the line."



This is the last Klein that Gary Klein ever built by hand; it's decked out in Poshbikes' custom finery and has never been ridden