

A New Quest

By Reanne Atherton

With Pontesbury being one of my local running spots, I tend to drive through the quaint village frequently, so with the opportunity to visit the new All Ability Cycling Hub, I meandered through the lanes to talk to Nicky Henshaw, the liaison officer and Cytec qualified bicycle consultant, Steve Holloway - who is also part of bicycle maintenance company, Cycle Smart, based in Telford - to find out more about this new bicycle shop on the scene.

The All Ability Cycling Hub is a new venture for specialist cycling company Quest 88. The family business which is based in Shifnal, has won numerous awards for its equipment and customer service. Quest 88 has been in business for over 25 years, catering mainly for the disabled and people of limited abilities by creating specialist cycles, trikes, parallel tandems and recumbent bikes.

With the business in such high demand, the decision was necessary to expand and introduce electric cycles to their already impressive range. The gleaming new shop officially opened on 29th October, and will showcase a select collection of electric bikes, as well as adaptive tricycles and recumbent cycles. There will also be a selection of accessories available.

Walking into the shop, Steve was in the process of assembling one of the new bicycles that will stand with pride amongst the electric family. Putting his tools down I was obviously a welcome interruption, as Steve was eager for me to try out one of the bicycles. Steve's professionalism and passion for cycling was showing as he wanted to give me the real customer experience allowing me the opportunity to ride one of the machines.

Initially the thought of getting aboard an electric bicycle naturally made me slightly anxious. Luckily my instructor was very understanding and patient. I'm a very competent cyclist, so for

me these unusual nerves were making me a little unsure.

Amongst the row of bikes, I easily chose my electric steed: the one with spots all over it. Before I knew it I was hopping onto the Roodog Polka Dot. As we joined on to the new cycle lane that links up the nearby village, it was clear this would be a perfect testing location. I can imagine the smooth, pothole free lane will be very useful to future customers trying out their new purchases. Nicky also pointed out why this bustling village gives plenty of cycling opportunities: "We have the new cycle path, the railway line which was converted and is good for cycling, we're on Route 44 and we also have Eastridge forest down the road, so we have a little bit of everything here."

On asking about the beginning of this successful unique company, Nicky said: "We started in 1988, hence the name 'Quest 88', and stemmed from a therapeutic and rehabilitation background and it was in the very early 90s we started manufacturing children's tricycles, and still produce these now at our headquarters." Nicky added, "We started with an admin base in Pontesbury over two years ago, and as time has gone by we realised we didn't need all of this space just for admin. As I'm here anyway we could rejig this and showcase the electric bikes. We have never done 2 wheelers before, but the electric bikes do complete everything we do. We will never do conventional bikes because other local bicycles shops are catering fine for everybody."

The innovative aspect about this particular range of electric bikes is that it gives you a choice of how the power is applied. By a simple press of a button, the power can change from pedal assist to a throttle. Similar to a motorbike but restricted to 15mph, cyclists can benefit from electric power without any leg power. From my own past experience, the power has only ever been available by putting pressure to the pedals. This additional power

option is perfect for people who struggle to apply much strength through their legs. Nicky said: "The good thing about throttle power is that we have a lot of people who have got weaknesses in their legs or in their ankles and they can't manage that initial start before the motor, they haven't got that strength. So we find this is a very useful tool to have."

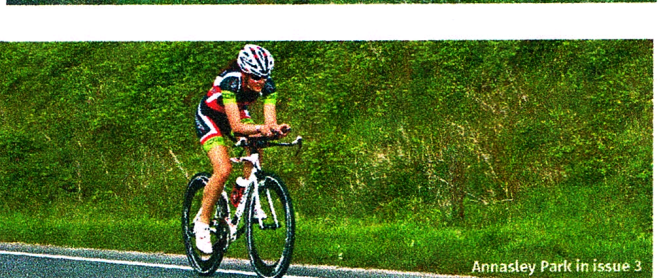
In Europe, Germany in particular, electric bikes are as popular over there as ordinary good old fashioned leg powered bicycles. Maybe here in the UK we're not far behind with this increasingly popular activity. Nicky revealed an astonishing fact: "Statistics show that in Germany 50% of all bikes sold are electric bikes." Steve also admits, "Europe are well ahead in their mind-set and their usage of electric bikes."

Nicky explains: "Electric bikes are aimed at two different groups of people: Health - aimed at possibly older people, unfit, over weight or have a need and just want to get out cycling; and you have your Commuters, getting to work not all hot and sweaty."

Specialist range of e-bikes that will be available are: A2B, F4W, Roodog and specialist German brand, Hase Bikes. Hase specifically manufacture recumbent bikes, and these are an extension to Quest 88's pedigree in specialist all ability bikes.

For an entry level machine, you would be looking at a very reasonable price of £899 for the Roodog Tower. The ladies equivalent is the Polka Dot £1085. Within the range there are two options of wheel size, 26" or 700c offering different levels of manoeuvrability.

As I reluctantly headed back to the hub with Steve, my usual riding confidence was showing again. With the power set on high, it really motored on, and it was as if I had awakened its mischievous personality. The journey back seemed to be over far too quickly as I came to a standstill outside of the shop and although I had the biggest smile on my face, I thought to myself, I'm going to miss this.



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