



GEAR+TECH: ME AND MY BIKE

Child's play

At Warwickshire-based Meteor Works, Lee Prescott has been honing his bike-building skills since he was a kid

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What were you doing when you were aged 11? Probably starting secondary school, playing with friends, maybe even running through fields of wheat. When Lee Prescott was 11 he was building his first bike.

'I had it all planned out from an early age. One of my first Christmas presents was a drawing board with a little parallelogram. It's pretty much all I've ever wanted to do. My dad is a motorbike designer and fabricator so during the summer holidays I was taken to the scrap yard, told to pick some stuff out and dumped in the corner of a workshop for six weeks.'

After a youth spent building makeshift mountain bikes, Prescott went on to create BMXs as lead designer at Pashley. A decade ago he partnered with his wife Jo to set up his own framebuilding business, Meteor Works, and its bikefitting counterpart, Velo Atelier.

At Meteor Works, which takes its name from the nearby workshop where John Kemp Starley invented the modern bicycle in 1885, Prescott mostly builds custom touring and road bikes, and a whole 35 years on from that first build, he's still doing things his own way.

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'I rarely use off-the-shelf tubesets,' he says. 'I prefer to look at each tube, work out what it needs to do and then select the best tube for that job.'

'We tend to pull from Columbus, Reynolds and Dedacciai as well as bits of specialist materials from ProFormance Metals in Daventry, which does a lot of aerospace-grade plain gauge tubing in a variety of sizes.'

While the mix-and-match mentality is unsurprising given Prescott's roots, it also lends itself to the other big part of his building process.

The long and short of it

'What we really pride ourselves on is that our bikes fit really well. Fitting is a big part of our business; we're one of the top bikefitters in the country. I'm the current vice president for the International Bike Fit Institute and I edit their magazine.'

'When shops are open we do fitting once a month at the Soho Cafe for Rapha CC members, with [former-pro-turned-osteopath] Alice Monger-Godfrey giving people's positioning a once-over and correcting any glaring problems.'



Meteor Works 'Fiona's Aero Road', approx £6,000. Frames start at £1,200, meteorworks.co.uk

1 of 4



Lee Prescott has been making bikes for more than three-quarters of his 46 years on this planet. 'It's pretty much all I've ever wanted to do,' he says

2 of 4

'A bikefit is part of the price of buying a custom frame because to me that's a crucial part of the process. I need to see how people move. To build the perfect geometry you need to understand flexibility, movement, use and weight distribution, as well as limb length.'

As a result of that method and reputation, Meteor Works gets a lot of requests for problem-solving road bikes from people who can't find the right frame from the mass market.

'We've had a run recently of making bikes for really tall people who struggle to fit on production frames because they're a bit too racy or they'll have to get endurance geometry production frames that they don't like the look of. They want something that looks cool *and* fits them. I'm also about to make a time-trial bike for a sub-five foot woman who wants to do an Ironman.'

The most popular request Meteor Works gets, however, is for multipurpose bikes, to the extent that the company launched its first production bike, the Æsir, last year. Prescott says it's a combination of the many repeated requests he has received over the years, with versatile geometry and sizing that goes both smaller and bigger than most.

It was initially built – like the others – with a hodge-podge of different steel tubes. However when Keith Noronha, one of their locals who happens to be managing director of Reynolds, saw the prototypes, he agreed to make the tubes to Prescott's specifications, which you won't find anywhere else.



3 of 4



4 of 4

"This bike is a recent custom build and is made for fast club rides and TTs, with a focus on optimum aerodynamics and comfort"

Speed machine

The bike pictured is a recent custom build – 'Fiona's Aero Road' – and is made for fast club rides and TTs, with a focus on optimum aerodynamics and comfort.

In typical Meteor Works fashion, Fiona's frame is a mish-mash of materials, consisting of a Reynolds 853 down tube and top tube, a Columbus Spirit seat tube, Columbus Nivachrom seatstays, and Dedacciai head tube and chainstays topped off with Deda's aluminium Zero 100 bars and seatpost. Aerodynamics are enhanced by mostly internal cables and an integrated headset, as well as teardrop down tube and seatstays and a horizontal top tube that is ovalised and tapered.

'We've done the most you can do without doing full moulds of stuff but kept it nice and stiff in the bottom end. Over the years we've done quite a lot of wind-tunnel testing so we know what basically works and what doesn't. Plus the bike itself makes so little difference – it's really about position and the wheels, so we fit Enve 45s and we already know her position is as good as it's going to get.'

In terms of aesthetics, Prescott insists he doesn't do flashy paint schemes, with the stealthy design inspired by a series of images including one of a jellyfish whose striking pink arms resemble the highlights seen on the bike's forks, chainstays and stem.

Despite living his dream since he was 11, Prescott is the first to admit there's still learning to do: 'I've never got on with TIG welding; I've never given it the time to really get stuck into it and that's gnawing at my brain a little.'

'If you use nickel silver brazing rods you can produce a joint that's almost as good as a TIG-welded joint using equipment I've already got and I don't need to keep switching torches. But I don't like to sit on my laurels. You need to keep learning stuff otherwise it never progresses.'