

# A team effort

Working in tandem for 20 years, frame-builder Dave Yates and ex-road international Joe Waugh agree that when it comes to forging a successful business, one thing matters above all else

**T**HE first thing that strikes you when you have a conversation with Dave Yates and Joe Waugh is their enthusiasm for their business. The pair first went into partnership 20 years ago, when Yates decided to take the plunge and make frame-building his career, rather than the part-time sideline it had been until then.

At the time, Waugh was 27 and one of the UK's leading riders. He was in the sixth year of an international career, and was beginning to think ahead to when his racing days would end. As he had just completed an accountancy course, it made sense that he should pair up with his old friend Yates — the original idea being that Waugh would look after the books while his partner would build the frames.

This isn't quite how it worked out, as Yates recalls. "Joe was hands-on right from the start, which was just as well, as we had to build the workshop from scratch. The building we were in was a shell, there was no electricity, nothing, and we were trying to build frames as well as renovating the place. Joe didn't mind getting his hands dirty — he was in the frame-spraying oven for two days when we first got it, trying to clean it up."

Yates had begun building frames from his garage four years earlier in 1976, the same year Waugh finished second in the Milk Race. For the next four years he built frames for the local shop, M. Steel Cycles. He took the full-time plunge when he left his teaching job in 1980, to go into partnership with Waugh and Geoff Dobson of Steel Cycles.

## The right stuff

This was not the easiest of times to start a new business, and Yates recalls the hardships of those early days. "It wasn't easy, but I've never been motivated by money. I suppose I was doing it for all the wrong reasons, as I wanted to do something that I enjoyed — I didn't set out to make a fortune." He pauses for a moment before adding with a laugh. "At least I've succeeded in that."

Yates continues: "We formed a company that was separate from the frame-building, where Geoff, Joe and myself were directors. After a couple of years the company bought the shop from Geoff, and that's how it is today. There's

four staff at the shop, including Joe, there are five of us here in the workshop, and we all work really well together."

Waugh is based in the shop in Gosforth while Yates remains in the unit in Wallsend. During the past 20 years more than 11,000 frames have been produced here, with Yates himself responsible for around 2,500. "When a customer comes to see us they specify exactly what they want. We do have a few off-the-peg frames, but we prefer to build to order, and I think our customers prefer that as well."

All these frames have one thing in common, in that they were all made of steel. So how have the recent changes in material choice affected the business?

"Well, aluminium is the flavour of the month at the moment, but I think that people will start coming back to steel eventually," says Yates. "Aluminium is fine if you're a pro and you're getting your bikes given to you. We live in a dis-

posable world, and they are almost disposable bikes. Have a crash on a steel frame and you can get it repaired."

## A daring approach

While the racers may be lining up to buy aluminium frames, Yates takes heart from the Audax specialists who prefer steel for their long-distance riding. "I do a lot of Audax riding myself. People see my bike and we get a lot of orders that way. They realise you can't get as comfortable a ride from an aluminium frame, so they come to us and we build exactly what they want."

But the pair do not rely entirely on appearances at Audax events to sell frames. They have a website, which is about to be upgraded, and Yates explains that he is hoping the new site will feature

Waugh's racing career more prominently than it does now. "I keep pestering him to

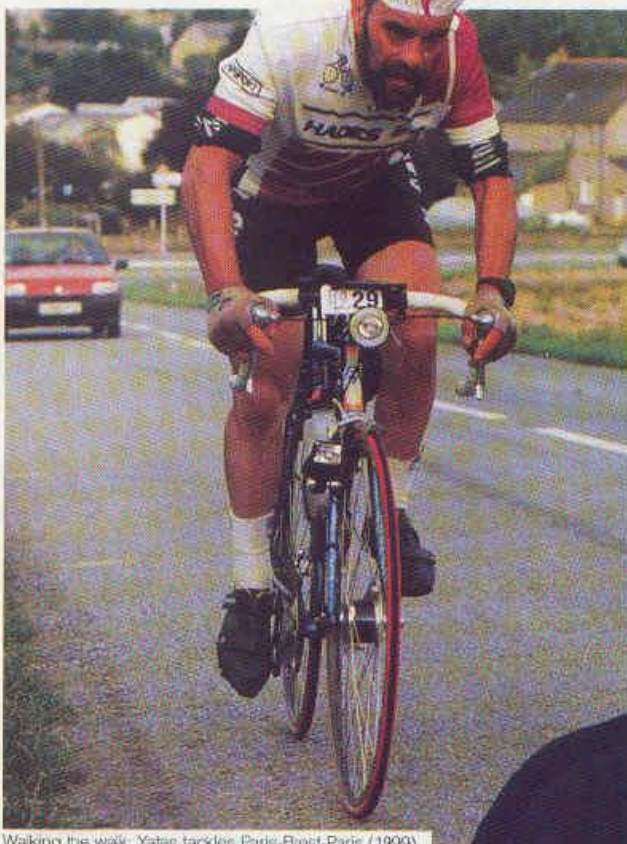
sort out some pictures of his racing days. We've got to do it, because Joe had such a good career and a lot of our potential customers don't know anything about it."

That career began in the late Sixties when Waugh joined Tyne RC, but there was no sign in those early days of the climbing power that would help him make his mark. "No, I wasn't much of a climber when I first started," Waugh recalls, now aged 47. "In fact I used to get dropped a lot on the hills, so I don't know why it developed like it did."

Although he had made a name for himself in the North-East during 1972, it wasn't until the following year that his name became known outside the area, when he was the revelation of the Milk Race. For a 20-year-old, Britain's leading race must have been a daunting prospect, especially when you consider that he was given just two weeks' notice.

"I had a telegram asking me to ride for the Regions team as they were looking for riders. I'd been doing OK in local races and the selectors must have noticed my name in the results, but the first stage of the Milk Race was the longest I'd ridden that year. Then the second stage was the next longest, and so on. It was a bit of a shock really."

It may have been a shock, but Waugh proved he was up to it, taking second place on stage four to Great Malvern



Waking the wick: Yates tackles Paris-Brest-Paris (1999)







In the frame: Dave Yates (centre) with his band of merry frame-builders

Shop-floor team at M.Steels, Gosforth



behind Sweden's Sven Ake Nilsson. As the race developed, he didn't falter, eventually finishing 15th overall. "I was pleased with that, but you've got to remember that in a Regional team you can hide a bit and take your chances," he points out. "It's not like being in the Great Britain team, when you're there to win it."

Immediately after the Milk Race, Waugh travelled to the Isle of Man, but the Manx International was not his goal. Instead, he rode the Viking GP. "When I entered, I had no idea I was going to be riding the Milk Race, and I didn't even think about riding the International," he explains. "I entered the Viking, so after riding a two-week stage race it was a piece of cake. I got away with Paul Carbutt early on, I won it and Paul was second."

1973 also saw Waugh taking third place in the RTTC '50' championship with 1-54-40, before going on to be "absolutely battered" in the Tour of Sweden, a race used by the World's teams as preparation. But for a rider brought up on time trialling, there was consolation when he finished 7th overall in the British Best All-Rounder.

1974 and '75 saw Waugh racing in France with VC Metz, along with Bill

Nickson and Jack Kershaw. The race results were promising, but other factors intervened. "I was homesick a lot of the time, especially in '75 when we were there for most of the year."

When Waugh and his fellow GB teammates Phil Griffiths, Bob Downs, Dudley Hayton, Carbutt and Nickson lined up for the 1976 Milk Race, they were confident they could win the race for Britain for the first time since Les West in 1967. Two weeks later, just five seconds separated winner Nickson from Waugh when they crossed the finish line in Blackpool. At the time, many felt Waugh could have won the race had he wanted to, but he refused to accept this possibility.

## Strength to strength

"We had a great team spirit that year, and all we were concerned about was that one of us won. The only way I was going to win was if something happened to Bill. In fact I got away up the road one day with Bert Johansson [who won the Olympic road race two months later] and he said to me, 'you can win this race'. But it was never an option to attack a team-mate."

Nickson went on the ride for TI Raleigh in Europe, but Waugh says he does not regret not taking the same route. "I preferred to stay at home.

You've got to be honest with yourself. I did the right thing."

There is, however, one regret that Waugh does

have. The Olympic road race in Montreal was the target for him that year. The new champion, Bert Johansson, said later that Waugh was one of the few he was worried about. But the Tynesider crashed on the rain-soaked circuit, and never regained the front group.

"There have only been two times when I've had a tear in my eye over a bike race, and that was one of them," he says. "I wanted to do a ride there and it was so disappointing to crash." It transpires that the other occasion that misted Waugh's eyes was in 1979. That year he won 32 races, but not the one he really wanted: the national road race title, won by Robert Millar.

Waugh had the chance to put the Montreal misery behind him in the 1980 Moscow Olympics. A win in the Felix Melchior stage race in Luxembourg, against many of those who would be in the Soviet capital six weeks later, seemed a positive sign, but this time illness saw him pulling out of the Olympic title race.

At home the wins continued, with the highlights being his victory in the Manx International in 1981, a success he repeated the following year. 1982 was also Commonwealth Games year, and Waugh had decided that his international days would end after he returned from Brisbane. It was a good Games for the England team, with Waugh, Downs, Malcolm Elliott and Steve Lawrence winning the team time trial, and Elliott taking the gold medal in the road race.

"That was the end of the international days but it was nice to go out with a Commonwealth title. Since then I've raced a few time trials but I haven't bothered with road races. It would take too long to get used to the change in pace."

Regarding the business, Waugh is as enthusiastic as his partner. "We really have got a great team here. Everyone pulls their weight and we all get stuck in and do what's necessary when we have to. It's like Dave says — not many can say they really enjoy what they do for a job, but we can, and that's important."



Fast times: Joe Waugh, Milk Race prologue, 1982

Phil O'Connor

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