

amounts of U-matic video cassettes and piss off a lot of cab drivers," he said. "I used to have a lot of run-ins with drivers but not so much any more. There's not a lot of space, so whatever you do as a courier you're going to be in someone's way. The best thing to do is move through the traffic without creating too many ripples. But it's not always possible to do. You have to be assertive but you should never really be aggressive. It won't do any good and it's not called for. Most people in central London just want to do their job like you. The trick is to reconcile what you want to do on the road with what they want to do."

Bill said the best thing about his job was "coming home in winter after a day when it's been raining non-stop for nine-and-a-half hours. Everything you own is wet. You're dirty, wet and hungry. You put the kettle on. You think about how much work you've done and you sit back and just think 'yeah'."

American and a Canadian. Everyone's in the same boat."

Working conditions aren't too good for couriers at the moment. Since the recession, wages are much worse than they used to be. But Bill reckons that within the next ten years, as the traffic situation gets worse, good pedal couriers will be in very high demand.

How much does he earn?

"About £60 a day."

FRAMEBUILDER Dave Yates

Dave Yates is a bit of a dab hand at taking tubes of metal bashing them together and creating classic bikes like the Dave Yates Diabolo or frames like the Saracen that Deb Murrell races on. He works out of a factory in Walsend, Tyneside and when he's not dealing with the administrative side of his job he's beaver away making road, touring and off-road frames. You name it, you pay for it, and he'll make it.

Typical working day

"I open up the factory at around 7.45am," said Dave. "Then I sort out the coffee machine and the post, give price quotes for jobs, and fix things that are broken in the factory (eg shot blaster, toilets, roof etc). I measure customers for frames, sort out problems, deal with reps, sort out more problems and dish out advice to customers on the phone. I'm also the backup system for the workshop, so if anybody's off work I stand in and do their job. I get home somewhere between 7pm and 10pm."

What keeps Dave going is the grin he sees on the faces of his customers, but what gets him down is being so busy with administration that he doesn't have as much time as he would like to get in the workshop and build more frames or get out and ride his bike.

Dave started making frames 15 years ago because it seemed like a good idea at the time. Since then he has personally built more than 1,500 diamond-shaped metal tube sculptures that we like to call bikes. He is now 46 and

has seen framebuilding change from a very traditional craft to a state-of-the-art multi-material business.

"We used to make just road frames from Reynolds 531 and Columbus SL that were all very similar," he said. "Now it's all kinds of frames made out of anything. And even if we don't make frames from certain materials we still have to be prepared to work with them."

How to become a framebuilder

To get into this business you need to have a fairly good grounding in engineering and design. It's not just a case of welding bits of metal together and Bob's your uncle. A good way into the business would be to get an apprenticeship with an established framebuilder. But Dave's advice is: "Forget it and get a real job."

Asked what his plans for the future are, Dave simply replied: "Survival." But in fact he is fairly confident that he'll always keep his head above water. "The good ones have always been able to find work," he said. "That's why we've been here 15 years."

Wages?

"Sometimes."

MRI DECEMBER 1995

88



The photographer manages to frame Dave Yates.

Right: Most people have to mind their heads. Julian Wall doesn't.