

Full cycle

Five best bikes

01

Skeppshult
Sweden

“When we bought Skeppshult in 1989 we didn’t know bikes,” says Kjell Sture (*right*), who purchased the small bicycle firm with partner Peo Helge. Skeppshult was founded in 1911 by Albert Samuelsson in Skeppshult village; he opened a factory in 1920 but the company was largely unknown until Sture’s and Helge’s arrival.

“Skeppshult was in good shape when we turned up but it was little known to the rest of Sweden,” says Sture. “We taught the employees more skills to up the quality. When other companies were heading east for their frames, we invested money in our Swedish operation.”

Then, while the rest of the world was buying mountain bikes in the early 1990s, Skeppshult shunned the fad. “We have always stuck to our guns and it has always paid off,” says Sture.

skeppshult.se

02

Arrow
Tokyo

Jinbei Yamada (*below, right*) began selling his cult bikes from a corner shop in Tokyo in 1972 and the company’s motto has always been the same: simple is best. Customers can choose from designs in 18 colours. They can even buy the bikes in kit form and build the two-wheeler themselves. A popular model is the Classic, with a foot brake and no mud guards.

arrowtr.co.jp

03

Cykelmageren
Copenhagen

Rasmus Gjesing (*opposite page, top*) got inspiration for his two-wheel business after talking to a bike designer who was showing him his latest model. “He asked me what I thought about his bike. I didn’t like it and I told him so.” The designer scurried off and produced a streamer, which he attached to the handlebar. He asked Gjesing what he thought of it now, to which he replied: “Well, it’s the same bike with a streamer stuck on, so it still looks horrible.”

Gjesing is big on simplicity. In 1994 he opened his workshop in Nørrebro in the north-west of Copenhagen. His design style is as plain as his speech: pared down and with a half turn of irony. His bikes, which remain largely unchanged from his original models, are bought by a loyal fanbase around the world.

Gjesing is also a detail obsessive. He produces 500 bikes a year and oversees every aspect of production – something he is determined to keep doing: “Although I’d like to make lots of money, I will never mass produce.”

cykelmageren.dk



04

Alta Bike
Oslo

Alta Bike’s single-speed city cruiser (*below, left*) is an all-Norwegian effort created by Oslo-based design consultancy Frost Produkt, graphic artists Bleed and Norway Says, a furniture-design firm. The bike’s one-gear set-up works best in urban traffic where riders seldom reach speeds that require them to change gears. Another advantage for commuters is the Alta’s lightness, at just over 9kg.

altabikes.no

05

Helkama
Helsinki

In 1964, Helkama launched the Jopo. Just as Raleigh’s Chopper defined 1970s Britain, the Jopo became an icon of 1960s Finland with its one-for-all egalitarian philosophy. It took its name from the first two letters of Finnish words *jokaisen polkupyörä*, meaning “everybody’s bicycle”. Employing a new technique – two pressed-steel frames as opposed to one welded piece – Helkama gave the bike a new form, which became one of its selling points.

“The first only required one gear and a coaster brake,” says Markku Autero (*below*), Helkama’s head of design, of the original Jopo. It went down well: 214,000 were sold before production ceased in 1977. “In 1997 we reintroduced the bike but renamed it Pojo after reducing the wheel size from 22 inches to sync with the European standard 20 inches,” he says. “It wasn’t until 1998 that we reverted to the classic 22-inch wheel because of problems.”

Autero and his team utilised modern techniques, such as laser cutting, to make the frames sturdier. In doing so they corrected the original Jopo’s wobble and produced a new model for the 21st century. But does it still ring people’s bells? “It’s as popular as ever,” says Autero. — (M)

helkamavelox.fi

