

# Ride and park

Railway stations, town centres, offices, homes – you always need somewhere safe to store your bike. **Dominic Bliss** pays a visit to cycle-parking specialists Cycle-Works



**G**reat ideas arrive at the most unlikely moments. For Peter Davenport, boss of British cycle-parking specialists, Cycle-Works, his great idea came 15 years ago while he was teaching at a college in the American city of Seattle.

One day he noticed a fellow lecturer parking his bike inside a bike locker. This was long before such lockers existed in the UK, so Peter, a keen cyclist, was intrigued. He collared the lecturer, meaning to find out more. 'The guy thought I was a bit weird, running up to him as he was locking up his expensive bike,' Peter remembers. 'He probably thought I wanted to steal it.'

## Velo-Safe and sound

It turned out the lecturer's university had over 300 bike lockers on campus, available for students and staff. It was just the business idea Peter had been looking for. On his return to the UK he soon set up Cycle-Works, initially importing bike lockers and stands, but later designing and manufacturing them himself. Since then the Portsmouth-based company has branched out into bike racks and bike shelters, too. Fifteen years on and they now make around 20 different products, many of them manufactured in British factories.

Their flagship product is the Velo-Safe locker, a wedge-shaped steel container spacious enough to secure even the biggest

bikes available on the market – anything short of a penny farthing, in fact. Retailing at around £650, it's a design that was dreamt up by Peter and his colleagues, and which is manufactured at a high-tech fabricator's half an hour away from Cycle-Works.

Peter says it was crucial he chose a UK manufacturing base. 'In theory they could be made anywhere. But if it's abroad then you have the shipping costs of bringing it back into the UK. And it's a heavy steel product.'

He also appreciates being able to visit the factory at a moment's notice. Cycle-Works staff regularly make the short trip from Portsmouth to discuss development and design of their products. As Peter's marketing manager Jon Spencer explains: 'You can see a piece of metal come off the line and make design changes if you need to. If you're working with a factory in a different country, that process is going to take weeks. It also gives us the ability to customise our products if customers need that.'

## Platforms for expansion

On a warm spring day, Cycle-Works' latest order of Velo-Safe lockers – a batch of 16 destined for the city of Chester – is in mid-production. In one area of the factory, a huge laser machine nosily slices steel sheets into the correct size; in another area, selected panels are powder-coated with green paint; across the factory forecourt two men bend **»**

**Left and centre:** Shipping costs for heavy steel products like these are fairly high, so it makes sense to make them in the UK.  
**Above:** Peter Davenport



Photos by Dominic Bliss & Cycle-Works

'We believe that people will only cycle frequently if they have somewhere suitable to park their bike'

Jon Spencer shows how the bike that he rode to the factory from the Cycle-Works Portsmouth office fits into a Velo-Safe locker. The wedge shape of the Velo-Safe reduces space requirements

the panels into shape, ready to be riveted together.

The fabricators make metal products for many different clients. While his employees busy themselves with the Velo-Safe lockers, the factory manager points out parts destined for a helicopter.

While Peter's bike lockers may not reach such dizzy heights, he is nevertheless hoping they, and his other products, will become an important feature of British transport. Four of the country's major railway stations (London's Liverpool Street and Euston, Edinburgh Waverley and Glasgow Central) have installed Cycle-Works bike racks (not the Velo-Safe, but another of the company's products). Other clients include hospitals, schools, colleges and local authorities.

One of Peter's most interesting projects has been at Peckham Rye, a railway station in south London. When the station was recently refurbished, the council chose to upgrade the rather tatty bike parking at the same time. Cycle-Works were brought in to custom-design new bike stands to complement the Victorian brickwork at the front of the station. The result included a floral design in the crossbar of the stand that matched a bas-relief on the building.

### Parking – lots

Jon admits that Cycle-Works products aren't the cheapest on the market, but he insists that they're ahead of their rivals when it comes to security, aesthetics and quality. Sales figures seem to reinforce his claims. In 1997, Cycle-Works' first full year of trading, they sold 30 lockers. Last year that figure had risen to around 300.

There's no doubt the recent British resurgence in cycle culture has helped. The government's Cycle to Work scheme, coupled with its anti-obesity drive, has

encouraged many to take to their bikes. Add to this the recession and the recent hike in petrol prices, and it's not surprising we're in a new golden age of cycle commuting.

Peter and Jon are both quite evangelical when it comes to encouraging bike use. 'The Cycle-Works mission is to raise the profile and image of cycling, particularly for commuting and work-based trips,' they state on their company website. 'We are all passionate cyclists, and believe that cycling should be encouraged for health, social, equality and environmental reasons – as well as being the best way to reduce congestion. We believe that people will only cycle frequently if they have somewhere suitable to park their bike. This needs to be as safe, secure and easy to use as possible.'

There's no doubt they both know their end-users. Peter used to be a campaigner for the CTC, while Jon is an ardent roadie who cycled over from Portsmouth for the factory visit.

But with local government figuring so prominently on their client list, recent public funding cuts have inevitably taken their toll. 'We have long-term agreements with a lot of councils,' Peter explains. 'We might phone them up and say "We haven't heard from you for a while." Their response is: "Well, our cycling budget is zero this year, and I'm lucky even to have a job."'

Nevertheless, both Peter and Jon are optimistic about the future, confident that the Government will continue to encourage sustainable transport, and that the public will continue to cycle to work. 'Our products are all based around utility cycling,' Jon adds. 'We believe that area will grow even more.'

Minutes later he's astride his bike again, heading back to Portsmouth.

*For more information, see [www.cycle-works.com](http://www.cycle-works.com)*