

Joff Summerfield's penny-farthing

Last December, Joff finished a 10,500-mile, 18-month tour on his high-wheeler.

Dan Joyce asked him about his bike



In late 2008, Joff Summerfield returned home after spending two-and-a-half years cycling around the world on a penny-farthing he built himself. Rather than resume his former career as a Formula One race engine builder, he began to make penny-farthings for a living in a London workshop. But ultimately he wanted to get back on the road, and in June 2014 he set off to ride the world again, beginning by riding south through the Americas. Once again, he chose to ride his penny-farthing.

'Penny-farthings aren't particularly practical, comfortable, easy to ride or, let's be honest, efficient,' Joff acknowledged. 'But they are a whole lot of fun. The most useful thing about the penny is the doors that it opens. Everyone seems to love the bike, and when they discover that you're travelling on it they seem to get the whole crazy idea. If I had a pound for every photo that has been taken of the bike, I would be a rich man.'

Joff built his first penny-farthing in 1999 and has been developing his ideas since. While each bike he builds is bespoke, the latest design iteration is Mark 6. That's not what he toured on, however. 'My machine is a Summerfield Mark 3.5,' he said. 'This was the fourth penny that I built, and I have used it ever since as my touring bike. The first penny that I built, and then rode to Paris for the Millennium celebrations, was an absolute monster. The bike weighed 76 pounds. With all my kit, I was up to a 120lb for a five-day ride. I made it to Paris for the celebrations with an hour to spare. After this, I built much lighter, simpler and stronger bikes.'

There was nothing about his current touring penny-farthing that he'd change, he said. Its Victorian technology had already been augmented with the digital accessories common to 21st century tourers. 'The adaptations for touring have to be fairly simple so as not to add too much extra weight,' Joff said. 'On my recent journey, I

“The most useful thing about the penny is the doors that it opens. Everyone loves it”

used a dynamo in the rear wheel. I wired this into a Sinewave Cycles Revolution to give me a USB-out that I could use to charge my Garmin, cameras, etc. I also had a solar panel on the back of the bike to charge a slave battery, again to keep my cameras topped up.'

The gearing, on the other hand, was as old-school as it gets: a 49-inch fixed-wheel. 'I aim to ride 40 miles a day,' he said. 'This I can do day after day as long as the road is

fairly flat, of good surface, and at sea level. So far, I've ridden the penny over most terrains, including high Tibetan passes, Mexican deserts, and Andean death roads.'

Joff's latest world tour began in Toronto, Canada, and ended prematurely in Ecuador. He said: '120 miles south of Quito, I was tied up at gunpoint and robbed. They took almost everything, bar the bike, tent, sleeping bag, and the clothes I was wearing. You meet so many wonderful people while cycling around the world, you sometimes forget that a tiny percentage are evil. After four years in total on the road, this is the first time that something like this has happened. I finished the current journey.'

Despite this, his 18-month trip had many highlights. 'There were so many that it's hard to pinpoint just a few,' he said. 'Zion National Park was stunning. It was great to meet and ride with a lot of fellow cycle tourists. And the whole of Mexico was wonderful.' ●

For more details, visit Joff's website: pennyfarthingworldtour.com

Tech spec: Joff's Penny-Farthing

MODEL: Summerfield Mark 3.5 **FRAME:** 1 3/8in diameter backbone **WHEELS:** 49-inch front, 17-inch rear **GEARING:** 49in fixed **BRAKES:** Barely **STEERING & SEATING:** It kind of steers, and is uncomfortable to sit on **ACCESSORIES:** Garmin, GoPro, Brooks panniers, Goal Zero solar panel, Microsoft Surface Pro computer

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