



**CYCLING
PLANET**

THE LAST POST

**POSTAL DELIVERIES BY BICYCLE ARE NOW A RARITY AND NOT THE NORM.
POSTMAN JOHN CRAGGS REFLECTS ON HIS CYCLING CAREER**

For seven years I cycled for the Queen. Yes, I was a postman. Royal Mail had a fleet of 36,000 bicycles nationwide. Most are being pensioned off due to the changing face of delivery. Some will be retained, probably on the more rural deliveries.

There are far more packets these days, due to Amazon, eBay, etc, and far fewer letters, due to the growth in internet communication. Ten years ago the bicycle was still seen by management as a viable proposition. No longer.

The bike gave the postie a lot of free rein once he left the office. It was rather like being self employed with an additional safety net. My regular bike was the Millennium model, which preceded the step-through Mailstar. I hated the Mailstar for its weight, squishy fat tyres and general sponginess.

Millenniums had 26x1 3/8in tyres, a front mounted basket, and hub brakes that worked in the wet. It had three widely spaced hub gears, the bottom gear of which was a ludicrous 'twiddler', until tackling

hills with 36 pounds (or more) of mail in the basket. Then it was perfect. Middle was fine for general duty on flat deliveries. When the cable broke, I locked mine in middle with a safety pin through the little adjusting chain until it could be fixed. Top gear was magic for returning home with a tailwind, in 'job done' mode.

All post bikes were and are tough, but have a maximum working life of seven years. Many don't make it. When mine was 'written off', all remaining of the

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original was the frame, fork, seatpost, and chainring. Everything else had been crash damaged or ridden into the ground. And my bike was one of the better treated!

I had eight bags or more to deliver each day, picked up from secure bag-drops

along the route. The deadweight on the front wasn't as awkward as you might think, although you were very aware of 'holding it up' at low speeds. And a front-end puncture made it a swine to push. Some people spend a fortune at a gym to get forearms like a postman!

Apart from dog bites, the main occupational hazard was falls. Once my front swept out on wet leaves, slamming me onto my left shoulder, leaving a trapped nerve that still niggles sometimes. The fall signalling the end of my postal career came when the bottom bracket spindle just snapped, allowing the chainwheel and pedal to fall off. The bike suddenly lay down under me and the handlebar end centre-punched my chest.

The better memories, however, are of glorious mornings in the countryside, watching dew-laden fields shimmer as the sun's angle changed. There were fields of crystalline red and blue that I will never forget. And they paid me to be there! There were also days that involved fighting force ten gales or deep snow. Job satisfaction sometimes comes in strange packages.

Now the red bicycles are a rare sight. It feels like the end of an era. ☹