

POOLE'S ROCKET MAN

With echoes of steampunk chic in its design, Jeremy Davies' new super-trikes are the hot wheels to be seen with this season. Jeremy Miles went along to meet the creative genius behind Boxer Cycles



Jeremy with one of his 'Rocket' trikes

WE'RE sitting in a Sandbanks cafe full of yummy mummies and Lycra-clad cycle freaks and I'm talking to 'The Rocket Man', aka Jeremy Davies, purveyor of a whole new breed of super-trikes.

It may be millionaires' row outside but the Ferraris, Porches and top of the range BMW's barely warrant a second look from passers-by. It's one of Jeremy's electric tricycles that is attracting admiring glances. People are practically queuing up to take pictures of it with their smart-phones.

The cafe, Rockets and Rascals, is also a bike shop. It is owned by Hugh Roper who is one of Jeremy's business associates and a former hopeful on the BBC series *Dragon's Den*. Hugh, who unsuccessfully sought backing for an illuminated bike helmet from the Dragons, is a serious cyclist, his customers are too, but they seem more than happy to be associated with Jeremy's slightly crazy three-wheelers.

Jeremy's Poole-based company Boxer Cycles is a gratifying success story: an example of how if you take a clever idea, add some nifty designs and sprinkle it with a teeny bit of English eccentricity you can come up with a real winner. His flagship tricycle - The Rocket - is certainly a head-turner. It looks like something out of a 1950s sci-fi annual and has a certain steampunk chic about it. "The Rocket's design was based on a mixture of ideas inspired by Jules Verne, Flash Gordon and a 1930s airliner," says Jeremy.

Its nose-cone (we're thinking outside the box here) is a near-lift from the Hindenberg airship. Yes, I know that didn't end happily, but the Boxer Rocket is something else. It is also essentially a practical machine, born as a solution to a very real problem.

Jeremy Davies explains: "I was simply looking for a way of getting my wife, two kids and dog to the beach without having the stress of horrendous traffic and needing to pay silly money for parking.

I thought about a bike with a trailer but it just seemed like an invitation for disaster - I didn't like the idea of my child's head being that close to a car bumper."

The dog - a Staffie-cross called Watson - presented a different problem. "It's not easy transporting a 28 kilo animal who, if he sees a cat or a skateboard, is likely to leap out and take you with him. Eventually I decided to make something myself, something big enough to get us all to the beach safely in one piece."

After some rather hit-and-miss 'Frankenrike' experiments, the result was the immediate ancestor of today's Rocket which, along with a tangible sense of character, is both light and strong, highly manoeuvrable and has its own battery-driven power system. It's easy on hills, cheap to run and comes complete with headlights, brake-lights, indicators and computerised handlebar controls. "It puts riders on an equal footing with other motorists," says Jeremy.

His initial prototype - customised from a cheap Chinese cargo-bike - proved an instant success. "On its maiden voyage from Whitecliff Park to the beach I pretty much took three orders en-route. People were saying 'Where did you get that from, I want one'. It was extraordinary how popular it was."

That was five years ago. In the meantime 42-year-old Jeremy has separated from his wife and now lives and works with the woman who became his chief design engineer. Working at her computer Elizabeth Plasencia tells me: "Jeremy is brilliant at coming up with incredible ideas and concepts. It's down to me to make sure they work. The only downside is that he sometimes wakes up at four in the morning dying to chat about the bikes!"



Jeremy assembling one of the trikes at his Poole factory



Above: Jeremy with his chief design engineer, Elizabeth Plasencia, and the Boxer Rocket





“The Rocket’s design was based on a mixture of ideas inspired by Jules Verne, Flash Gordon and 1930s airliners”

Between them they have perfected not just The Rocket but also their standard bike, The Shuttle, and a delivery bike which Jeremy describes as having “what is basically a big bread-bin with a roller-top on the front”. Though prices range from £5,000 plus down to £2,800 all three have proved astonishingly popular and, with orders pouring in, Boxer has just launched a crowdfunding scheme to try and raise enough money to order the components in bulk.

Much of Jeremy’s business ethos is based on green credentials forged several years ago when he was working towards establishing the world’s first eco-superstore in Melbourne, Australia. One of the main investors lost \$150 million in the Lehman Brothers crash and the project was pulled. Jeremy, who’d moved to Australia a dozen years earlier, headed back to the UK.

“We pretty much put a pin in the map when we chose Poole, we just wanted to go somewhere with a beach. I’m so glad we did. This part of Dorset is undoubtedly one of the best places in the world to live.”

Boxer cycles are assembled in a small factory unit to the north of the town with almost every component, apart from the motors and batteries, manufactured within a one mile radius. His green approach seems to appeal to a clientele

which is made up of an impressive cross-section of would-be customers - from young families to students, business people and a surprising number of pensioners. The main attraction is the bikes themselves which can be bought as-seen or customised for specific requirements. At his factory Jeremy points out a Shuttle in the throes of receiving a higher than usual backrest to accommodate the needs of a disabled child.

He is the first to admit that the idea of a tricycle with load-carrying ability on the front is hardly new, the idea of three-wheel child carriers only really took off in flat countries like Belgium, Holland and Denmark. With very recent developments in the price, power and reliability of lithium-ion battery packs and motors there is now a ready supply of buyers among those living in more hilly terrain. Boxer Cycles has targeted that gap in the market and it’s done it in unique style.

Looking lovingly at one of his creations, Jeremy gently polishes a slight scuff mark off the bodywork and tells me: “You can’t get a parking ticket, you don’t need a driver’s licence and you don’t have to have tax, an MOT or insurance. A lot of people are getting very interested.”

Indeed! What’s not to like? ♦

To learn more about Boxer Cycles and its current crowdfunding initiative go to boxercycles.com



Poole mum Amy Burke with her daughter Evie-Jean and friend enjoy a ride in a Rocket Boxer Cycle

PHOTOS BY HATTIE MILES