

STORES

John Ryan pedals by to take a look at Halfords' new Cycle Republic store in London

Cycle Republic g

Bike shop design is easy, isn't it? Get a few bikes – road and mountain – and arrange them in the middle of the shop. Make sure there's room to get past them to the accessories displayed around the perimeter walls – saddles, lights, inner tubes and suchlike – and finally, leave a space for helmets, jackets and sundry other items of clothing.

If possible, have an on-site workshop that looks suitably blokeish, not too fussy, and when it comes to taking the money, clad the counter in wood, chipboard, or MDF and put a few impulse buys on it just in case.

Two wheels better

That is the template for bike shops from low to high-end and to an extent, what differentiates them is the degree of knowledge that the staff have and the manner in which they treat those unfamiliar with the two-wheel fraternity's unspoken code.

In entry-level stores there's no shame in not knowing your cassette from your cables, but head upscale and things change – customers are expected to know more.

Indeed, there are better-end bike shops whose shoppers tend to be Mamils (middle-aged men in Lycra), where if you can't speak the language the reception may prove a little chilly.

Not so in Cycle Republic – the recently reborn bike shop brand that has been resurrected by parent Halfords.

Halfords created the Cycle Republic fascia in the last decade. It was aimed at the cycling enthusiast, rather than the first-timer, and there were two branches. But the idea was scrapped in 2009 and since then it has been allowed to sleep in peace as a footnote in the Halfords annals.

Making tracks

Now Cycle Republic is back, two stores are up and running with a third to open in Twickenham on Monday and there are more to follow.

The two extant branches are in central London, one that opened



CYCLE REPUBLIC, MARGARET STREET, LONDON

Opened January 30

Number of floors Two (ground floor foyer and basement)

Store design In-house
Target market Cycling enthusiasts

Ambience Garage industrial

Cycle Republic parent Halfords

in December at the base of the Euston Tower, and a larger outpost on Margaret Street in the West End that has been open for three weeks.

It is worth noting that while the new Margaret Street store is a few steps away from Regent Street and a healthy stone's throw from Oxford Circus, it is in a distinctly secondary location by West End standards.

Practically that means many shoppers probably would not find this store unless they happened to know about it, although bike shops do tend to be destinations.

Margaret Street is a cut-through for pedestrians heading into the area north and east of Oxford Circus, where there are many diverse businesses with a heavy emphasis on fashion and media. That means there is a healthy and affluent local demographic and it would be hard to pass this shop without stealing a glance.

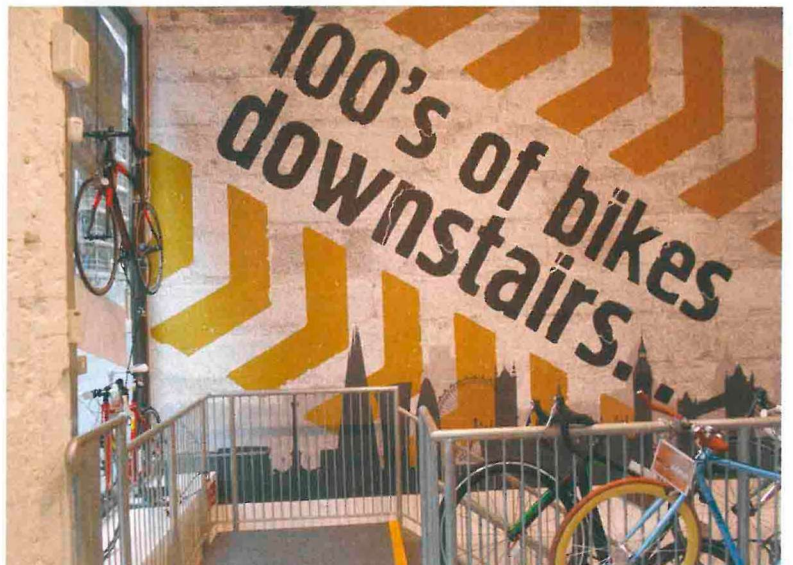
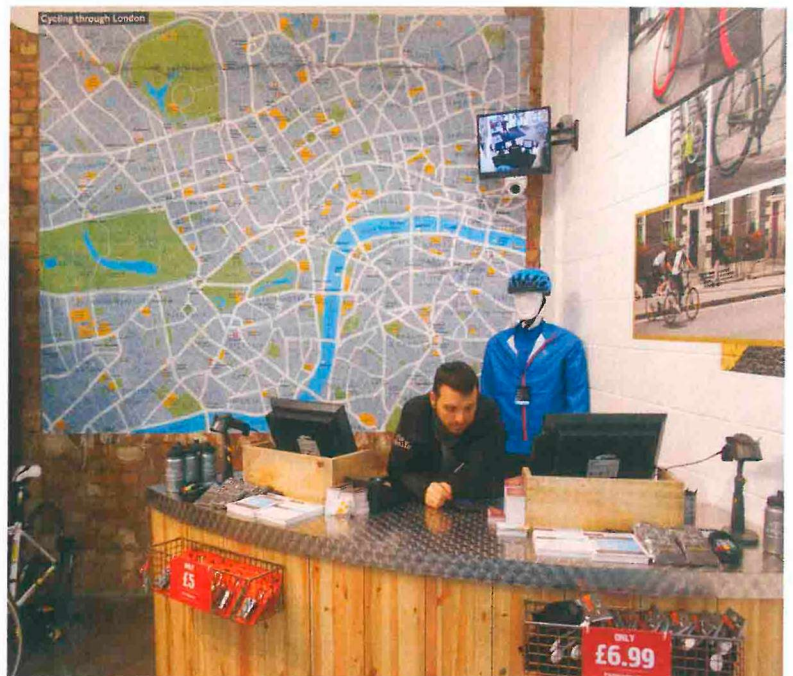
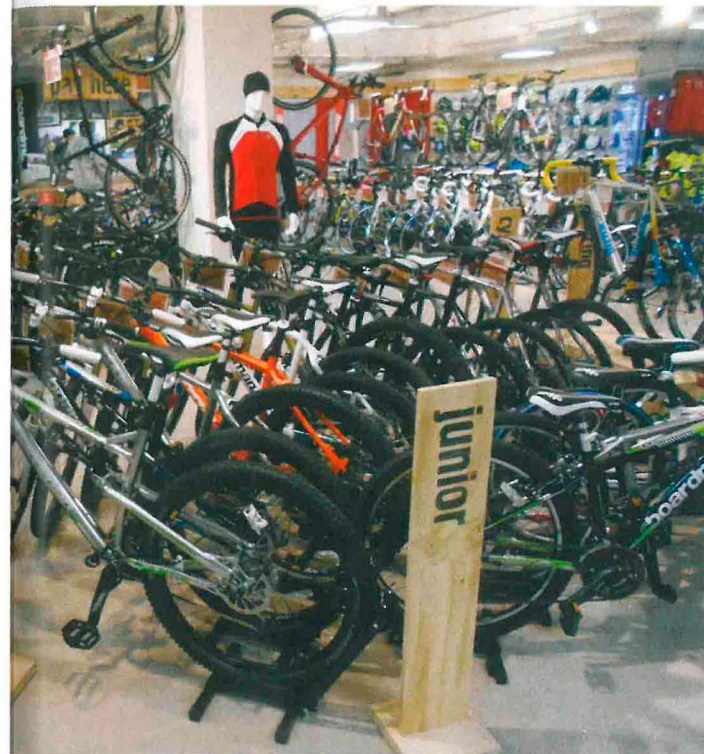
The store windows look like the windows of a bike shop should, except the bulk of the store is underground.

Housed for the most part in a basement, the street level area acts as a

For more pictures of Cycle Republic's
Margaret Street store visit
Retail-week.com/cyclerepublicstore



ets back in gear



As the sales floor is underground, there is no natural daylight and the ambience is garage-like

foyer-cum-decompression zone prior to the visitor heading downstairs.

This is almost exactly like the Evans Cycles flagship around the corner on Mortimer Street. Like that shop, the foyer has a desk against its rear wall, behind which a greeter sits ready to explain that the real offer is downstairs.

As in all bike shops these days, just inside the store entrance there is a pump where riders can inflate their

tyres. This is accompanied by the usual local map spread across the back wall. The wall itself has been stripped back to bare brick, providing the industrial feel that has become customary in emporia of this kind.

Head downstairs and the first thing that will be apparent is the massive number of bikes with a few walkways enabling progress to be made around the space.

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As the sales floor is underground, there is no natural daylight and when coupled with overhead air conditioning trunking and a plain concrete floor, the ambience is garage-like.

Closer inspection of the mid-shop offer reveals that there are many different bike areas with space set aside for road bikes (racers), women's bikes (sit-up-and-beg bikes with a wicker basket, for the most part) and e-bikes (electric bikes for those who can't really be bothered), among others.

All of the elements of the offer are demarcated by plain wood signposts with black writing that rise from the floor.

The range itself is very broad. A Boardman entry-price racing bike is £499. At the other end of the scale, the racy-looking Pinarello that has pride of place on one of the mid-shop displays is £6,200.

There is something for most wallets then, but in terms of experience, looking at the shiny two-wheeled machines is just the beginning.

For those interested in showing off their Tour de France credentials, there is a Boardman bike rigged up to a monitor so the rider can pedal furiously along a road that appears on a screen in front.

To the left there is a blackboard featuring the best times completed on the machine. This is a bit like the circuits completed by celebs on *Top Gear* and according to Peter Kimberley, Cycle Republic director, the device has engendered a keenly competitive atmosphere in the shop.

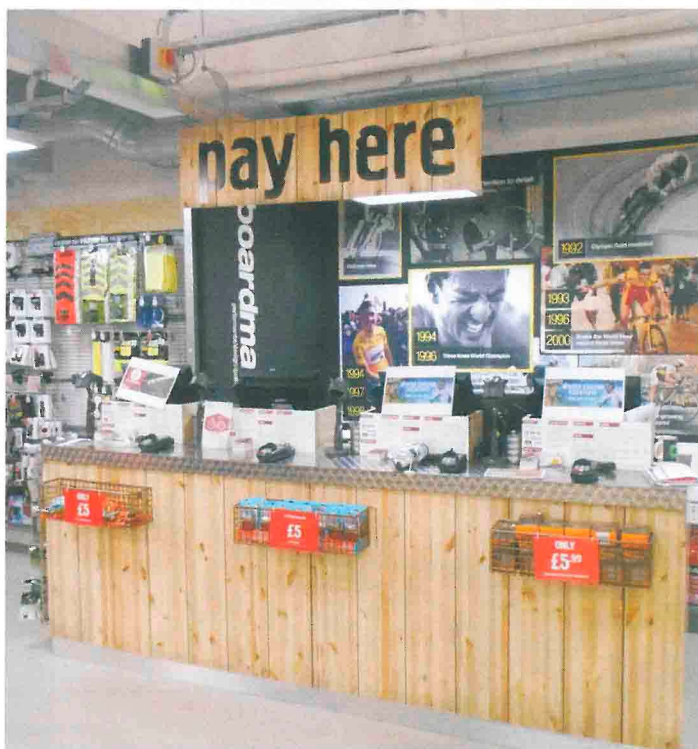
Around the rest of the perimeter there is everything from a wall module for helmets to another for saddles. A substantial space is set aside for a clothing shop-in-shop.

Down to nuts and bolts

And so to the Workshop. This is where cyclists can bring their bikes to be repaired, serviced or tuned.

There is nothing unusual in that, but Kimberley points to a grey bike that leans against one of the Workshop's walls. "We will have courtesy bikes like this in every shop so that customers can still ride while their bikes are being serviced or repaired," he says.

This is standard garage practice, but not in bike shops, and shows perhaps how Kimberley and his



"We will have courtesy bikes in every shop"

**Peter Kimberley,
Cycle Republic**

team have looked at what is done in parent Halfords and taken a cue.

He says that in the long term he hopes to offer puncture repairs as a free service. "These guys take a couple of minutes to mend a puncture, so we'd like to be able to do this for free," he says.

In cycle shop terms that would add value for shoppers and bring the price of getting a puncture repaired in this part of the West End from around £15 to less than £5 – the cost of an inner tube. And multi-buy inner tubes are on offer – five for £10 – putting the proposition head-to-head with retailers such as Decathlon.



Clearly Kimberley is pinning his hopes on a proposition where service will be to the fore. With that in mind, the staff, all of them cyclists, get free servicing for their bikes as part of being employed by Cycle Republic. "You want them to have a good bike to come to and from work on and you want them to be safe," says Kimberley.

After Twickenham, the next Cycle Republic store will open in Norwich. This is a retail format that has come a long way since it was last on the high street and in terms of competing with the several bike shops in the Margaret Street vicinity, it holds up well. 