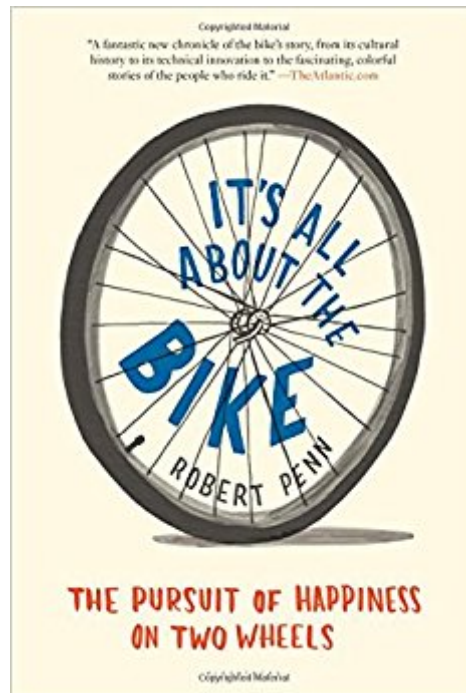




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# It's All About The Bike: The Pursuit Of Happiness On Two Wheels



## Synopsis

Robert Penn has saddled up nearly every day of his adult life. He rides to get to work, to bathe in air and sunshine, to travel, to go shopping, and to stay sane. He's no Sunday pedal pusher. So when the time came for a new bike, he decided to pull out all the stops and build his dream machine. It's All About the Bike follows Penn's journey, but this book is more than the story of his hunt for two-wheeled perfection. En route, Penn brilliantly explores the culture, science, and history of the bicycle. From the United Kingdom to California, via Portland, Milan, and points in between, his trek follows the serpentine path of our love affair with cycling. On the way to building the perfect bike, Robert Penn brilliantly explains why we ride.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Wales resident Penn, a contributor to Condé Nast Traveler and various bicycle publications, has traveled 25,000 miles on a bicycle, and his expertise is evident. Seeking "craftsmanship, not technology," he met with top bike mechanics in order to customize an ergonomically efficient dream machine: "I want a bike that shows my appreciation of the tradition, lore and beauty of bicycles." Coasting past the large manufacturers who service the cycling masses, he visited the U.K.'s few remaining artisan frame builders, where he analyzed the angles of frame geometry: "Along with the immaculate fit and the right tubing material, geometry is an intrinsic part of buying a bespoke bicycle." As he writes about handlebars, gears, wheels, and saddles, each component gets a chapter, and the reader feels Penn's enthusiasm at seeing his steed assembled. Along the way, he looks back at bike history, beginning with the 1817 Draisine, propelled by paddling one's feet along

the ground. Saddles were a concern to the conservative elements of Victorian society: "That bike riding might be sexually stimulating to women was a real worry." These pages are a delight, packed with facts, informative illustrations and two-wheeled tales, they map a path into the heart of cycling culture. (May) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“It’s All About the Bike puts [Penn’s] vast and endearingly shaggy bicycle boffinry on a brisk round-the-world tour. Penn’s energy never flags, and he knows when to change gears. The book is as a wheel-builder named Gravy described Penn’s just completed, perfectly tuned, 28-spoked rear wheel: “Well, my friend. It’s true.”

New York Times Book Review “A fantastic new chronicle of the bike’s story, from its cultural history to its technical innovation to the fascinating, colorful stories of the people who ride it. [Penn] approaches his subject with equal parts humor, humility, and authoritative intelligence as he sets out to find himself a new bike. Entertaining, illuminating and beautifully illustrated, It’s All About the Bike is a rare and precious portal to the heart and soul of bike culture and its surprising footprint--tireprint?--on all of culture.”

Atlantic “The social history is snappy and his almost religious quest for ultimate craftsmanship is full of wit.”

Financial Times “It’s All About the Bike is more than just a gearhead’s hejira, a globetrotter’s catalog of componentry for the cycling crowd. | With humor and insight, Penn examines the historical, social, and cultural significance of the bike.”

Philadelphia Inquirer “If you’ve ever felt the wind rolling over your back as you tuck into a downhill or cleaned a log with a bunny hop, give it a shot. It’s a quick read and even serious cyclists will learn something.”

Associated Press “The author’s ability to describe the joys of bicycling--the space for thought that the rhythm creates, the freedom of swooping down a hill, the satisfaction of having pedaled to the top--is one of the book’s strengths, along with anecdotes of his experiences cycling around the world years earlier. If you don’t long for your own bike at the end of this book, you will at least never look at one the same way again.”

Kirkus Reviews “[Penn’s] expertise is evident | These pages are a delight, packed with facts, informative illustrations and two-wheeled tales, they map a path into the heart of cycling culture.”

Publishers Weekly “Gem of a book”

Economist “The bike is the heart of our cycling lives, but it’s a starting point for all sorts of journeys, literal and metaphoric. So Penn’s title merits a tiny edit: it’s not actually all about the bike, it’s all about the stories behind the bike. But it’s all the better for it.”

William Fotheringham, Road.cc “Investigating the

bicycle's long history while he's at it, Penn makes building one's own bicycle seem like the most natural, obvious and enjoyable thing to do. — The National (UAE) — “Robert Penn relates his quixotic quest to procure the perfect bicycle with authority and humor, infusing his fluent narrative with thoughtful and provocative digressions that invoke technology, ergonomics, history, and social ideals. He richly deserves his \$5,000 dream machine.” — David V. Herlihy, author of *Bicycle: A History* and *The Lost Cyclist: The Epic Tale of an American Adventurer and His Mysterious Disappearance* — “Robert Penn has assembled a splendid patchwork quilt of bicycle history, arcane workshops, and fascinating people into a passionate journey in search of his dream machine. After reading him, you'll never look at a bicycle the same way again and will enjoy riding yours even more. And you'll probably start your own velocopedal quest for perfection into the bargain. A simply lovely excursion not into bicyclists, but into BICYCLES. You must read this before you watch the Tour de France! — Brian Fagan, Author of *Elixir* and *The Great Warming*, and an avid recreational cyclist with a Penn-like steel framed bike. — “The pages overflow with pioneers, mavericks and geniuses — certainly, it is hard to imagine anyone who reads this book being able to buy a bike off the peg' again. — Tim Lewis, Observer (UK) — “No matter how shiny and costly the item of bike bling, there is a back story, usually a good one. Artfully, Penn turns his quest for hardware ... into a worldwide spin around cycling and its culture. — William Fotheringham, Observer (UK) — “[Penn] writes with authority, humour and refreshing candour ... A celebration of craftsmanship over technology and of a bygone era when things were built to last ... If Penn is to be believed, we are entering a golden age of cycling, when it really will be all about the bike once more. — Sunday Telegraph (UK) — “[Penn] writes with a Bill-Brysonesque facility for concentrating a lot of information and research into an easy-to-read and surprisingly compelling tale. Best of all ... his account enriches your enjoyment of a ride. — Tim Dawson, Sunday Times (UK) — “I've just spent a week pedalling slowly — | with a copy of Penn's zealous eulogy in my pannier. His infectious admiration for the exhilarating sociability of cycling, coupled with reverence for quality craftsmanship, made highly engaging company ... appreciate the wit and enthusiasm of this unusual odyssey. — James Urquhart, Independent (UK) — “A hell of a fun ride tracing the symbiotic relationship of bike and rider, this will have you thinking about how and why you ride. — Library Journal (starred) — “Warning: do not even casually flick through this book if you have promised your significant other that you will not be cluttering up the garage/shed/landing/bedroom with any more bloody bike — | Penn uses his own personal mission as a peg on which to hang a fascinating

history of two-wheeled travel. —• —â øHelen Pidd, Guardian Bike Blog (UK)

This is the story of a man who decided to build his Dream Bike after many years getting experience as a bicyclist. Interwoven with the main plot (the man traveling around the world to get the parts and components for his dream bike, and in the process visiting the factories and meeting the owners and some true personalities of the bike world) are remembrances of his lifelong adventures on the bike, which are astounding; a lot of interesting history (especially captivating: how the today ubiquitous Mountain Bike came to exist), and some useful tips about bicycle fitting, selecting components, and other interesting and useful bits of information for bicyclists which, however, never become too technical. At the end, the author recommends a selection of bike related literature which would be interesting to follow up on. The book is well written, entertaining, informative and nice to read. Some critics might argue that it constitutes a hidden promotion of a bunch of high-end bicycle component manufacturers, but honestly: who cares? Nobody gets hurt, and hey, we all have to make a living of some sort! :-)

I bought this book based on a review in The Economist that made it look interesting. I'm not a bike nut, though I have one and ride it a couple times a week. This book, though, is not written for the bicycle fanatic, but for a layperson for whom bikes are, and have always been, part of the background of life. There's detail on the origins and development of the bike, along with enough -- just enough -- insights from the author's experience to make it not a sterile read. It's also interesting to meet the people involved in various aspects of the bicycle business, from mountain-bikers in Marin County to handlebar manufacturers (who knew there was so much technology in a handlebar?) in Italy. There's also enough here, in terms of content and accuracy, to make it of interest to people who ARE already knowledgeable about road bikes: two of my friends who are competitive road bicyclists have read it with enthusiasm. So, all in all, a pleasure to read, and over way too soon.

Mr. Penn brings to this book great breadth of experience in the saddle, having cycled to some of the most amazing places on the planet. He retains the sense of wonder anyone who has ridden a bicycle has when they first achieve the wonder of moving forward without support on this most amazing two-wheeled vehicle. The bicycle is truly the most wonderful and efficient human powered machine ever developed and we are still learning about the physics of its self-stabilizing qualities. The author takes us on an adventure, grounded in his pragmatic sense of what works and what

doesn't for the quotidian rider, as he pursues his dream bike, one that isn't off the shelf and that is based upon insight into the history, tradition and artisanal qualities of bicycle component production. He brings the reader along on an adventure any cyclist with a sense of wonder would enjoy, meeting the current generation of artisanal component producers. Before we meet these amazing people, we are treated to the history of the relevant component, from origins to evolution through both utilitarian and bicycle racing uses. He obtains the component of interest during a visit, frame from Brian Rourke at Stoke on Trent, headset from Chris King in Portland, OR, wheels from Gravy in Fairfax, CA, tires, steaming hot just after vulcanization from Hardy Bolts of Continental in Korbach, Germany, saddle from Brooks in Manchester..., you get the idea. Your sense of appreciation for each component of the bicycle will deepen after you read each of these engaging sections. You begin to see why the bicycle was initially greeted with the same fanfare and production facilities as the automobile later was. You also more deeply appreciate how remarkable and utilitarian this machine is. The health of the artisanal side of the industry is great news for the future of the bicycle. As interesting as each of these sections are, though, the best part of the book is the infectious sense of pleasure Mr. Penn can't seem to help but convey with each meeting and with his bicycling. This is remarkable given some of the hair-raising adventures he's been on with a bicycle. He makes you want to get out and get it going on your own bike and to hope that maybe, if you play your cards right, you will one day put together your own dream machine. Highly recommended. Easily the best bicycle book I've ever read. Ride on, Mr. Penn. Ride on.

Having worked in bike shops and then for a wheel manufacturer for a few years I have a little more insight into these machines than the average rider. I like to build my own bikes. None of them are stock and a couple of them were built from scratch, except for the frames. Anyone who rides bikes for a while is going to start doing some customization of some sort to make the bike perform better or make riding it more comfortable or prettier or whatever. The end game for this endeavour/hobby/obsession is to get a bike built from scratch, and this is the basis for Robert Penn's book. He sets out to build his ultimate road bike and describes his visits to the makers of major components. He picks the brains of these craftsmen and find out why their particular products are the objects of desire for so many enthusiasts and professionals. Cleverly interspersed with these visits is, literally, the history of the bicycle and also some tales of Penn's own round the world ride. Penn does a great job of telling this cycling history. He keeps it fun and relevant to his own pursuit of building his perfect ride. I own many books about bicycles and this is easily my favorite read of them all. I loved it. I cannot recommend a book on cycling any higher than "It's All About the

Bike". Thanks for a wonderful read, Robert. Cheers.

This is two books in one. The author is collecting components for his dream bicycle and takes you on the journey. As he progresses, he also provides the rider with a condensed history of bicycling from the early 1800's to present. This is a fast, very enjoyable read that I could see myself reading over and over.

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