

# My bike

## Fuzz Edwards' 1964 Ellis

Fuzz Edwards has definite views on modern maps, electric lights and hub gears. And don't call his bike an Ellis Briggs. **Les Woodland** reports

I met him at a café, puffing on a pipe and studying a map. The pipe was unusual enough – 'They're pretty much *infra dig* these days, aren't they?' – but the map was even odder. Because it was a cloth-backed Bartholomews and Barts haven't made them since... well, since long before motorways and bypasses.

Fuzz Edwards lives across the road from Fulham football ground in west London. He starts many of his rides with a train trip into the countryside, an inconvenience except that it has the benefit of getting him out in any direction he chooses. And he's got Barts maps for anywhere he wants to go, none of them earlier than 1947, none later than 1952.

'They're properly coloured,' he says approvingly. 'I like them. You can see where the hills are.' He spreads one out to show me, the backing cloth crackling as an expanse of eastern England spreads in pale browns and greens.

'But don't you find they're... well, out of date?'

'Not really. No map is ever out of date. They just get overlaid with all sorts of crap you don't need, like so-called tourist attractions. There's actually more on these maps than on modern ones because these were hand-drawn. Modern ones are drawn by machines and they have to be made simpler. My sister hates them and she gave me a set of modern maps but I don't use them. She thinks I'm a tooty-fruity but I just don't like them.'

'But...'

'Motorways? People always say motorways. And yes, sometimes I run up against one I didn't think would be there and I have to find another way round, but it's not a problem.'

There is, I think, a deliberate eccentricity in all this. I say so and he neither confirms nor denies it, saying simply that 'a proper eccentric doesn't realise it – to him it's normal.'

Fuzz – his real name is impossible to draw out – is 69 and he's been cycling since 1947. He rode 5,000 miles last year, a distance he apologised for as 'moderate'. His pale blue T-shirt identifies him as a member of the CTC's Central London section. A long time ago he was a lecturer at the London College of Printing.

The bike matches the man. It's an Ellis: not an Ellis-Briggs, as he's quick to point out but simply an Ellis.



The irrepressible, pipe smoking, retro map using, Ellis riding (of Fulham... not Ellis Briggs) Fuzz Edwards – ready for another grand day out

'He was a wonderful man between the wars, in Fulham,' he says. 'He built track bikes for Herne Hill. This was one of his last ones before he died in 1964.'

It has track ends but it's not a track bike. It's got them, he says, because of the demands of the combination of a Cyclo derailleur, adapted to take a 3/32-inch gear, and a Sturmey Archer AW three-speed.

'They're the strongest they made,' he says proudly. I feel like saying I didn't realise weakness was ever a problem with hub gears but think better of it. Only moments earlier I'd seen him admiring a similar hub that a stranger had pulled from a junk heap he'd happen to pass down the road. Fuzz was already noting where the heap was so he, too, could go rummaging in what was – to me – junk.

The derailleur-hub combination is wonderfully bizarre, the Cyclo shifting the chain from a moderate 17-tooth sprocket to a whopping 32. The derailleur works from a lever on the top tube, the hub from a conventional lever on the bars.

'It'll change on any gradient, even a one-in-four,' Fuzz says proudly and nothing will stop him jumping on to demonstrate it. We haven't got a gradient

### TECH SPEC

#### 1964 Ellis of Fulham

Frame: Ellis 1964

Wheels: 32-40 spokes, 27in steel rims, Campag solid barrel spindles

Gears: Cyclo derailleur/Sturmey Archer AW 3-speed

Chainset: Chater Lea with TA ring

Dynamo: Lucifer

Extras: Lucas Cylcometer, Lucifer dynamo headlight, Bartholomews maps 1947-1952

– not one worthy of a shift from 17 to 32, anyway – but a bumpy grass field is considered a worthy test. And sure enough the chain flips almost noiselessly.

I'm about to ask why he doesn't have a normal derailleur like everyone else, but the normal concept of an interview is impossible with Fuzz. He sort of takes your part as well.

'And look at this,' he says with an urgency that stumps any follow-up question. He points at the chainset. 'That's a TA ring on a Chater Lea chainset. Beautiful, the old Chater Leas.' Further up front is a huge Lucifer dynamo headlight – 'a wonderful light that, not as bright as some but a lovely widespread light.'

And down on the front hub, an old-style Lucas cyclometer with its little striker on the spokes tick-tocking as it turns the star wheel.

There's no point asking why he doesn't go in for electronics like everyone else these days. You'd be as well off asking the Pope why he never hob-nobs with super-models.

'I can get thousands of miles out of that,' he boasts. 'Not like those electric ones. I've never known anyone get more than a couple of thousand out of them. They get rain in them and that's that. They're finished. Can't repair them. This one, it just goes on for ever.'

The wheels it measures are spoked 32-40, 27-inch steel rims on solid Campagnolo spindles.

'They made them then, back in the sixties when they first came out, 32-40. Solid barrel. You can see that, can't you? Not like a quick-release barrel. Solid.'

Solid is the kind of word that Fuzz approves of. That and 'no longer made.' He smiles and takes another puff on his pipe. Mildly daft but entirely happy. ☺