

# The cyclist's tale

by  
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Once upon a time there lived a boy. Ever since he was little, he'd dreamed of becoming a cyclist and joining his local cycling club. Alas, he knew that he would never climb Moo Coop Mountain on the rusty old bike that was all his poor father had been able to afford. For seven years the boy saved his goat-keeping money until he had enough to send off for his dream bicycle. He hoped it would arrive in time for the famous Macclesfield Wheelers' Christmas Ride.

The great day came on Christmas Eve. But what was this? The delivery person had surely made a mistake: this box wasn't big enough for a bicycle! His trembling hands pulled the cardboard aside to find a frame, some wheels and all sorts of strange packages. Dismayed, the boy realised why his new bicycle had been such good value. He hadn't unticked the 'self-build' option on the order.

He dragged the box into the garage and put the tubes and tyres onto the wheels; that at least was something he could do. But the rest wasn't so easy and he didn't even recognise some of the bits. Indeed, he hardly knew his derailleur from his downtube. Dismayed, the boy put his face in his hands and sat on the floor. Presently he was fast asleep, his weary head barely cushioned on a meagre pile of old Cycling Weekly magazines.

Much later, the boy woke suddenly. It was dark and he had heard a sound! Shrinking back into the shadows, he held his breath as his eyes got used to the gloom. There in the moonlight two men were working on his bicycle!

Try as he might, the boy just could not catch a glimpse of the men's faces. Both wore close fitting black caps and orange jerkins with some indecipherable writing. Not once did they turn from their task, pausing only to consult in low voices or pass an allen key to the other. On and on the strangers worked as the boy's eyes grew heavy...

The boy woke to a sunny Christmas morning, and what an unusual dream he'd had! A lovely golden light was shining through the window and all was quiet. The boy crept from his hiding place, his heart filling with wonder as his eyes beheld his new bicycle, a pile of components only yesterday, now built and ready for him. And, although he was sure he hadn't ordered them, there was even a flap at the end of each mudguard.

The boy became a cyclist and did indeed join his local club, enjoying many merry miles of races and rides, tours and time trials. Even Moo Coop Mountain turned out not quite so fearsome after all. He lived a long, long life and grew into a very old man, his once thick hair all gone. Each Christmas, as he sat by

the fire, wrapping his pedals carefully in tissue paper, he thought back across the years to that special Christmas long ago. Just who had they been, those mysterious strangers? Again he unfolded the only clue they'd left: a single piece of paper, yellowed now and very creased. Once more he puzzled at its solitary inscription:

Hap Pychr Istm Asfr Omt Hew Hee Lers