Nowhere else could the words "it'll have become, in most cases, spawan­monger or a village blacksmith. His much of an anachronism as a coster­more threatening.

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limited to the occasional black-and­handy". Shop decor tended to be

and bolts stripped from ancient machines but never discarded because they "just might come in handy". Shop decor tended to be limited to the occasional black-and-white postcard of the local sprint champion from the 1920s.

To the mechanically incompetent teenager, such places and their proprietors (who were always called either Reg, Stan or Alf) inspired not so much affection as naked terror. Being able to sense immediately whether or not you knew your bot­tom bracket from your derailleur mechanism, they would dismiss you with just a faint sneer of contempt. Nowhere else could the words "it'll be ready next Wednesday" sound more threatening.

These days, grumpy Reg seems as much of an anachronism as a coster­monger or a village blacksmith. His cramped and gloomy surroundings have become, in most cases, spa­
cious, gleaming showrooms, resem­bling design studios more than workshops. Cycling has become a marketing person's dream - technol­ogy and fashion combined in a product which is both healthy and environmentally friendly.

As you'd expect in Sydney, Pad­dington leads the way at the trendy end of the market. I felt more than a bit self-conscious about wheeling my rusty old racer across the immaculately-polished wooden floor of Woolys Wheels (82 Oxford St, Pad­dington, phone 331 2671). Woolys caters not just for those who want a good bike, but also those who want to be seen to have a good (or at least an expensive) bike. In fact, many of their customers settle simply for being seen and don't bother about the bike at all - more than 20% of Woolys' sales are in clothing and re­lated accessories, with bike gear ap­parently still popular on the Sydney dance club scene.

Customising is a speciality and in Paddington they know how to pay for it. You can buy a frame at Woolys (not a whole bike, mind you, just the frame) for $3,000, if you're so in­clined. Their most expensive com­plete custom job wound up at $7,000. Not the sort of machine you'd want to leave tethered outside the pub on a Saturday night. If you're the sort of person who thinks that a computer, to measure heart and pulse rate, etc, is a useful bike accessory (you can buy them for $50-80), then Woolys is for you. However, be prepared to pay a good bit more than elsewhere for parts and clothing and don't ex­pect to pick up anything second­hand.

For competent repairs, good ad­vice and a rather less intimidating atmosphere, I prefer Calypso Cycles (404 King St, Newtown, phone 517 1655). They stock all the flash gear and cater for the triathlon masochists and yuppie customisers too, but not to the exclusion of more mundane jobs for the less committed. The staff are particularly helpful and not patronising. Recommended.

The friendly approach is also much in evidence at Inner City Cycles (31 Glebe Point Road, Glebe, phone 660 6605). Run as a co-opera­tive, Inner City specialises in moun­tain and touring bikes, but is also one of the few shops in Sydney to provide a hire service. What's more, they offer maintenance classes ($90 for six two-hour sessions) and sell not only second-hand bikes, but even second-hand parts. I was gratified to find that they keep these in a welcoming jumble of old wooden boxes, albeit downstairs and out of sight! This is a goldmine for the cheapskate cyclist who doesn't care too much if she or he doesn't have matching designer trademarks on every component. For personal service and a great attitude, Inner City is unbeatable.

Finally, right at the opposite end of the scale to Woolys is Gilbert's Cyclery (16 O'Brien St, Bondi, phone 30 5216). To walk into Gilbert's is to step back into an age before skin­tight lycra shorts, aerodynamic hel­mets, fluorescent jerseys and orange-tinted sunglasses. The shop is barely wide enough to walk through, crammed as it is with new bikes, old bikes and, most of all, bits of bikes, which litter the floor and the counter; and compete for space on shelves already stuffed full with unidentifiable clothing, miscon­scious, gleaming showrooms, resem­bling design studios more than workshops. Cycling has become a marketing person's dream - technol­ogy and fashion combined in a product which is both healthy and environmentally friendly.

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