

BACKPEDALLER



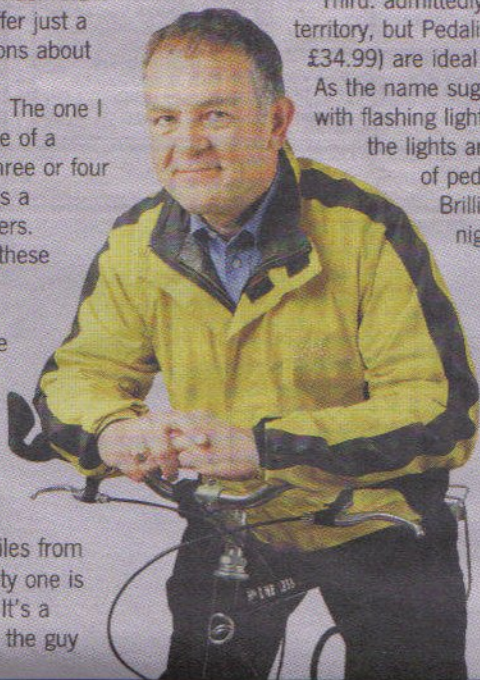
Even now, a decade later, I can remember the sense of shock. It was December and I was in a department store. It was ablaze with Christmas lights and packed with shoppers looking slightly manic. There, hanging over one area of the shop, was a sign. It read: "Stocking fillers — gifts for less than £50."

I hope I'm not tight-fisted. But I do find the idea of the 50 quid stocking filler slightly offensive. It crosses the border between the indulgent and the decadent. If you want a stocking filler, then consider a paperback book, some Brazil nuts or a novelty pencil sharpener. It shouldn't cost £50.

And what has this got to do with cycling? A bicycle won't go down the chimney and it won't fit in a stocking. It's a nightmare to wrap. And in any case, the person who's going to ride the thing should be the one who chooses it: a bike given as a surprise is likely to be the wrong bike.

All true enough. But you may decide that the cyclist in your life — spouse, lover, "significant other" or whatever phrase we're meant to use these days — deserves a stocking this Christmas. And if that's the case, I offer just a handful of suggestions about things to fill it.

First: a multitool. The one I like is about the size of a penknife and has three or four hex (Allen) keys plus a couple of screwdrivers. Armed with one of these and an adjustable spanner, there are few things on a bike you can't fix. Cheap multitools bend and fall apart — usually on a dark night when it's raining and you're three miles from home. A good quality one is less than a tenner. It's a reasonable bet that the guy



in your local bike shop has a Park Tools multitool in his pocket: they're durable and comfortable to use.

Second: Richard Ballantine's latest book, *City Cycling* (Snowbooks, £9.99). Millions of people — myself included — were inspired to take up cycling in the 1970s after reading his *Richard's Bicycle Book* (which included instructions on how use a bike pump to kill an attacking dog. Just believe me). *City Cycling* is a worthy follow-up.

Third: admittedly beyond stocking-filler territory, but Pedalites (www.pedalite.com, £34.99) are ideal for a cycling commuter. As the name suggests, they are pedals with flashing lights. The clever bit is that the lights are powered by the action of pedalling, hence no batteries. Brilliant (ho, ho) for dark nights.

Fourth: a shower cap, free from any hotel. (Use the little bottle of shampoo, ignore the sewing kit, take the shower cap.) Just the job for keeping rain off the saddle when you park your bike outside. All are more use than a novelty pencil sharpener.

Ben Laurance