

Alex Singer

Bicyclettes artisanales et sur mesure à Paris.



ISBN 978-4-86410-055-7.
Asuka Shinsha,
Tokyo, 2010.
Hardcover,
168 p. Printed
in Japan. \$ 80.
www.bikequarterly.com

From 1938 until today, Cycles Alex Singer has

made some of the most wonderful bicycles ever made. Alex Singers have been appreciated especially by Japanese cyclists. This new hardcover book celebrates Cycles Alex Singer, seen through a Japanese lens.

On 168 pages, this beautifully produced, large-format book shows studio photographs of 44 Alex Singer bicycles owned by Japanese collectors. A highlight is the machine that won the 1946 *Concours Duraluminum* technical trials. Weighing only 6.875 kg (15.16 lb) fully equipped with fenders, rack, lights and even a pump (but without tires),¹ this probably was the lightest “real-world” bike ever built. Detail photos show how every part was modified to save weight. Even the pedal bodies were cut away, exposing the spindle and bearings.

Renovating this bike was Ernest Csuka’s last project before he died in late 2009. This book is an homage to this builder, who was the soul of Cycles Alex Singer for half a century. Interspersed between the studio photos are historic photos of Alex Singer bicycles in action. The book is rounded off by wonderfully evocative views of Ernest Csuka in his shop and on his rides.

Most of the featured bikes look like historic machines from the 1940s through the 1970s, but details of their

frame design, and of course, their serial numbers, give them away as bikes built during the last three decades for Japanese customers. The variety of components is amazing, from ultra-rare parts like Nivex front derailleurs to the more common, but no less elegant Huret Jubilee derailleurs that were Ernest Csuka’s favorites. All are beautifully photographed with many detailed photos of chain rests, light mounts, lugs and other “specialties.”

While I appreciate these collector pieces, I also remember Ernest Csuka grousing about the very worn components supplied by his Japanese customers. Sometimes, he had to work hard just to make them function at all. “The customers won’t ride these bikes much,” he opined, and the immaculate condition of the bikes in this book indicates that he may have been right.

I would have liked to see more classic Alex Singers from the 1940s and 1950s, when these bikes represented the state of the art of bicycle technology of their time and were intended to be ridden hard. Ernest Csuka was a strong rider himself, and one of the most touching photos in the book show him with his son and grandchildren atop the Col de la Madeleine in recent years. Reprints of Alex Singer catalogues with their artful Daniel Rebour drawings complete this book.

The text is in Japanese, but a (sometimes rough) English translation of a few chapters is included with the book. The texts don’t offer much new, certainly not an in-depth history of Cycles Alex Singer, and they contain a few errors. Even so, I enjoyed Olivier Csuka’s reminiscences of visiting suppliers in the Paris region with his mother.

The photos alone will delight Alex Singer aficionados and those who appreciate beautiful bikes.

Disclosure: One of the authors, Ikuro Tsuchiya, is a friend of the editor. Bicycle Quarterly Press sells *Alex Singer: Bicyclettes artisanales et sur mesure à Paris*.

Notes:

1 In 1946, lightweight bicycle tires were available only on the black market, so the bikes were weighed without tires and tubes to level the playing field. For comparison, the lightest randonneur bike *Bicycle Quarterly* has tested, with carbon fiber frame, fork and fenders and a titanium rack, weighed 8.825 kg (19.46 lb) without tires, or 1.95 kg (4.3 lb) more than the 1946 Alex Singer.

