

Classic Cycles Built in Queens

A Look Inside-Worksmen's Ozone Park Factory



By Robert Cummings

They're everywhere - the fat-the bicycles used for moving everything from soup to sushi in NYC - but few people realize that these utility cycles are manufactured here in New York.

Near the eastern terminus of the A line in Queens, on a quiet dead-end street, is the Worksmen Trading Corporation. The company was founded by Morris Worksmen, a retailer, tinker and inventor, nearly 100 years ago, explained part-owner Wayne Sosin. In 1914 Worksmen was granted a patent for a rear-loading utility tricycle of his own design,

The trike became a popular means to transport goods in the city. Merchants found that it was fast, efficient and didn't require the care and feeding that a cart horse did. Morris Worksmen started manufacturing the cycle in the back of his shop, on the site of what is now the World Trade Center. By 1934, the company had moved to Brooklyn and expanded into other forms of utility cycles. Morris's son, Irving, continued to build the business.

Worksmen cycles moved to the factory floor in the early 1940s. as they proved to be a simple and cost-effective way to move workers within vast manufacturing plants. The bikes are used in large refineries that prohibit internal combustion engines for safety reasons. Clients like GM, Boeing, Exxon and Texaco account for the largest part of Worksmen's sales.

Worksmen also manufactures specialized adult recreational cycles, such, as large tricycles used by hotels or the tandem bikes for rent in Central Park, along with vending carts, folding bicycles and, of course, the ubiquitous delivery bike.

"If you've ever had anything delivered in this city, it's been delivered on a Worksmen," Sosin noted.

The Manufacturing Process

With the help of a city Industrial Development Bond, Wayne Sosin and his partner Jeff Mishkht moved the com-

SHOWN AT LEFT: Rack and Container Bicycle System designed and built by George Bliss for a NYC caterer. The piggyback containers detach, stack and roll into an elevator, and can carry 30 box-lunches. The bike can store upended,

party to Queens in 1979. In a three-story building that occupies roughly one city block, a crew of 45 workers assembles utility bicycles, for use in NYC and all over the U.S.

Worksmen buys cut steel tubing from a local manufacturer. The framing tubes are cut, bent, drilled and swedged (swedging produces a tapered tube) to shape on hydraulic machines.

The bicycle frames begin taking shape in the third-story welding area as the tubes are fitted together by a crew of ten. The welders work over freestanding arm clamps, assembling the cycle frames with lugs -- short, heavier bits of steel tube that sleeve over the framing tubes at the frame's juncture points. The welders use acetylene torches to sweat brass into the space between the tubes and the lugs, thus clinching the joints.

Once the frames are assembled and all the brackets attached, they go to the painters. The paint is sprayed on and baked hard in an oven. Factory bike frames are painted safety orange. Others are sky, yellow or New-York-black.

Surrounded by boxes piled high with rims and wheels, a crew of four assemble the wheels. One worker laces the wheel, while her supervisor laces and tightens the spokes. Two men hand-true the wheels on a machine that measures the tension exerted on the rim by its spokes.

Each department has a working supervisor. "There's nobody standing around with clipboards," Sosin said.

"We make almost everything we sell Sosin said proudly. most of the components bought outside the company are made to Worksmen specifications. Large bike baskets for instance, are manufactured in house. Smaller cargo baskets are purchased from an outside supplier.

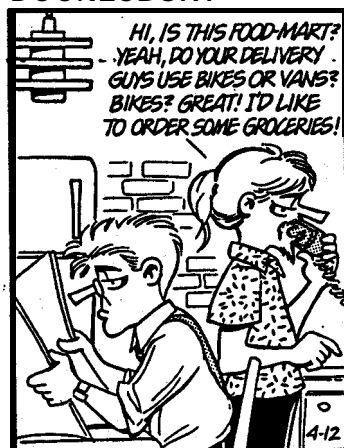
Meanwhile frames are moving toward completion. In a whirl of hydraulic wrenches, pinging hammers and radios, cups are pressed into the flames at the bottom brackets and steering tubes. Decals are put on the frames. Any special gearing, custom brake configurations, handlebar styles or options are also attached here, in the assembly area.

At a station near the windows, a young worker keeps a running tally of the bikes he has assembled. He hammers the serial numbers of each bike into the steel of its frame.

The models begin to take shape: The Industrial Newsboy, the Standard Delivery Tricycle, the Utility Tricycle and perhaps Worksmen's best-known model, the Low Gravity Bike (also known as the pizza-delivery bike). The front wheel turns independent of the pizza box - a good thing

(continued on text page; see Worksmen Factory)

DOONESBURY



SAVE THE BIKES

Demonstrate for the Right of People to Use Cargo-Bikes for their Livelihood

Protest Indonesia's confiscation of tens of thousands of cargo bikes to make room for automobiles in Djakarta. Join Transportation Alternatives' demonstration at the Indonesian consulate. Thurs. June 14. 1 pm. 5 E 68 St. For more info, call TA.

Economy, Ecology & Energy

Airborne Express knows the fastest way to guarantee next-day delivery to its MatUtan customers: by bicycle -- or tricycles, to be precise. For the past several years, Airborne t&a have been providing overnight service throughout midtown and downtown.

Overnight packages flown in from around the world are tucked to Airborne's NYC distribution centers early each morning. These centers are designed to enable delivery cycles to be parked at loading stations positioned along a conveyor belt. parcels are sorted and loaded into the lockable boxes on the trikes and pedaled to their destinations.

Airborne's trikes are manufactured at the Worksman Trading Coqomtion factory in Ozone Park They get a lot of hard use around town - so much so that Airborne has removed its logo from the lock-boxes. "We don't need the bad image our dented bikes give," said an Airborne staffer.

The firm, the nation's third largest overnight package service, has reportedly ordered new custom-designed cycles with a cargo box made of a special resin These will be weather-proof and dent-resistant, and will proudly bear the Airborne name.



PHOTO: BILL WALTZER

SHOWN ABOVE: Airborne' Express's Lower Manhattan Distrlbu-tion Facility provides fast, pollution-free freight delhrrery. Tri-cles park at loading stations, parcels are sorted from conveyer belts and loaded In SHOWN AT RIGHT: Trikes head out the door, right to the customer. No hike to the parking lot, no waiting for the engine to warm up. The Worksman tricycles are sturdy and effclent. Glamorous? No. Economical? Yes.

Worksman Factory (continued from previous page)

because the bike weighs 85 pounds, minus the five large pies that the insulated pizza cabinet can hold.

The cycles are inspected one last time and packed for shipping. Worksman ships most bikes in two or three large parts. All the small components are pre-assembled. "Most companies that make three-wheelers sell their bikes like erector sets," Sosin observed. "They're impossible for the consumer to put together. We take care of that before the bike goes out."

Back in his corner office, Sosin spoke about the company. The Worksman Trading Corporation has always followed a pattern of slow but steady growth. From a manager's standpoint Sosin said, it's difficult to run a small plant. The problems are many and challenging, but, he added, the benefits far outweigh the liabilities.

For the moment WTC will stay small. "If expansion comes," he said "it will be market driven." Sosin paused, leaned back and smiled. "Small is beautiful," he said,




PHOTO: ROB CUMMINGS

VEHICLE FOR A SMALL PLANET.. .

is the inspiring new report published by the renowned Worldwatch. Institute. Author Marcia Lowe, herself a Washington, DC bicycle commuter (and keynote speaker at Transportation Alternatives' Bast Coast Bicycle Conference last fall), reviews progress in bicycle transportation all over the earth. Cops on bikes in Seattle. Milk deliveries by bicycle in Kenya. Beijing bicyclists. NYC cyclists' victory over the midtown ban. 'The worklwide movement for afford-able, ecological pedal power. How to get people out of cars and onto bikes. It's all in this readable and memorable 62-page book To get your copy, send \$2.50 to T-on Alternatives, 494 Broadway, NYC 10012 Or come by the T.A. office and pick up a copy for \$1.50.

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