



Love the Life!

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Myrtleford Cycle Centre

WORDS JACQUI DURRANT

It would be difficult to meet two people more committed to cycling than the owners of the Myrtleford Cycle Centre, Steve Conner and Claire Stock. Steve describes himself as a 'utilitarian cyclist' who has never driven to work and, until recently, swore he would never own an internal combustion engine. (The couple had to compromise after the birth of their daughter in 2007, buying a car for bushfire evacuation only.) Claire's background is in transport engineering, specialising in active (non-engine propelled) modes of transport.

They met in Steve's hometown, Edmonton, Canada. At the time, Claire was delivering the bicycle traffic reports on community radio. One day she ran a competition with a bike bell as the prize and Steve entered, hoping to meet her. 'I won the bike bell and, eventually, a beautiful wife and daughter.' After the couple moved to Australia, they visited Claire's parents in North East Victoria. On that trip they met one of the region's bicycle tourism officers who mentioned that there was a bicycle store for sale in Myrtleford.

'We were going to set up shop in Melbourne, but we looked at the figures, and Myrtleford looked good,' says Steve. 'We have a really interesting client base; we've sold something to every kind of biker. The largest number are mountain bikes, but equal to this are hybrid bicycles bought by people of retirement age who want to keep fit by riding the Alpine Rail Trail. I spend as much of my time talking with customers about their children as I do bikes, which makes me very happy.'

The couple also has a lot of business coming from the trail, which stretches from Wangaratta to Bright. 'We sell a lot of soft saddles,' chuckles Steve. Tourists also come to hire cycles and plenty of owners travel from Albury and elsewhere for bicycle repairs and maintenance. Steve had always done his own repairs, but building and repairing cycles for a community programme in Edmonton was what finally spurred him on to train as a professional bicycle mechanic at the Barnett Bicycle Institute in Colorado Springs.

What type of cycle does he own? That depends on the task: he and Claire have mountain bikes, road bikes, and a trailer to tow their daughter, Emlyn. 'And then there's my extra-long "Franken-bike" (which has a flat-bed on the back); used to carry everything, including bikes for the shop and building materials.'

'One day, when we were moving house, I even carried a table balanced on the back of my bike. At the intersection of the Great Alpine and Happy Valley roads, a man pulled over to ask for directions to Falls Creek. I told him the different routes, and he said 'Thanks mate,' and drove on. This is what I love about Australians: there was no way he couldn't have noticed the table, but he didn't say a thing!'

The couple live a few kilometres out of Myrtleford. As mad-keen cyclists they chose, of course, to live on the Alpine Rail Trail.

Emlyn is towed to kindergarten each day in the bike trailer, but Steve and Claire already look forward to the day she can ride to school. 'We like to emphasise that we are a family business,' says Claire, lending weight to the couple's dedication to cycling as an activity suitable for all ages. Given their enthusiasm, it should take only one visit to the Myrtleford Cycle Centre to make you want to 'get on yer bike' and cycle off.

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