

Bike-fitting in Italian

Forget 3D motion capture and digital manipulation, Giuseppe Giannecchini's bike-fits are works of art

Simon Smythe

“You can follow a recipe as accurately as you like, but if a chef comes in and cooks the same meal you'll think, why didn't mine taste like that?”

Only Italians would draw a parallel between bike-fitting and food. Peter Cole of Artisan Cycles is half Italian but when he describes the work of Giuseppe Giannecchini it's fully in the language of *la cucina italiana*. “The chef knows that the tomatoes are slightly bitter so he adds a little sugar,” he continues. “Giuseppe has a holistic approach to bike-fitting: he understands how everything is linked to something else.”

While the rest of the UK tries to work out whether it's time to put some distance between itself and the rest of Europe, Cole and his business partner Diego Lombardi have imported Italian cycling culture directly to a small village just outside Bishop's Stortford in Hertfordshire in a unique way. All the products at Artisan Cycles' shop-cum-fitting studio in a converted barn at Much Hadham are made in Italy, and that includes Giannecchini himself, who is flown in from Padua for one day of pre-booked fittings each month. To persevere with the Italian food analogy, this is like being able to throw away your Domino's menu and getting your pizza delivered directly from Naples.

As every fan knows, Italian bikes are art, not science. The same goes for Italian bike-fitting. There's no 3D motion capture, no lasers, no software to digitally map rider and bike. Giannecchini uses an experienced eye backed up by self-devised mathematical formulae. He and his disciples maintain there's no substitute for a thorough understanding of biomechanics. A bike-fitter should be able to just look and see what's right and what's wrong.

Built around the rider

Giannecchini studied architecture at university then, in true Italian tradition, learnt from a master. In his case that was legendary frame-builder Irio Tommasini. Rather than building a frame from measurements written on a piece of paper, as was standard 'contractor' practice, Tommasini would take a pro rider into his workshop and start from scratch with him. Giannecchini took

and developed Tommasini's method over the following 15 years and now counts professionals such as Francesco Chicchi, whose picture and jerseys hang on the wall of the Much Hadham studio, among his satisfied customers. Most recently he fitted Italian national junior cyclo-cross champion Francesca Baroni. Although Artisan Cycles has only existed since 2014, Cole's relationship with Giannecchini goes back 10 years.

“I was working with [Italian frame company] Viner in 2005,” remembers Cole. “They said, ‘When we go to the London show why don't we bring a biomechanic with us?’ The year before we had been doing it ourselves, me and Rodolfo from the factory, taking measurements. So we had a turbo-trainer and a jig that Viner made and that's when I first met Giuseppe. It was at Earls Court and some people had ridden there. They said, ‘As I've got my bike here, can I bring it?’ So they brought their bikes to the stand, put them on the turbo-trainer. Giuseppe looked at them and said, ‘You can't ride like this!’ So immediately we thought, hold on a minute...”

Made to measure

“Without naming names we had made frames for other companies in the UK that were bike-fitting centres who wanted made-to-measure frames. They would send me the information and I'd say, ‘Well, what's the head tube height?’ They'd say, ‘Well, we don't know — do what you think's best.’ I was thinking these guys were supposed to be the experts...”

Lombardi adds: “There was no one in the UK market who knew what they were doing, even with the newest computerised systems. There's the tool, but no one to operate it properly. They didn't have the expertise or knowledge.”

Cole continues: “So to start with we used to bring Giuseppe over for one day a month and we were working out of a gym in Fulham. We [Viner] were just selling through dealers and not to the public, so didn't have premises. We had two or three people coming to be fitted and they would tell 10 more people. We never advertised Giuseppe and it's still mostly word of mouth.

“Then we had a new Viner dealer in Shoreditch and we had a bit more space there, but the shop owner's priority was to sell bikes. Giuseppe said, ‘I

don't do that — it's either correct or not correct.' From there he went to a gym in Shoreditch. This is where I met Diego. He started sending customers to Giuseppe for his Racer Rosa [made to measure in Italy] brand and eventually we sat down one day and decided to create our own centre. The idea was to link in Giuseppe's service and to have a factory direct — all the products you see here come direct from the factory where they're made."

As Cole tells the story, Giannecchini measures and manipulates his third customer of the day, Great Britain duathlete Simon Jones, who is aiming to improve his cycling split in the World Championships in Spain later in the year and who has been sent to Giannecchini by his coach. Jones's own bike is in Giannecchini's turbo-trainer, while the Italian makes adjustments and sprints back to his desk to log it or grab another measuring instrument. There's a constant stream of Italian, a running commentary, translated by Lombardi. As if to make the Italian bike-fitting experience that much more authentic, Giannecchini does not speak English.

New and improved position

In each trip to the UK Giannecchini aims to fit eight riders. He can fit most people in under an hour — considerably less than the two or three hours required by what Artisan Cycles describes as "those who call themselves fitters after a three-week crash course". Afterwards customers can order a made-to-measure bike — made in Italy of course — through Artisan in aluminium, steel or carbon, or they can simply make the most of a new, improved position on

How does Giannecchini measure?

Before a bike-fit Giuseppe Giannecchini takes these measurements (in order): height, in-seam, sternal notch (the bit between your collarbones), arms length, shoulder width, shoe size and bodyweight. He then uses a goniometer (angle-measurement device), spirit levels and tape measure to fit a rider. His jig, which was handbuilt by an Italian ex-pro rider, is the only computerised part of the process: it moves hydraulically and is controlled by Giannecchini's laptop.

How to book a bike-fit with Giannecchini

Artisan Cycles (artisancycles.co.uk) keep Giuseppe Giannecchini's diary and will book customers in for the next available Saturday. Giannecchini has also started doing fitting sessions at a centre in Glasgow run by coach Iain Grant. Artisan Cycles can put you in touch. The cost of a fitting session is £199. He is currently trying to establish courses for bike-fitters.

their existing bike. Jones ends up buying some clip-on tri-bars with a lower stack height than his original pair that allow him to pedal in the same position as in the drops.

Cole points out that even though Artisan Cycles offers made-to-measure bikes by Epoca and Racer Rosa, Giannecchini is still completely independent: "He doesn't have a commercial ulterior motive. He isn't aligned to a brand. In addition to that he has a philosophy: I'm here as an independent professional, like a doctor, and I'll advise you to the best of your health."

As Jones's time with Giannecchini comes to an end, he is visibly pedalling more powerfully and is clearly both relieved and exhilarated to have had the Italian maestro fit him. "To be honest, at my age [57] you don't need to be Mo Farah or Chris Froome to get in the [GB] team," Jones says with considerable modesty.

"I went to Adelaide [Duathlon World Championships] last year and came fifth in my age group, and second GB guy, and that qualified me for this year's World Championships in Spain. But I just felt as though my body was being put in an unnatural position with the aerobars and I would go on the drops. Then it would take another two minutes to recover from the bad position." He thanks Giannecchini and shakes his hand.

Lombardi, his interpreting session over, has the last word: "Even when we were in East London we got a lot of customers who had become disillusioned by other London bike shops where the service was not face to face any more, there was no possibility of made to measure any more. That was one push for us to do what we're doing. Even if we get bigger and replicate this business somewhere else, we want to keep it as it is." ■

