



Tack holds in his mighty hand what appears to be spent bicycle inner tubes, but, as you can see, it's not the end of the road for these cycling byproducts.

## OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW

BY JOSH TACK

→ SO FAR, this column has been focused on new and emerging bicycle technology and industry trends, but since this issue is about older bicycles, let's mix it up a bit and talk about a corner of the industry that is helping to create the products of tomorrow using products of the past.

Every year, there are hundreds of new and exciting cycling products that are released for public consumption. In some cases, these products are a major step forward in innovation, but in others, the innovation might be a step back in preparation for a leap forward (and yes, sometimes we see things we hope to never see again). In any case, we continue to come back for more because, like it or not, any piece of equipment will wear out with regular use over a long-enough period of time.

Before I get too far ahead myself, it's worth noting that there are a lot of things you can do to keep your equipment running well after its

expected lifespan. Titanium and steel bikes will always be useful even if they're bent or broken. Cyclist adore them for their ability to be repaired or modified at some later point in time, whether that means welding a crack or adding a feature that wasn't available when you first bought the bike, such as disc brake tabs. As carbon technology becomes more advanced, it can also be modified or repaired well after production, although this work is much more specialized and more expensive.

As for the components on your bike, replacing bearings will extend the life of hubs, bottom brackets, and headset, and then there are the less sexy things that anyone can do at home, such as greasing threads and lubricating your chain, which can prevent rust and corrosion from attacking your bike. Although it isn't the most glamorous part of owning a bike, taking care of your equipment through basic maintenance to extend its life span is one of the most effective things you can do — and it's inexpensive too.

The time will eventually come, however, when, despite your best efforts, a part becomes completely non-functional or unsafe to use and you simply have to replace it. For me, tossing out an old component or accessory is not an easy task. I generally spend more time and energy than I should obsessing over purchasing cycling equipment, so when the time comes to replace that gear, I often find myself hanging onto unusable bike parts for years on end before finally recycling them.

Fortunately, it seems as though the do-it-yourself (DIY) community is becoming more and more prominent. We're seeing a lot of cool ways people are taking discarded bicycle parts and giving them new life — and not in a creepy zombie sort of way. In these cases, you may see the term 'upcycled' thrown around quite a bit. Upcycling is a form of recycling but in a manner

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GREG SIPPLE



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If you've checked out Pinterest, Etsy, or Instructables, you know that there's almost no limit to what can be produced from old bicycle parts. Clocks, ornaments, and jewelry seem to be the most popular upcycled products for metal components such as chains and cassettes, which many of us discard at least once a year. More involved projects include creating furniture and household fixtures out of bike parts and frames. The opportunities are only limited by your imagination, and as the DIY projects become more mainstream, we're seeing some companies rise out of the upcycled concept.

In most cases, the companies popping up are taking advantage of bicycle inner tubes as their materials of choice. Since tubes are replaced more often than any other component on your bike, they make for an abundant material for companies to stockpile. When it comes to producing soft goods, such as bags or panniers, they

are relatively easy to work with and the cost is fairly low. Many of these products can hold up very well and often last longer in their second life than they did in their first as bicycle tubes.

Two companies that are finding success with soft goods made from bicycle tubes are Green Guru ([greengurugear.com](http://greengurugear.com)) and Alchemy Goods ([alchemygoods.com](http://alchemygoods.com)). Both companies take advantage of their own networks of participating bike shops around the country who supply them with worn-out bicycle tubes that would otherwise be sent to the landfill. Once the tubes are rounded up, one of the most important steps is cutting them open into usable strips and giving them a good cleansing. My initial impression of a messenger bag made of tubes was favorable and I was surprised by how clean and odor free it was.

On the durability front, tubes have some favorable qualities. When assembled well, they can hold water at bay, are resistant to tearing, and age quite gracefully in their second life. I've noticed with wallets made from tubes that the material softens up over time, which gives a nice worn in feeling, similar to what you get from leather wallets. For those of us that are a lot quicker at fixing a flat than sewing a button, I also appreciate how easy these are to repair.

Both Green Guru and Alchemy Goods make some great messenger bags, in addition to smaller goods, such as purses and wallets. They are both on par in terms of quality, and both pay great attention to detail, but Green Guru offers a more expansive line of products, including panniers, handlebar bags, and saddle bags.

While these are just a couple of relatively small companies buried in an enormous industry, I'm excited to see how this business model develops over the years. On the local front, it seems to be taking off quite well. We're

lucky enough to have a local company, Upcycled Montana ([upcycledmt.com](http://upcycledmt.com)), located right here in Missoula that produces wallets and belts made of old bicycle tubes and tires. If you're traveling through Missoula by bike, save your worn out tubes and drop them off at our headquarters. We're happy to get them queued up for a second go.

When talking about upcycled products, I can't leave out Adventure Cycling tours department staffer Paul Hansbarger. He has a cool side project going called Hans Bagworks ([hansbagworks.com](http://hansbagworks.com)), which, among other things, upcycles out-of-date Adventure Cycling maps into lightweight wallets.

I really encourage *Adventure Cyclist* readers to take a look at what people are making out of used bicycle gear. If you want to challenge yourself, see if you can take on a DIY project yourself. If it's a failed project, don't worry, there are even websites dedicated to failed DIY attempts ([pinterestfail.com](http://pinterestfail.com)), so you won't have to consider it a total bust. Also, if anyone from the Project Runway television show is reading this, I've always hoped for a fashion project involving bicycle materials (don't knock that show till you see it).

For some more DIY inspiration, be sure to catch my blog posts at [blog.adventurecycling.org](http://blog.adventurecycling.org). In addition to providing some maintenance tips to help you add miles to your gear, I'm excited to share some detailed descriptions and photos of some of my favorite bicycle-related DIY projects. **AG**

*Josh Tack is the membership coordinator at Adventure Cycling Association. On the one hand, he's a believer in the "ride it until it breaks" mantra and upcycling, while on the other, he often must possess beautiful shiny new things. It's a constant struggle. He can be reached at [jtack@adventurecycling](mailto:jtack@adventurecycling) for questions or comments.*