

BIKE COUTURE

Innovations in helmets and attire for your commute

BY ALEX NOTMAN

Attention all car commuters! Your excuses for pushing the gas pedal instead of the bike pedal — at least from a fashion perspective — won't be worthy much longer. Yes, we all know it's better for the environment and our health if we bike, but often it's superficial justifications that keep us from trading four wheels for two. Here are some nifty tricks and cycle-centric designers who are making roadblocks like helmet head, or stuffing a change of clothes in your pack while pedaling to work like a spandex-encased sausage, obsolete.

I have a friend who bikes infrequently because, as she complains, wearing a helmet smooshes her curly tendrils, leaving her with a sweaty, matted mess. There are the simple fixes, like a helmet with extra ventilation. But how are designers fixing this? Bike helmets are becoming sleeker and many are coming up with hip fabric covers. So instead of looking like a mushroom with your helmet on, you're now the cool dude in a chapeau.

Then there's the Hövding. Two Swedish designers, Anna Haupt and Terese Alpin, after seven years of studying cycling accident data, have developed an airbag for your head. The product looks like a stylish parka collar, but hidden in its fabric is a motion sensor that sets off a nylon airbag that will encase the head upon collision. The Hövding still needs some tweaks, such as its hefty price tag (\$450!), but like most inventions, that price should come down with time.

Moving on to skirts, dresses, caftans, kilts — whatever your nonpants fancy — there is always a fear that your skirt will catch a breeze à la Marilyn Monroe. Try this fix: Take an elastic cotton headband and slide it onto your thigh like a garter, safety pin skirt fabric to garter and voila! No one will see your superwoman/man skivvies. If you're squeamish about safety pins, companies like Urban Spoke and Bird Industries sell plastic clip "bike garters" for 12 bucks a pop.

Perhaps you don't want to put holes in your clothes, or maybe you just want to strike a more professional air, well there are also solutions for you. One Pacific Northwest designer, Ann DeOtte of Seattle, recently funded her women's bike fashion line Iva Jean through Kickstarter; it launched this spring and offers items like a formal, waterproof pencil skirt whose hidden seam is actually a zipper that reveals an extra panel of fabric for range of motion. DeOtte says it's her top seller.



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"I thought there could be a market because it was something I was dealing with personally, that the only options were to have full cycle pants and technical clothing," she says. "There's a lot of love for the skirt ... It's almost impossible to find a tailored skirt that you can wear to work and wear on your bike." Other features in her line include high-waist cuts and lower back hems for protection from the elements (or for the more modest rider), breathable and reflective fabrics and extra pleats for movement.

There are professional options for men, too, like the Giro New Road Urban Cycling collection. And in town, men and women can make tweaks to their professional wardrobe with items like bands and shields that protect trousers from the bike chain. Kelsey Moore, a manager at Arriving By Bike, also notes a more stylish alternative to spandex: Ibex Merino Wool. "It breathes," she says. "Wool is really awesome because you don't get sweaty and gross."

So work on some new excuses, because especially here in the PNW where designers and cyclists abound, you can't coast on cries of helmet hair or non-work appropriate attire any longer. ■

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