



AN UPCYCLED LIFE...

making memories

Judy McNeill, otherwise known as Beer Babe, has combined a passion for cycling with a desire to save waste from landfill. As a result, her products are all made from inner tubes...

Until a couple of years ago, I was working as a Marketing Manager for a company that dealt with the disposal of hazardous and non-hazardous waste. I was very aware of the potential reduction of the waste we all produce. I didn't realise at that time that recycling would become so important to me.

When I left, I started to look around for unusual opportunities. I came across Green Guru, based in Colorado, that was recycling bicycle inner tubes into bags. I realised that it could have potential in the UK, so I set about investigating my options.

In common with a lot of cyclists, I was able to find a number of used tubes lying around my garage that I could experiment with. It took me a while to be able to stitch the tubes together to a standard that I was happy with.

The first piece of upcycling I remember making was a bracelet from a used bicycle chain that I snapped while on holiday. I pulled the chain apart, got the links plated and turned it into a charm bracelet that acted as a reminder of the holiday.

The first item that I made out of an inner tube was a simple, slotted wallet. A wallet is quite an easy item to put together as it is basically a series of rectangles. Once the tube is cut open, it is easy to cut it into the right-sized pieces for assembly. The zip was the most complicated part but, as I could put a zip into a dress, I just adapted how I did it. I had issues stitching the rubber with a sewing machine, but I realised that if I used an edging tape, I could stitch the wallet together without snagging the rubber.

Rubber is not the easiest of mediums to work with! Although I invested in a sail-



makers machine, I found that a heavy duty domestic sewing machine worked better for me. It is a 40-year-old machine which I inherited a number of years ago.

I always prepare the inner tubes by cutting them open and putting them through a machine wash. This cleans the rubber, and also removes the smell that is often associated with punctured tubes.

One of my most commented-on items today is the Six Pack Bike Bottle Carrier. I originally made a carrier that would hold two water bottles on my bike, as I didn't have enough cage mounts and I don't like using a backpack. I was able to extend it into one that would hold six bottles and could be mounted over the cross bar of the bicycle. It can also be removed from the bike and carried separately.

More recently, I have started to make myself a waistcoat, and have even been asked to make a sporan for a guy in the US who rides his bike in a kilt!

We are a throwaway society and too much rubbish ends up going to landfill. One of the

most commonly disposed of items for a cyclist is the inner tube. This type of waste, in common with many others, is never disposed of in sufficient quantities for an alternate use to be found. At a recent mountain bike race, there was an inner tube amnesty (new tubes for punctured) where over 400 tubes were collected. These were destined for landfill disposal along with a hefty disposal charge for the company, so they were more than happy to donate them to me for upcycling. I also work with a number of bike shops who collect tubes for me.

I also collect used malt sacks from the local breweries which I incorporate into some of the items – partly for decoration, but mainly

to add stability to the rubber. All of my frame packs are lined with the malt sack to prevent the sides from sagging on the frame. I have been able to be quite innovative with using it and, once again, I am able to divert it from landfill as it is a single-use item.

I am often asked to make custom items and I really enjoy the challenge that making these brings. On occasions it takes some thinking about, but I haven't failed the challenge – yet! This also allows me to find new ideas to incorporate into my products.

As for the future, I really want to expand the business to the point where a country-wide collection of tubes would be possible for recycling into products. The potential number of products that could be made from tubes is almost endless – leather or fabric products can always be duplicated in inner tube. My husband is a really big fan of what I am doing, so I'd also like to get him more involved in the near future.

Read more from Judy at www.beerbabe.co.uk