

STORES

Sheffield's Fox Valley retail park might be a new-build pastiche of northern industrial architecture but Full Gas Bikes is the real deal. **John Ryan** pays a visit

Full Gas Bikes looks set

Ever had the feeling you've been conned? The sensation is usually accompanied by a hollow feeling and the sense that you should have seen that one coming. Yet there are occasions when sleight of hand can be a positive thing. An example can be found in Stocksbridge on Sheffield's northern flanks.

At first glance you might think the newly opened Fox Valley retail park is repurposed from Northern industrial architecture, neatly transformed into an open-air shopping mall with the stone and glasswork cleaned up.

This is what sensitive, development should be about. Yet it turns out to be a new-build pastiche of local industrial architecture on the site of a former Tata steelworks.

Pride of place is given to Full Gas Bikes, which is housed in what looks like a former mill building, complete with a block and tackle hoist on the gantry above the store frontage. You have been conned but you feel good about it.

Full Gas Bikes is a first for managing director Tony Gibb, a former UK number one ranked rider and 14 times national champion.

The architecture notwithstanding, what is most striking is the use of grey cast iron around the door and the slick, racy-looking logo, picked out in various shades of blue and silver against a white background.

Halo boxes

If you were to visit the store after dark, something else that would be apparent from the exterior would be the interior, particularly the use of bikes as backlit 3D graphics. It is the bikes on the back wall that command the gaze. There are four of these and they have been set in niches along a white mezzanine wall towards the back of the shop. Gibb calls them "halo boxes" and both their position – each of the niches is about 45 degrees from horizontal – and the colour contrast of the bikes within them against the white surround, make this a dominant feature.

There is a lot more to the interior – designed by Gibb, architectural practice M Moser and Trek, the bike



FULL GAS BIKES

Fox Valley Retail Park, Stocksbridge

Opened June 16, 2016

Size 6,500 sq ft (including the mezzanine)

Design Tony Gibb, M Moser, Trek

Standout features

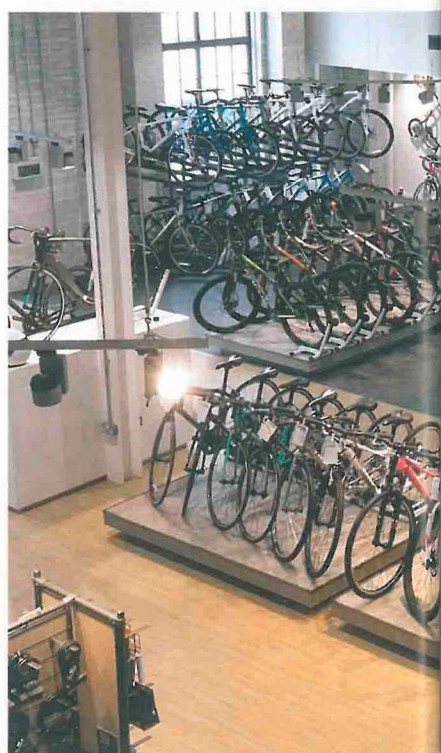
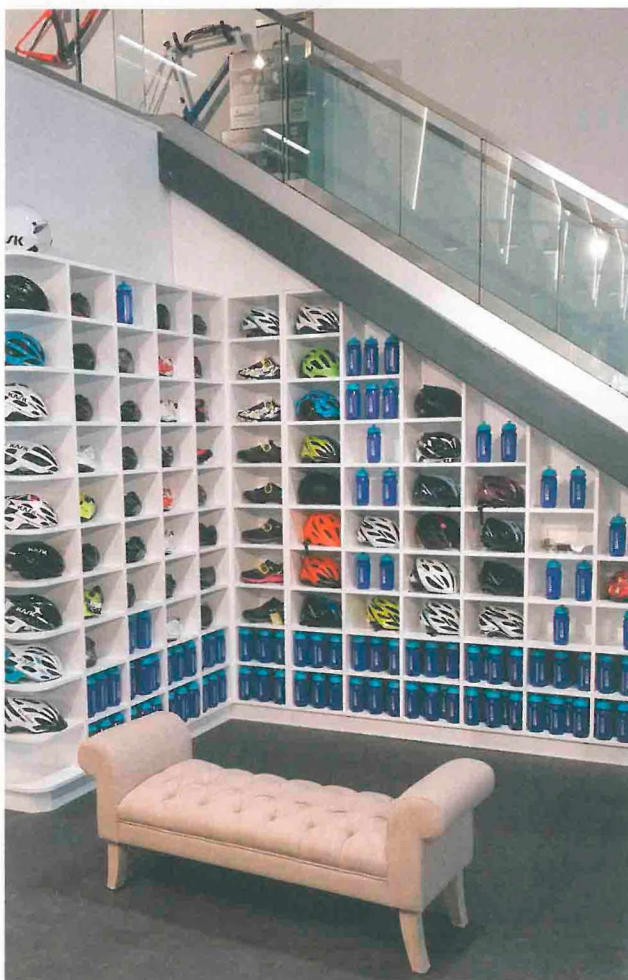
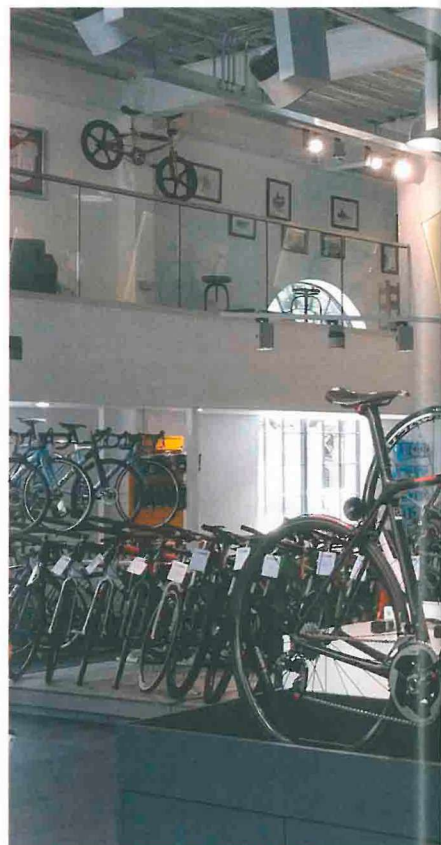
The 'halo boxes' and cyclist graphics

Ambience Modern art gallery meets cycle shop

Future plans Eight stores in the next 10 years

Cheapest bike in the store £99

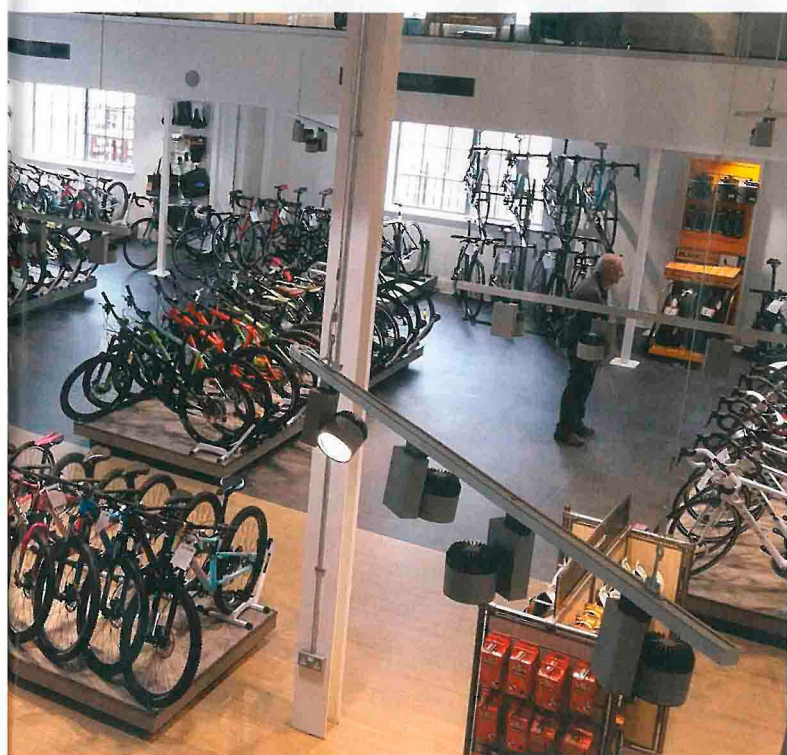
Most expensive bike in the store £12,000



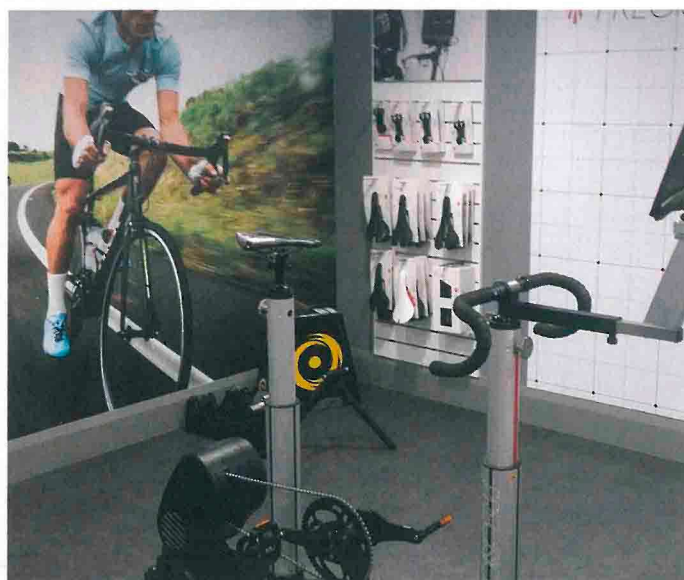
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to race ahead



"There is a sense of modish modern art gallery, rather than bike shop"



STORES



brand stocked across the store – than a few bikes contained in niches on a wall. The bulk of the selling area is on the ground floor – the modest mezzanine level occupies a small part of the rear extending to a gallery that runs from back to front along the left-hand side of the shop. And the mid-shop is devoted almost entirely to bikes with accessories around the perimeter.

The danger of overcrowding has been avoided thanks to the arrangement of the bikes on low mid-floor plinths, dictating the path that potential buyers take through the store.

To the right, along the perimeter at the front, there are some cast steel rails that give a down-to-earth feel to the visual merchandising of the cyclewear.

Beyond this is the cash desk, which is square and sports an Oakley cycle-glasses display case. Nothing too remarkable about this perhaps, but it is the graphics behind the cash desk that catch the eye.

Warhol effect

There are Andy Warhol-style prints of famous cyclists. The prints are part of a set of nine, and the other six grace the walls in the Dransfield Properties offices above the store. The shop prints will be rotated from time to time with those in the offices, according to Gibb, and like the bikes that function as graphics, the outsized nature of what has been done here takes this interior away from bike store norms.

Couple this with the combination of brickwork and steel that form the internal materials of this store and there is a sense of modish modern art gallery, rather than bike shop.

The space beneath the glass



and steel staircase that takes visitors up to the mezzanine level has been used as a triangular display vehicle for helmets and water bottles, and directly under the mezzanine there is a service workshop, a ride and posture test area and a cafe.

The latter was still undergoing some final adjustments on the day of visiting, but will work well with its seating and screen showing road races. Rapha was one of the first to do this in its store in Piccadilly, which opened in mid 2012.

And so to the upper level, part



of which is used for events by the Stocksbridge Cycling Club, which Full Gas Bikes supports. This is home to a selection of frames, fat-tire mountain bikes and the gallery that affords views over the whole of the shop.

Moving up

This is a good-looking store and does much to impart a feeling of difference to the Fox Valley retail park, but will it work? Gibb says that one of the reasons for locating it here is that around Sheffield “there are a lot of established bike shops, but they’ve all got some drawbacks, whether it’s car-parking or size, so we think this one has a good chance”.

“The intention is that the store is an experience and that we’ll roll out another eight stores over the next 10 years,” he says. The Fox Valley retail park may not be the genuine industrial architecture redevelopment that it appears to be, but it has been carefully crafted and Full Gas Bikes is the real deal – a bike shop for cyclists who want something more than rack upon rack of branded bicycles.

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Tony Gibb