

SINCE
1866
BROOKS
ENGLAND
SADDLES
BAGS
ETC.



...a Little Bit of History

1865 - Legend has it that a young man of 19 years old called John Boulton Brooks bought himself one of those new fangled velocipedes. He would have cut quite a dashing figure back in the day, but that was not all he cut; the wooden saddle was excruciatingly uncomfortable. Now his father made leather saddles for horses - and indeed he and his contemporaries, normally came to work on a horse. So the young Brooks set about designing and developing a comfortable saddle from leather in his father's works. The rest, as they say, is history.

1866 - John Boulton Brooks (1846-1921) established a works in Great Charles Street, Birmingham for the manufacture of leather strapping for horse harnesses and general leather goods.

1870 - Noting that more and more people were indulging in the new pastime of cycling, John Boulton Brooks went over to the manufacture of bicycle saddles.

1880 - The first safety bicycle came on the scene and with it the need for more comfortable saddles. No longer were riders willing to accept that the only option open to them was to ride a piece of formed wood.

1882 - Brooks filed his first patent for a sprung bicycle saddle, the first of its kind. After which he went on to file a number of patents for bicycle saddles, motor cycle saddles and other leather goods. These included galoshes, snap-on leggings, handlebar muffs, folding footrests, toe-straps, gents and ladies cycling shoes, oil-skin clothing and, of course, bags.

Many of these items are still in existence now and can be found in Cycling museums in both Wales and Cornwall.

A little known fact however is that Brooks also manufactured furniture – chairs, tables, desks, cabinets and mirrors for home, hotel or business use and stools, lockers, cupboards, bins, shelves and tables for commercial and industrial usage.

Many of these items are chronicled in a collection of yesteryear catalogues that we have at Brooks England.

1900 - In the early 1900's Brooks Ltd., was offering an astonishingly broad range of bicycle saddles and other accessories such as saddle bags, tool bags, saddle back rests, inner tube cases, motorcycle belt cases, pannier bags, luggage bags, hat cases and even bicycle mounted cigar trays.

1920s - Brooks took over the Lycett Saddle Company and Brooks saddles became the first choice of cycling champions. During this period each and every rider in the Tours utilized a Brooks Saddle and Brooks current marketing campaign revolves around photographs of famous yesteryear cyclists undertaking the stages of the Tour de France with Brooks Saddles.

1926 - The B66, the big Brooks best-seller was introduced. This saddles still makes up over a third of the company's total saddle sales – despite what you may consider to be far more advanced designs having been introduced.

1930s - Brooks took over the Leatheries Cycle Saddle concern and even purchased a motorcycle company named, coincidentally, the Brookes Company.

1935 - A history of industry in Birmingham, the centre of bicycle saddle manufacturing in Britain, mentions that in 1935 of the 2,733,000 cycle saddles manufactured in Britain, no fewer that 60 per cent were manufactured by J.B. Brooks & Company.

1939 - War broke out and Brooks' skills and plant were rapidly harnessed to the help the war effort.

1945 - The war over, Brooks entered a period of expansion unlike anything ever it had experienced before.

1955 - A boom time for Brooks, with a workforce of 1,500 we were selling some 55,000 leather saddles and 25,000 mattress saddles a week.

1958 - The saddle division of Brooks Industries Limited, as it was now called was taken over by the Raleigh Cycle Company.

1960 - Raleigh was bought by British Tube Investments Group, which then transferred Brooks and Sturmey-Archer first to its automotive and then to its bicycle division.

1962 - Brooks moved to the Downing Street Works, Smethwick, Birmingham, to be combined with the Wright Saddle Company, then part of T.I., to form the Raleigh Saddle Division. The current Brooks facility is found 5 kilometers north- west of the original site in the town of Smethwick.

1969 - In July of this year the Brooks facility was ravaged by fire and gutted. Nothing daunted, Brooks staff salvaged what was left of the plant and stock and continued production.

1987 – Brooks, as part of the T.I. Bicycle Division was taken over by the American Derby International Group.

Today - Brooks sells in over 20 countries and now a special range has been re-developed for Japan where it is held in high repute as the connoisseurs choice. In Scandinavia there is a resurgence for Brooks, which had disappeared for over 2 decades. Germany continues to be Brooks largest customer by quantity and The Netherlands by head capita.

Many high end manufacturers such as Cannondale and Koga Miyata are now specifying Brooks and we still receive support from the likes of Roberts Cycles, Mercian and George Longstaff.

In 2002 Brooks England were taken over by saddle giants Selle Royal, who manufacture 80,000 saddles per day (more or less what Brooks produce in a year) concentrating on PU Foam and gel technologies. Their high – end brand Fizik manufactures carbon or titanium railed saddles and Gilberto Simoni and Danilo Cunego rode to victory in the 2003 and 2004 Giro d'Italia on a revolutionary design named the Arione. The Lookin brand caters for leisure riders and Selle Royal, as a brand, tends to be PU foam applications for Original Equipment Manufacture.

Despite such advances in technology Selle Royal intentions in taking over Brooks are to keep the brand alive and growing in the respect of its tradition and history. Brooks saddles production will remain in Smethwick, Birmingham.

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