

# The Babel Bike And Its Inventor



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TECH

By Alexander Baron



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Britannia may no longer rule the waves, but England has given the world many other things to be grateful for including the greatest scientist who ever lived, Sir Isaac Newton. That tradition of invention continues to this day through Sir Humphry Davy, Michael Faraday, Joseph Swan, Frank Whittle, right down to the computer age with Tim Berners-Lee.

One of the most important pioneers of this new age is Clive Sinclair, who is not only a genius but one of the nicest blokes you could hope to meet. Sir Clive is now 75, and when he is not enjoying his well-earned retirement, puts his engineer's brain to use separating the suckers from their money at the poker table. A father of three, the apple didn't fall from the tree with his eldest son Crispin, who has come up with a mechanical invention, the Babel Bike, which he claims is the safest bicycle ever built. Last month, he held a [seminar for women cyclists](#) in London – sixteen of whom have died on the capital's roads in the previous four years.



*Crispin Sinclair – the father of Babel Bicycle*

**Alexander Baron:** Thank you for taking the time to speak to us. For the benefit of our readers, most of whom unlike me have not played poker with your illustrious father, can you give us a bit of background, and how you came to be an inventor?

**Crispin Sinclair:** I have been passionate about bicycles and cycling since my father took the stabilisers off my bicycle – on one of his rare days off from poker playing! I spent many happy years in my childhood reading every bicycle book and magazine I could get my hands on, and I can strip a bike to its ball bearings. I have ridden solo across Europe. The idea of the Babel Bike came to me one day in London, about 3 or 4 years ago, when I bounced off the side of a turning van whose driver had failed to check his mirrors, or signal.

I guess, in short, I started inventing the Babel Bike from that ‘Eureka’ moment (though from memory I was using other phrases at the time).

**AB:** Your Dad invented a **folding bicycle** which was probably the last thing most people would have expected after his pioneering work in electronics. That has been a qualified success, but with this you appear to have gone one better. The big selling point is obvious, but what made you think you could tackle the safety angle?

**CS:** Whilst I am the first (as far as I know) to design a bicycle that is capable of withstanding impacts from cars (obviously, up to a limit), I am NOT the first to design safety into a two-wheeled vehicle. BMW created the C1 motorcycle in the early 90s which had a roll cage and seatbelt. So while I am the first to put safety into the bicycle, BMW have already proved that designing safety into two-wheeled vehicles IS do-able (though of course the safety requirements of bicycles and motorcycles are very different, the basic principles are the same). I am also now working with TRL and MIRA (two leading UK safety authorities), to develop the Babel Bike further.

**AB:** Where does the name come from?

**CS:** From the Babel fish in *The Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy*.

**AB:** How did your last seminar go, and will you be holding others?

CS: Last month I spoke at the 'Women's Network Safer Cycling Day' put on by the City of London (unsurprisingly, in London). They thought (and I agree), that the Babel Bike might well appeal to female cyclists, who are under-represented in London, largely because of safety. Whilst the Babel Bike is designed to appeal to all, it could hopefully get more women on to their bikes, for the daily commute.

The seminar went well, and it was a pleasure to give the talk. I have no further talks planned at the moment, but I am open to offers.

**AB: Do you envisage any further safety features?**

CS: As well as the 'roll cage' and seat belt, the Babel Bike has an auto-alarm (that triggers as soon as the bike is hit, and sounds like a loud car horn), built-in lights (that come on as soon as you start pedalling), indicators, wing mirrors, a forward-facing mount for a smart phone (so that it can act as a video recorder), a custom designed seat (to spread the loads during an impact). Hopefully that will be enough, but I am sure more features will be added in the future.



**AB: How many have you sold so far?**

CS: Not a lot! Unfortunately the Babel did not do as well I had hoped on Indiegogo, but I am carrying on and am looking to re-launch soon.

**AB: The Babel Bike may well be the safest one in history, but it is far from the cheapest which means that not only will it have a limited appeal but it is likely to become a target for thieves, even with its anti-theft features. Unless it can be mass produced it is likely to remain a novelty. How do you propose to bring down the price?**

CS: Exactly as you say – by mass production. And the UK Government's 'cycle-to-work' grant will also mean a big price reduction, as they have now extended it to include more expensive bikes, such as the Babel. The Babel Bike also has its components sealed and locked inside the frame (so unlike other bikes, you can't steal bits off it), each bike is security-coded (and we won't sell spares for stolen bikes, so they will be unfixable), and there's an optional (and concealed) GPS. The Babel can also be locked up (near your home) with a heavy duty motorcycle lock, and one of the bike's foot protectors doubles as a D-lock, when you're out and about.

And whilst the Babel is certainly NOT cheap by bicycle standards, for everyone who pays through-the-nose to take their car to work, (because they are, understandably, too nervous to ride a regular bicycle) then the Babel Bike is the cheapest and quickest safe option for getting to work – it even works out cheaper than taking the bus, train or tube (subway), to work!

**AB: Have you considered foreign investments, franchises, and foreign markets? China would be a great place if Katie Melua is **to be believed**.**

CS: All investment is hugely welcomed! I think China might be a good market in the future, but at the moment poor Chinese people will probably find the Babel Bike too expensive, while the (rapidly expanding) Chinese middle classes are still in love with the motor car – it will probably take them a few years before they realise cars are not a good way to get around a city.

**AB: What are your future plans invention-wise?**

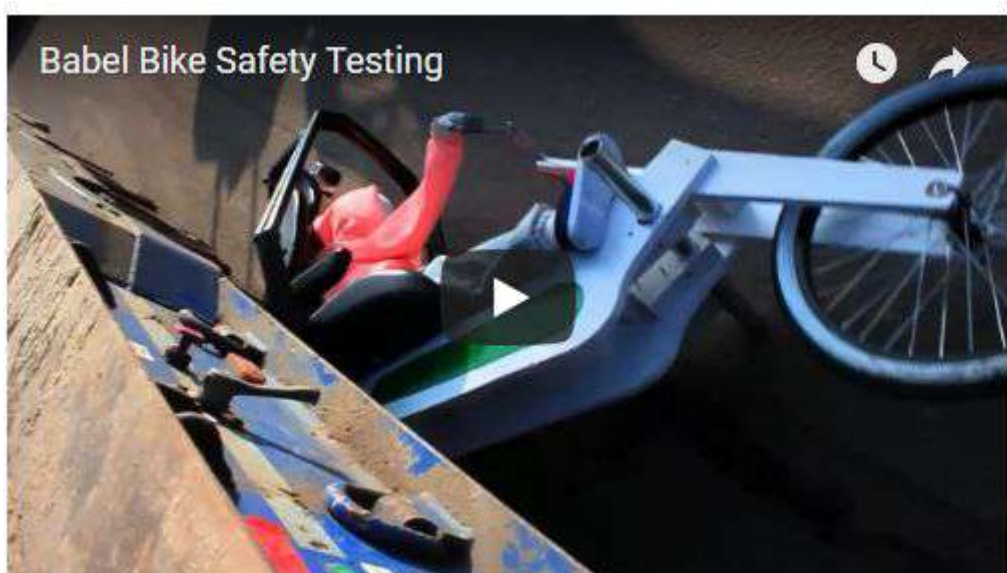
CS: Currently just sticking with the bike – it's enough work by itself.

**AB: Have you seen **Ann Makosinski's invention**?**

CS: I had a quick look on-line – looks great!

**AB: What are your future plans invention-wise?**

CS: To be honest, I can't think of anything off the top of my head. Somewhat annoying, as I love ideas and inventions. For once, my mind has gone blank.



Check out the Babel Bike at its [official site](#). You can also find videos of the bike and its inventor on YouTube.

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