

# Bike Fitter: Women I've Worked with Have 10 Per Cent of the Options Men Have

Fitter and frame designer at Velo Atelier says his most recent client could not be fitted on a single off-the-peg bike

**Recent data [released by Strava](#) showed that 60 per cent of women opted for a female specific bike, but strikingly irrespective of choice all rated comfort as the most prominent reason for their decision.**

The debate over [whether women need adjusted geometry is ongoing](#). Initially, the suggestion was that women generally had long legs and short bodies, so our bikes needed to be designed differently. Then it was largely claimed that we'd been duped by marketing spiel and just needed unisex bikes to be tailored via saddle, stem and handlebar choice. Now the trend is moving back as some bike designers say data [suggests women have a shorter wingspan](#) so as a generalisation can't find optimal fit on bikes designed for men.

The most insightful and interesting information has to come from the people who measure bodies and design bikes specifically to fit them, as opposed to those who have created a bike and need to justify their choices: custom frame designers. We've already spoken to one such designer – [Caren Hartley – who was against off-the-peg women's bikes](#). Today, we received a call from [Lee Prescott who fits bodies to bikes at Velo Atelier](#) and told us he believed the market was making compromises that meant women weren't able to easily find a good fit.

It is worth remembering that Prescott has a motive in selling custom frames, and is discussing small sample sizes – but his observations are

undeniably interesting...

## *Prescott's bike fit findings*

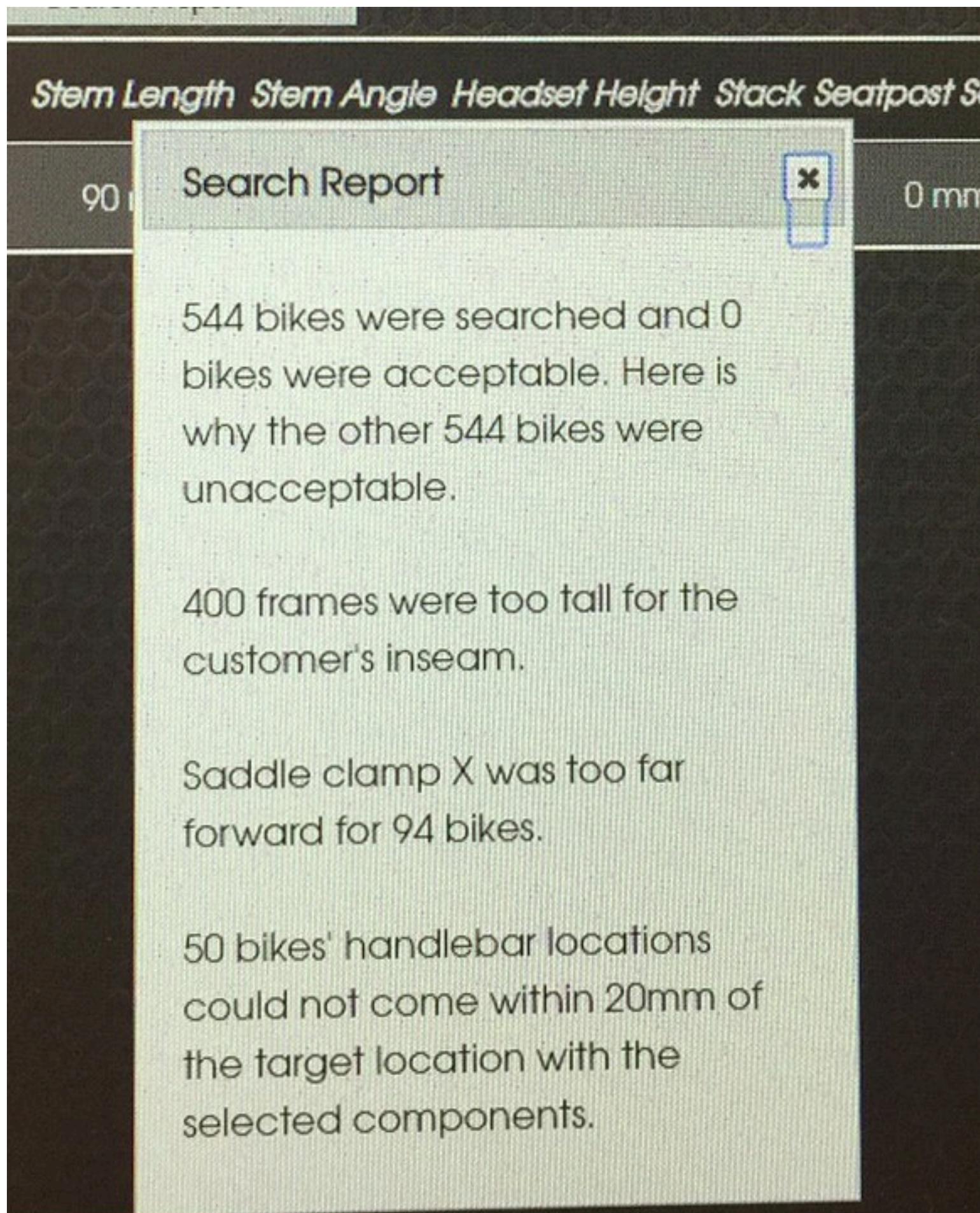


*TWC's Michelle was fitted at Velo Atelier recently*

Former designer-in-chief at Pashley, Prescott designs [custom frames as well as fitting bodies to existing bikes](#). When doing so, he sits the client on a rig, adjusts it to find their optimum position, then searches a library of off-the-peg unisex and women's frames to see which will suit. He told us that when doing so women are usually presented with 10 per cent of the choices men have and the last three women he's fitted have been unable to find a suitable option on the market.

Describing the most recent case he said: "We just had one lady that came in – she was very, very uncomfortable on her own bike, in various areas, we tried to get her comfortable on her bike but couldn't. So I put her on the rig and wound it into a position where she was feeling great, did a search and it came out that no bikes would fit her."

Prescott says that the woman in question wasn't particularly unusual in terms of her proportions, and has provided us with a view of the report. The 544 bikes checked were women's and unisex frames:



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That's not to say the same result will befall us all. The bike fitting and servicing centre in Warwickshire works with a 95 per cent female customer base and Prescott is clear: "That's the most extreme result I've had so far. But it's much more common that when I fit someone on a rig and search for results that I find more limited bikes for women than for men. I would say of all the ladies I've fitted recently they got about 10 per cent of the available bikes that men could fit on to comfortably."

Explaining the key issues, he said: "It's mainly the top tube being too long and head tube wrong. The last three ladies that I did sizing for have ended up having custom frames. Two physically couldn't find a bike that fitted them without making major modifications, and the third lady we could fit on to two or three women's Specialized bikes but she just hated the aesthetic of them – the ones that were short enough had big long head tubes and sloping top tubes and she would have needed a short stem that then alters weight distribution negatively."

Often unisex bikes will be fitted with a short stem to make it 'fit' a woman who needs the reach to be reduced – Prescott said: "From a design perspective, a short stem smacks of an ill-fitting frame." I press him for numbers – and he explains: "I like to see a proportion between stem and top tube – so yes you could have a 50 mm stem if you're really short and it's appropriate for a very short top tube."

At [Velo Atelier](#), Prescott is offering a pretty premium service. In the last three months he's completed about 20 sizings on the rig (most Bikefits happen on the client's bike) – and it's worth remembering that his customers won't be representative of the needs of the entire population – he said: "I think some of it might come down to the kind of demographic of ladies that we're seeing. Ladies that are serious about cycling – they want serious bikes. The majority of bikes made to be shorter are designed to create a more comfort orientated position. To make them more performance orientated you have to put a crazy negative stem on and all the weight distribution is screwed up. So when you're descending the cornering is less positive or whilst climbing the front wheels are popping

up because there's not enough weight on the front wheel.”

“We're at a point now where women's cycling is starting to be taken seriously in the industry.”

However, he did agree when I asked “is the issue partly that the industry is largely made up of men, making decisions on women's bikes?” – saying: “We're at a point now where women's cycling is starting to be taken seriously in the industry. The bike industry is so conservative. It's taken quite a long time for the ball to drop that actually ladies want aggressive performance orientated bikes as well and it's not all about pink and shrink.”

*Who is doing a good job off-the-peg?*



There are some brands Prescott believes are doing a good job – and as a brand neutral expert we were intrigued to his his recommendations: [Specialized](#) and [Canyon](#). The first didn't surprise me – Specialized have always been clear in their commitment.

Canyon are working on a women's bike, but currently simply fit shorter stems and women's saddles to their unisex frames so though I can see their future commitment is very serious I was surprised Prescott recommended their current offering. However, he explained: "Most of Canyon's bikes are fairly aggressively designed in terms of geometry, but their small frames work quite well for quite a few of our clients. A lot of companies producing carbon frames share parts of the mould across sizes, but Canyon appear to have actually properly adjusted the geometry for each size – as opposed to compromising. Their small bikes are made for a shorter person so the weight distribution is good."

## *Buying now?*



*Make sure you get a proper fit and that changes are included in the cost*

Of course, we can't all afford a custom bike – and Prescott does understand that. Offering advice for women looking to buy a bike in the near future – he said: "Don't be tempted to just buy off the internet based on price – make sure you take a test ride or go and see a local bike fitter. If you do buy online, get sized properly – spend £100 getting properly sized. If you are buying [in a shop] make sure if things are changed – saddles, stems, handlebars – that it's all done as part of the deal to get better value

for money.”

**The debate is ongoing. Prescott offers his opinion – but we have to point out he creates and sells custom frames. So, we’d love to hear opinions and experiences from as many female riders as possible – are you pro or anti women’s specific bikes?**

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