

TRENDS » DESIGNER BIKES

Coco, that bike is so you

BY NATALIA WILLIAMS

Look no further than Karl Lagerfeld, Chanel's head designer and arbiter of all things stylish, for confirmation that a trend is in our midst.

This month, the designer's first bike for the luxury fashion brand will be wheeled into stores around the world with a pretty price tag of about \$14,000 in Canada. Say hello to cyclist chic.

"Coco was a real sportswoman," says Anny Kazanjian, Chanel's executive director of public relations and fashion promotion, explaining Lagerfeld's inspiration behind the latest item to join the brand's growing line of sports products, which include golf clubs, tennis racquets and skis.

Lagerfeld is hardly the first big-name designer to venture into cycling's terrain - Gucci, Armani and Hermès have all released models over the years - but his timing is impeccable.

A European cycling renaissance has been spurred by the successful debut this summer of Paris's bike-share program Vélib, a 24/7 system that allows riders to pick up a bike from one service point and return it to another for a small fee.

The rest of Europe is also

along for the ride, with cities in Belgium, Spain, Luxembourg, Norway and others set to enhance or introduce bike-share programs. And in North America, city officials in San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Portland, Ore., Chicago and

New York have expressed interest.

"Cycling on the whole is enjoying a renaissance as both a hobby and for fitness," says Jane Smith, managing director of Mercian Cycles in England, adding that the green move-

ment is also encouraging cycling's new-found stylishness.

Mercian hooked up with designer Paul Smith last year to craft a limited-edition line of bikes. The British-based designer, best known for his men's wear line, was an avid

cyclist until an accident ended his plans to turn pro. Still a fan of the sport and always one of the brand, he agreed to crafted two models for the cycle shop. The Mercian Tour Bike - \$6,250 (U.S.) - is finished with a handcrafted sad-

dle and the Mercian Track Bike - \$5,995 (U.S.) - comes with a colour split frame. Both are tailored to the customer's preferred style and colour.

While "sales of the Mercian bikes were healthy," says Paul Rousseas, a spokesman for Paul Smith in New York, there are no plans for new models.

Less luxe but rich on nostalgia, California-based Paul Frank Industries released its latest series of city bikes in August. With prices ranging from \$390 to \$470 (U.S.), the line is designed to feel vintage and comes complete with banana seats, bright colours and separate accessories such as streamers. The company is already considering new models.

Still, for those in the market for a souped-up ride, Chanel offers the best of the best. Hand-assembled and finished in the company's workshops, the eight-speed black beauty has two saddle bags made of aged calf leather - complete with the brand's signature double-C logo. "It's a serious bike," Chanel's Kazanjian says.

And with just two expected in Canada (one has already been pre-sold), "it's one of those quasi-exclusive items," she adds. "Sometimes the fun is simply in owning it."

» Special to *The Globe and Mail*



Coco would have loved this \$14,000 bicycle designed for Chanel by Karl Lagerfeld.