

Mobility Special

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Business. *Global.*

Move with the times

Technology, environmental concerns and global trade are rapidly changing the way we get around. Where are we headed?

A senior car executive recently visited MONOCLE's London HQ and spoke to the team about the shifts reshaping the automotive industry. In passing, they mentioned the average age of a new-car buyer in 2024. In Europe, they said, it's a staggering 55. With entry-level prices for many of the continent's top marques hovering at about €40,000, it's not surprising that the trade in used vehicles is so robust or that many choose to forgo car ownership altogether.

Then our visitor said something else that was nicely surprising. They make cars for men and women who like driving and are not fretting about autonomous vehicles sweeping away their business – far from it. (In a similar meeting almost 10 years ago, another car executive assured

us that driverless vehicles would dominate by 2025.) It's conversations such as these that have shaped this year's mobility issue. While research into driverless cars, flying taxis and next-gen supersonic aircraft receive bountiful media coverage, they remain sideline issues for the people at the sharp end of the industry. Whether you are running a car brand, an aircraft maker or a bicycle-manufacturing plant, your business is almost certainly being shaped by a far more interesting set of fast-moving trends. Legacy car brands are looking askance at how China is challenging them in every market. Aviation players are grappling with the demands of legislators for cleaner aircraft. And many bicycle brands are wondering how they can come good on their environmental credentials if they are sourcing all of their parts from Taiwan, importing them to Europe for assembly, then shipping their completed bikes back to Asia.

Over the following pages, we'll look at the triumph of small cars (cheaper, nimbler in congested cities), as well as the automotive brands that have found success with modern people-carriers. We will take you to an air show to find out why alternative fuels have become such a hot topic and explore the consequences for re-engineering a city if you design public transport that elevates your journey. And we will also drop in on Romania's version of Detroit in its Motor City heyday. In short, we'll go beyond the usual headlines as we ask, what's next for mobility? — AT



Wheels up!
Get ready to explore the world
of mobility. First stop: Toronto



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Business. Zürich. Easy riders

Compact-cargo-bike company Finc is doing the heavy lifting that's taking the Swiss cycle scene in a new direction.

WRITER Claudia Jacob PHOTOGRAPHY Philip Frowein




Markus Freitag's passion for pedals was first ignited in 1982 while watching Steven Spielberg's *ET*. Some 40 years later, the Zürich-born entrepreneur has created a Spielberg-inspired bicycle brand that's perfect for nipping around his hometown. Called Finc, its namesake model is a svelte two-wheeler that is as compact as an urban mini-bike, as capacious as a cargo bike and as sturdy as *ET*'s BMX. "Our niche is an easily manoeuvrable model with a simple but sophisticated luggage system," says Freitag.

In 1993, Markus and his brother, Daniel, launched Freitag, a brand that produces bags designed for cyclists, so launching a bike brand made complete sense. "Finc is the bike I would love to have had on my doorstep all my life," says Freitag, who reinvested his profits from the bag brand to launch the bike in April.

Though the Danes had pioneered the cargo bike in the 1980s, today the "Made in Switzerland" label is a hallmark of quality cycling products across the globe. Yet Zürich has not fully realised its potential as a cycling city. "The streets are cramped due to the tram system and we lack cycle lanes that would allow bikes to play a supporting role in this urban context," says Freitag. The Finc is a product of these surroundings, designed to comfortably navigate the narrow streets.

And Freitag's brand might just be onto something: record numbers of commuters here are ditching the car for the bike. Pro Velo, a network of regional bike associations, saw a 21 per cent increase in participants in its Cycle to Work campaign when compared to 2022. This uptick is reflected in industry growth. In 2024 the Swiss bike sector is predicted to be worth €720m, while Denmark's lags behind at €490m. "Bike ownership here has grown exponentially since the pandemic," says frame builder Wim Kolb, who constructed the first Finc prototype in 2020. "In Zürich, residents are interested in zero-emission alternatives and have the disposable income to be able to invest in quality," he says. "The infrastructure needs to catch up to allow the cargo bike to flourish."

The Finc – meaning "nimble" in Swiss-German – is made from a special steel alloy. The compact design weighs 16kg, about a third of the weight of the average cargo bike. "We have deliberately not reinvented the bicycle," says Freitag. Instead, high-quality, low-maintenance components were chosen, which complement a tried-and-trusted diamond-shaped frame. When *MONOCLE* takes the Finc for a spin, the pedalling feels effortless thanks to the smooth tread of the 20-inch tyres created by German manufacturer Schwalbe. All of these factors, says Freitag, mean that it is not necessary to power the bike with electricity. "The Finc was designed for Zürich's flat pavements."

But Finc isn't just a brand; it's also about community. On Thursday evenings, cyclists convene at the company's HQ for a beer, a flick through its smart selection of cycling magazines and, should they choose, a test ride of the bike. Getting Zürich's residents in the saddle requires both infrastructure and curiosity – the Finc has certainly set the wheels in motion. — 

fincycles.com

1. The Finc team outside the firm's HQ
2. Finc fanatic going for a spin