

LEXUS

Bamboo Dreams

If you've been loving the eco-friendly aspect of your Lexus hybrid, here's a great new way to green your other wheels—and the rest of your life. Thanks to California master bicycle craftsman Craig Calfee, you can now order a custom bike made of the world's most renewable and exciting natural material: bamboo. Appropriate for triathlons or trips with toddlers, the bikes amaze for several reasons.

Their vibration damping is superior to even carbon fiber bikes, giving riders the feeling of floating on clouds. And while bamboo is technically a grass, it has a greater strength-to-weight ratio than steel. Which means Calfee's creations are extremely light yet stiff, strong, and durable. It's no wonder they've survived the Hawaiian Ironman (the Tour de France of triathlons) and that Robin Williams and actress/triathlete Maxine Bahns are fans. There's another benefit to these \$3,500-to-\$8,000 rides: "They're great conversation pieces," says Calfee. "When you're going to a café and want to make some friends, roll up on a bamboo bike. Everybody wants to check you out."

Actually, interest in bamboo is growing as fast as the plant does (which has been clocked at an astounding 3 feet a day). A coterie of architects has created new joinery systems that allow for new uses of the material: support columns for a German office building, for instance, and a Colombian suspension bridge that actually holds cars. Meanwhile, tinkerers worldwide have been, well, bamboozling convention, creating such items as all-bamboo surfboards, electric race cars, hammocks, PC cases (one won a Swiss design competition)—even beer (note to intrepid drinkers in China: It's called Science Bamboo Beer).

The fibers of this strong-as-steel grass are also being spun into quality fabrics that have, improbably enough, the softness of cashmere. The plant's antibacterial properties make it resistant to mold and mildew. And it's breathable, absorbent, and beautiful. Which explains why vendors like Hammacher Schlemmer and Lands' End are selling bamboo-fabric sheets, pajamas, robes, and towels. And why even celebrity wedding dresses have been spun from this miraculous grass. For more information, visit www.calfeedesign.com/bamboo.htm, www.americanbamboo.org, or www.deboerarchitects.com.

—Rachael Migler



THE IS-F: READY FOR TAKEOFF

A word of warning to the world's sports sedans: The Lexus IS-F will arrive soon. This latest addition to the IS model series is, simply put, the highest-performance Lexus ever built. Under the hood, there's an exceptionally powerful direct injection 5.0-liter V8 engine with more than 400 horsepower and 350 lb-ft of torque on tap. The vehicle has also been given Lexus' latest advance in transmission systems: an eight-speed direct paddle shift gearbox, which is tuned to deliver ultra-fast shifts in manual mode operation, and will also feature throttle "blip," which helps synchronize engine rpm on downshifts to ensure seamless shifting. This all adds up to power, acceleration, and handling that rivals high-performance sports cars—and a 0-60 speed of under five seconds. IS-F drivers will also enjoy high-performance brake technology akin to those found in racing cars: massive perforated discs with opposed aluminum six-piston front brake calipers and two-piston rear-brake calipers. The IS-F even looks fast. It features large 19-inch, 10-spoke, lightweight forged-alloy wheels; a low-to-the-road race car stance with side air outlets behind wide front fenders; and quad exhaust tips in the rear. Inside, the cabin includes sporty blue-lit instrument gauges; perforated leather seats and a perforated steering wheel and shift knob; and an optional composite aluminized interior trim. Visit www.lexus.com in

