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VELO VISION AND VELO-VISION We weren't first with the name. Velo-Vision (note the hyphen) is a progressive HPV-friendly bike shop in Körten, near Bergisch-Gladbach, Germany, who also make their own recumbents. Velo Vision magazine is working in friendly harmony with Velo-Vision in Germany.

Velo Vision is printed on paper produced from sustainable forests to Nordic Swan standards.



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All photos by Peter Eland.

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WEIGHTY MATTERS

'??kg' in the text of a review isn't very helpful for readers, as I realised just before deadline. So the trusty *Velo Vision* digital bathroom scales were hurriedly deployed on all three of this issue's test bikes. The results? 19.4kg, 21.4kg, and 32kg – read the reviews to work out which is which.

That's a lot of metal. Yet all three bikes received broadly favourable reviews, with the weight mentioned only in passing. Given that pages and pages are devoted in more sport-oriented cycling magazines to the shaving off of grams, let alone kilograms, are we over-lenient when it comes to bike weight?

Maybe so, maybe not. While I appreciate the truly exhilarating feeling of riding a really light bike, when it comes to real practical cycling – commuting, or distance touring – light weight is something I'll willingly sacrifice for function and reliability. If it bothered me, I'd rather just get a light bike for playing on in addition to my utility bikes.

It's all about choosing the right tool for the job. The most satisfying ride I've had in the last few months was on the 32kg Scooterbike Urban. York was in snow, and traffic was at a standstill. A few brave cyclists were falling off, then walking on the ice. But the trike had no problem at all taking me to work, and I even skidded around a bit just for fun.

That's what special cycle designs are all about. They let you complete a transport task – a journey on ice, a bike-and-train trip, or load-carrying – with a minimum of fuss, safely, under your own steam, and make it enjoyable too.

We all need many bikes – some light, some heavy. Now if only I had more space to put them all...

Peter Eland

PS There was a rather underwhelmed response to the 'Back Page' last issue, and we've also had an unprecedented rush in advertising bookings. So I've dropped it for now. To make up for this, *Velo Vision* is now (and will remain) in full colour throughout.

THE RUNABOUT WITH REVERSE



A recumbent trike with reverse gear and differential? With specs like that mechanically-inclined Tom Riley couldn't resist a chance to try out the Scooterbike Urban ...

The 'Compact Long Wheelbase' format gets short shrift in a lot of reviews. In mainstream cycling titles, machines in any recumbent layout are often new to the reviewers, and their lack of confidence and experience with recumbents often leads them to damn the machines for faults which are not really there. In more specialist publications, reviewers acclimatised to more laid back machines, often built for speed, can feel that the format falls between two stools, and perhaps fail to give it the attention it deserves.

The format persists, though. For a

comfortable, general purpose, all-round recumbent that is easy to live with, easy to ride, undaunting and predictable in traffic and not too bulky, the CLWB fits the bill pretty well, and whilst the classic Oke-Ja and BikeE are no longer available, there have emerged other machines from HP Velotechnik, Cannondale, Giant and others, aiming to fill the gap.

Another contender in the format, not distributed in the UK until just recently, is the Scooterbike. This established range of machines is made in Germany by USED. Based around a main frame unit which

can carry either a bike rear triangle or a trike rear axle, the various models are set up for speed, leisure, touring or commuting and come with a wide variety of drive options, from 8-speed derailleur to Rohloff hub. Our sample, the hub-gear Urban trike, is perhaps the most remarkable technically, with seven speeds, reverse gear and differential-based two wheel drive. Priced at £1895 in standard (very well equipped) spec, it's now being imported by Kinetics of Glasgow.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

It was a dark and stormy night when I broke a journey across the Pennines to collect our sample machine from its owner, Rob Brock, and the subsequent rain-lashed journey to York may have coloured the enthusiasm I felt for the pretty blue trike when it and I were warm and dry at the end of the trip.

But not very much, though, because the high quality of this machine is immediately apparent. The metallic finish is good, the steel frame tubes are neatly welded, and the components are all of high quality, with Schwalbe Big Apple tyres, Magura Big hydraulic disk brakes and Alesa deep profile rims. Mudguards, a rack and a quality dynamo lighting system are all fitted. Hubs are the manufacturer's own, and carry the disconcerting tag 'Another USED product'. The name was chosen, apparently, to reflect the manufacturer's intent for their machines to be tools for everyday life that get used regularly, rather than being leisure jewellery. Throughout the bike there is no point at which one can spot the manufacturer cutting costs or fitting lookalike equipment.

After a while the domestic authority suggested that I should try using the trike as an urban runabout rather than doing three point turns in her living room.

For that purpose the rack at the

end of the frame accepted some medium sized panniers without a problem, the tubes being of a sensible diameter. Our trike also has the optional carrier system of a sturdy plate carried over the rear axle, to which a briefcase, courier bag or grocery box can be attached with no problem. The only quibble I have with this arrangement is that those wishing to carry outsize loads will have to saw off the overhanging end of the mainframe, or buy a trailer.

The seat is comfortable and adjusts quickly on an aluminium track, and mounting and dismounting are easy with the very low step-through frame. Overall weight is around 32kg.

ON THE ROAD

On a conventional upright trike you are free to move your weight around, correcting the balance of the machine over obstacles and around corners by pulling on the handlebars. No such opportunity on the Urban, so I found that I was taking things very cautiously as camber changes and uneven ground swayed the machine from side to side. It later proved that considerable provocation was



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Three wheels and full mudguards make the Urban great fun, and practical transport, in snowy conditions.

BELOW LEFT: The red widget on the lever is the parking brake. In continental fashion the front brake was on the left on our trike, but this could easily be changed.

BOTTOM LEFT: A rather stiff twist shifter, and the lever with hydraulic reservoir for the matched rear Magura 'BIG' discs.

BELOW: The seat slides along the frame for leg-length adjustment, with plenty of travel for short and tall riders alike.



needed to get the machine onto two wheels, though this is not a machine that the rider would want to 'chuck around' at high speed. The trike is fitted with Schwalbe's excellent 'Big Apple' tyres, which are very free-rolling and cushioning, but the rider can feel them 'loading up' and springing back with every lateral force applied to the bike, both on cornering and on uneven ground, which beginners might find unnerving.

The trike rolls along well, though I was conscious, unusually for me, of some loss of efficiency through the hub geartrain. Comfort was great; I sat there churning away against the wind, rather enjoying the sofa-like position, lack of need to balance, and single finger steering.

Steering became a drag after a while, though. The rake and trail seem to be lifted directly from the bike versions, so the handling when this setup is transferred to a trike does tend to follow the camber of the surface pretty strongly. Even a

flat surface hands-free isn't an option, as the bike tends to veer one side then the other according to which foot is applying the power, and how much weight is on each side of the seat. Hands-free riding isn't strictly necessary, or even recommended, but it is beneficial to have a machine with neutral handling on which to impose the rider's will, rather than have to override the tendency of a machine to follow its own path.

My whinges about geometry aside, that front wheel is great fun to guide, and especially at low speeds. A dinky red differential on the back axle allows each rear wheel to turn at its own speed as you go through a corner. With the more usual one wheel drive you will turn with alacrity one way, and with a great deal of effort in the other, the rider having to supply a lot of power to overcome the drive being only through the 'inside' wheel. With a differential, a trike can twizzle around with ease, and in an urban

environment this is a lot more useful than a touring rider used to the open road might think. One of the reasons for the great popularity of the Cycle Maximus load carrying trike is its manoeuvrability thanks to its differential.

Gearing range from the SRAM 7 hub gear was adequate for York, where any significant gradient is brief, but a lower range or an option like a Mountain Drive would become required as soon as a rider wanted to tackle more challenging slopes.

Brakes are a Tektro cable operated disc with a parking lock at the front, and a pair of Magura hydraulic disks at the rear. Rear brakes alone are more than adequate in almost all situations that this machine is likely to get into.

Public reaction to the trike was interesting. I received far more 'thumbs ups' from groups of urban youths than one normally does when pedalling anything unusual. Perhaps the 'easy rider' styling seems familiar to an onlooker and gives the machine some credibility.

But those fascinated with the drivetrain will want to know how I got on with the reverse gear. Well, in normal riding, I seem to have become conditioned to trikes enough to tend to avoid situations where I'd have to reverse. Realising this I went out and created some, and the reverse gave no problems. The gear is achieved via the coaster



ABOVE: Handlebars adjust for reach and angle, so most riders should be able to achieve both knee clearance and comfort.

BELOW: Reverse gear comes via the coaster brake on the hub gear. This in turn drives the (red) differential unit on the rear axle, which splits the power evenly between the two rear wheels, even when, as you corner, the wheel on the outside has to go faster than the one on the inside of the bend.



('back-pedal') brake on the seven-speed hub – I think the pictures will explain better than I can – and the reverse drive simply cuts in as soon as you turn the pedals backwards. If you do this whilst moving forwards, the bike simply brakes to a halt first, giving a 'transmission brake' option, although I don't know if the manufacturer recommends this practice. Ratio in reverse is whatever is selected on the gripshift.

Shifting itself is simple enough, the Sram twistgrip type shifter being as stiff as they usually are, especially when fresh out of the box. It is a mite disconcerting at first to have no means to backpedal without significantly retarding progress, but this is no more inconvenient or less easily overcome than accommodating a coaster brake or fixed gear on a conventional bike.

CONCLUSIONS

The Urban is a very well put together trike, and the standard spec will leave the general purpose user wanting for nothing. The ride is fun if not sporty, and the reverse and diff make manoeuvrability fantastic. Load carrying ability is pretty good, though I was disappointed not to be able to get a pair of touring size panniers into the space between rack and wheels, and the presence of the rear frame

overhang limits the size of carrier box or basket that one could mount on the rear (optional) carrier plate. These whinges aside, and suitably modified or equipped with a trailer, the trike has great potential as a load lugger.

How does it measure up as an urban runabout? Well, the Urban offers a fairly unique package of trike stability and road presence, CLWB compactness and ride height, and a drive system that means you never have to take your feet off the pedals, and for those who are nervous of venturing into traffic, want a recumbent or utility bike that will place as few demands on them as possible, or who have limited mobility, this machine has a lot to offer. For this last group, the Urban may turn out to be a boon. Its ease of use and comfort are likely to win it a following amongst those with special needs.

Downsides? Really only its bulk, which is inherent in its trike format, and those who like a little adrenaline in their commuting are unlikely to find it here – the trike certainly isn't 'chuckable' in the manner of a sporty trike recumbent or a lightweight hack bike – but then that's not what it's supposed to be.

For those leaving the trike locked in town, security will be an issue as the bike is beautifully made, and looks it. It's also a squeeze to get it into a crowded urban Sheffield stand.

The Scooterbike Urban, then, is well produced, innovative, fun, practical and easy to ride. The attributes of the rear triangle and its sophisticated transmission have never failed to make me smile, and this bike is fantastic to muck around on at low speed. It would be exciting to see this setup on a low and sporty machine...

Tom Riley

Photos: Peter Eland

AVAILABILITY

Manufacturer: USED GmbH:

Tel +49 5434 923888 1 or see

www.scooterbike.com

UK importer: Kinetics: Tel 0141 942

2552 or see www.kbikes.co.uk