

Velo Vision Sample Article

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If you have any problems or suggestions about the magazine in general, or this PDF article in particular, please email me at

peter@velovision.co.uk

I hope you enjoy the read.

Peter Eland
Editor and Publisher,
Velo Vision

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Velo Vision is published quarterly by Velo Vision Ltd. Daily news and updates can be found on www.velovision.co.uk

ISSN 1475-4312

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PUBLISHING SCHEDULE:
Issue 23: early September 2006
Issue 24: early December 2006
Issue 25: early March 2007
Issue 26: early June 2007

Velo Vision is a member of INK, trade association of the alternative press in the UK. www.ink.uk.com

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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SWINGS AND ROUNDABOUTS

Regular readers will know that *Velo Vision's* content isn't exactly planned and 'themed' several issues in advance. Instead each magazine seems to sort of self-assemble just in time, from whatever eclectic articles end up being ready on deadline.

That does keep the magazine fresh, but it also runs the risk that it can swing off balance. Issue 22 is rather a recumbent-heavy issue, with three bikes and a trike tested, plus more recumbent content elsewhere in the magazine.

I do try to bear in mind the different 'constituencies' amongst the readership, and I know that some are most interested in folding bikes, some want more velomobiles, others like 'normal' city bikes, and many also like the more non-technical content. I do hope that the majority enjoy reading about all sorts of innovative bike,

whether directly relevant to a personal interest or not.

In any case, recumbent non-enthusiasts need not despair. The pendulum will swing the other way next issue as we have mostly upright reviews planned, with a Landescape tandem, Kronan town bike and a child-carrying triplet lined up so far.

I don't think I should be too apologetic anyway. Recumbents are fun, and if you haven't yet tried a few modern bikes and trikes, maybe this issue will inspire you to give it a go!

Peter Eland

PS: With 22 issues now taking up space in the *Velo Vision* stores, we're becoming seriously short of space. Visit the York Cycle Show (see events listing, page 9) if you'd like to pick up some back issues at extremely low clearance prices!

ISLABIKES BOUNCE BACK

Sue Holden tests two from the range of relaunched Islabikes, designed as simple but quality cycles for children. So what's the verdict from the kids?

Peter Eland is a bit of a hero in our household. In a world dominated by cars, he delivers us exciting images of an alternative; real people having a great time on some fantastic bikes. Or, as my sociologist partner might say, 'representational affirmation of a marginalised practice'. Or, as my son Bobby might say, "ooh, look at this funny one! I'd love to have a go on that!" Peter's pedestal was raised further when he published a piece about Bobby's RennRad bike (VV 21). It is now reaching vertigo-inducing height, since he invited us to test out some new children's bikes.

Enough homage, what of the bikes? They are hot-off-the-production-line Islabikes, a new range of four bikes in 8 sizes for children aged from two to teens. The designer, champion racing cyclist Isla Rowntree, has also brought her much-lauded rack-mounted trailerbike back into production. Isla has excelled at all kinds of cycling, so little surprise that she has designed the bikes to be as practical and versatile as possible, with an eye to using them in competitive riding as well as for trips to school or for touring. Each bike can be customised, with the number of options increasing with the size of the bike, including tyres, valve type, mudguards, rack, and clipless pedals. And you can have any colour, so long as it's silver.



CNOC 16

THE TEST MACHINE

The Cnoc is available in two sizes. The smaller one has 14" wheels and an 8" frame and costs £100 plus £12 delivery. We tested the 16" wheels/9" frame version (above), costing £110 plus £12 delivery, with the addition of mudguards for a further £13. For

both sizes there is also the option of buying 'no tools' stabilisers for £10.

The Cnoc's frame, stem, seat post and rims are all aluminium, while the forks, handlebar, cranks and bottom bracket are steel. The front brake is a V-brake, the rear a back pedal coaster brake. The bikes weigh around 6.5 kg for the Cnoc 14, and 8 kg for the Cnoc 16.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Which looks more attractive to the average child; a glass of real orange juice, or a novelty sucky-bottle of lurid fruit flavour drink emblazoned with a wacky cartoon character? A sensible bike or one in pearly pink with a bespangled handlebar and a little seat to put dolly in? It can be hard work swimming against the

tide of substandard goods which are marketed to appeal to kids. The trick, of course (in addition to teaching one's offspring a critical approach to capitalism) is to make the good products look attractive too.

Bring on the Cnoc. This has to be the snazziest, slickest looking bike aimed at three to five year olds; very dinky but also very

proper bike. Bobby, who is almost five, particularly likes the BMX style handlebars, and its reflective shininess, naming his steed 'Hi Ho Silver'! It draws a lot of appreciative attention in the playground, though probably appeals to boys a bit more than it does to girls.

From my perspective, it looks good because it is free from associations

with Action Man or Barbie and the macho/girly styling which seems to be the default for children's bikes. Instead, the Cnoc's silver styling neatly avoids gender associations, so it can be passed between boys and girls unproblematically. Islabikes have also avoided the risk inherent in Puky bikes of your child going off the bike before they have outgrown it because the step-through design and primary colours look childish.

THE RIDE

On his first ride on the Cnoc, Bobby was thrilled at the improvement in his speed, compared to his 14" wheel RennRad. We were pretty amazed too, not only at the higher speed, but also better handling – whereas his steering had been a bit erratic, suddenly it became very steady. We rode out to Morecambe for our photo shoot, and were delighted to find that he was able to ride on a busy shared-use path very competently, and at a speed which did not seriously test the patience of adults. Furthermore, he is now able to get up inclines for which he previously had to dismount.

This praise for the Cnoc is made without the comparison of Bobby riding a similar bike – some of the improvement would have been evident, I assume, on moving from 14" wheels to a Spiderman bike with 16" wheels. However, a portion of it must be due to the Cnoc's design; part of the reason it looks so good is because it is so well proportioned, with all the components scaled down to suit a young child; a brake he can reach, a back pedal brake too, slick tyres which don't slow him down, and full-size mudguards which are his passport to puddles. In terms of weight, the Cnoc 16 is a good kilo lighter than the equivalent quality light bike, the Ridgeback MX16 in blue for boys (Melody in pink for girls), which for the same price has the disadvantages of chunky tyres and no eyes for mudguards – and which is twice the price of the Cnoc if you end up buying one of each for colour conscious sons and daughters! The other quality contender is the Puky Z6, which is £130 including mudguards, stabilisers and a rack,

but with its steel frame weighs 2 kg more than the Cnoc. However, you may consider Puky's ecological credentials to be better, being made in Germany rather than the far East.

BELOW: Bobby's steering stability and speed both took a turn for the better when he switched to the Cnoc.



THE ROTHAN

THE TEST MACHINE

The Rothan is the baby of the Islabikes range, but is made to the same specification as its bigger siblings. For £65 plus £12 delivery you get a no-pedals learner bike with 12" wheels, aluminium rims and frame, steel forks, a low slung saddle, and a handlebar which adjusts for height and reach. It weighs just a lovely little 4 kg.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Whilst my nearly three year old daughter Flo's first reaction to the Rothan was indignation – 'but where are MY pedals?' – it is an unarguably cute bike which draws attention wherever we go. Indeed, the combination of Flo and the Rothan causes a ripple effect of smiles breaking out on grumpy faces as we go by. Just imagine how happy



those people might feel if they were actually *riding* bikes!

The Rothan, though, is not cute as in cuddly bunny (though Flo has inexplicably named it 'Fluffy Bike'). As with the Cnoc, it is the disarming combination of small-but-perfectly-formed, diddy and yet deadly serious, which makes it such a head turner.

THE RIDE

The ride, of course, was initially a waddle. On its first outing Flo mainly walked with the bike between her legs, and understandably, didn't go very far. Second trip out, and with many reminders to put her bottom on the saddle, she began to get the hang of it. By the third outing she was speeding up and beginning to balance; the following day she amused herself by raising both legs and warbling 'wee-oo-ee-oo!'.

At the time of writing (about the ninth time she's been out on Fluffy) she has been practising bike skills such as how to lean the bike against a wall, how to walk it around Woolworth's, and how to get it back from the nine year olds who are enjoying coasting about on it in the school playground. It's surprising to see how adept she has already become at negotiating pedestrians, stopping at kerbs, and scooting uphill. All of which, in addition to the skill of balancing, will serve her well when she moves up to having pedals. Aside from all that learning, she is loving the free movement, the 'big girl' independence, and the way that she can now be an active participant in family cycling trips (with our trailer playing the role of sag wagon).

For Flo, all of this is only possible



ABOVE: Flo got the hang of scooting the Rothan after just a few attempts - but it's a good idea to take a child trailer along as a sag wagon too (below)



because the Rothan fits her well (and she is a dinky lass) and because it is light. She won't grow into our bigger and much heavier RennRad learner bike for perhaps another year. The fit means her tiny hands grip the slim handlebar properly, and she is well positioned for powering along. The lightness means she can manoeuvre the Rothan better than Bobby could

manage the RennRad, plus it's a big bonus for me when she goes on strike and I am left to carry it.

The only downside to the Rothan - in common with the Like-a-bike - is that it doesn't have a brake, so the rider needs to use their feet to control the bike on downhill. Whilst I am sure Flo will improve at this, at the moment it is stopping her from freewheeling down hill; having put her feet down too sharply, she is now wary of repeating that juddery and slightly scary experience.

Interestingly, Puky have extended their range of learner bikes to include models which have brakes, and in larger sizes to accommodate older children. These look more toy-like than the Rothan, and I'm sure are heavier too, but at a similar price or less (depending on the model) they offer real competition. Like-a-bike also make a model similar to the Rothan, the Jumper, but with rear suspension and costing £110, which we may be testing in a future issue.

CONCLUSIONS

As a somewhat cynical and tightfisted consumer, what do I make of the Islabikes? The sales pitch on Islabikes' informative website is, in a nutshell, "Isla's a great rider, she's taken note of how badly many bikes serve children, and has come up with serious bikes with attention to detail that look good and perform well, devoid of gimmicks". Do I swallow it? Yes. The bikes are light, they fit, and children and adults like them. Isla's styling decision - to have a consistent 'grown-up' and gender-neutral look for the whole range - is, I think, a wise one, and something which sets her bikes apart from their competitors. She is also offering a buy-back scheme, so in the unlikely event that you could not sell on an Islabike yourself, she will take it in part exchange for your next purchase.

The fact that the bikes are only available from Islabikes is clearly a limitation, and brings in the additional delivery cost (though you can arrange to drop in to their base near Wolverhampton and try before you buy). However, the website is very thorough, describing fit measurements and specifications in detail, and the bikes are delivered as complete as possible, with clear instructions on how to finish them off. They even come with useful tips for adults on how to help children learn to ride. Buying through the web also avoids the danger of confrontations in the bike shop, where your child forcefully tries to persuade you to buy a gimmicky effort!

Our biggest problem with the test bikes? They have imbued a sense of pride and excitement in our children which borders on boastful. "Look at me!" say the bikes and the children alike. Loudly. As for all that gender stuff and plain styling, I'll admit a concession: Bobby has customised the Cnoc with a Darth Vader bell; Flo has her eye on a Barbie one.

Sue Holden

AVAILABILITY

Direct from the manufacturer: Tel 01746 710835 or see www.islabikes.co.uk