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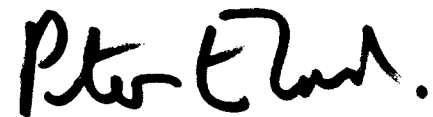
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Peter Eland
Editor and Publisher,
Velo Vision

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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.



COVER PHOTOGRAPH:

The Challenge Concept XT trike on the road.

OPPOSITE: The Koga Worldtraveller on a forest track near Bellingham. Both photos by Peter Eland.

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TESTING TIMES

Once again we have an issue chock full with bike tests – I hope you enjoy it. Our March issue is always popular with manufacturers wishing to launch fresh products ready for the new cycling season, and our thanks in particular go to both Challenge and Hase Bikes for rush-shipping us test trikes hot off the production line. Our continued thanks also to all of my friends in York who model for the photos and whose 'second opinion' insights I often feed back into the review write-ups.

It's a sign of a flourishing industry that there's a constant flow of significant new models seeking evaluation and exposure to you, the critical reader and potential customer. Are we ever going to run short of new and exciting bikes to test? Not likely!

Peter Eland

RIDING THE SCHOOL RUN



Sue Holden and Dave Horton explore the options for transporting multiple children by bike – on a budget.

Here's the challenge. Your eldest child is starting school, and a younger sibling needs to travel with you too. You want to go by bike but don't have the cash or storage space to contemplate snazzy solutions such as a Christiana trike or a triplet. How can you turn your existing bike into a school run workhorse?

This article shows how four families with young children at Dallas Road School in Lancaster have tackled the problem. It also tests one new piece of equipment, the FollowMe.

OPTION 1

Two kids snug in the trailer

When Maya started school her little sister Lola was only six months old. With a winter's riding ahead, and wee Lola having to do the two mile



when they get to the shops, Zoe can just convert the trailer into a pushchair by taking off the towing arm, and attaching swivel wheels and a handle; especially useful if Lola is asleep.

We also began transporting our children by trailer. Initially we had one which was rather narrow and had a saggy unsupported seat for the children. Later we upgraded to a second hand Chariot Comfort. This folds well, is very comfy and robust, and is also wide enough for larger children. Nowadays we only use it for the school run if the rain is really lashing down and one of them is feeling fragile; both children are generally too stubbornly attached to the joys of pedalling to opt for being passive in the trailer.

trip four times a day, their mum Zoe opted for a Chariot Comfort trailer with a baby hammock. Both children are kept out of the weather, and enjoy the sociability of sharing toys and snacks in the trailer whilst their mum slogs away on the bike. Also, having dropped Maya at school, there is loads of storage space for shopping. And

MAIN PICTURE: The Pashley U-plus-2 trailer trike, now sadly discontinued, is a stable if heavy way to transport two youngsters. This set-up is described overleaf under 'Option 5'.

INSET: Adding a trailerbike is a good way to take advantage of the propulsion potential in young legs. See the 'Option 3' section for a report on how this Islabikes model performs.



For the adult, trailers feel heavy but otherwise don't affect your ride. They track beautifully and only occasionally cause problems when negotiating, for example, a kerb or narrow gate. Many would argue that they are also substantially safer than having children on your bike, as the weight is low and the trailer is so stable.

For us the main disadvantage is storing the bulk of a trailer – as we don't have a garage to roll it into, we have to keep folding and unfolding it. Added to this is the waste of not harnessing the kids' pedal power – once they are big enough to contribute, it can seem a bit galling (particularly on hills) to be hauling them to their cries of "can't you go any faster?"!

Availability

Chariot trailers, and the equally high quality Burley trailers, are widely available. The 2006 Chariot Comfort costs £365.00 from, e.g. www.comptoncycles.co.uk (Tel 0208 690 0141). The stroller conversion kit is £45, baby sling £40. There are many other trailers available; basic ones start at £80.

OPTION 2

One up front, one on the back

What did people do before the cycle industry started providing for children? They tied one jumper around the top tube for the smaller child to perch on, and the other sat on the rack at the back! Guaranteed to horrify safety experts, and likely to attract disapproval from people in general, at least in the UK, but without doubt the cheapest and simplest option and no fiddling with spanners either.

Of course, there are different kinds of seats which formalise this set up. For the 'one on front' Dave has a simple seat bolted onto his bike's top tube. Flo, who has used this seat since she was two, holds her feet on stirrups which attach to the down tube. These footrests fold up, so that when she is not on the bike, Dave doesn't have to ride with his knees out. From here

have to hop off the saddle and stand over the top tube when stationary, the front seat may not be an option, because it takes up much of the space that you need to stand in. The adult also has to ride with their knees out, but most report that they get used to this, and it is OK for short distances.

As for the 'one on the back', we didn't use a special seat. Before we had a trailer bike, Bobby, who was then four, would sit side-saddle on the rack, holding the seat tube and the back of the rack and with his dangling limbs protected from the wheel by a pannier. This, with the top tube seat, is the set-up Dave would use when in a hurry to get Bobby and Flo to school and nursery. Dave notes how, with Bobby perched on the rear rack in this way, most car drivers seem to take special care when overtaking! The only formal alternative to sitting on the rack for a child of school age is the Bobike Junior, which is suitable for children up to 32 kg, but which is also quite heavy in itself.



Flo gets a great view of the road, is nicely nestled between Dave's arms, and they can communicate easily. A beautifully simple, cheap and functional solution for moving a pre-school child.

One limitation, however, is that, for a front seat to work, the adult needs to be able hold the bike steady whilst sitting on the saddle. If, like Sue, you

Availability

Our top tube seat is called a Companion Carrier and cost £35, available to order from www.spoke.co.uk, Tel 01865-311610, who also stock all the following seats. A more widely available alternative is the Hamax Lecco seat, which costs £16, and has fixed foot rests. More sturdy variations on the theme, which are suitable

for younger children and for bikes without a horizontal top tube, include the Bobike Mini (around £65) which attaches to the bike's handlebar stem, and the Weeride (formerly called Centric Safe Haven) (£70) which has its own crossbar. The Bobike Junior is £89 from www.spoke.co.uk and other sources.

OPTION 3

Single seat trailerbike

As Bobby grew heavier and keener to pedal, we moved him from the rack to a trailerbike. This gives him the pleasure of actively riding, and at a decent pace, whilst giving us the peace of mind that we are in control of the riding.

We plumped for an Islabike trailerbike because it hitches directly over the towing bike's rear hub, using a cycle headset as the pivot, giving good tracking and handling. It attaches with ease to its special rack using two quick release skewers. The rack is highly adjustable, but it is also heavy and lacks a plate for a back light. The rack attachment also means that you must remove any panniers to attach or take off the trailerbike.

The trailerbike itself is light and easy to convert for use by either Bobby or Flo, as both the saddle and handlebar have a wide range of movement. This means that once Bobby has been dropped at school, Flo can switch from the front seat to her preferred position where she can pedal! It also has six gears, which not only helps in input to forward motion (which can be considerable), but is also a good way of teaching them about gears and how to use them.

There are many other trailerbikes available which hitch to the towing bike's seat post, with or without gears and handlebar adjustment. The main advantage of these is lower price; the downside is that the ride is less stable because the point of attachment is too high and liable to develop play. To fit them you also need about 5 cm of clear seat post; one father at the school is riding with his saddle too high to accommodate the hitch.

Finally, with the Roland Add+Bike system you can fit a child seat on the rack and attach a trailer bike to the back of the rack too. Unfortunately, we were not able to get hold of an Add+Bike in time to test it for this article. Comments on website forums suggest that it handles well.

Availability

The Islabike trailer bike is only available from www.islabikes.co.uk (Tel 01746 710835), costing £200 including the rack + £12 p&p. An additional rack is £30.

The Burley Piccolo also attaches to the rack, and is available for around £330, additional rack £80, from many suppliers on the internet or otherwise.

The Roland Add+Bike (formerly known as the Hoening) is available for mail order from www.bikesandtrailers.com (Tel 01273 480479) for £215 for the single gear model, £289 for 3-gears and £358 for the seven gear version plus £38 delivery. An additional rack is £32.

Other trailer bikes, hitching to the seat post, are widely available and start at about £100.

OPTION 4

Using a FollowMe

One disadvantage of trailerbikes, with the exception of the Roland Add+Bike, is that you can't put a child seat on the rack. So the only way of transporting two children is by putting one on the front, which may not be possible if, like Sue, you have short legs and a small bike frame.

For this article we tried the FollowMe, which joins the adult's and child's bikes in such a way that you can still use the rack for a second child. This Swiss invention attaches low down, using axle extensions on the lead bike's rear wheel and the child's bike's front wheel. An extending bar connects to the child's bike's down tube, lifting their front wheel off the road, and keeping it straight.

When the child's bike has been detached, for example, leaving it locked at school, the FollowMe folds up and hangs from either the adult's rack or saddle rails. The FollowMe is also easily detached from the adult's bike using two quick

release skewers. It is suitable for all bikes from 12" to 20" wheels, with a suggested maximum additional weight (child + their bike + any other load) of 45 kg.

Sue found that setting the whole thing up was a little fiddly but not complicated, and was pleased to find that you can set a sensible clearance height for the front wheel regardless of the size of the child's bike. This avoids the 'bucking bronco' effect sometimes seen with other towing devices, where the need to used fixed points for attachments can result in the front wheel of the child's bike being too high off the ground. Attaching and detaching the FollowMe is also reasonably straightforward, and becomes easier with practice.



Riding with the FollowMe feels fine because, as with a trailer, the attachments are low down and the tracking is good. However, Sue experienced more wobble when setting off than with the Islabike trailerbike, probably due to the extra length, which sets the child's weight and their back wheel further behind the adult.

As the photo shows, the main advantage for the school run is that the FollowMe enables you to transport a child on the rack or on a rear-mounted bike seat. Its other distinct advantage is the flexibility it gives for a child cyclist to move between full independence and semi-dependence, according to changes in road conditions, tiredness and the patience of accompanying adults! Whilst other towing devices also allow this, they do so with much less stability; they use high-up attachment points on the adult's seat post and on the child's bike's headset. One parent at the school is on his second Trailagator, because the wrenching forces had caused too much play and movement to be safe.

There are also cost and space-saving benefits to the FollowMe; just once piece of clunk to buy and store rather than having both the child's bike and a trailer bike. However, when the FollowMe is still attached to the adult's bike it adds about 13 cm to the length; enough to mean Sue could only get her bike in the shed with much difficulty.

The main disadvantage we found with the FollowMe is that its turning circle is large. This can be a problem in the confines of the school bike racks, or even turning around in our back alley. In comparison, our trailerbike combination is much shorter, and flexes over about 290 degrees, compared to the FollowMe's 135 degrees. Another difference is that, having left Bobby's bike at school, Sue found the FollowMe a slightly rattly thing to have on her bike for the rest of the day, compared to leaving the trailerbike and continuing free of any attachments.

Availability

The FollowMe costs the equivalent of £125 plus £14 for P&P to the UK and is available direct from the manufacturer www.FollowMe-Tandem.com (Tel +41 62 874 05 04). Additional parts are available, for example, to attach the same FollowMe to additional adults' and children's bikes, and the manufacturer is hoping to set up distribution in the UK soon.



OPTION 5

A two seater trailer trike

Anni began by transporting her daughter Ruby to school using a rack-mounted child seat. But this felt too unstable, as Ruby's weight exceeded the maximum for the seat, and it did not allow her to join in with the riding. Ruby has dyspraxia, causing poor balance, so Anni did not feel confident that she could manage on a single wheel trailer bike. Instead she got a second hand Pashley U-plus-1, a trailer trike for one child. The previous owners had, however, attached a child seat, turning it into transport for one child and one toddler. In the photo it looks a little cramped, as we had to press "I'm a big girl, I'm nearly four!" Flo into the role of the toddler.

The U-plus-1 comes with seven gears, mudguards and a luggage rack. Although it attaches to the

adult's seat post, Anni finds that the ride feels very stable because the trike set-up eliminates any wobble. In comparison, she found a ride on Sue's bike with the Islabike trailerbike much more wobbly and sweat-inducing. The stability of the trike also means that, with the saddle down low, Ruby is able to mount and dismount independently. In the absence of a younger sibling,

Certainly, compared with the other four options we have featured, the U-plus-2 seems most able to cope with transporting two larger children. Alison will still be able to use it when Tilly starts school this year, and for a year or two after, until Amos is riding to school independently.

The main disadvantage of both the trailer trikes is the weight of their steel frames, and their bulk. Unfortunately, Pashley have stopped producing the U-plus-2, and there is no equivalent in the marketplace so you'd need to track one down second hand (or, like Alison, third hand).

Availability

The U-plus-1 is available from Pashley www.pashley.co.uk (Tel 01789 292 263) and other internet sources such as www.discountbicycles.co.uk for £445. The U-plus-2 is discontinued, but used to sell for £545.

CONCLUSION

Families are meeting the challenge of transporting two children on the school run in a variety of ways, using relatively cheap and cheerful additions. These may lack the beauty and ingenuity of specialist machines, but are perhaps more suited to the terrain of the UK, and the psychology of thrifty parents. Doing the early years school run by bike is entirely possible and eminently practical – it can also be highly enjoyable. By riding rather than driving we also illustrate the possibilities to others; this week another mother has joined the small band of cycling folk at school after seeing our daughter, younger than her own, on a trailerbike.

Finally, we cannot say which of the options is best – each family must find a solution, or a compromise, which best meets their needs, depending on budget, existing bikes, ages of children, storage space, traffic conditions, and so on.

What we can say is this: it's a great feeling to drop off the children, shed the paraphernalia, and go for a ride on your plain, simple, naked bike.

Sue Holden and Dave Horton