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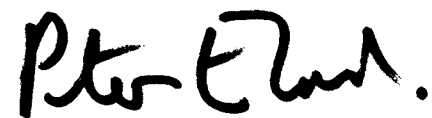
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Peter Eland
Editor and Publisher,
Velo Vision

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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: Riding the Strida. Photo by Peter Eland.

OPPOSITE: The *Velo Vision* trailer is usually used to move bike boxes around York, but here it's helping some friends move a sofa. Photo by John Isles.

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EUROBIKING

I hope, dear reader, that you will excuse the late appearance of this September issue – as last year, we delayed publication so as to include the report from Eurobike, which takes place in early September. It really is the focus of the European cycle industry, with many manufacturers timing their R&D effort to have their latest and best ready to exhibit to the thousands of dealers, journalists and distributors at the show.

As a journalist, I'm privileged to have perhaps the best job of them all: seeking out the interesting and the new, without having to get into the nitty-gritty of buying and selling. The manufacturers and designers are keen to tell me about their work, and I try to repay their enthusiasm and hard work by reporting their innovations as fully as possible. Perhaps the most difficult part of the process is the editing: cutting down the masses of photographs and notes to a length which won't overwhelm the rest of the magazine. I've done my best, as ever, and I hope the report will let you enjoy a vicarious visit to perhaps the greatest cycle show on earth.

Peter Eland

THE SUPER-SIZED CYCLE

It's billed as a 'bike for the oversized rider' – but could the USED BigBoy also be a wonderfully low maintenance bike for round town? We tested it to find out.



BACKGROUND

USED are principally a distributor, based in Germany, and handle a number of interesting products including the Down Low Glow (see VV 22 p. 36), Carryfreedom trailers (VV 15 p. 32), Monark transport bikes and the Scootertrike (VV 17, page 32). They also do a few own-brand products under the 'Cactus 10' banner, of which the most prominent is the BigBoy.

The BigBoy has been tested to carry riders of up to 135 kg (over 21 stone, almost 300 lb). While it's hard to find published weight limits for most bikes, it's fair to say not many are built with heavy riders in mind. Those that do have limits tend to be folding bikes or very lightweight racing machines. In any case, even if a bike has reserves of strength in the frame, the wheels will often be the

weak point under heavy load.

So, if you want some peace of mind that you're riding a solid rig, the BigBoy should offer an appealing alternative to custom-building.

It's imported to the UK by Loads Better, and is available in a number of frame sizes and five colours. Our test bike is to the UK specification chosen by Loads Better, with the 5-speed SRAM hub gear, and the base bike costs £525. They can also provide the bike with 3, 7 or 8-speed hub gear options at £460, £525 or £595 respectively. Two styles of low step-through frames are also available.

Our bike was a 60 cm brown-red Big Boy, the largest frame size. We also had the optional Brooks B67 sprung saddle (£35.95), leather grips (£17.95) and rear carrier (£21.50) for a price as tested of £600.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

This is definitely a bike with wow factor! With its cream Fat Frank balloon tyres, brick red frame and matching mudguards, honey leather grips and saddle and floral graphics, it's very much a "nice bike, mister!" ride. It's tending perhaps towards cruiser styling, but the mudguards and lights suggest that the design's also functional in intent.

Looking more closely at the frame, the front end is beautifully brazed with neat lugs joining what must be some fairly heavy-walled steel tubing. The rear triangle, while also very neatly brazed, is less impressive, with squashed flat tubing forming the dropouts. At the top, the rear stays are also squashed flat and bolted to the seatpost clamp.

It's all presumably strong enough (they've had it fatigue tested) but it doesn't really look the part – I'd like to see proper joints and forged dropouts at this price, and especially on a bike intended for heavy riders. I asked USED to comment, and they told me that they will be changing to more conventional construction in future batches of BigBoy frames as production numbers increase (and there'll be a new, fancy, laser-cut seatstay bridge, too). As it is, it's more of an aesthetic than a practical complaint. It's not something a

non-bike geek will even notice. And it's also about all I could find to complain about.

Moving on, and top marks for the full-length metal mudguards, powder coated to match the frame. They're solid and rattle-free, and cover the fat tyres well. They give plenty of clearance for the Schwalbe Fat Franks, white-wall 'balloon' tyres in the MTB size (26" x 2.35" or 559-60), with puncture-resistant Kevlar layer and reflective bands on the sidewalls. These run on stainless steel rims from reputable Dutch manufacturer Van Schothorst. There are 36 stainless spokes front and rear, and they're serious spokes – 2.35 mm diameter. Bike wheels usually have 2.0 mm spokes or thinner, and the extra size makes a big strength difference.

The combination of fat tyres, steel rims and heavy spokes should provide close to bomb-proof wheels even for heavy riders, and are a real plus for this bike.

The rear hub is the 5-speed SRAM model, with its 'clickbox' protected by a steel loop held under the axle nut. On the other side is a drum brake, with reaction arm P-clipped to a chainstay. Finally, the Chainglider chaincase completely encloses sprocket, chainring and chain. It's a light plastic shell which 'floats' over the chain, rather than being attached to the frame.

It all adds up to quite a bit of hardware to disconnect should you need to remove the wheel, so I'd recommend trying to fix most punctures with it in place. If you do need to go for it, the Chainglider removes easily – just pop the plastic rear cover off and remove it to reveal what should be a clean and well lubricated chain.

In the front wheel is the Sturmey-Archer combined hub brake and hub dynamo, as we've tested before in *Velo Vision* (see VV 21 p. 28 and VV 25, p.47). The dynamo part drives a Smart halogen front light and a standlight-equipped LED rear light which is fixed to the mudguard. The wire to this rear light passes very tidily through one of the rear mudguard stays.

The 'cockpit' of the bike is pretty much a stainless steel only zone: you don't want fatigue-prone aluminium



TOP: The BigBoy uses the SRAM 5-speed hub with drum brake.

ABOVE: The Chainglider protects both the chain and the rider's trousers.



The Chainglider comes apart easily and in seconds, without tools, for rear wheel removal.



Soft leather grips look and feel great, and the stainless steel stem and bars are strong and durable.



What a splendid saddle – well worth the upgrade (it's optional). The suspension is very effective.

on a heavyweight bike like this. Bars, stem and seatpost are all stainless, with a fair amount of 'rise' in both stem and bars to give a relaxed, upright position. Leather grips, the SRAM twist-shifter and the obligatory bell adorn the bars, while the wide, well-sprung and good-looking Brooks saddle tops the seatpost.

Finally, I must give some special praise to the double-leg stand, fitted under the bottom bracket. It gives superbly solid and stable support to the bike, especially combined with the spring which links frame



and fork. This keeps the front wheel pointing forwards when the bike's parked, and that does make parking the bike a real pleasure. I couldn't feel it affect the handling while riding.

The price of all this equipment, and the 135 kg rider rating, is weight. As tested, the BigBoy weighed 19.62 kg without the rack, which added 840 g when fitted. But for a flatland town bike the weight isn't necessarily an issue, except perhaps if you need to lift it.

THE RIDE

The BigBoy is a good advertisement for the 'balloon bike' concept, promoted by Schwalbe on the back of their Big Apple and Fat Frank tyres. The level of comfort you get over almost any surface is impressive, especially when combined with the wide, sprung saddle and soft leather grips. For urban riding it's a more convincing system than some of the elaborate full-suspension 'comfort' town bikes: simpler, lower maintenance and (though perhaps not on this bike), lighter.

The amount of air you put into the tyres does make some difference: the tyre sidewalls suggest between 1.5 and 4 bar (23 to 60 psi). Heavier riders should certainly tend toward the higher pressures: if you run the tyres too soft they slow down and the back wheel can 'squirm' alarmingly in corners. But suitably inflated they roll pretty well, can absorb pretty much any bump you care to ride over, and also feel secure on corners.

But this is by no means a fast bike – the fairly upright riding position, the weight and those big tyres all mean that even with a top gear of just 78", you'll be unlikely to spin out unless you're plummeting downhill or surfing a strong tailwind. It's one of those bikes which you can ride reasonably briskly, but once it's up to cruising speed the effort required to go any faster is huge – better to just relax and go at the pace it lets you.

The SRAM 5-speed hub shifted well, if not infallibly. Quite often I'd need to ease up or back-pedal fractionally to provoke the change.

Not a problem at all, and in use it was quiet and felt efficient enough in all gears.

The Chainglider really works a treat – perfectly silent, and I couldn't tell it was there from pedal resistance (although no wonder, perhaps, with those fat tyres...). There is noticeable resistance if you back-pedal by hand, but it's hard to say how much that affects the riding efficiency. Anyway, it's great not to have to worry about tucking in your trousers.

I found the bottom gear, at 31", about right for setting off, and gentle gradients. But you'd want more and lower gears if you live somewhere hilly. You might also want to consider whether the hub brakes are really up to serious stopping of a heavy bike and rider from the sort of speeds you'd get from a decent downhill. On our test bike they weren't fully worn in, perhaps, but I'd say stopping was adequate for moderate speed riding on the flat, but not much more than that. As I've reported before, the Sturmey front drum is OK most of the time but in a 26" wheel it just doesn't have 'emergency stop' power. Nor is the rear drum particularly powerful. You really need to pull both brakes on hard to stop the bike reasonably fast, and I'd definitely like a few more reserves in hand. It's not easy to upgrade, either: the frame is equipped with neither disk nor canti bosses, so you're basically stuck with the drums.

On to the bike's other systems, and the lighting system was reliable in use, even through the occasional downpour. I have been spoilt, rather, by the automatic LED lights I use on my own bike, and actually switching lights on and off seemed a bit of a

chore. But it's always great to have the lights there whenever they're needed, and it's an easy upgrade if you want to fit a sensor-controlled LED headlight. The halogen one fitted is pretty bright anyway, certainly good enough for urban riding.

The carrier rack is rated, they say, to 25 kg, and at the price it's hard to complain. I'd personally prefer a model with better support for the pannier back, but it shouldn't be hard to fit your own if you want. There's absolutely stacks of heel clearance for panniers thanks to the long-wheelbase frame.

CONCLUSIONS

For heavier riders looking for a bike which will take the weight and get them on the road in comfort for practical, round-town cycling, the BigBoy is well specified and, perhaps, unique. It's certainly a lot cheaper than custom-building a bike which could match its weight capacity and features.

If you live somewhere hilly, though, it might not be such a perfect match. Both gears and brakes ideally need significant upgrades for the hills, and doing this could be tricky.

But even for riders who don't push the weight limits, the BigBoy offers a whole lot of town bike utility and style. In an ideal world there'd be a wide range of Chainglider-equipped, hub braked, hub geared, hub dynamo'd bikes to choose from at different weights and prices. But here in the UK at least, the choice is pretty limited, and the BigBoy is one of the few bikes on which you'll find the lot.

It's surely one of the lowest-maintenance bikes around, and with its full, practical equipment and striking appearance it's an appealing way for riders of any size to cruise the streets in style.

Peter Eland

AVAILABILITY

In the UK, via Loads Better: Tel 0845 8682459 or see www.thisisloadsbetter.co.uk Manufacturer in Germany: USED. Tel +49 543 1908 9980 (they speak English) or see www.used-hq.com