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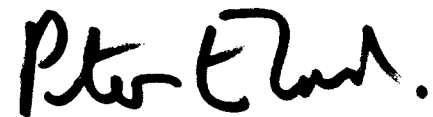
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Peter Eland
Editor and Publisher,
Velo Vision

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VELO VISION AND VELO-VISION
We weren't first with the name. *Velo-Vision* (note the hyphen) is a bike shop in Körten, near Bergisch-Gladbach, Germany. *Velo Vision* magazine exists 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 Cadenza. Photo: Peter Eland.

OPPOSITE: The weir on the River Ouse at Naburn Lock near York provides a turbulent backdrop. Photo: Peter Eland.

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TOO MUCH TESTING!

This is an issue somewhat stuffed full of reviews: perhaps too many. I think we've done justice to everything we've tested, but with a total of four bike tests plus masses of short reviews, it's been something of a logistical challenge.

Everything needs to be ridden as much as possible. Everything needs to be photographed several times: first while still clean, and then in use, preferably when it's sunny, and when I can persuade some of my friends to come out on a bike ride and have their pictures taken for the action shots.

Then, between sending the magazine to print and mailing it out, I'll try to get the review bikes cleaned, disassembled, carefully packed up and sent off. After that there's a few glorious weeks of actually having some spare space at home and in the office before the next batch of test bikes arrive, usually in huge cardboard boxes...

I'm certainly not complaining: I know how lucky I am to get to try all of these interesting bikes. I hope our reviews allow you to share some of the pleasure I take in riding them. And I'll try to scale back a bit for next issue!

Peter Eland

THE LONGTAIL LOADBIKE

We test out the Yuba Mundo, a six-speed 'longtail' workbike at a bargain price. Rated for 200 kg loads (or two passengers), can this bike take the strain?



MAIN PICTURE: The Yuba carries up to two passengers plus the rider. Of course, it's also designed for bulky cargo (**LEFT**).

BACKGROUND

The Yuba was developed in Germany as a workbike versatile and affordable enough to appeal both as a transport solution in developing countries and as a 'longtail' utility bike everywhere. 10% of the proceeds from direct Yuba sales in Europe and the USA go to JugendHilfe Ostafrika, Worldbike, Re-cycle or Planet Vélo – all charities providing cycles for developing countries. This also applies to bikes sold via Loads Better, the UK importer for the Mundo: kudos to them all for making this voluntary contribution.

There are currently three models of the Mundo: a red single-speed (UK price £460), the blue 6-speed which we reviewed (UK price £498), and to special order a version using the SRAM 5-speed hub gear, which is rated for loadbike use, for which the UK price is to be confirmed.

Contact Yuba or your country's importer for full details of exact prices and availability. The price may also be affected by the degree to

RIGHT: The Yuba offers a large load bed above the wheel, and also rails rated 50 kg each side. These detach easily if required via two bolts (**ABOVE RIGHT**) and a steel clamp block (**ABOVE FAR RIGHT**) each side.

which you are happy assembling the bike yourself: options range from full DIY or part-assembled, to fully-prepared by a local dealer.

As yet the accessory range is limited to mudguards (SKS) and bike stands – either the one-leg type or, as I'd choose without hesitation, a two-legged one. There's the Hebie Bipod, but as you'll see on some of the pictures we instead fitted the Hebie Bigfoot: see the review elsewhere in this issue.

Planned accessories include side bags, boxes and baskets, and arrangements for child-carrying. Other ideas are welcome, say the manufacturers, and they'll respond to customer feedback.

Our six-speed Yuba was one of the first production batch, and arrived unassembled. After building it up and using it for several weeks I passed it to York's cycle couriers, who reported back with further feedback which I've incorporated into this report.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The Yuba's frame is neatly welded (in Germany) in oversized steel, with a solid blue powder coat finish. It comes in two main sections: the main frame and the load bed, which attaches with six M6 bolts. The side rails are also separate, fitted with a couple of bolts under the main frame and with a clamp system at the back – so they're also easily removed if required. It all fitted together quite easily, with just a little fiddling required to get all six carrier holes lined up correctly. I also fitted the forks; headset races are already pressed in place, so it's just a question of assembling it.

The frame's a textbook example of triangulation, and manages to achieve quite a smart and sporty look, in my view, despite its workbike origins. The low step-through main frame is useful for easy access when loaded, and also provides the 'one size fits all'



adjustment capacity. The super-long seatpost let the bike fit riders from not much over 5' tall up to 6' 3" and more – it's a good family machine.

Up front, a quill-type headset supports wide, swept-back bars, giving a relaxed and upright riding position. The saddle is wide and sprung to match – most of your weight will be on it. Some riders, especially the cycle couriers, said that they'd prefer a more leaned-over approach, and this would be easily achieved with a pair of MTB riser bars and a less bulky saddle.

There are all the necessary cable stops, but apart from that braze-ons are limited to the mounting plate for the stand and a dynamo tab on the fork. No disk brake mounts are available either front or back.

Any workbike or tandem rider will tell you that the most failure-prone part of a heavy-duty bike is the wheels, and Yuba have gone a long way to ensuring that's not the case here. The front wheel is a relatively normal heavily-built 36-spoke design, but at the back they've gone to town with a BMX-standard 15 mm solid steel axle (back axles are usually around 10 or 12 mm!), 48 heavy-gauge 2.34 mm spokes and a wide, strong rim. It looks absolutely bomb-proof.

Both wheels are the 26" MTB size, and are fitted with 'Cruiser' 2.35" tyres. They're big and should be robust, with plenty of rubber on the tread, but the 'Max inflation 2.8 bar / 40psi' on the sidewalls is puzzling. At that pressure any decent load on the back will squash them flat. Pending word from Yuba we decided to risk it and vastly over-inflated them to around 75 psi. This transformed both the load capacity and handling of the bike.

I'm not sure whether to recommend an eventual upgrade here. The obvious choice is the 60 mm Big Apple tyre from Schwalbe. It's rated to 4 bar and 150 kg, so you'll still be pushing the limits, but by a smaller factor, and you might save some weight. But the tyres supplied are robust, and Yuba will have chosen them for a reason. Perhaps they simply don't dare for insurance/legal reasons to endorse the over-inflation which is really required to

get proper performance out of them. Braking is handled by V-brakes front and rear: the ones provided are decent quality basic models, and worked well enough. An obvious easy upgrade would be to replace them with Magura hydraulic rim brakes for more power and lower maintenance.

The six-speed Yuba employs basic derailleur gearing, with a twist-grip controlling a low-end Shimano derailleur. With a 14-28 freewheel sprocket set and 38T chainring that gives gear ratios of 36 to 72 inches – adequate for flat town riding, but a bit limiting for heavier loads or hills. There are several ways to extend the gearing range: add a wider-range freewheel (and maybe a derailleur upgrade to cope), add a front derailleur and triple chainset, or you could even add a Schlumpf bottom-bracket gearbox.

A chainguard was provided, supported above and below the chainring by a bracket which fits under the drive-side BB cup. The mounting bracket screws into the frame with a self-tapping screw. I had to bend the bracket to get the guard to clear the chain, but this



ABOVE: Basic but effective V-brakes do the stopping.

ABOVE RIGHT: Twist-grip gears and good solid metal brake levers

RIGHT: A low-end derailleur. Note also the 15 mm axle.



should be sorted out on later Yubas. The chainset, incidentally, is a steel one with steel cranks – certainly a chance to save some weight here if you decide to upgrade.

Weight as tested was a few grams over 28 kg. This was a bit of a surprise, as the Yuba leaflet and website suggested 19 or 21 kg. But we checked on two sets of scales, and that's what it weighed. This was later confirmed by Yuba: several kg



have been added between prototype and production for strength. Overall length is around 2.1 m. For storage you can park it on end – this is much better with the steering damper fitted, as otherwise the front wheel swings round and bends the reflector bracket.

Some pictures show the stand and steering damper fitted for separate review later this issue. A stand and mudguards are, in my view, almost essential accessories for this sort of bike. Both are of course easily fitted.

THE RIDE

Unladen, the Yuba is a stately ride. It's sort of like the Santos with swept-back bars, but an even smoother ride. The tyres are pretty much as fat as the Fat Franks, and the extra wheelbase means that bumps make even less of an impact. Add the super-soft saddle and it's a very cushioned ride indeed.

The steering is stable but light – having little weight on your wrists seems to help here, and it's easy to point the Yuba precisely. Remarkably this holds true with loads or people on the back too – the only load which disturbs the handling much is a person who won't sit still! Otherwise, while the bike gets heavy and you do have to apply more force with your legs, this is quite well isolated from the steering.

The brakes have a good 'grab' once adjusted right, and I didn't find them lacking even with passengers. The only niggle is that the joints on the rims had been left a bit rough, and fed a noticeable judder back through the bike under braking. Not enough to be serious, but annoying.

The gears worked fine: shifts are noisy and clunky, but reliable. There's a smooth cable run back to the derailleur which no doubt helps, and a six-speed isn't anywhere near as picky about tolerances as today's 8 or 9-speed systems.

The bike rolls along well unladen, but with additional load the back tyre starts to flatten and resistance increases. Inflating the tyres to a safe maximum helps here, but as with any heavily-loaded bike you don't really want to be going too fast anyway – safely, slowly and surely is the way to go.

LOADED UP

The load bed measures around 22 x 80 cm, and the side rails extend another 15 cm or so each side for an overall width of 54 cm. A sticker on the frame has reminders of the load limits: 200 kg on the carrier, but with a note that only 50 kg should be behind the back wheel. The side carriers are rated for 50 kg each side.

In practice, carrying people is the most likely way you'll reach those limits. While you can sit directly on the carrier it's not especially

their hands – a bit safer and more secure than the rails of the sprung saddle which several passengers instinctively grasped for.

There's just about room for two adults on the back, but an adult and a child would probably be more comfortable. Really small children will find the width of the carrier a lot to straddle, and will also need close supervision to keep hands and feet out of the rear wheel (or you could add some safety shields...).

One of the most frequently-asked



comfortable, and you risk the rear tyre rubbing the seat of your trousers. You could take a leaf out of the Xtracycle book and make a plywood base, or do as I did and just fold some heavy cardboard over the load bed and add a cushion. With the side rails acting as footrests this is quite a secure perch. If you do this regularly, a stoker stem off a tandem and some cut-down mini bars would be a nice addition to give passengers something to hang onto with

questions was about how to fit child seats. I don't see an obvious solution, except perhaps to fit them 'side-saddle'. The carrier's just too wide to fit between the legs of most current ones. Yuba are working on it.

Non-people loads are easier in a way – just strap them on and go. Depending on what you haul, some sort of baskets or boxes attached each side to throw stuff into will add a lot of convenience, and Yuba's own accessories along these lines

are eagerly awaited. The rails are too thick to use normal panniers – an adaptor rail might be a useful future accessory.

Very large one-piece loads can be tricky – they end up perched fairly high over the rear rack, and strapping them down so they're stable isn't always easy. If possible, it's often better to strap them against the side of the rack, resting on the side-rails and then ride 'lopsided' – even with 30 kg or so on one side of the bike it's perfectly manageable, and you just

instinctively ride with a slight tilt to compensate. Again, boxes each side which rise up to the height of the main carrier would be good: their tops would form a larger, flat load area, and long loads might also be strapped to the sides where they'd clear your legs and pedals.

But as the pictures show, you can get a lot on the Yuba just as it is. I carried large computer boxes, the Dahon folding bike, various piles of magazines and groceries and still didn't feel I'd really pushed the Yuba's abilities. The cycle couriers temporarily attached some cardboard boxes to each side, as most of their loads are relatively small, and say they plan on some proper rigid boxes in due course.

Overall the Yuba put in a very convincing performance as a heavy-duty workhorse,

and even the cycle couriers were impressed at its robustness.

CONCLUSION

When it was first announced the Yuba generated a deal of excitement – a serious load-bike for well under £500, at a time when you'd be well into four figures for any equivalent specialised design. And the quoted weight, at around 20 kg, was pretty much the same as a Burrows 8-Freight – a bike

costing more than twice as much (see review in Issue 9).

Now, though, the production machine turns out to weigh 28 kg, and competition has also hotted up. A few years ago the Xtracycle kit was the only longtail in town, but recent launches of the Surly Big Dummy and Kona Ute mean relatively mainstream bike companies are now getting in on the act. Some smaller-scale enterprises, such as Fraser Cycles in the USA and York's Bikerescue recycling operation, are also coming up with home-brew alternatives as the longtail concept spreads.

I don't think the Surly's available in the UK as yet, but the Kona is, and at an RRP of £580 it's not far off the Yuba in price. The Kona looks perhaps better equipped component-wise, but it's lighter-duty by far than the Yuba, with 32-spoke wheels and nowhere near such a massive frame. It's more a stretched normal bike than a from-the-ground-up workbike – but that might be enough for some riders. The Xtracycle kit is even cheaper of course, but can't compete with the rigidity of a built-in design. If you do want to spend close to twice the money, the 8-Freight gives you a lighter bike, distinctive design and arguably an even more versatile load bed.

So the Yuba doesn't have a completely clear run, but it's still a benchmark product, especially for the heavy-duty end of the longtail market, and especially if you're prepared to upgrade some of the components. In any case, here you have a heavy-duty hauler which really can carry loads and people in way that was previously simply beyond a normal bike – and certainly beyond any bike at all costing under £500. And that's quite some achievement.

Peter Eland

AVAILABILITY

Manufacturer: Yuba GbR, Germany – Tel +49 228 967 6192 or see www.yubaride.com
UK importer: Loads Better – Tel 0845 868 2459 or see www.thisisloadsbetter.co.uk