

## **Velo Vision Issue 2 - PDF version**

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This was the second Velo Vision magazine published, and as you might expect, in the years since the magazine has evolved considerably. Current issues have more pages, more colour, better photography and improved image quality. In response to reader feedback, more recent issues also contain somewhat more practical content (reviews etc) and somewhat less 'cycle culture' – although we've retained a rich and varied mix of articles from around the world.

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

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I hope you enjoy the read.

Peter Eland  
Editor and Publisher, Velo Vision

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# VELOVISION

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**BALLANTINE: THE SEARCH FOR SPEED  
SPEZI BIKE SHOW REPORT  
REDMOUNT ROLLER, EQUINOX REVIEWS**

## RED ALERT

*So new that I could only get hold of a pre-production machine, the Redmount Roller is itching to grab a corner of the bustling recumbent trike market. So does it measure up? And, as a bonus question, what about the Rohloff Speedhub? One reason I squeezed in this review shortly before press date was that the pre-production Roller is fitted with this 14-speed hub gear, something many have lusted after but few have actually ridden.*



**RIGHT:** The Roller in front of York's new Millennium Bridge, completed several months late due to the winter floods. The new crossing is just for pedestrians and cyclists.



The Roller will be launched 'officially' at the Mildenhall Rally, near Cambridge, UK, at the end of August 2001. There will be a 'standard' version available with either seven-speed hub gears or a derailleur system, and the 'Deluxe', with nicer components, largely to your specification. Prices weren't fixed as we went to press, but are expected to be in the region of £2200 for the Standard and as much as you want for the Deluxe. The pre-production machine we tested is definitely 'Deluxe' with the Rohloff hub, which would add to the price. They tell me they'll be doing a time-limited 'introductory offer' and will also have a 30-day 'buy back' policy: details, and latest specifications, will all appear on their website. Redmount HPVs, the manufacturer, comprises Mike Allen and Bob Smith. Based in Kings Lynn, near Norwich, UK, they have, they say, already put over 5000 miles on the Roller prototype. As with most trike manufacturers, they're happy to work with customers individually on the specification of their machines.

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

While many of the 'new' trike designs around seem to be particularly inspired by the Greenspeed layout, the Roller draws its influences from rather wider afield – and isn't afraid to go its own way. Using rod-end bearings as the steering joints, for example, fell out of favour with mainstream trike manufacturers a few years ago. And instead of splitting the frame with an S&S joint or a sleeved arrangement, simple flanges are pressed into service. Most of all, perhaps, it's all made from heat-treated aluminium. With the notable exception of the Windcheetah, most manufacturers seem to be going for steel when it comes to trikes. It seems like a trike with plenty to prove. Even at first glance the Roller offers a distinctive appearance, with the sharp angles of the tubing around the seat, and the high seat-back. The large, cut-away gussets on the frame and the forward-angled handlebars add to the effect. Opinions differed about the looks – few thought it particularly elegant, but others found it purposeful and striking, with the high seat back giving it a sporty, 'roll-cage-like' feeling. Some

were less impressed, finding the welded angles on the seat supports ugly, and the whole appearance cluttered. Personally, I tend to agree about front-end clutter – the gussets are impressive, but don't help in this respect. But I rather liked the overall proportions and appearance – it all looks solid and purposeful. Then again, red is my favourite colour! In my experience, the bits yet to be added – carrier rack, and front mudguards – can also have a disproportionate effect on the machine's appearance if not well-executed. Both are 'in the works' according to the designers, and should be ready by the time the machine is launched. They'll also be tidying up some of the frame details – putting end-caps on those open tubes in the rear triangle, for example – and improving the chain management with new chain pulleys and guides. Numerous detail and component changes will also fall into place, including replacing the Sturmey-Archer hub brakes with models by MBL from Denmark. These apparently have the advantage that the nuts on the ends of the front wheel axles can be recessed into the

hubs, reducing overall width by a few centimetres without changing the track. The drums are each laced to the corresponding lever by a commendably short length of cable, with a gentle up-and-over curve that should offer little ingress to water. With luck, this should help keep the cables running smoothly for longer than most. The components – apart from the Rohloff hub, of which more later – were largely pre-production fare, but followed Redmount's philosophy of sourcing parts from Europe wherever possible. Rims and brake levers will definitely be changing, and the TA Cyclotourist crankset on the test bike will be replaced with the Zephyr – a standard race pattern crank. A very prototype-looking computer mount was fitted, and a mirror adorned the right-hand handlebar end. A substantial plate is welded to the bottom bracket, ready for a headlight or, perhaps, a front fairing. Three bottle cages were fitted. Only the one on the front boom is easily accessible while riding. The other two, behind the seat back, are apparently 'experimental'.

**RIGHT:** Two cable 'noodles' give hand clearance for the Rohloff twistgrip

**FAR RIGHT:** The cable runs to the brakes are short, and the upward curve should help keep water out

**BELOW RIGHT:** The folding-down seat is a nice touch, and makes negotiating narrow doorways much easier



indicating and braking at the same time. I dare say you'd quickly learn to compensate instinctively. Pull both brakes, and it stopped reasonably fast. The drums are certainly up to the job, but I rather missed the effortless power of disks. To really stop with the drums you need strong hands and a full grip on the levers. Disks may be overkill for a solo trike, but brakes are a good place to have some overkill! There are plenty of good, inexpensive disks around these days, so it's surprising that this new machine hadn't taken advantage. I found the seat really comfortable. It's wide enough to ensure that there are no pressure points where body meets tubing, and I did appreciate being able to adjust the angle. There were no undue squeaks or groans from it, either.

I was in two minds about the handlebars. Your hand rests very comfortably on the foam grips, but I felt they needed to be just a bit further away from me. You can tilt them forwards a bit, but that changes the angle. I'd have liked to slide them a few inches to the front. As it was, my elbows felt a little cramped, especially when cornering sharply.

I'll write about the Rohloff hub separately. The rest of the drivetrain did its job unremarkably: the chain bounced off the rear pulley several times, but I'm assured that the chain management will be improved for the production machines.

**SUMMARY**

This should definitely be a contender, once they've sorted out the final niggles and tidied up the details. It covers all of the main bases, with competitive weight, handling, comfort, transportability and a good set of components. Of course, other very important factors couldn't be assessed here. Luggage carrying capacity – and handling when loaded - can be crucial, for example, and we couldn't test long-term reliability and customer care. Is it enough just to be a contender? The Redmount needs convincing arguments to sway buyers away

from the established manufacturers. It's their equal technically – or should be soon – but it doesn't have their track record. I struggle to put my finger on a single, decisive factor, apart possibly from the angle-adjustable, high-backed folding seat – or maybe the distinctive look. This might well be enough. It's an expanding market, and any competent trike – which this one is – will find customers who appreciate its particular design aesthetic. If you like it, go for it – you won't go far wrong.

**THE ROHLOFF SPEEDHUB**

If the Roller has a lot to prove, so has the Rohloff Speedhub. At a retail price of over £500 (US\$800, DM 1500) for a hub gear, it needs to be very good indeed. The specification promises that it delivers the range of a derailleur system at nearly the same efficiency, while also delivering the benefits of hub gears: reliability, simple chain line, and low maintenance. To this it adds a 'loop' shift cable system, with the indexing at the hub, which should banish forever the temperamental response of derailleurs at the end of long cable runs.

The hub itself is beautifully-crafted: "a Swiss jewel!" according to one envious onlooker. Redmount had chosen the disk brake version – at least, it used the 'shiftbox' usually seen on the disk brake version, even though no disk brake mountings were fitted. This takes the form of a small black box, from which lead the two cables, and which bolts on just below the left-hand dropout. A small knurled thumbscrew on the box can be undone, and the box simply comes away.

The Redmount has a 54-tooth chainring driving a 16-tooth sprocket, giving a gearing range of around 18.5" to 97". The Rohloff has ratios spaced almost uncannily evenly across this range, with precise 13% jumps between the 14 gears. All of these are selected via a single twistgrip, at a standstill, moving or, it is claimed, under load. The gear numbers are moulded onto the side



**LEFT:** The Rohloff Speedhub: shifts as promised, but noisy in some gears.

A flanged joint under the seat lets you split the Roller in two for travel or storage. I didn't have the time or inclination to take it apart and put it all together again, but I'd say it would be an hour's work. Not a problem if you're taking it on a week's tour. The remaining 'chunks' are quite big, too – but far more manageable than a full trike. Lifting the Roller through the door and down the stairs – a vital part of any bike test – showed another handy feature. Slide a few catches away, and the seat folds down and forwards, making narrow doorways far less of an effort than they are, for example, my S-327, with its fixed seat. It is a real boon for those of us who have to lift the machine indoors often, and would also let you store the machine compactly on its side. As far as I know, the only other trikes offering a similar feature are the GNAT and the Anthrotech. A few minor niggles showed up when folding the seat. First, the mesh at the top of the seat back touches the chain when it's folded: not a problem with an out-of-the-box chain on the test machine, but after a few weeks of British winter riding it might become an issue.

Maybe they could devise some flip-over flap to keep dirt away from your hair. The second minor niggle was that the telescopic flag wouldn't stay in its 'down' position – as the seat goes forwards, it starts pointing downwards and kept flopping out. I think they might be changing the flag, anyway – this was clearly a bit of old fishing rod. The pivots which allow the seat to fold also offer angle adjustment – via the two telescoping supports which come off the rear 'seatstays'. The seat adjusts from around a fairly radical 30 degree layback to an upright 45 or 50 degrees – that should suit most tastes. The seat itself looks smart and neat, with mesh neatly tensioned by elastic shockcord. As with many mesh seats, you can vary the tension in different parts to give extra lumbar support, for example. The high seat back acts as a headrest, and there are a couple of neat velcro-on pads to cushion your neck and the back of your head. These didn't get in the way when riding, but it was rather pleasant to let one's head rest back, comfortably cushioned, while waiting for the lights to change. A few statistics: overall weight as

tested: around 15.6kg (35lb). Seat height: 27cm. Track: 80cm. Wheels: 20" (406) all round. They hope to lose a few pounds for the production machines.

**THE RIDE**

Testing the trike outside the office immediately showed up my main criticism of the design: the poor turning circle. Now it's no worse than several other commercial trikes I've tried, but in comparison to my own S-327 or a local Greenspeed it is, I'm afraid, rather poor. This isn't a problem at all on the road, only when moving slowly through town, following poorly-designed bike paths or the like. Depending on your riding environment, this could be something or nothing. Out on the road proper, and the Roller immediately felt more at home. The steering self-centred nicely, with just enough feedback from the road surface to feel responsive. It handled nicely at speed, too. There was a certain amount of brake steer: pull hard on one brake, and the trike pulled gently off to that side. A useful feature perhaps on a fast, twisty descent, but a tad irritating if you're

of the twistgrip so you can see where you are – unfortunately, on the Roller, the 'pointer' is at just the wrong angle to be visible. Mechanical sympathy made me instinctively ease off when changing gear, just as with a derailleur – it's an easy transition. Deliberately trying to shift under load, it worked well most of the time. Sometimes, it would 'stick' in a gear and only shift further when you eased off. I also ran into the well-known 'bug' whereby as you shift up from 7th gear, you're abruptly in 14th – a real leg-wrencher at times. I imagine you'd get used to this, too, and avoid it. That said, however, considerably-precise: instant shifts with no derailleur-style gaunching at all. The shifting is as advertised, then. Efficiency? Hard to tell, but I didn't notice any huge extra drag. No, the main 'downer' with the Rohloff is the noise. First, the freewheel seems very loud, particularly in (I think) 11th gear, and in various others, too. It does vary according to the gear – freewheeling along, I could hear the difference when I shifted. Pedalling

along gently on the flat is OK, too – but put a bit of power through the hub, especially in a low gear, and it sounds rather like a misaligned derailleur or, perhaps, a 'jackshaft' derailleur system. There's enough noise to make onlookers turn around and watch – and for you to squirm with embarrassment. If for all of your cycling life you've associated a quiet machine with a well-adjusted one, this will take some getting used to. Of course, it's probably worse on a recumbent with mesh seat – the hub is much nearer your head than on an upright. A hard-shell recumbent seat might cut out the noise nicely. And you might, with the help of a Mountain-Drive or multiple chainrings, arrange your ratios so that most of your riding is in the higher, quieter gears. There's a nice chain tensioner provided with the hub that would help you do this. So, is it worth it? Up to you of course – but I'd recommend you borrow one and take it for a good long ride before you commit. Maybe the benefits of simple, all-in one enclosed convenience outweigh the noise pollution. Apart from that, it's a gem.

**CONTACTS**

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**Rohloff:** You should be able to order the Speedhub through good bike dealers in most countries. The parent company, with a website in both English and German, can be contacted at: Rohloff GmbH, Mönchebergstr.30, 34125 Kassel, Germany. Tel: +49 561 875615 Fax +49 561 875338 Email [info@rohloff.de](mailto:info@rohloff.de) Website [www.rohloff.de](http://www.rohloff.de)