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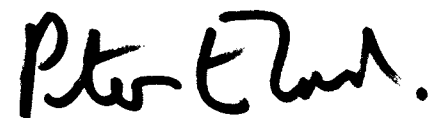
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Peter Eland
Editor and Publisher,
Velo Vision

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VELO VISION AND VELO-VISION
We weren't first with the name. *Velo-Vision* 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: Taking the Estelle for a spin.

OPPOSITE: The impressive cliffs at Etretat were the destination for a day-ride on our tandem tour this summer. Both photos: Peter Eland

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THERE AND BACK

It's been rather longer than it should have been since last issue, for which apologies. Various factors conspired to make this issue late: particularly a nasty lurgy which struck me down shortly after returning from Eurobike. We'll be back on track for next issue, which will reach UK readers before Christmas as usual.

Before all of that, I did manage to actually go cycling for a few weeks in July, as you'll see from the photo opposite and other items throughout this issue. Getting

away for a few weeks by bike is a real tonic, in a way that everyday riding and weekend outings can't quite match. We took a leisurely ride westwards along the coast from Dieppe in northern France, striking it lucky with the weather and a series of spectacular cliff-top campsites.

I hope many of you managed to get away cycling over the summer, too – if you did, why not send a picture? We'll publish a selection next issue to help banish the winter gloom!

Peter Eland

Bikebins

Invented as a response to leaky panniers, the BikeBins system aims to bring hard-shell solidity to cycle luggage. So how well does it perform in practice?

Like many cyclists I've pretty much grown up with panniers, graduating from flimsy, non-waterproof budget models to today's fully waterproof, rugged and well designed systems. But they've all had a similar basic design: a flat back panel and a fabric bag.

Going against this design orthodoxy is the BikeBin, a hard-shell plastic pannier. It was invented, apparently, in response to a leaky experience with normal panniers. It's sure to be better than the cheap ones, but how does it match up to today's state of the art fabric bags? Bikebins provided one for us to test, confidently saying "Give it a good kicking, it'll take it!"

The BikeBin comes in several colours – you can go for more discreet black or green, or instead stand out with brighter red or blue. Or, as we did, choose bright yellow. I rather like this colour: it gives you a spuriously official look, perhaps a little like a paramedic or cycle policeman. Lids come in black, silver or 'Aqua', a sort of sea green.

The box measures (inside) roughly 375 mm long x 170 mm wide x 320 mm deep – all measured at the widest part, the top. The front of the box bows slightly out, accommodating the locking catch, and the box sides taper in

symmetrically just over half way down for heel clearance. Capacity is quoted at 17 litres, and ours weighed 1.31 kg – about a third heavier than my big 20L Ortliebs.

On the back, the Rixen & Kaul attachment system may be familiar to some readers as the one Carradice have used for many years, with hooks to fit rack diameters of 6 to 12 mm. A very few modern bikes with built-in racks may be a problem if designed for modern Ortliebs which go up to



16 mm, but it'll work perfectly for the vast majority. Little 'click' catches lock each hook to the rail. It works well, though some with big fingers may find it a touch fiddly getting in behind the catches, which go quite close to the pannier back in the 'open' position. The hooks can of course be adjusted along the rail, with four possible locations each side.

The whole attachment plate is very securely bolted through to the Bikebin body, with large plastic caps inside spreading the load. The bolt holes are sealed, too, retaining the Bin's completely waterproof status. Below the hooks is a horizontal rail for the lower attachment 'claw', which hooks behind an upright on your carrier rack.

The lid is in moulded plastic,



ABOVE: The Bikebin can be locked to your carrier rack, and the lid locks too.



BELOW: The attachment system is bolted securely to the plastic shell, and fits rack rails up to 12 mm.



with strengthening ribs and robust stainless steel hinge pins. A lip around the edge goes over the main body, ensuring that rain would have to go uphill to get in. The lid can be locked shut using the keys provided – one of 100 key shapes possible, so chances are moderately slim that another BikeBin user will have the same key.

A rubbery handle lets you carry the BikeBin, although as it's attached just above the hooks, the box will hang unevenly and dangle against your legs. There is a shoulder strap provided with it which you can fit, but I didn't like the clutter of it hanging loose



around the box when not in use.

The manufacturers also suggest that the Bikebin can be locked to the bike through this handle – if you then lock the lid you could leave the box securely on the bike as you do your shopping. I spoke to one user who does this and finds it very convenient. I was a bit reluctant (or too paranoid) to do this – it seemed to me that cutting through the rubber handle with a Stanley knife would be the work of seconds. I wouldn't advise leaving valuables in it, anyway.

So, I've now been using the Bin for a good three months in all weathers. I take a pannier into and back from work almost every day, carrying at a minimum a set of waterproofs, but often more. Over the period of the

review I carried a good number of parcels between work and home, moved a Mac Mini computer and keyboard around several times, and as usual shuffled bundles of magazines between work and home (where I keep 'overflow' stocks of back issues).

The bad news is that for a number of those loads I just couldn't use the BikeBin. The computer keyboard, around 430 mm long, was too long to let me shut the lid. A bundle of 50 magazines (150 mm thick) will almost go in, but won't quite as it gets stuck on the lock mechanism and the black plastic covers where the attachment is bolted on. A

number of random parcels had similar problems. All of these loads fitted into my normal Vaude or Ortlieb rear panniers – perhaps distorting them out of shape, with lids at full stretch – but they fitted in and were rainproof.

It's not just the capacity, though

most big rear panniers are 20 litres or over, against the BikeBin's 17 litres. A fabric pannier can conform to the shape of your load, a rigid box can't. I think the 'give' of fabric means it is also less likely to bruise fruit or other delicate loads.

While we're on disadvantages, a few more small ones. I didn't have a problem with the empty box rattling, but if you put anything hard (a multi-tool, minipump or whatever) in it without some cushioning, it'll drive you potty. I didn't find it a real problem until it started raining, when my usual 'padding' of waterproofs was removed.

Another minor issue is storage. Fabric panniers squash flat when empty, and I can store three or four

of them in the space the BikeBin takes up full or empty. Then again, you can store some panniers inside the BikeBin...

OK, on to the positives, and there are plenty! First, the obvious ones: it does just what it promises in terms of ruggedness and complete waterproofing. I've not quite kicked it as they suggest, but it's been bashed around a fair bit, sat on, stood on, had the bike leaned over onto it, and generally worked hard. The only damage to date is that some of the 'Bikebins' lettering on the front is now a bit ragged. And there's been no hint of water ingress, despite some serious deluges. I can well believe it'll stay watertight and intact longer than even the toughest fabric.

One thing I particularly liked was how quick and easy it is to open and shut the lid. Just two hand-flicks to open or close the hooks. It's noticeably easier and quicker than fumbling around with floppy

straps, drawstrings and buckles on a fabric pannier. And it's easy to see the contents at a glance, too.

The rigidity of the box is also sometimes useful. Lay your bike down on its side, and it'll sit quite neatly on the box and the end of your bars, with gears etc somewhat protected. And on tour, it's sometimes nice to have a proper seat.

Add some padding, and the rigid box offers peace of mind for delicate loads. A camera or small laptop padded with clothing are very well protected and pretty much crush-proof: not something you can say for fabric panniers.

BikeBins also have a trick up their sleeve for extra-large loads. If you have two, the flat surface which

the lids form is ideal for strapping on bulky loads: it provides a very stable platform. Plastic loops at the front of the lid (and the shoulder strap attachment loops on the box body) provide good solid tying-on points. This could be a major plus for someone looking to carry big things without a trailer, or for touring.

The Bikebins are currently available direct from the manufacturer, for £29.50 each or £27.50 each for two or more, all plus postage. International shipping is no problem – see the website or contact them for details. The price seems pretty reasonable,



certainly on a par with any other quality rear pannier.

I liked a lot of things about the BikeBin: the ruggedness, the easy opening and total waterproofness. But there is a certain sacrifice in versatility and capacity: many loads which a normal rear pannier can carry just don't go in, and it's bulky to store. But those may be fairly minor niggles for many users. Personally, I get round the capacity problem simply by having a spare pannier handy at home and at work, and the Bikebin is the pannier I'm now using by default every day.

Peter Eland

BikeBins: Tel 01747 871258 or see www.bikebins.com