

SPEZI 2002

Peter Eland reports from the seventh annual Special Bike Show in Germersheim, Germany



Another year, another SPEZI. Look back to your Velo Vision Issue 2 and you'll see a fine crop of new material – amazingly, there was just as much, if not more, this year. The SPEZI is probably the biggest special bike show – anywhere. When it comes to recumbents, perhaps it has some challengers: Cycle Vision in Holland for example. But the SPEZI, while it has plenty of recumbents, also goes wider, with tandems, disabled cycling, occasional folding bikes, and load-carriers and family bikes aplenty. In fact, it's a very close fit with the sort of bikes which tend to appear in the pages of Velo Vision. It's held in Germersheim, a small, pleasant if unremarkable German town towards the south end of the Rhein. If it's not on your map, find Saarbrücken – it's about at the same level, a bit to the right. There are good rail connections.

The SPEZI takes over the Germersheim Town Hall, filling two large halls and spilling out over most of the surrounding grounds: a large test-track is a key feature, along with another for children. The test-track was mobbed throughout the weekend, even showers failing to damp the enthusiasm to try out all the bikes. Most of the exhibitors had at least one vehicle on the track for people to try out. As the show gets into full swing, an additional attraction materialises: the hordes of cycles parked outside the show while their owners visit. There's always a selection of home-built inventions of varying quality – some looking a bit rropy, others easily reaching commercial standard. Vehicles which lend themselves to it, like the seven-seater Conferencebike or the chain of five linked-together Hase Kettwiesels, used the plaza in

front of the hall to give rides, enthuse people and generally raise the profile. Back indoors, visitors had a choice of seminars and talks to attend throughout the day. A particular attraction this year was a design competition for folding recumbents, described later in this report. For me, reporting on the SPEZI and, for the first time, manning a small Velo Vision stand – not to mention helping to judge the folding recumbent competition – made for a very busy weekend. Still, it all worked out rather well in the end: all of the magazines I'd brought along were sold, and I came back with several rolls of film and a ream of notes. From which, dear reader, comes this report... As usual, full contact details (wherever I could obtain them) for all companies and people mentioned are in the 'contacts' section.

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Spirit (below and right)
 HP Velotechnik's new entry into the crowded 'comfort bike' market is the £1000 (\$1500) Spirit. With full suspension, neat styling and a very similar layout, the Cannondale which we reviewed last issue would be a rival – were it not almost twice as costly!



Cordes trike (below)
 Jan Cordes, German framebuilders with an ever-increasing range of recumbents, were displaying this rather attractive recumbent trike. With its relatively high seating position it will appeal particularly to less agile riders, particularly perhaps the elderly.



Footbrake (above)
 I spotted this neat adaptation on a Hase Kettwiesel trike which had been adapted by Ergovelo, who are disability cycling specialists. A customer with limited upper body function can lift a foot from the pedal and apply additional braking via this lever.

Tripendo (below)
 The Tripendo leaning recumbent trike has apparently been considerably refined since its launch several years ago, and despite the highish price, apparently a good number have been sold.



RECORD MOULTON (right)
 The German importers of Moultons had a rare treat for SPEZI visitors: the original Moulton which set the speed record for a faired upright bicycle many years ago now. Any reader care to guess how many teeth on that ring? Of course, they were also showing modern Moultons, including the exquisite New Series.



Colitri (above)
 I wasn't quite sure what to make of this: all that was on display was a half bodyshell. It looks like a new velomobile with two wheels at the back, called the 'Colitri'.



PHOTO: KEIJO KANSONEN



A RATHER ODD BIKE (above)
 Presumably, this bike is propelled by somehow rising up and down on the pedals and saddle - but I never saw it in action. Does any reader know more?



Votum (above)
 I didn't meet the maker of his impressive aluminium two-wheeler, but a card left on the bike proclaimed it to be the work of Wolfgang Kischnick of 'Votum', which appears to be an aluminium fabrications company.

Wood tandem (right)

This wooden tandem was parked outside the show, and I didn't manage to speak to the builder, Axel Ewen, about it. But it looks as if it's an implementation of the sheet aluminium 'Rug an Rug' tandem from Flevobike, which was designed as a self-assembly project for schools. Clearly, the sheet-metal design has lent itself well to reinterpretation in plywood.

Axel Ewen runs recumbent building courses and seminars, according to the flyers he's left with the machine. He can be contacted on Tel: Germany +49 3 90 37 782.

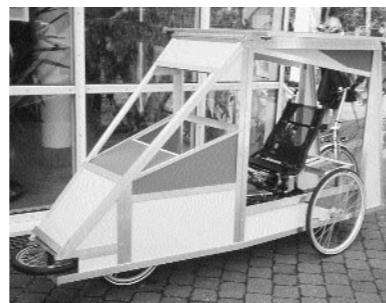
Zox tandems (below)

German manufacturer ZOX had a full range of bikes at the show, from low-racers to commuters, but their main innovations this year were in the form of two new tandems. Both are unusual (perhaps unique) in having independent drivetrains for the two riders. The rear rider drives the back wheel in a conventional manner, while the front rider uses ZOX's now well-proven front-drive system.

The first of the new tandems is a touring machine (below) based



Lissy (right)
The Lissy, a two-wheel sociable trike developed by Peter Lis, was almost constantly in action outside the show giving people lifts. The version he had here this year was electric-assisted.



Serious protection

This rather imposing bodyshell (mounted onto a Hase Lepus trike) was apparently designed principally with the aim of offering plenty of protection for the occupant. In this, it's probably succeeded, but at the cost of a rather substantial weight. Note also the horizontally-mounted wheel acting as a sort of rotating 'bumper' on the front!



Pedersen for peanuts? (above)

Well, relatively peanuts, anyway. There are always plenty of tempting second-hand or ex-demo bikes on offer at the SPEZI. How about a rather lovely bamboo-painted Pedersen for a mere €1300 (around £800, \$1200)?



Kids' tryout (right)
Children had their own try-out track, where lots of robust child-sized trikes and recumbents were on hand to cope with the heavy demand.



around a single beam, separable into several sections. This feature lets you convert your tandem to a solo: just add an extra rear wheel to the front section and off you go! Of course, it's also very useful for storage or transport.

The second new model (right), the ZOX DUO Compact, is an extremely short-wheelbase machine, with two riders being squeezed into not much more length than most solo bikes.

Both tandems start at €3200 (around £2000, US\$2900), and there is already apparently a four week waiting list.



the chain during the folding process, the combination of a quick fold, reasonable folded size, and very complete equipment for practical use made it the winner.

Junik

Second place overall was taken by another commercial product, the 'Junik' Brompton recumbent conversion kit from Juliane Neuss and Ingo Kollibay. The quick fold, very practical equipment and 'finished' design convinced the jury.

Joachim Murken

Third place went to Joachim Murken, with an impressive stainless steel folder. Among the clever features of this bike was the seat, which split in two vertically and so folded down alongside the rear wheel.



THE FOLDING RECUMBENT DESIGN COMPETITION

Upright cyclists have plenty of choice when it comes to machines you can fold up, tuck away and combine with other forms of transport. Yet there have been very few attempts to do the same for recumbents. Encouraging innovation in this area was the aim of the Folding Recumbent Design Competition, which took place for the first time at the SPEZI.

The idea of two folding recumbent designers, Hanno Hirsch and Joachim Murken, the organisation was then taken on by a Jury of independent 'experts' – myself among them. A list of judging criteria was drawn up, showing how factors like folded size, luggage capacity and so on would be weighted in the final judgement.

Each of the ten entrants was asked to bring along a bike, and demonstrate folding and unfolding before the jury.

Folding times, size and bike weights were measured.

Overall, the standard was high, with much ingenuity on display. Some of the entries could certainly have done with a bit more time to finish their bikes off – but the competition was arranged fairly late in the day, so perhaps next time...

So here are some of the entrants who stick in my mind. Apologies to those who don't feature.

ATL-Falter by Radnabel

First place in the overall rankings was taken by Dieter Baumann of Radnabel. His folding version of the full-suspension long-wheelbase recumbent collapsed extremely quickly to a remarkably small package. Although the jury didn't like the way that you had to get your hands dirty on

The competition winner was the Radnabel ATL-Falter (above). From a field of ten entries, Joachim Murken's bike (below) came third, after the second-placed Brompton recumbent conversion kit.



Frank Lienhard

Frank Lienhard should perhaps have received a prize for pure cheek. His minimalist recumbent (above) was arranged so as to just comply with the German train regulations on maximum folding bike dimensions – once he'd 'folded' it of course. But in this case, all it involved was moving the rear wheel from its 'normal' axle to a 'dummy' one positioned a few inches forward, under the seat – a matter of a few seconds only, but decreasing the overall length of the machine. Then, with a cover draped over, it was ready to travel...

Hanno

Another nice idea came from Hanno Hirsch. His was a 'bend-in-the-middle' type machine, which split quickly into two halves. The seat was removed, and the various pieces strapped to it – then, the whole thing converted to a backpack, using the padded seat front as the 'frame' – and so leaving both hands free to carry luggage.



PHOTO: KEIJO KANSONEN

Hase Trets

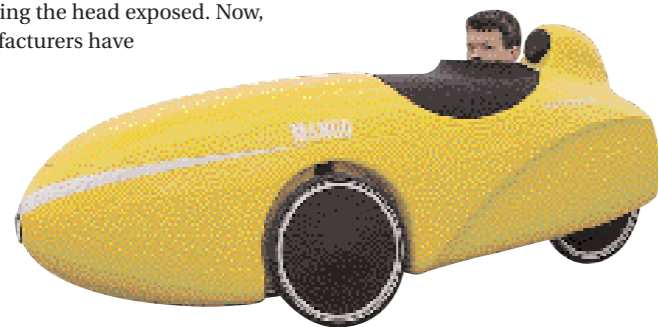
Hase Spezialraeder, well-known for their lively and versatile Kettwiesel recumbent trike, and for the upright/recumbent Pino tandem, have introduced a very neat two-wheeled recumbent trailerbike, the Trets.

Intended for children between three and twelve, the Trets attaches to a standard Weber trailer hitch, just like a conventional child trailer. But instead of sitting passively, the Trets passenger pedals along, with their own seven-speed drivetrain. A three-point seat belt arrangement is provided, mudguards are optional, and the frame size can be adjusted to fit the rider.

For me, this is probably the product of the show: a really neat and fun way for a child to travel, and well-engineered too.

Quest Mango

Readers will have seen a good number of Quest velomobiles in our report last issue: those are the lovely curvaceous ones, leaving the head exposed. Now, the manufacturers have



introduced a slightly smaller, simpler and cheaper version, the Mango.

The new model is around 40cm (16") shorter than the Quest, and instead of the front wheels being enclosed by the bodywork, it has open wheel arches. According to the manufacturers, this gives more manoeuvrability and easier parking, but there's some loss of speed.

Like the Quest, the Mango's transmission is fully enclosed in the bodyshell, with the aim of minimising chain-related maintenance.

The first Mango is being tested now, and production should start in september this year. The price will be €4500 (around £2800, US\$4000) for the basic version with eight-speed Shimano Acera gears and drum brakes. Other versions using for example the Sram 3x9 hub will be available at extra cost, and they're working on developing a Mango with the 14-speed Rohloff hub gears and disc brakes.



Aiolos Tri-lite (left)

It's amazing what difference a little tweaking can make to one's impressions of a product. When I visited the Aiolos stand last September at the Cologne show, I was rather lukewarm about their new folding trike, the Tri-Lite (see Issue 4, page 42).

At first glance, nothing much seemed to have changed when I saw them again at the SPEZI – but in fact, it's a much more finished product than it was just seven months ago. The folded package is neater; the folding action is much easier, and altogether it looks far more like a commercial product. Weight is a claimed 19.4kg. And while it's no Brompton, and you'll have to carry the seat separately, it's about the only show in town when it comes to non-DIY folding recumbent trikes. Of course, there are plenty equipped with S&S couplings, allowing you to split the frame and pack them down, but a proper folder is so much more convenient.

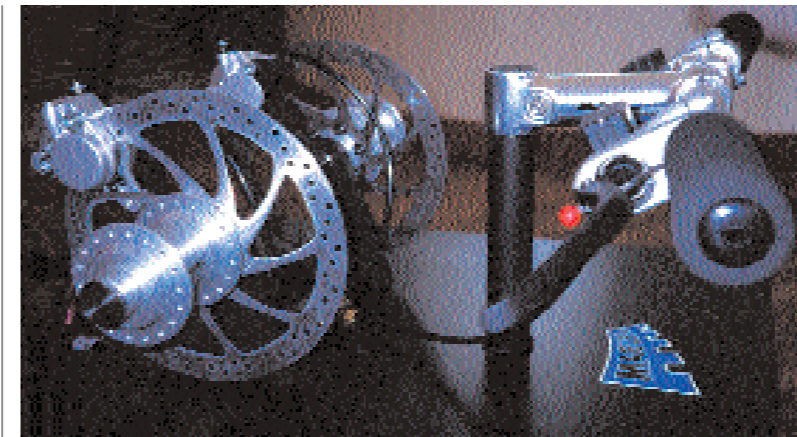


Plaisir (below right)

This elegant sociable recumbent, the Plaisir, is relatively affordable at €2000 (£1244, \$1800). The marketing seems clearly aimed at the elderly and retired. Even so, it's an interesting vehicle: there's a huge 170 litre lockable box under the seats, and there are plenty of options for luggage-carrying, for the disabled, or even for amphibious use (a pair of inflatable pontoons). You can have a radio built in, complete with waterproof housing. A rain and sun roof, child seats and electric-assist are all possible, too.

Aiolos Duolite (above & above left)

The people behind the Tri-Lite folding trike also had a folding tandem on show, the Duolite. Built out of large-diameter steel tubing, it certainly had a striking appearance, which the chunky monoblade front suspension only enhanced. It folds quite well – to a size of 87 x 55 x 29cm (34 x 22 x 12") and weighs, apparently, 19.7kg.



Twin disks

Magura, best-known perhaps for their hydraulic rim brakes, also make both conventional cycle disk brakes and a range of special products for various niches. Microlight aircraft, golf carts, agricultural machines... and now recumbent trikes, tandems and load trikes are all set to benefit.

They were demonstrating a system at the SPEZI custom-designed to actuate two disks from a single lever. So, you could brake both front wheels on a recumbent trike simultaneously – or both back wheels on a rickshaw.

Or, as they were showing on their stand, you could mount a disk on each side of the front wheel of a tandem (they had a recumbent one from Ostrad), doubling the braking power and heat dissipation available.

The callipers are mirror-image types, so you don't have to use one upside down – and the brake lever can also be used on either left or right. A version with parking brake will be available in a few months.

Of course, it's possible to make other systems work OK: Hope disks are a favourite for this, as one of their calliper models is already symmetrical. But the problem of needing twice as much motion from a single brake lever has never been properly addressed – until now.

Azub recumbents

It was interesting to meet some exhibitors from the Czech republic at the SPEZI. AZUB have it seems been making recumbents for the Czech market for four years now, and the refinement of the product seemed to bear that out. They're now hoping to move into Germany and the rest of Europe.

At first glance their machines are fairly conventional short wheelbase recumbents, but there are some nice design touches when you look closer. For example, there are two adjustments for length: both the seat and the telescopic boom have several inches of travel. This means that unless you're extremely short or tall, you can fine-tune your weight distribution, moving the whole riding



position forwards or backwards. Similar versatility is in evidence with the steering: there's an above-seat steering option, of course, but the below-seat bars are also extremely adjustable. The bars are supported by an angle-adjustable stem, which can be reversed, too, and the bar extensions can then be vertical or horizontal as you please. You can even change the steering ratio (that is, how much the front wheel turns as you move the handlebars) by selecting which of a series of holes you bolt the linkage into.

The rather spindly-tubing is actually relatively thick-walled cro-mo steel: reliability is a priority. It's designed to use standard components wherever possible: headset bearings for the handlebar pivot, for example. A fine selection of tubular steel racks give the option of carrying up to six panniers.

It's competitively priced at around €1200 (£750, \$1100) for a model with adjustable suspension and SRAM 3x8 transmission: more basic ones come in under €1000 (£600, \$900).

They suggest that potential purchasers check their website: www.azub.cz for details of how to order. At the moment they're selling direct, rather than through dealers.

Utopia (right)

Attentive readers of Issue 3 of Velo Vision will remember that the purveyors of high-class low-maintenance bikes, Utopia, had developed a fully-enclosed derailleur drive system. At the SPEZI they were showing this system mounted on their Phoenix recumbent. Unfortunately, it appears that the final injection-moulded part needed to fully enclose the chain on this bike would have been too expensive to produce, given the numbers involved. Still, with just a few inches of chain showing, it should cut down on cleaning considerably.

Utopia's other novelty was some extremely robust 28" (700c, 50-622mm) tyres. With a profile at least 50mm or 2" across, and a smooth tread, the 'Big Smile' tyres from Schwalbe are meant to roll easily across just about anything. And Utopia's frames are just about the only ones around with enough clearance to fit these monsters.



Thorax (below)
Most visitors took the chance to use the test track, and most manufacturers had a bike there. This trike is a full-suspension model from Thorax, who have recently found a UK importer (Specialbikes, Tel 01904 703413, www.specialbikes.co.uk).



PHOTO: KEIJO KANSONEN

Special thanks to SPEZI co-organiser Hardy Siebecke and family for their hospitality, and for kindly publishing a nice article about Velo Vision in the show programme. Thanks to Doro Siebecke for the translation. Thanks to everyone who helped out by manning the Velo Vision stand while I took a break. Thanks also to Keijo Kansonen for letting me choose from his digital images of the show. Also, to Hanno Hirsch for sending me a CD of further SPEZI images, and to all who contributed to that CD.