

Velo Vision Sample Article

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I hope you enjoy the read.

Peter Eland

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

TRAVELS WITH A TUBA



PHOTO: IAN GILBERT

Jon Hodkin takes us on a pedal-powered musical journey with Inner Tuba, the unique, entertainingly educational tricycle touring show.

MAIN PICTURE: Jon Hodkin pulls the Inner Tuba rig up the 'home stretch' to his base in Stornoway. He says "An 11 inch bottom gear and good drive wheel traction haven't let me down yet on some serious climbs".

The first time I wrote a full length magazine article was back in December 2000. It appeared in 'Musician', the journal of the Musicians' Union of Great Britain. Nearly seven years later it's time to bring my ongoing story up to date – this time for readers of *Velo Vision*. It's quietly pleasing for me that the editors of both 'niche' magazines have judged that my offerings might appeal to their readers. Confused? Well, I am a tuba player and a cyclist. Inner Tuba, my cycle touring and musical show, gives me the opportunity to bring the two together.

Happily for me the opportunity to contribute to *Velo Vision* has been on the cards for some time. Whilst there's never the perfect moment, now seems a good time to go to print. Lots of good things have happened for Inner Tuba. Encouraged by this, I'm brimming over with ideas for Inner Tuba's future. Read on to find out what's been going on, and, with a kindly tailwind, what might follow...

BACK IN TIME

Very briefly, let's go back to 1987. By then I had been cycle touring regularly for about ten years, and had been a low brass player for about 15. I switched from euphonium to the bigger and musically more versatile E flat tuba in 1982. But life was not sweet; I was forever leaving the tuba at home in favour of bike riding or vice versa. In a successful attempt to raise me from my misery, Lancaster sheet metal worker Bob Lewney loaned me his cycle camping trailer, his own design and build. I was hooked – surely Bob could build a bigger version to transport my tuba? He tackled the challenge enthusiastically, and tuba trailer number one was soon launched.

During its early life, I used it routinely for towing the tuba about to rehearsals and gigs, and I quickly discovered the general benefit of trailer ownership and use – whilst I can't claim to have moved house by pedal power (yet!) like

many *Velo Vision* readers, I've been towing large loads such as firewood and groceries for years.

By the late '90s I had been living in the Midlands for several years, and was often out and about playing with freelance professional orchestras, ensembles, theatre pit bands and so on. The diary was quite full, and performing was stimulating and fun. One day, I drove to a small primary school to do a solo tuba workshop in advance of an evening concert by my brass quintet in the same town. Performing a recital to adults who are interested enough in your music to buy a ticket and come out on a rainy night is one thing, but I wasn't at all sure what I was going to do with me, a tuba and a school hall full of four to seven year olds!

Despite my inexperience, the kids loved the session almost as much as I did. Driving home that night after the quintet concert, it dawned on me that I had the makings of a solo tuba show. And I had a bike and a tuba trailer. The idea of my very own cycle touring musical show was born.

BELOW: Day one of the Year of the Artist tour in 2000 – the trailer shown before addition of steel chassis and tennis ball suspension.



YEAR OF THE ARTIST

Mmm, but how to fund such a venture? Thankfully the Year of the Artist (YOTA) came in right on cue, my bid was successful and in return for the funding I completed my first 1184 mile, 42 venue, 20 day tour of the five counties of the East Midlands in October 2000.

YOTA was a unique national project, which started in June 2000 and ran through to May 2001. During the year, around 1000 professional artists from all disciplines were in residence in cities, towns, villages, rural and urban places across England. "YOTA is giving artists the opportunity to explore new ideas, space to create new work, unleash their inspiration and create new forms of engagement with new audiences", stated their publicity. These aspirations rang true for me!

My tour started from East Midlands Arts Headquarters in Loughborough, where I played to some 60 primary school children. By lunchtime I was in Nottingham, performing to about 30 residents in a sheltered housing complex for elderly people. I rested up in Retford, with the first of 19 overnight hosts who fed and watered me so generously in their homes. Next morning I played at a school for people with a range of disabilities, before moving on to a

Newark primary school – and a film crew from Central TV news. That night, my hosts near Bourne were enthusiasts of freeform experimental music. Now, with 130 miles behind me, I got into some 'new sounds' with three seasoned free-formers. Quite an experience. Next day took me to a special school in Bourne, a secondary school near Lincoln, and finally to rest near Gainsborough.

This gives you a flavour. For 20 days, Inner Tuba was on the move, and on some days, the riding was tough. The rewards however, were great, and these two contrasting quotes from school pupils neatly sum up my ongoing motivation to develop Inner Tuba – and generate a modest living from the process.

"I enjoyed it because I have a bike myself and the thought that I could do it myself one day. It also encouraged me to carry on riding for the rest of my life. Christian Miles."

"Dear Mr. Tuba Player, Just a short letter to thank you very much for your performance. I enjoyed it thoroughly. I don't think I will experiment with my skills quite to your depth, but I think it is great that you are doing something you love and that you have gone out there and done what you wanted to do. Good luck for the future. Thanks again. Emma Wyld (tuba player)."

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

Before delving back into the intricacies of towing hitches, solar panels, gear ratios, tyre choices and all those good things, I'll briefly try to describe what the musical part of the performance is all about. Originally the idea was for the music to stand independent of the mode of transport, but, over time I've discovered that really all the elements 'on offer' merge happily into a concept which audiences respond to favourably. The music bit goes something like this:



Press and media like Inner Tuba – a live feature in Newcastle on Tyne before setting off to the West Midlands

Jon plays the Archbishop of York CE Junior School in Bishopthorpe in June this year, before performing at the York Cycle Show with Derek Carpenter.

PHOTO: DEREK CARPENTER

I play my tuba. Since YOTA, I have been performing almost exclusively in primary schools. Children find the tuba exciting to look at, and the dynamic range, from extremely soft and lyrical to very loud and full, surprises and engages them. Playing a range of repertoire demonstrates the dexterity and versatility of the instrument – it's not all 'tonic to dominant' *oom pah*, as many assume. I talk through the history and development of brass instruments, and demonstrate the didgeridoo, a conch (which on the road I curse – it's very heavy!), an animal horn, a long hosepipe with detachable funnel, and a sackbutt.

Feedback from my demos tell me that many people of all backgrounds, ages and abilities don't know how lip vibrated instruments work, and even less about their geographical and cultural roots. As importantly, I impress upon listeners the truly special and unique nature of a live performance. It is, time and again, very satisfying for me to play to attentive audiences, who have clearly taken this message on board.

THREE WHEELING

On completion of the East Midlands Tour I was full of enthusiasm for taking on longer trips, and I optimistically set about planning a tour across Canada. All I needed was more funding and a new trailer, incorporating suspension to match my full suspension bike, and off I would go. Or so I thought!

I came back to my home in Lancaster to plan the trip, where I soon found myself immersed in a wonderland of cycling knowledge previously unknown to me. In short I met John Bradshaw and Pat Douglass, then organisers of the Lancaster Cyclefest event (sadly no more). I was advised by them that what I really needed for long distance load lugging was a recumbent trike. I was sceptical for all the usual reasons – after all, I already had a nice bike, Canada beckoned and, well those trike things are so dangerous aren't they? Nobody can see you down there!

Pat and John quickly put me right, thanks to the loan of their early Peter Ross Trice. My opinions U-turned; for towing heavy trailers, recumbent trikes are way better than upright bikes. They are safer (very difficult to fall off), better on hills (because you don't need a minimum speed, you can use very low gears), more comfortable (you've got a nice chair to sit in and your body is supported), and the combination of trike and trailer really looks the part too.

There was no way I was going another 10 miles, let alone across Canada with a bike and trailer. I learned even more at the 2001 Lancaster Cyclefest (where some readers may remember Inner Tuba performing), from trying out the newer and superb products from Inspired Cycle Engineering, and mixing with the great and good from our international cycling community. Needless to say, they are a very nice bunch indeed!

So, following initial trials, a trike and a trailer with suspension (to cushion the ride of instruments) became top of my wish list. For a few years, technical developments ran alongside courting various potential sponsors and funding bodies with touring proposals. The chicken and



LEFT: Lancaster sheet metal worker Bob Lewney meddling with the suspension system – time out from serious trailer building.

egg dilemma of touring – generating interest and support but not being able to start without that same support was, at times, a tough one to crack.

However interest and support has always been forthcoming, and one pivotal example of this comes in the form of a collaboration with Derek Carpenter and Michelle Whitworth. Many readers will know them. Derek is a professional clown, cyclist and good all round engineer and fabricator. He strengthened and modified the original trailer, revised the hitch arrangement and came up with the idea of using tennis balls for suspension. Not content with this, in 2005 he and Michelle loaned their Anthrotech trike for me to tour several hundred mile to schools in the Midlands, the North and across to Northern Ireland.

BELOW: At the Callanish Stones, Western Isles.



PHOTO: PETER MARNOCCH

Even more, Derek has introduced me to the world of clowning and street performance, and we now perform together professionally in a number of cycle based shows. This has in turn helped me to develop Inner Tuba performances, and they are now unapologetically much less formal – even at times slapstick – than they were back in 2000. Hard as I might try, it's just not possible to keep the artistic and functional sides of Inner Tuba apart!

MATTERS MECHANICAL

You are probably best to look elsewhere in *Velo Vision* for authoritative technical reviews on machinery, but please allow me a few lines.

The Anthrotech, equipped with a Sachs 3x7 and Mountain Drive, was geared sufficiently low for towing the 65 kg gross weight trailer up the very steep and long hills I encountered in the North Pennines and Mourne Mountains, County Down. The handling was good too – with a great turning circle, ideal for demonstrating to pupils in smaller playgrounds.

The problem for me was getting in and out of buildings. Back in 1985 I designed the trailer to be 27" wide – narrow enough to pass through a domestic door opening. When using the Anthrotech, 35" wide or so, I became part contortionist and part Houdini getting it in and out of my house. And there are still a surprising number of schools with narrow bendy corridors, steps, fire doors with springs and so on, which are the only route to the performance hall. It's good to set up



ABOVE: Dynamo hubs and solar panels fuel the LED lighting system



PHOTO: AVRIL DUNCAN

ABOVE: The Trice Mini on its maiden trip – here at the Butt of Lewis, Western Isles

quickly on arrival, but this was sometimes all a bit cumbersome, and not necessarily the best first impression of alternatives in cycling to onlookers. Horses for courses, but the answer for Inner Tuba? A very narrow track trike of course!

All good things come to those who wait, and, like buses, three came along at once in June 2006. Lancaster, a Sustrans Cycling Development Town, engaged me to perform in 'Bike It' schools, the Western Isles Council confirmed a tour visiting primary schools from 'The Butt to Barra', and, at the CTC York Rally, Inspired Cycle Engineering offered to provide the ultimate towing vehicle – their Trice Mini with 27.2" overall width, modified with a mesh seat to accommodate my slightly tubby tuba physique.

The race was on to get the show on the road. Long-time sponsors CycleGuard increased their support by insuring the Trice, and old friend Matt Wigley rewired the electronics – from a design by John Beardmore. Inner Tuba

generates power on the move, from Schmidt dynamo hubs in the trailer wheels and solar panels mounted on the trailer lid. An improved LED road lighting system, complete with brake lights and indicators was also assembled.

WESTERN WEATHER

I began my Western Isles tour in Stornoway at the end of August 06. It was a joy to visit well-equipped schools staffed by enthusiastic teachers, travelling through fantastic rugged landscapes between gigs. But can the weather really be that bad in late August? It soon became apparent that unusually forceful cross winds and my trailer's relatively high centre of gravity were a less than ideal combination.

I have always been keen to take Inner Tuba to audiences in remote venues, partly for the cycling challenge of getting there, and partly because I figure such venues tend not to get too many tuba playing visitors. It was then a shame to 'pull' the tour ten miles from what must be one of the remotest schools in the UK. I promised Clasmol Primary, its four pupils and Penny, their teacher, that I would come back... with a new, low, stable, road hugging trailer.

Bob Lewney and I set to work designing and building Tuba Trailer No 2 in time for performances in the Lancaster 'Bike It' schools in February 07. The return visit to Clasmol School and the rest of the Western Isles tour was planned for March. With just two weeks between, I decided to



PHOTO: IAN GILBERT



ABOVE: Playground assembly – all four pupils of Clasmol School present and correct.

RIGHT: The new trailer is lower, more stable and also looks a whole lot nicer!

TOP LEFT: No ferries to Barra today... stuck on South Uist in atrocious conditions

LEFT: Sunshine on Day 23 of the West of Scotland tour.

have a go at selling my show to individual primary schools *en route*, and cycle to them. The take up was excellent.

But the weather was consistently atrocious – 20 of 23 days of rain sleet, snow, and blizzards. By the time I got to South Uist, no boats were going anywhere for three days, the electricity was on and off and the winds were gale force. I pedalled to the Butt, but couldn't reach Castlebay and Eoligarry Schools on Barra, the small island at the southern tip of the Outer Hebrides. I'll try again, but like all island communities, I guess they are used to folk not showing up!

More positively, I reached everywhere else on time, performances were thoroughly enjoyable, and the kindness of strangers uniform. With the ground waterlogged throughout Scotland, camping was mostly impossible, so offers of barn shelter from farmers were most welcome. Contact with cyclists often brings out the best in people.

FUTURE PLANS

Next up is an autumn 300 mile tour from Kent to Lancaster, via schools in Lincolnshire, and Yorkshire. After that I'm wintering up in Stornoway, from where I will continue developing the technical aspects of Inner Tuba. I could write a whole article and more about this alone, but here's a brief idea of what's happening.

Experience has shown that the Trice Mini is the ideal Inner Tuba vehicle, so I can 'tick that off', with thanks to ICE, as a quality job really well done. Work continues on improvements to Bob Lewney's superb new trailer. Nick Lobnitz of Carryfreedom trailers is generously offering his design and build skills to the project. He has already assembled a new hitch and connecting arm, which makes for much firmer handling. We are seriously considering replacing the steel chassis with an aluminium subframe. The tennis ball suspension has been retired following trials with Schwalbe Big Apple tyres. Nick and I are pretty happy

that there will be sufficient spring in these. Altogether these will lead to a simpler and – that tricky factor in 'one offs' – a lighter design.

On matters of lightness, lead acid batteries are, er, not very. For this reason, it is good to have Robin Goodhand on the case. Since meeting him in Stornoway, he has enthusiastically set to work analysing Inner Tuba's electronics systems. As a Renewable Energies lecturer and research scientist based at Lews Castle College (a campus of The University of the Highlands and Islands) he is well qualified to offer his skills, and his input is very welcome. His initial assessment suggests that while the existing system is working well, improvements can be made by increasing the size and electricity output from solar panels (photovoltaic cells) and exploring alternatives to the lead acid battery currently in use. We are talking to lithium Ion battery specialists: a 40 amp hour battery weighing at just 4 kg is distinctly appealing.



Robin also suggests that data logging of electrical power generation and consumption patterns whilst on the move is do-able, along with making an easy to grasp display of this to show to Primary school pupils during schools presentations. When it all comes together, I'll be able to run a small 12volt computer and perhaps, in the tradition of recumbent cyclist Steven Roberts of 'Computing across America' book fame, get into website updating, audio recording, podcasting and suchlike whilst on tour. I had better save up some pennies for all the kit!

FINAL NOTE

As *Velo Vision* so skilfully reminds us, innovation never stops, and Inner Tuba is well placed to embrace, enjoy and demonstrate this. The best way of course is to be 'out there' touring and performing. Plans are in the pipeline for one or two big tours in the UK – watch this space. And maybe it will soon be time to think again about some international touring too. OK, so Butt to Barra has eluded me so far – Barra I owe you one! But New Zealand's Bluff to Cape has a certain ring to it.

And why do I want to do it? As I explain in my shows, it's simple really. I love cycling, I love travelling and I love playing my tuba.

Thanks to all who help me.

Jon Hodkin
www.innertuba.org.uk

