

Velo Vision PDF

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I hope you enjoy the read!



Howard Yeomans

Editor and publisher, *Velo Vision* magazine.

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COVER: Alison, enjoying a bridleway ride on the Stanforth Kibo. Read the review on page 34.

OPPOSITE: Originally a prop for our village scarecrow competition, the roadster has become a permanent exhibit on Main Street.

Photos: Howard Yeomans.

4 News

Cargo on eight wheels, Burrows goes urban, Kettwiesel folds, e-Cargo bikes galore, inventions and fledgling projects, events, and much more.

12 Review: eC-Velo Challenger

We try the new velomobile on a sunny day-visit to Future Cycles in Leicester.

16 Review: ICE Neodrives

An almost exhaustive test of the electric-assist package on an Adventure from Inspired Cycle Engineering. Does electric now appeal to more than just those required to use it?

20 QuattroVelo

Allert Jacobs, designer at Velomobiel.nl, shares his thinking on the new four-wheeled velomobile.

24 Short reviews

- 24 Reader review of the GoLED rucksack with remote control indicators.
- 25 Overboard waterproof pannier and ICE recumbent jersey.
- 26 More clothing: Swrve waterproof trousers and jacket and Reverse Gear jerseys.
- 28 The 'green' clean with Green Oil.
- 29 Versa drop bar shifter for Alfine 11-speed hub.
- 30 Toddlebike, a pre-balance bike.
- 31 Cyclegeezzer gifts from reused bike bits.

32 Review: Sturmey Archer X-RK8

After 3000 km, Mirek performs a close examination of his hub gear's internals.

34 Review: Stanforth Kibo+

A down-to-earth steel adventure and

touring bike. We load it up to see if the sky's the limit for this mountain goat.

38 Readers' bikes

- 38 Switchblade. Mark Chillery offers a ride on his project bike with hybrid row-power.
- 42 Kervelo. Marc Le Borgne describes his prototype front wheel drive recumbent.
- 44 Paul Meredith describes building a Rans Stratus from scratch and Julie Lovegrove rides hers 'trans-Am' in the States.

48 Book reviews

The Human-Powered Home, The Biography of the Modern Bike, and Muck, Sweat & Gears.

50 Dropping in on dealers

Peter Barter writes from a seductive quarter in Paris to describe one of his favourites – Les Vélos Parisiens.

52 Letters

A selection of your letters, including a modular sociable and the Eurostar recumbent challenge.

57 New and upcoming

The showcase for new releases and products for future review!

59 Subscribe to Velo Vision

Back-issue availability, and details of our retailers and distributors worldwide.

60 Advertisements

The first place to look for specialist products and services. Please support our advertisers, who support this magazine!

Freezy trees

Well, winter has perhaps finally started to bite, so it is with some relief that I have put out the winter issue before spring! Whatever the weather, Issue 50 should, I hope, give many a reason to cosy up and indulge in a bit of armchair cycling.

I ruminated long and hard on making minor changes to the format this issue, instead deciding that it ain't broke and concentrating on packing in a great deal of content. Hopefully, there's more than something for everyone—we aim to please—and if

you want to share your views on any of the content, we value the feedback highly.

As always, inventions and designs feature heavily in our pages, so if you have ideas or projects to share, big or small, please write in.

Many events stand before us this year. In particular, I'm looking forward to more recumbent racing – where I hope to trial some new machinery, the SPEZI in Germany, plus the York Cycle Rally, again in June. Do come along and say 'hello'!

Howard Yeomans

STEEL'S REPRISE HAS PEAK POTENTIAL





In 1985, two young adventurers, Nicholas and Richard Crane, climbed Mount Kilimanjaro on foot and by bike. Taking cycling to its extreme, they each used the mountain bike of its day, a steel frame Saracen – sometimes riding, but often carrying, their bikes in their conquest of Africa’s highest peak. Simon Stanforth’s father owned Saracen Cycles and, via this connection, he contracted the original adventure cycling bug.

BACKGROUND

The Kibo was launched in 2014, into a slightly different cycling world than the one of its forebears. Back in '85, mountain bikes had been around a while, but were still a niche product. Bicycles like the Kibo were used for anything from fully-loaded touring and trail riding to downhill racing. Nowadays, we have cycles designed (or marketed) for specific purposes, so an all-rounder rarely stands out from the crowd, unless, of course, it's a retro all-rounder!

The Kibo may be recognisable immediately as a mountain bike, albeit perhaps an old one. Rather than taking ours to a single track or anywhere near a mountain, a fairer assessment of its potential would probably be made in its touring and multi-use roles. Fortunately, we're surrounded by the muddy tracks, trails, and 'rough stuff' likely to be encountered on a long-distance multi-terrain tour.

The frame and forks of Simon Stanforth's bikes are made by one of the UK's bespoke frame builders, Lee Cooper, who started his career as mountain bikes were emerging onto the UK market. Working with steel, bronze, and silver in his Midlands workshop, he makes frames for customers worldwide and, with Simon, has made two batches of Kibo frames.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The Kibo's characterful appearance grabs attention, emphasised by the combination of wide tyres and a thin steel frame and fork. Reynolds 631 butted tubes are used throughout – a cold-worked steel, drawn into seamless tubes that are (they say) air-hardened to improve grain structure. Whilst the machines required to make this tube must be truly impressive, the important point is only the quality of the metal: strong in the right places and practically flawless. In case of accidental damage – for example, during a long-distance tour – steel is the only material that can be easily repaired with a basic metalworking facility while in the hands of skilled workers; a frame can be restored to its original strength.

With ovalised blades, the fork has a minimal appearance compared to modern dimensions and is clearly designed to absorb road shock, not for absolute stiffness. Socketed into the attractive cast crown, the blades are spread more widely than most, giving lots of clearance for mud and debris, with space for mudguards, too.

Attractively-filed lugs feature elsewhere on the frame and the solid fork-ends all have two eyes, for both racks and mudguards. Usefully, sloping rear dropouts give

enough adjustment for a hub gear if later fitted, but, in the case of a derailleur setup, the axle is simply backed up to the rear of the slots. Frame clearance in front of the rear wheel is great enough that wheel removal is unimpeded.

The Kibo we tested was fitted with the 'plus' specification, adding a little more luxury to some of the minor finishing parts: saddle, grips, and so on. The fork on the standard Kibo is Reynolds 525 not 631. The front and rear racks (Tubus and Dajia Cycleworks, respectively) are not part of the specification, but any conventional touring racks will fit to the frame. Generally, the components are high quality, chosen for their simplicity (in the case of the Sunrace R90 gear shifters) and performance. The Paul Components brakes and adjustable reach levers were particularly impressive – all parts machined from solid and very easy to set up perfectly.

No corners were cut when it comes to the wheel-build Deore hubs, butted spokes, and very sturdy double-wall Rigid Sputnik rims. Add to that the protection afforded by the wide Halo Twin Rail tyres and the result is something that looks very reliable and able to take a few knocks from the occasional boulder. Given the weight embodied in the wheels, the

bike, as shown with racks, was only 14.8 kg (32.5 lb).

Just one item I would be tempted to swap is the micro-adjust seatpost, because single-bolt designs can fail without warning, usually requiring a replacement. The modern 27-speed transmission worked predictably well, providing an appropriate range for touring of 17" – 106". Thinking ahead about that inevitable world tour, any mechanical problems in the field are likely to be minimal, although the rear derailleur shifter is indexed without an option to switch to friction, while the front one is a purely friction device.

THE RIDE

In the spirit of its intended use, I properly loaded up the Kibo and tried it out on some challenging terrain. Fate, however, dictated I try the on-road experience first, because, as it turned out, I needed to hurriedly set off on an unloaded shopping-run with empty rear panniers.

Unencumbered, the bike felt surprisingly lightweight, perhaps an impression given by the steering geometry, which is very light and easy to turn. Riding on the Halo's large footprints felt very assured and they run well on tarmac when inflated to only 35 psi without any unwanted squish or squirm when cornering. With its Nitto stem set near the top of its range, the moderately upright riding position was comfortable and balanced in a posture I can happily maintain all day. However, after only half an hour, I took the opportunity



to take a diversion from the road towards my nearest bit of trackway, including, of all delights, a ford. Halfway through, I remembered how water always looks shallower than it is. But, by luck more than judgement, my feet only got a splash – thanks, in part, to the high bottom bracket and despite the leggy 175 mm crank arms.

With the rear rack loaded with groceries, the Kibo was working at only half-capacity. When I fitted the front rack, I loaded both up a bit more, with a moderate 6 kg (13 lb) at the front plus 13 kg (29 lb) at the rear. I was still barely testing the bike. The frame coped easily with everything I lashed onto it, with more stiffness to spare, having an uncanny ability to be, at the

same time, very comfortable and springy, yet responsive and never wayward, even when pedalling hard out of the saddle. The effect of this brutality on the spindly front-end was surprising, too, in that there was no surprise flexibility or unexpected effects. Only when braking hard did the fork rebound when stopping; they all do it, sir.

On-road, we achieved some moderately high speed, but, as always, the windage effect kicks in, especially with those wide handlebars and bags attached. Remembering it's not a race, it's about the journey, I moved from the tarmac to the chalk tracks and progress slowed only slightly. This is where the big tyres began to work to my advantage, soaking up

bumps and stones, big and small. As a result, mainly of the 2.2" tyre width and running a low pressure, rolling resistance was impressively low, perhaps better than a narrower 700 x 35c tyre. The original bicycle suspension has no inherent flaw – pneumatic with no moving parts. The Halo tyres gripped reasonably well on mud, being something of a hybrid design. Physically isolated from noise and bumps, I almost floated along with a sense of impunity, my full attention no longer required to plot a smooth line between obstacles.

The addition of the front panniers actually stabilised the front end and reduced the chance of being bounced sideways on big, loose stones. Feeling very safe and secure,



ABOVE: Reynolds 631 fork blades. The crown has reinforcing ribs around the steerer tube. Also, note slimline Kool Stop pads on the generous braking surface.

LEFT: Spacious frame makes rear wheel removal easier.

FAR LEFT: Paul Components adjustable brake levers rival the best.



progress was almost unstoppable right down to a point where I was riding on a tilled field margin at about 4 mph. On a very loose surface with my 19 kg load, the tyres were still just about floating on the surface. For some, walking may be preferable. Pushing a loaded bike can twist my back, so, thankfully, staying in the saddle was an option.

Fitting mudguards would have provided the chance to better enjoy the all-terrain riding and, had I done so, the job of cleaning the bike (and my clothes) would have been much easier. Another reason for mudguards is to protect the bike itself, and the most vulnerable area looked to be the lower headset bearing, which is a highly reputed Tange component – well worth protecting. Although sealed, the component could use at least a small flap or a bearing wrap.

An important addition for one of our testers was a bike stand, useful whatever the bike's role. Perhaps a two-leg, centre stand makes most sense for a supporting a loaded bike. Fitting one under the chainstays of the Kibo would require a careful clamping, as the frame has no stand plate. I resorted to my usual practice of holding a brake on with a ring of inner tube and resting the handlebar on a wall or such. Our model had Brooks leather grips with an all-metal clamp, which are delightfully attractive when new, but, as a result of parking, ended up with a lot of scratches. Everyone thought the Brooks grips were certainly pretty, but they are thin and offer no padding. A grip with a larger surface to distribute weight on the palm would help, but it wasn't a big issue combined with the upright riding position.

CONCLUSION

The Kibo frame and fork, plus those big tyres, worked well together, giving a high degree of comfort and shock-absorption without compromising stiffness and rigidity. Whether we were riding on rock, tar, or mud (or combinations thereof), we had some great rides on the Kibo and there aren't many places I can't imagine taking it.



The combination of a versatile and repairable frame and a tough powder-coated finish make this an attractive frameset in its own right. Our Kibo was fitted out with sensibly-chosen components that are good, but not extravagant; the whole package represented good value, while still leaving some choices (lights and luggage, for example) down to the customer. Excepting perhaps some attention to mud protection, I think it needs no further preparation before

embarking on a big tour.

Kibo is the name of one of the three giant volcanic cones on Kilimanjaro. The remaining two, perhaps, give Simon some scope to introduce further models. But, having spent time in its saddle, I'm not sure where the next design could come from. The Kibo could go a long, long way (many already have) and when they come home, perhaps they will tell Simon a new adventure story from the mountains or the flatlands.

AVAILABILITY

Two builds are offered: the standard Kibo and the Kibo+ as reviewed here. Custom builds are also available on request. Frames are finished in either 'British racing green' or black.

Howard Yeomans

Kibo+ RRP £1995 inc. VAT from a small number of UK retailers. See www.stanforthbikes.co.uk for the list of shops, e-mail info@stanforthbikes.co.uk or tel UK 07850 881 438.