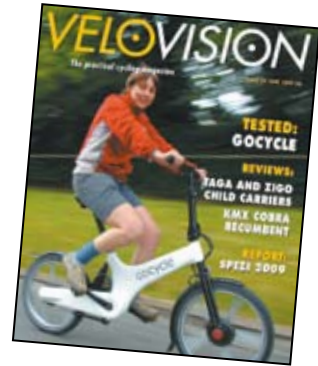


Velo Vision Sample Article



This PDF is a sample of the material in *Velo Vision* Issue 34, June 2009. The full contents page is shown opposite.

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

peter@velovision.com

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* 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: Gocycling! Photo: Peter Eland

OPPOSITE: A swarm of bees on parked bikes in Bishopthorpe Road, York, provided an unusual sight for shoppers. Photos: Arthur Clune

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On the move

As you'll read in the News section, and see in the masthead details above, we moved premises in late May, and we're now happily settled into our much larger office at the Eco Business Centre on the north edge of York. Please do use the new address if you need to contact us or send anything.

We've also been on the move to the SPEZI, with another convivial coach trip to a packed weekend of cycling and innovations, as you'll see in our full report.

Finally, we've been moving ourselves around on a fascinating range of review bikes this issue, all in their own ways innovative and interesting. The Gocycle and Taga in particular are rare instances of 'designer' concepts embodied as practical, useful products – but do their looks get in the way? Is the simplicity and affordability of more traditional cycle engineering, as on the Zigo or KMX, a better bet?

There's an easy way to find out – read the reviews and decide for yourself!

Peter Eland

The Golden Age of The Handbuilt Bicycle

Jan Heine and Jean-Pierre Praderes

I ordered this book months in advance of publication before the price was even set, and then waited for the hefty bill. So, first, a nice surprise when I was charged far less than I expected.

There is no doubt in my mind that anyone who loves bikes will love this book. It is as gorgeous as the bikes inside. The photography is stunning, the text informative and interesting; the paper quality is also up to the mark. It is quite simply a joy to behold. A 'coffee table book' perhaps, but worthy of preserving against any chance of coffee damage.

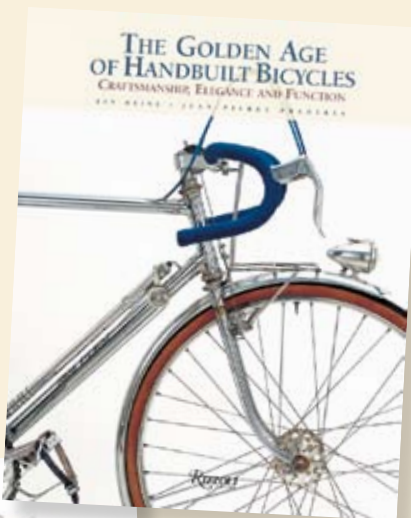
The biggest surprise for most upon opening the pages for the first

time is a complete lack of the legendary Daniel Rebour's illustrations. However, he and his wife are both present in some of the photos; photos which not only highlight the bikes but also the people. Finally, we are able to put faces to names like Singer, Follis and Herse. There are also faces and names of those who paid for and rode such wonderful creations.

As in Britain, the French golden age of cycling was from the beginning of the twentieth century through to about the early 1960s when the car became a viable, affordable alternative to the bicycle. However, there is one subtle difference between French cycle culture and British, and it has to do with being French and the particularly French desire for '*le difference*'.

The '*Constructeurs*' were a cut above mere frame builders. They took it upon themselves to design the bicycle from scratch to the extent they would manufacture their own components when not happy with readily available alternatives.

It is easy to see a common thread between the culture of *Haute Couturier* and *Constructeur*. As 'ready to wear/ride' becomes more prevalent, then 'made to measure' becomes more desirable, sexy even. Drop bars are obviously feminine with those tactile curves. Indeed, *constructeur*



Camille Daudon, whose shop was close to the Chanel and Dior boutiques called himself '*Couturier de Cycle*'. It says something when a bike shop can afford to be on the Champs Elysees with the big

fashion houses. Certainly a golden age.

The bicycle as an expression of affluence may be a foreign concept to some, but those who 'commissioned' the *constructeurs* to perform their art were writing open cheques. For these bicycles, whilst constrained within the conservative thinking of the diamond frame, are unique creations built to satisfy the aspirations of their eventual riders. The detailing is often hidden, known only to the builder and his customer, in a sort of conspirators' pact. Tool kits hidden within handlebar stems, a lovely idea. Even the legal requirement for a name and address tag provided a styling opportunity and was often engraved, yes engraved, onto the stem cap or onto a humble cable guide. Did I say humble? There is nothing humble here. Understated maybe, but closer inspection reveals far from lowly inspiration.

The photography of the bikes is painstakingly undertaken with attention to lighting and catching the just-so-ness of each machine. But just as fascinating are the black and white pictures of the machines or the builders in action, most taken somewhere between 1930 and 1960.

Again, there is certain Frenchness to these cyclists who look like they have just left their

stylist. On page 30 there is a picture of a certain Mr Chaix with his Velo Reyhand, dressed impeccably in polo shirt, tailored shorts, and, no doubt, bespoke leather shoes. This is a look I have been trying to emulate for years without success. And observe the cool nonchalance of the *mademoiselle* on page sixty-two, having just ridden up the Col du Galibier. Not a hair out of place, or an unsightly damp patch anywhere. On page four, there is a team time trial and one of the team is wearing a beret. It's just the French being so... well, so bloody French.

These bicycles may appear patriotic at first. They are fitted with exclusively French components, Simplex, Huret, and Maxicar. In later years they do allow the Italians to creep in, but never the Taiwanese or the Japanese. However, almost all the frames are made from the venerable Reynolds 531, showing that quality, and not patriotism was guiding the selection of components.

Interestingly, it is also possible to detect a pre-retro retro movement. There is a fine example of a Singer built in 1962 but using early 1950s components because that is what the customer specified.

Anyone interested in the culture of the *porteur* (delivery rider) would find this book extremely informative. There are fine examples of *constructeur* built *porteur* machines that above all prove that some *porteurs* were capable of earning sufficient funds to finance a Singer.

This book is a timely reminder of a now endangered, certainly in Europe, species. *Constructeur* culture is being continued in the USA but they are just not French, are they? In France, Singer's Paris shop still exists and Gilles Berthoud is producing fine bespoke luggage and mudguards alongside his bikes.

My favourite? Without question the Herse Camping 1949 (above left). I could see myself rough stuffing in the Alps, beret at a jaunty angle, not a drop of sweat and my shirt as unsoiled as the moment it came out of the shop... dream on!

Luke Stephenson

The Golden Age of The Handbuilt Bicycle is published by Rizzoli International Publications, ISBN 9 780 847 830 947. In the UK the RRP is £25. See also www.vintagebicyclepress.com to order direct from the authors in the USA.