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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.
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harmony with Velo-Vision in Germany.

Velo Vision is printed on paper
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to Nordic Swan standards.



COVER: Riding the oVo tandem:
read the full review on page 24.
Photo: Peter Eland

OPPOSITE: Spectacular scenery
while touring the French Alps by Nazca
Gaucho, as reviewed this issue. Photo:
Henk van der Woerd, Nazca Ligfietsen

4 News

Recumbent shop opens, heavy duty trikes, oceanic pedalling, digital developments, our 2012 event listings and more.

8 EUROBIKE 2011

Everything from Elvis to electrics at Eurobike, the cycle show of the year in Germany. Paul Robison reports.

17 Solar satchel

We try the 'Solar Genome Messenger', a solar-powered courier bag.

18 Review: Catrike Musashi

A low, sleek and sadly soon to be discontinued recumbent from the Florida-based trike specialists.

21 Review: Nazca Gaucho

High wheeling recumbent style: riding a mile-eating recumbent just back from completing the PBP.

24 Review: oVo Tandem

Two ride in comfort on this remarkably compact and easily transported cycle.

28 Review: Bakfiets and Nihola cargo trikes

We visit Practical Cycles and try out two heavy-duty child-carrying trikes: the Bakfiets.nl CargoTrike and Nihola Family.

32 Short reviews

- 32 Wheel to wallet: a recycled inner tube wallet from Balkan Tango.
- 32 Biologic Arx grips: ergonomic and with a useful bonus feature.
- 33 Tapwater.org: a bottle with free refills.

- 34 The Toddlebike: a pre-balance bike for pre-schoolers.
- 35 Classic critiqued: the SKS Renncompressor in action.

36 Review: Intrepid Handcycles

Trying their Tourer, plus news of a revolutionary new model.

39 More short reviews

- 39 The *Bicycle Travel Journal* scrapbook
- 39 Brake bolts: use modern brakes on old frames.

40 Review: The FollowBox trailer

Pushing the limits of single wheelers.

42 Readers' bikes

- 42 The offset trailer: how to reclaim road space by clever design.
- 44 Catrike Trail: recumbent owner reports back.
- 45 Tom Thumb: a better way to mount a mirror?
- 46 Folding for less: upgrading a budget bike for top performance.
- 48 Spinburn Solo: the fast folder you've never heard of!

50 Letters

Cycle curiosities worldwide, cycling at 80, Brompton bite back and more in our round-up of reader letters.

54 Subscribe to Velo Vision

How to subscribe, back issues and details of our distributors worldwide.

55 Advertisements

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

Packed with pedalling

First of all, many thanks to everyone who wrote with messages of support following the note I enclosed with last issue. Steps are being taken to ensure that the current three issues per year schedule, alternating with *Electric Bike*, will be a short term measure only – watch the website for announcements. Thanks to you all for your patience.

Meanwhile, I think we've packed a lot into this issue. Even after ten years on the job it's included some 'firsts'

for me – my first proper chance outside of trade show test tracks to ride a recumbent high-racer, and to captain a two-wheeled recumbent tandem. Trying the two cargo trikes was a completely different experience, but no less interesting. Readers have reported, too, on their ideas and bikes: as ever, all contributions are very much appreciated.

I hope this issue inspires you to try a bike which is out of the ordinary, too!

Peter Eland



HEAVY HAULERS HEAD TO HEAD

We visit Practical Cycles in their new premises in Lytham St Annes, near Blackpool, for a side-by-side review of Nihola and Bakfiets.nl cargo trikes – and a few other interesting items along the way!

BACKGROUND

This strange mix of ‘dealer visit’ and review came about for a variety of reasons. I’d originally hoped to review the Nihola trike here in York, but for various reasons the logistics of getting one over here were frustrated. Then, when I heard that Practical Cycles had moved to new, much larger premises since our ‘Dealer visit’ report in Issue 37, it seemed as if it would be altogether easier to just visit, report on the new shop, and try the trike all in one trip.

Proprietor Zaynan Lythgoe made me very welcome as ever, and we spent a full morning trying out the Nihola and, as he’d just got one in, a rival product from the Netherlands:

the Bakfiets.nl CargoTrike. Two products he’d recently imported from the USA also caught my eye: the heavy-duty Surly trailer and a lightweight cargo bike from Civia. Read more about these over the page.

HEAD TO HEAD

First, though, we’ll take a look at two heavy-duty trikes, the Nihola Family from Denmark and the Bakfiets.nl Cargotrike Narrow. Both are designed as much as child-carriers as load haulers, and with that in mind each came with a protective hood to keep rain off passengers – or loads which prefer not to get wet!

Such machines are used in large numbers in their native countries for utility trips such as the school run

and shopping, and they’re built for daily use in all weathers – and such bikes are quite likely to be parked outside, too. They’re starting to catch on in the UK, with more and more parents realising that it’s hard to beat the road presence, stability and substantial construction of a trike like this for safe, confident transport in traffic.

Practical Cycles are one of four dealers selling the Nihola in the UK, and one of a number for the Bakfiets.nl machine. Check the manufacturer’s websites for the latest lists. At Practical Cycles the Nihola costs from £2325, and the Bakfiets from £1959, both including the rain hoods as shown. If you can’t collect in person, then shipping to most

addresses within the UK costs £65 for either machine. The Bakfiets comes with a 10 year guarantee on frame and forks (1 year most other parts).

Naturally gearing upgrades, electric assist and other options are all available to such an extent that we have no space to list them all here – dealers will of course be delighted to advise. The Nihola was pretty much standard, while the Bakfiets had optional dynamo lighting, and upgraded Shimano IM-70 roller brakes.

There are other versions of both machines, too – a wider version of the Bakfiets, and several variants of the Nihola, even including a dog-carrier! Again, consult the websites for all the details.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The two trikes take quite different design approaches within the same basic layout. The main difference is in the steering: the Nihola has a fixed chassis, with car-style steering, while the Bakfiets pivots in the middle, swinging the whole front end around to steer. As you’ll read later, the steering design decision has a profound effect on how the trikes ride.

It also makes a difference to the size of load bed that the machines can accommodate. A look at their vital statistics reveals that overall sizes are similar: for the Nihola that’s 200 cm length, width 89 cm (though it will get through an 85 cm gap if you angle the wheels) and a claimed weight of 32 kg. The Bakfiets weighs, according to Practical Cycles, around 38 kg.

The Bakfiets is a touch longer at 220 cm, but somewhat narrower at 82 cm overall: without a steering mechanism to accommodate, the wheels can be tucked right up against the load bed. But despite the narrower design, its load box is larger than the Nihola’s. Exact comparisons are tricky, given the



ABOVE: Wide, swept-back bars fixed to the load box provide plenty of leverage to steer the Bakfiets.

RIGHT: The Bakfiets has a double-pull lever to activate the two front brakes.

BELOW: Zaynan Lythgoe of Practical Cycles rides the Nihola (left) while I try the Bakfiets Cargobike (right).



tapering sides of the Bakfiets and the curved corners of the Nihola. The load bed bases measure around 84 cm x 64 cm max (Nihola) and 90 cm x 53 cm (Bakfiets), but I’d say that once you take the shape into account, the Bakfiets box is significantly more voluminous.

Either way, both have room for two smallish children, or for a whole pile of parcels. Load ratings are 100 kg plus rider (Nihola) and unstated for the Bakfiets, although Zaynan of Practical Cycles suggests “at least 100 kg”.

The Nihola comes with a lap belt and three-point harness for one child. The Bakfiets has fold-down bench seats at front and rear of the box to carry up to four kids.

The makers of the two bikes both stress the strength and safety of their boxes: the Nihola has a steel framework around the load area, covered with plastic panels, while the Bakfiets box is made of substantial plywood, standing on a metal frame. I’m told each has recently been commended for safety by Dutch and German cycling organisations.

Both bikes use Shimano hub gears,



in either seven or 8-speed options (8 being standard on the Nihola). There's a partial chaincase on the Nihola, and a full one on the Bakfiets.

With so much weight to slow, brakes are a serious business for this type of trike. Both use twin-pull levers (with parking lock) to activate both front brakes at once, with the other lever controlling the back brake. The Nihola has gone for 70mm drum brakes on each front wheel, with a V-brake for the rear, while the Bakfiets is equipped with Shimano rollerbrakes on each wheel. The upgraded versions on the trike we tried are all equipped with substantial alloy cooling fins.

The right front wheel on the Bakfiets also accommodates the optional hub dynamo, powering a headlight tight against the side of the box. It is on the 'traffic side' for the UK, but I'd rather have seen this positioned further forward so that it could be seen from more angles. Incidentally, it's rather difficult to fit a hub dynamo on the Nihola with its single-sided front wheels.

Of the two rain hoods, I would have to say I prefer the Nihola's: it's a tougher-feeling fabric, with strong zips, and it fits closely around the top of the box. In contrast, the Bakfiets canopy has a tendency for the sides to flop around and tuck inside the box – potentially letting water in. And while the Nihola's is certainly less spacious overall, its shape should provide better headroom, and a better view, for child passengers.

Finally, both trikes come equipped with mudguards, rear racks, frame-mounted locks to immobilise the rear wheel, and wide squishy saddles. The particularly long, easy to use lever for the seatpost adjustment on the Bakfiets deserves special mention.

ON THE ROAD

Riding either of these trikes requires a mental gearshift into 'trundle' mode: there's not much point hurrying. The weight shouldn't much of an issue on the flat, but it could be in the hills, where you'd better have either strong legs or a wallet deep enough to add some electric assist.

As the claimed weights suggest, the (empty) Nihola does feel quite noticeably lighter to accelerate than the Bakfiets, although once some load is added any difference will swiftly become negligible.

More significant perhaps is the 'heaviness' of the steering. While the Nihola's steering linkage feels quite light-action, the Bakfiets seems at first quite ponderous: a change of direction means shifting the entire front end sideways. Add some

RIGHT: The car-type steering on the Nihola is solidly constructed.

BELOW: The dynamo lighting is an optional extra on the Bakfiets.

BELOW RIGHT: A pulley linkage ensures that braking force is evenly distributed between the Nihola's two front brakes.

weight and the effect is even more pronounced: it's not necessarily a problem, but it does mean that the Bakfiets encourages a smoother, slower style of riding: it's physically less easy to steer suddenly or sharply.

If you do need to make a sharp turn, though, the front end of the Bakfiets will swing right round – so far that you need to 'change hands' to keep a grip on it. The resulting turning circle is distinctly tighter than the Nihola's, and in use this can be very useful. It's easier to manoeuvre when parking the trike up, when doing a U-turn, and the like.

A less obvious effect of the 'swing' steering on the Bakfiets is that I felt somewhat less solidly seated on the bike. The steering pivot of the Nihola gives you a fixed point which your arms, via the handlebars, are braced against, so the two hands and the saddle provide tripod-type support.



If the whole handlebar moves sideways as on the Bakfiets, that support shifts, or rather you have to shift it, by pushing against the saddle and pedals. For this reason I found myself thinking I'd prefer a less squishy saddle on the Bakfiets to provide something more solid to brace against as you're pushing the steering from side to side.

Sensible riders are unlikely to test the stability limits of these trikes with excess speed, especially with a load on board. But they are upright trikes, and they do have limits: it's easy enough to deliberately lift a wheel on either, empty at least. The lower load bed of the Nihola does give it an advantage here, though, making the loaded bike very hard indeed to tip. But loading up also makes the Bakfiets feel more solid and stable, too.

The two trikes' response also differs when one front wheel drops into a pothole. It'll jerk at the Nihola steering somewhat, but it's quick and easy to correct for any change of course. The Bakfiets has much more inertia behind its steering, so any jerk is reduced. The Bakfiets just cruises through most obstacles, especially when it's loaded. But it's a harder physical effort to correct if it does go off line.

Finally, watch out for cambers. As with any trike, riding along a cambered road will tend to pull the steering – which way usually depends on whether the trike and rider's centre of gravity is in front of or behind the steered wheels. I found the Bakfiets more sensitive to this than the Nihola – it was noticeable, but not a problem, on both.

Lest the above seem overly harsh on the Bakfiets, I should stress that tens of thousands of people in the Netherlands and Denmark ride trikes with this sort of steering daily, and once you get used to its quirks and characteristics it's a perfectly valid way to go. But I was clear in my mind after riding the two machines head to head that the Nihola is the better-handling vehicle, to my taste at least. If speeds are likely to rise, down hills for example, I'd favour the Nihola even more.

Both vehicles use types of brakes which are good for all-weather

reliability but not renowned for powerful stopping: 70 mm drums on the Nihola, and rollerbrakes on the Bakfiets. But in the 20" (406) front wheels used by both trikes (rather than 'full size' 26" or larger wheels for which they were originally designed) these brakes have more 'leverage' to stop the machine, especially with the help of the rear wheel brakes (roller on Bakfiets, V-brakes on Nihola). I wouldn't say that braking on either trike was spectacularly sharp or positive, but it was adequate.

There's not much to say about the gearing on the two trikes, as both use similar Shimano hub gears. On the flat the gearing range offered by either 7 or 8 speed hubs should be fine, but you'd probably want lower ratios for any hills – easily changed by a dealer.

CONCLUSION

Though I've come out fairly clearly in favour of the Nihola when it comes to handling, there's more to buying a load bike than that. To accommodate that steering linkage which makes it so nice to ride, the Nihola has a smaller, more oddly-shaped load box and greater overall width than the Bakfiets, and also a wider turning circle. Which factors are decisive is up to each potential user.

And of course, these two are not the only heavy-duty carriers to consider. Other options include the 4wheeler Quad (as reviewed in Issue 40) and the new Carryo (see News pages this issue), both with linkage steering. For swing-steering there are a number of Dutch and Danish makers, but the one you really shouldn't skip trying is the Christiania, pioneers of the format and by all accounts still among the best of breed.

Overall, I think someone looking for a serious, dependable load or child-carrier with real road presence would be well served with either of these machines. Do as I did, and try both!

Peter Eland

AVAILABILITY:

Nihola: see www.nihola.dk for a dealer list
 Bakfiets.nl: see www.bakfiets.nl for a dealer list
 Review bikes from Practical Cycles:
 Tel or see www.practicalcycles.co.uk



Practical Cycles new premises

When we last visited Practical Cycles, their operations were split across a couple of locations in Lytham St Annes, just south of Blackpool on the UK's north-west coast. Now they've moved into a substantial new warehouse just off the Preston Road. There's masses more space for stock, bike boxes and workshop, and a huge car park is just outside for test riding. They're open most days, but it's always best to contact them before a visit, especially if you're looking for something in particular.



Surly 'Bill the Trailer'

We saw the short 'Ted' version of this trailer at Eurobike last year – see Issue 39. The longer version, 'Bill', is an impressive size (1.6 m long, 61 cm wide), and it looks really well and robustly made. Unfortunately the price is also impressive: £449 seems not too bad for the trailer – sadly you then need to buy the hitch unit separately, for another £239! But if you have some good brakes on your towing bike and want to pull up to 135 kg, it'll do the job in style.



Civia Halsted

This lightweight butcher's style bike from Civia can carry up to 22 kg on its recycled plastic front rack: not a massive load, but it would make a nice machine for, say, pizza deliveries. Adding a rear rack would increase capacity considerably. Companies can also order placards to fit within the frame for extra publicity. Prices start at around £850.