

Velo Vision Sample Article

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peter@velovision.com

I hope you enjoy the read.



Peter Eland
Editor and Publisher,
Velo Vision

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Small print

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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: Paul on the Challenge. We'd shortened the boom, but not the chain, hence the rear derailleur position. Photo: Peter Eland

OPPOSITE: Great placenames on the way to Ilkley. Photo: Debz Butterworth

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ALL ABOARD!

It was great to meet such a varied bunch of readers for the *Velo Vision* coach trip over to the SPEZI show at the end of April. The coach is already booked for next year, and we'll open up for bookings soon – watch the website for details.

And talking of long, multi-seat vehicles, you may have noticed a bit of an upswing in the amount of tandem-related content of late. I'll try to keep it in check, but it has been fun discovering the ins and outs of

a new way of riding. It's almost like back when I first came across recumbents: new technology to read about, frame layouts to debate, tyre choices to ponder... and yes, a recumbent tandem has crossed my mind. It's just finding somewhere to put it...

Finally, with apologies for the advert, I should mention our new *VeloVisionary* T-shirts! All the details are on page 53, and we should have them in stock by the time you read this. I hope you like them!

Peter Eland



This brings the seat height down to around 57 cm, pretty much in line with a slew of other recumbents: the three we reviewed in Issue 22, for example, were all around 55 cm (and all with 20" front wheels).

Incidentally, the other 24" size, 520, is also interesting, as there are a number of even faster racing tyres available in that size, including the Schwalbe Stelvio. A second set of wheels built up with these rims would fit easily into the Seiran 24 – with the disk brakes swapping over would take just seconds. That might make a nice package: use the 507s with heavier tyres for touring, then swap for the 520s if you fancy a blast or going racing.

We picked up our review Seiran 24 at the SPEZI show. It's essentially the same as production machines, with the exception of a roughly welded pre-production rear swingarm. It was fitted out for light touring, with small rack, mudguards, and Schwalbe Marathon tyres. Disk brakes had been upgraded from Avid BB5s to BB7s, and ours also had the optional Ventisit seatpad.

Other available options include front suspension, underseat steering, 'open cockpit' above-seat steering, a large carrier rack for four panniers, several gearing and brake options, and a wide variety of parts upgrades to reduce the weight. Standard colours are red, blue and black, and others, including the vivid green of our bike, cost €60 extra.

Prices start in the Netherlands from €1790 with SRAM X7 gears, or (as tested) from €1990 with Shimano XT derailleurs. For full price lists see the Challenge website or consult their dealers.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Our bright green Challenge has the sinuous, clean lines typical of the brand, with the 'split tube' rear swing-arm working very well visually, continuing the line of the main frame. The overall effect elicited plenty of admiring comments.

The frame is aluminium, with a sliding boom for leg-length adjustment. It's fitted with straight forks and on these, as at the back on the swingarm, there are no brake

bosses, just the standard mounts for disk brakes.

The seat, formed neatly from aluminium sheet, adjusts from 29 to 35 degrees. The small carrier rack, rated for 12 kg, bolts onto the seat sides which give it good, wide-spaced support. The large four-pannier rack goes up to a more impressive 25 kg.

Up front there's a 52-42-32 Tiagra chainset, but a Truvative 48-36-26 is a no-cost alternative and perhaps more suitable for loaded touring. With the 11-34 nine-speed cassette these give gear ranges of 23" to 114" and 18" to 104" respectively. The gears are shifted using SRAM twist grips.

The chain run is managed using a couple of large-diameter toothed pulleys, which ran smoothly and quietly. Smooth plastic chain tubes fixed to stainless steel brackets by cable ties keep your legs and clothing clean.

Wheels are built 32-spoke front and rear, using nice black-anodised aero rims. The Avid BB7 disk brakes are a well-regarded favourite, and run here with 160 mm disks. Our wheels were fitted with the 47-507 Schwalbe Marathon tyre, a reliable choice for touring across the sizes.

Our Seiran was fitted with what Challenge call a 'folding tiller' handlebar. The stem pivots just above the bottom bracket, and a bolt sets the angle at which it rests when you lay it back. I think this was meant to have some thread-lock on it, but it seemed more like grease to me, and it rotated freely. To retain the adjustment a good clean and a dab of threadlock would be an idea.

At the top of the stem there's a very neat little cast metal clamp, which holds the upper stainless steel section of the stem in place: there's a few inches of length adjustment (this is an added-cost option). It looks so neat that the rather obvious pinch bolt which holds the handlebars looks a little ugly in comparison. Now that is nit-picking...

Another very slight niggle is the cable routing down the stem – it's just held in place by a few cable ties, which tend to wander up and down. After that, though, the cable runs are very tidy indeed: they disappear



ABOVE LEFT: The stem folds on this stainless steel bracket, with a bolt to set its resting angle. Ours needed a touch of threadlock!

ABOVE: The optional telescopic stem employs a very neat clamp to secure the length adjustment. Perhaps the handlebar clamp could be made prettier to match!



LEFT: A Velcro patch protects the paintwork from the folded stand, and prevents rattles.

BELOW: Large, toothed chain pulleys run quietly, and chain tubes keep trousers clean.

BELOW: The 'small' rear carrier takes two panniers (or side pods) and 12 kg. The 'large' model takes four, and has a maximum of 25 kg: plenty for most types of touring.



BOTTOM: Seat angle adjustment and seat structure on display.



WHEEL APPEAL

We review the Seiran 24, which promises highracer-style efficiency in a package accessible to riders of moderate height. Are 24" wheels the way forwards? We tried it to find out!

BACKGROUND

Netherlands recumbent maker Challenge have a history of bikes with same-sized, large wheels. When they first started out, there weren't any small, fast tyres, and most customers were buying bikes for racing, so the aerodynamic highracer format made a lot of sense. As time went on more and more customers ended up using them for touring, too: the large wheels offered

easy and comfortable progress, especially on unmade roads.

The current incarnation of the genre is the Seiran, a relatively tall recumbent with twin 26" wheels. But with a seat height of around 62 cm, and the bottom bracket almost 80 cm from the ground, it requires a tallish rider, and one who's got the hang of starting and stopping a recumbent.

The benefits of twin large wheels

for rough road touring are clear, but for many years there hasn't really been a good choice of tyres for any size between the 26" MTB standard and the 20" (406) size popular on many folders and recumbents. But with touring-capable Schwalbe Marathon and Big Apple tyres now available in 24" (507), along with a couple of narrower semi-slicks from Innova and Vee rubber, Challenge decided to make a 24"-wheeled version.

into that main tube and emerge from the rear swingarm or front boom just before their destinations.

Mudguards were neatly fitted, albeit with some fairly radical stay-bending to clear the disk brake callipers.

Finally, the Seiran was fitted with a long, adjustable side stand, with the leg formed from two wires. It worked really well, and folds up neatly against the bike's side. A Velcro patch protects the paintwork and stop it rattling where it crosses the swingarm.

Weight as tested was 17.9 kg, not at all out of line for a touring bike. Challenge say that with lightweight components weights from 12 kg are achievable.

THE RIDE

As well as pottering around York for the photos, I also took the Seiran 24 out on a longer ride to find some hills, riding in a mixed group of uprights, including a tandem. Our route crossed some unmade bridleways, and took in a few harsh climbs

and some swift descents, with a stiff headwind on the way out and a tailwind home.

Despite my relative lack of recumbent fitness, I was glad to be on the Challenge. Swapping bikes briefly half-way revealed just how easily the Seiran was cutting into that headwind – on it, I had no idea how hard my companions must have been working! It would also just rocket past the solos on any downhill, and even the tandem couldn't keep up. Of course, they'd catch me on the hills shortly after – there's really no substitute for fitness when it comes to climbing.

The bike handled the loose bridleway surface well, bumping over large gravel controllably and



even coping with some slip-sliding in soft sand without feeling particularly perilous. I was never really troubled by road harshness as I have occasionally been in the past on rock-hard, small wheels. Of course, the rear suspension and seat pad played their part here, too.

The Ventisit seat cushion gave good support as ever. Challenge had attached it to their aluminium seat via cable ties, and while this was mostly fine, I found it would slip sideways at the very top of the seat. Ventisit had provided a roll of double-sized tape to fix this very problem, and applying a few patches sorted it completely.

The handlebars put the hands in a relaxed, aerodynamic position

near the chest. I did have an initial feeling that the steering would wander slightly instead of tracking perfectly straight, but this diminished after a few miles and I think it must be just one of those things that take a little getting used to. Downhill I had no problems at all – even after hitting a few unexpected bumps at speed – and the brakes were smooth and powerful.

Coming into town after a spell on the open road, the Seiran is perhaps less in its element. The fairly high bottom bracket and moderately high seat mean that there's a lot of leg movement needed for starting and stopping. It's not a problem with practice, but this is where any issues

of leg length and seat height will become apparent. Riders a fair bit shorter than me (I'm 6' 2") would be fine: I could easily get my feet flat on the ground at a stop. Familiarity with a 'legs up' recumbent certainly helps, especially if you're not long in the leg.

Oh, and do fit a mirror! With the laid-back seat, it was really hard to look behind safely. Challenge supply a handlebar-mounted model from B&M, and I'd say this is a must-have accessory.

CONCLUSIONS

It's perhaps misleading to say that this is a highracer for the shorter rider – the seat is still normal height as recumbents go, making shorter legs stretch to the ground. But it does make the highracer concept much less daunting for riders of moderate height.

And it certainly seemed to perform well in terms of speed and comfort. Without a side-by-side test it's hard to quantify just how much compared to the various models with 20" front wheels, but I think there is a difference. You can run that front tyre at a higher pressure and get the same comfort, and the difference just becomes plainer as the road surface deteriorates. Of course, if you run high pressure 20" but add suspension that rather muddies the waters...

It's a striking bike which could be kitted out for anything from heavy touring to fast day-riding or racing. In this role it has just as much to offer as for the tourer: narrow tyres and a fit rider can make the most of any rolling resistance advantage from the move up to 24" wheels.

The rest of the bike is well thought out, as you'd expect for an established manufacturer like Challenge, and we found little of significance to criticise. A welcome addition to the range, opening up the high-racer format to a new range of riders.

Peter Eland

AVAILABILITY

Manufacturer: Challenge Bikes – Tel +31 55 521 2405 or see www.challengebikes.com for full list of dealers worldwide.