



**GOBIKE, HALFWAY
FOLDERS TESTED**

**KMX, EVOX
RECUMBENTS
REVIEWED**

**CYCLEVISION,
SPOKESFEST
REPORTS**

**BUYERS' GUIDE:
SPECIAL NEEDS
CYCLING**

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Velo Vision, The Environmental Community Centre, St Nicholas Fields, York, YO10 3EN, UK

Tel/Fax +44 1904 438 224 (from UK, 01904 438 224) Email peter@velovision.co.uk Website www.velovision.co.uk

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER: Peter Eland
ART DIRECTOR: Brian Holt
WEBMASTER: Simon Ward
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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. Contact them on www.velo-vision.de



Cover photograph: Stuart Dennison of Bikefix in London, pictured at the York Cycle Show. Photo: Peter Eland.

Opposite: A high-wheeler at full speed, racing at Spokesfest. Photo: Peter Eland

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Keeping busy

Another busy summer draws to an end, with a flurry of new bike launches, plenty of fun events to report on and, as this issue's deadline approached, an unfortunate heat-wave which made it particularly irksome to be in the office not out on the bike.

It's been busy even before deadline panic set in. Amongst other things we've revamped the Velo Vision website, improving a lot of 'back end' stuff as well as adding a better (and ever more popular) version of the free small ads service.

And as many readers will have spotted, we've also been busy doing joint marketing with our friends at A to B Magazine (www.atob.org.uk), who specialise in UK transport matters, folding and electric bikes. This has resulted in a real flurry of new readers requesting sample copies and subscribing, usually to both magazines. Welcome to you all.

But to scotch a rumour that seems to be doing the rounds, we're not about to merge! The two magazines complement each other well, rather than competing, and there's plenty of room in this wide world for the both of us. By joining forces we can reach more of the many people who'd no doubt enjoy both magazines if only they knew about them.

We're also happy to welcome new Velo Vision stockists in Belgium and Sweden (see News pages). While we already supply magazines to over 30 countries via the website's online shop, having someone on the spot to sell magazines and introduce new readers is always good. Any other dealers, anywhere in the world, reading this and wanting to try Velo Vision in your shop? Please just get in touch.

Peter Eland

VELOVISION



Todd pulls the cigarette from his mouth and yells out the driver-side window. “Hey, bike lane’s over here!” The woman cyclist makes a brief response I can’t decipher. I hope it is a polite, if insincere, thank-you. Todd then speaks to the windshield, “I laid my life on the line to stripe that lane, so she better use it.”

I am passenger in a red '80s Chevrolet Camaro, Detroit’s final attempt at a muscle car, driven by what I had imagined to be one of the coolest bike advocates in the city of Portland, Oregon. Todd Roberts is a tall, wiry man in his mid-forties. His long, dark hair is beginning to show strands of grey, his thin face a few age lines. He reminds me of singer Lou Reed twenty years younger, with a smile that reveals a missing tooth.

He once borrowed his son’s bike briefly, only because his car broke down. But Todd does not ride a bike, even for recreation. “It’s boring as hell to ride your bike around. You’re riding down the road, just looking down at the same thing.”

He even finds some bicyclists offensive. “Goddamn tight-Speedo sonofabitches that are right next to the white line when I’m drivin’ my truck.” These days he drives a refuse truck. But he used to work for the Portland Office of Transportation, installing and marking bike lanes.

And that’s where he became an unlikely cycling hero.

Recognized nationally among the best and most active bicycling cities in the United States, Portland hosts over 250 miles of bike lanes. Portland is perhaps the only American city to have developed a bicycling master plan, which sets guidelines by which bike lanes are installed. The city also created a bicycle advocacy office within the Office of Transportation. Budget cuts have reduced the size of this office, but Portland’s

several advocacy groups, including Critical Mass, have become even more vocal. The largest, Bicycle Transportation Alliance, has over 3500 members.

Bike lanes in Portland share characteristics with bike lanes elsewhere – a pair of solid white stripes wedged between moving traffic and parked vehicles. Besides occasional signage, bike lanes are marked on the road surface with stick-figure rider symbols.

The city’s basic rider symbol kit contains two wheels, a set of legs, torso and arms, and a head, plus stripes to create a short section of bike lane. The pieces are a gritty, white thermoplastic embedded with tiny pieces of glass for reflectiveness. Until melted onto a roadway, they resemble asphalt roof shingles, both flexible and brittle and, as plastics, are most fragile in cold temperatures. They can be broken by bending almost as easily as cut with a razor knife.

In Portland, unlike other cities, once in a while you might notice a rider symbol sporting a ponytail. Or with flames shooting off the back tyre. A crooked nose. Spokes in the wheels. A scarf. A cigarette. An archer’s arrow through the head.

This is Todd Roberts’s bike lane art.

MAKING MISCHIEF

When I visit Todd he is nursing an afternoon whiskey on a day off from work. He leads me through the kitchen, light-heartedly barking instructions to his teenage son and his friends. He offers me a variety of beverages, and chastises me for my selection. “All these choices, and you choose water?”

On the patio I angle for a motivation that supports some bicycling ideology. There is none. When he opens a new pack of cigarettes in his car he throws the wrapper out the window. I learn that

he performs auto-detailing, such as pinstripes, murals and flames. He is currently working on an airbrushed t-shirt of a monster truck for a friend.

He’s quite creative and talented, and it’s this which has led to his modest but anonymous celebrity among Portland’s active bicycle community. His motivations are not without nobility, humility and a certain playfulness. The first design he made, in 1999, involved simply adding a triangle hat on the lane symbol in front of a Chevron station downtown. “Because it just happened to be sitting there,” he explains. “I picked it up, shoved it down with my foot. I was just screwin’ with my boss, to see what I could get away with.” When fellow crewmembers suggested that he might get in trouble, he countered, “You can do anything you want.”

A supervisor at the time commented, “Looks good.”

Even now Todd seems almost disappointed to have received no reprimand, but ultimately that was an encouraging response, and his designs became more intentional. “So a little bit more, a little bit more. Didn’t take much to do it. It was fun.”

After his reputation began to spread, at a department meeting a supervisor summarised the city’s response and their only restriction: “Word from downtown is, they like it. Just don’t put penises or vaginas on them.” Todd’s crewmembers eventually, and more timidly, made small additions – but not to the extent Todd would.

PATTERNS ON THE PAVEMENT

It wasn’t just a repeatedly spontaneous activity. Todd began working on a larger pattern that, at several locations, was thoughtfully considered. He laid down special features according to geography, landmarks or current events. In a new bike lane in

North Portland, near the site of a fatal auto accident the week before, he carved the rider symbol’s head into a skull. “Drunk driving car wreck. We were talking about drinking and driving or what-not.” This was October, so a few blocks away he also made a rider’s front wheel into a jack-o-lantern face to celebrate Halloween. Downtown, where a bike lane crosses a freeway entrance ramp, he put a lucky horseshoe in a rider’s hand. Outside the federal building he added flames to the back wheel, commemorating the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma a few years earlier.

Todd also has favourites. “The girl by Lloyd Center, by the cinemas. It’s there, it’s perfect and nobody’s touched it.”

He’s clearly disappointed that some have been destroyed by maintenance or motor traffic – and is protective of the ones that remain. Although 25-30 special symbols still exist, several have been erased. “The city paves over ‘em and what-not, eventually. God, I’m getting mad. They start screwing things up. Got a pattern going and...” He doesn’t finish his sentence.

I reiterate that much of his work remains.

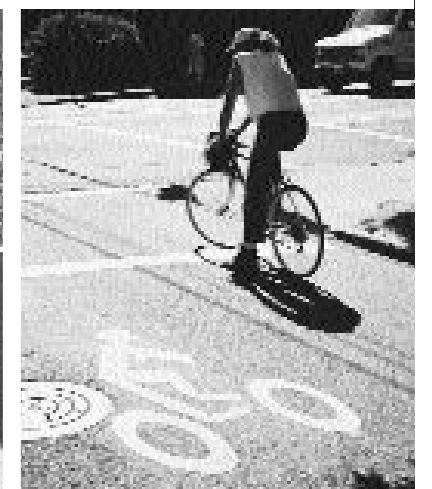
He replies quickly: “Yeah, but the rest of them are all gone.”

Sewer lines in particular tend to run underneath bike lanes, so repair and replacement often require digging long trenches. When a bike lane is reinstalled the bike symbols may be replaced – but any special features are not.

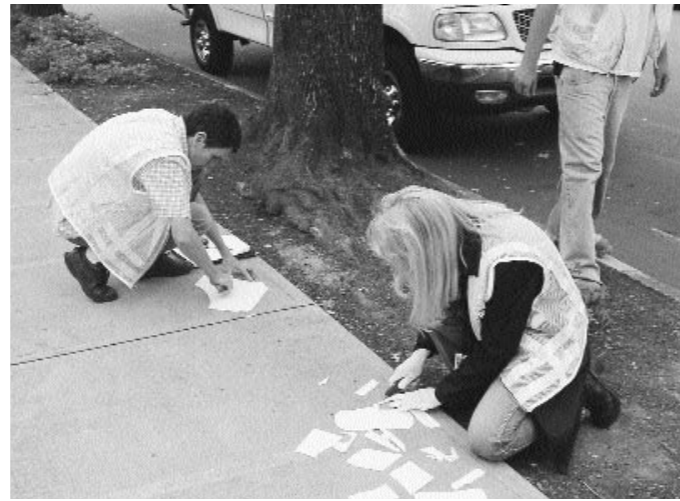
Todd recently drove around the city making an inventory of what pieces still exist. He worked for the transportation department for four years, unfortunately losing his job after an after-hours drink-driving offence. When I tell him his former supervisor is now making bike lane art, he snorts and says, “I’ll be damned,” surprised but pleased.

ARTISTS OF THE ASPHALT

Cycle commuters in Portland, Oregon often get a pleasant surprise as they ride the city’s bike lanes. Journalist and local cyclist James Waigand was intrigued, and decided to meet some of the unlikely artists behind this bike-friendly municipal mischief.



BELOW: Individual features on these Portland bike signs add a welcome touch of humanity



CREATIVITY CONTINUES

The current supervisor in the Pavement Markings and Signs Department is Kirstin Byer. “Todd is just a fun, creative person. He always had us laughing.”

Now, it seems, Kirstin has assumed his role. She is like an enthusiastic sister among stoic brothers, or even a den mother for a group of Cub Scouts. “I’ve got the best group in the world,” she insists. Kirstin notices creative crewmembers, ones who make T-shirts or tattoos, and encourages them. “Some of these guys, they do it all day long. And so it’s just work and it’s just the same thing. What a fun way to do your work and laugh at the same time.”

With the help of Doug Iwata, her right-handman, she coordinates twenty-nine employees, and jokes how she began in the sewer maintenance department and worked her way up, earning her current status in 2000. She, like Todd, is very bright and assertive. “Well, he did it; I can do it.”

Without really giving me a chance to object, as soon as I appear at her office Kirstin invites me to watch a crew install bike lanes and symbols at a busy intersection. We arrive as the crew is sweeping leaves and debris from the gutter. They then lay blue chalk lines to indicate the alignment of the lane itself, and the symbol and arrow within it. A primitive spray-paint marking – three circles with a triangle between – estimates the placement of the rider symbol.

Wearing canvas work gloves and an orange vest emblazoned with ‘Donald Duck’ on the chest pocket, crew leader Bill Tyrell uses propane gas to heat the road surface. He lights the nozzle and orange flames lap loosely from its end. Bill twists the handle, and the orange flame straightens, turns blue and finally colourless. The modest hiss of expelling gas becomes a roar like a jet engine, and the smell of propane widens and intensifies. He sweeps the invisible flame across the asphalt for several minutes. Unless the asphalt was just laid, a crew must heat the surface before laying the plastic pieces.

Bill shuts off the propane while the crew sets the short lane stripe and all the pieces of the rider except the head, which Doug delivers to Kirstin and me. “So what’ll we do? I just take the broken pieces and do something with them.”

I kneel on the sidewalk and quickly carve the first original idea I could think of – a stocking cap and ball. Kirstin is laughing and talking with her crew. Their stoicism is so obvious it appears feigned. I think they enjoy her visits to site. I fit the final pieces with the rest of the rider. Bill re-lights the propane and sweeps over the image, slowly, melting its parts into a single unit. Glass crystals lose their distinctiveness and disappear into the plastic, crisp edges soften. Kirstin says, “I think that they will last forever, because if a bike is riding on them as opposed to a car...”

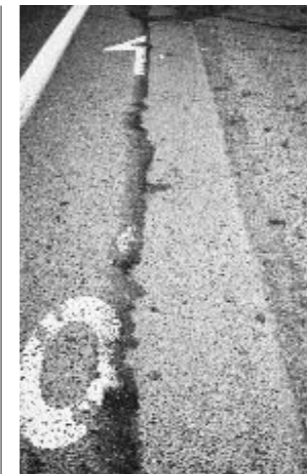
Across the street, outside a library, we continue Todd’s pattern of placing geographically themed symbols. Our second rider holds a book and wears a backpack.

Making special symbols is spontaneous, based on work orders and Kirstin’s time. They’re so spontaneous that she cannot remember many of the pieces she’s done. Responding to my inquiries about certain ones: “That might’ve been me,” she says quite a few times. And to my satisfaction, she also displays consideration of cyclists. “I think the bike community really enjoys the creativity.”

Myself, I like these bike lane art pieces partly because not every rider symbol has special features. It’s actually a small percentage citywide, and it’s exciting to come across one unexpectedly. The long, rainy Portland winter commute needs a surprise or two, once in a while.

Whether it’s Kirstin’s friendly ‘Hello’ to riders or Todd’s attempt to annoy his supervisor, it’s also nice to know there’s a human consciousness at work, helping make riding the cycle lanes that little bit more fun and enjoyable.

James Waigand, Portland, Oregon
E-mail: Supergrover71@lycos.com



UPDATE

Since interviewing Todd and Kirstin, I have witnessed just how transient this collection of bike lane art is. Three of Todd’s pieces downtown were recently destroyed by repaving projects, including his first one, and another fine image of a rider wearing a graduation cap at Portland State University.

Meanwhile, on the east side, a new rider carries a tennis racket near the courts at Sumner Park.