

## Velo Vision Sample Article



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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

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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.  
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**COVER:** Riding in suspended comfort on the Pirol Street Vario trike.

**OPPOSITE:** Daffodils mark an early spring ride for the Pino.  
Both photos: Peter Eland

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### SPRING HAS SPRUNG

Bounce galore this issue – and not just thanks to the Pirol trike, with its double-wishboned air suspension. I'm also feeling bouncy at seeing the first signs of spring, and a return to riding for pleasure alongside just cycling for transport – as I seem to have been doing through much of this winter. And there's a full schedule of events to look forward to this year as well – see page 9 for the listing.

There seems to be a spring in the step of

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the cycle industry too, despite the current economic woes. As this issue shows, the flow of new models and innovations hasn't dried up at all, and in the UK at least, climate concerns and a new spirit of frugality are keeping cycling in a more positive media spotlight than for many years. I'm hoping it's a good time to launch a book, as you'll see on page 7!

I hope you all enjoy this issue, and here's to tailwinds in 2009!

Peter Eland

## Big Squeeze brakes



I was intrigued when, a few months ago, I came across the website of R&E Cycles in the USA. They're custom bike and tandem specialists, making amongst other things the '8 Ball' travel tandem which, with the help of plenty of S&S couplings, can also be assembled as a solo bike.

But what caught my eye on this occasion was their 'Big Squeeze', billed as a new generation tandem cantilever brake. Why a cantilever? Isn't that so last century? V and disk brakes are now in vogue, and cantis seem to have fallen by the wayside except for some specialist uses such as cyclocross.

But R&E have some compelling arguments against the alternatives, and for cantilevers.

Against V-brakes is the incompatibility

with (most) drop bar brake levers without adaptors, and the thin pads which are typically used – leading to very short pad life, especially under tandem loads. V-brakes can also interfere with rear rack mounts. In contrast, cantis work with most levers for both drops and flat bars, normally have much thicker, more substantial brake pads, and don't get in the way.

Magura brakes are, say R&E, a good option for flat bars, but drop bar levers are no longer made for this system. Having hydraulic hoses also complicates matters for travel tandems with S&S couplings, whereas with a normal cable you can just add a splitter.

Disk brakes can, they say, work well, but they require heavier frames,

**The Big Squeeze brake was fitted to the front of our town tandem, necessitating the use of an add-on cable hanger, as above.**

forks and wheels to withstand the loads they generate. Plus there's the fragility of the disk rotors when packing or travelling.

So, enough reason to revisit cantilever brakes, perhaps. Their attempt to make the definitive cantilever, especially for tandems, is the Big Squeeze, made locally in the USA. At \$125 for each brake (plus shipping), it had better be good!

First impressions are positive – it's all smoothly machined and finished in grey-anodised aluminium, and ours came ready fitted with a pair

of chunky red Scott brake blocks.

Before fitting the brake you'll need a suitable brake lever (we used a flat bar lever with the 'short pull' canti setting for the cable attachment point) and a cable hanger to support the front brake cable. These are available for both threaded and threadless headsets. I fitted a generic threadless one, made from chunky aluminium and pleasantly flex-free.

Most modern frames won't be equipped with a rear cable hanger for a back canti brake, but adaptors are available which attach to the seatpost clamp bolt.

Fitting the brake is straightforward if you're at all mechanically inclined – and you'd better be, if you're messing around with your tandem's brakes! Spring tension is easily adjusted by turning the 'caps' and tightening the stud bolt. Then, with the pad clamp bolt loosened, you can slide the collar up and down the brake body and rotate it to seat the pad evenly against the rim.

Then just tighten it up to lock. The smooth, stepless adjustment for toe-in was particularly easy to use.

As you'll see from the pictures, the Big Squeeze has an unusual straddle cable arrangement. Instead of the cable just running between the ends of the two arms, it runs over the two adjustable-angle ends and down to the bottom of each arm near the pivot. A removable stop with a grub screw to clamp the cable anchors it on the non-nipple end.

It's hard to see how this is significantly different from the more usual arrangement when it comes to the geometry of the forces involved, as once the 'arm ends' are adjusted, they're fixed in place, as is the straddle cable, so no relative movement can occur. But it's a neat enough way of attaching the cable, and perhaps avoids some

fatigue-inducing cable bending at the usual lever-end anchor points.

The idea of the angled arm ends is to let you compensate for varying mounting stud spacing and rim width. This allows you to always set the brake pad close up against the brake arm, minimising flex and vibration.

Delivered with the brakes was a rather exquisite straddle cable hanger. Grub screws are provided to clamp the straddle cable – I just nipped these up gently to keep things in place.



Getting the straddle cable length right was a job requiring three hands, and reference to the pictures on R&E's website to get the angles about right. A detailed video instruction set is apparently in the works. But it wasn't hard, really, just a bit of trial and error.

With cable end caps fitted (not shown on the photos) it was job done, and time for a ride. The Big Squeeze had replaced a Magura hydraulic front brake, so it had a tough benchmark to match. Several fake emergency stops later, plus a selection of more gentle braking, and I was already quite impressed. Braking is powerful, well modulated and squeal-free except occasionally for a low-speed squeak just as you pull to

a stop. In the wet it works as well as any rim brake I've tried.

It's hard to quantify the stopping power exactly, but I experienced at least as much stopping for a given finger pressure as with the Maguras – and I'm thinking perhaps even a little more. Some of this is certainly down to the particular brake blocks fitted – softer ones give more braking, but wear out faster, and the standard Magura pads are fairly hard. But overall, an impressive performance.

A contributing factor which even R&E don't mention in favour of cantilevers is the very short run of cable outer which is needed, on the front brake at least. On our tandem there is just 20 cm or so between lever and cable hanger, meaning minimal cable friction and minimal lost motion due to the cable housing compressing. This no doubt contributed to the very direct feel.

So, these are fine brakes, but the \$125 price per brake does give pause for thought. The most significant benefit is, I think, the compatibility with drop bars levers, particularly combined gear shifting/brake units. It should suit riders of loaded touring bikes, also often drop bar riders, as much as tandem teams.

If you're on flat bars and a non-separable tandem, however, there are other solutions for less money (go Magura). But the Big Squeeze could also appeal to riders who for whatever reason dislike V-brakes and want a 'conventional', non-hydraulic alternative, or who are looking for a more easily adjusted upgrade to existing cantilevers.

It certainly does the job.

**Peter Eland**

R&E Cycles: Tel +1 206 527 1384 or see [www.rodcycle.com](http://www.rodcycle.com)



## ABUS Urban I helmet

WE don't usually bother getting helmets in for review here at *Velo Vision* – they're generally well covered elsewhere, designed as most are for racing or MTB use. So it was nice to be offered a 'commuter' helmet from ABUS in Germany.

The 'Urban I' certainly has a different look to most sports helmets – it's smoother, and less aggressive in style. The matt-finish blue is relatively sober, too, and there's a small, removable black visor. Compensating for any lack of eye-catching colours is a silver reflective triangle high up on the back, and a built-in rear-facing LED light low on the harness. This has both constant and flashing modes, and lights up impressively.



Twisting the LED adjusts the harness system for head size: simple and effective. The straps were all neatly done with good quality fittings, and our test riders liked the little chin pad to cushion the buckle.

In use, the only real complaint was that the rear light could on occasions be hidden

by bulky clothing – not a problem if you wear only cycling gear. Ventilation and general comfort was fine – it's also light, at 253 g for the smaller size we tested. It comes in S-M (52-57 cm) and M-L (56-62 cm) sizes, and black and grey versions are also available.

Recommended retail price is £49.99, not out of line for a quality helmet.

**Peter Eland**

ABUS: see [www.abus.com](http://www.abus.com) UK distributors: Zyro. Try your local dealer or see [www.zyro.co.uk](http://www.zyro.co.uk) to find your closest stockist.