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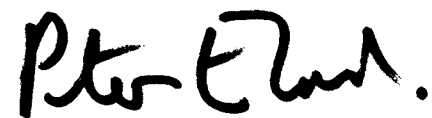
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Peter Eland
Editor and Publisher,
Velo Vision

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VELO VISION AND VELO-VISION
We weren't first with the name. Velo-Vision (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.

Velo Vision is printed on paper produced from sustainable forests to Nordic Swan standards.



COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Riding the Strida. Photo by Peter Eland.

OPPOSITE: The *Velo Vision* trailer is usually used to move bike boxes around York, but here it's helping some friends move a sofa. Photo by John Isles.

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EUROBIKING

I hope, dear reader, that you will excuse the late appearance of this September issue – as last year, we delayed publication so as to include the report from Eurobike, which takes place in early September. It really is the focus of the European cycle industry, with many manufacturers timing their R&D effort to have their latest and best ready to exhibit to the thousands of dealers, journalists and distributors at the show.

As a journalist, I'm privileged to have perhaps the best job of them all: seeking out the interesting and the new, without having to get into the nitty-gritty of buying and selling. The manufacturers and designers are keen to tell me about their work, and I try to repay their enthusiasm and hard work by reporting their innovations as fully as possible. Perhaps the most difficult part of the process is the editing: cutting down the masses of photographs and notes to a length which won't overwhelm the rest of the magazine. I've done my best, as ever, and I hope the report will let you enjoy a vicarious visit to perhaps the greatest cycle show on earth.

Peter Eland

RIDING THE TRIANGLE

The Strida is a folder with a long history. But is it a convincing cycle as well as a daring design? We rode it to find out.

BACKGROUND

Designed in the late '80s, the Strida has been in and out of production ever since, progressing through Mk 1 and Mk 2 versions until the Strida 3 was launched a few years ago. Currently, they say, over 20,000 are sold each year. A new model, the Strida 5 (picture overleaf), with disk brakes, spoked wheels and other changes, has recently been launched in the Far East and the Netherlands, but it's not available in the UK.

The basic Strida 3 sells for £250, but our bike was fitted with the £85 'Performance Kit' comprising folding handlebars, nicer saddle, mudguards, and rack. It would normally also feature folding pedals, but our bike, as provided by Strida designer Mark Sanders, had compact plastic pedals instead.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The new Strida is one of the least bicycle-looking bikes around. By that I don't just mean the strange shape of the frame: it's the overall look. With the moulded plastic wheels and 'chainring', belt drive and concealed drum brakes, it has few of the visual clues which say 'bicycle'. At first glance, it's just the pedals and brake levers.

This is perhaps one of the design's major strengths – it looks more like any other 'designer' consumer good than it does a bicycle. And as public transport operators, in particular,



seem to have a particular antipathy towards things that are obviously bikes, this can be very handy...

Anyway, in contrast to the plastic used on some previous Stridas, the Strida 3 frame is built from 7000-series aluminium throughout, with a rigid stem supporting the folding



handlebars. The wheels, each supported one side only, are the smaller 16" size and they're fitted with 1.5" (40-305) tyres. Inflation pressure must be limited to 65 psi because of the plastic wheel rims. A drum brake is fitted to each wheel.

The drivetrain (pictured above) is unusual, and defies cycle convention with a freewheel in the chainring, rather than at the rear wheel. This means that the belt drive rotates even when you're freewheeling – no big deal, really, and I never noticed this when on the bike. There's a little 'snubber' bearing just above the rear wheel 'sprocket' to prevent the belt jumping off. The gear ratio is 56".

The saddle and rack are both mounted on a large plastic moulding which looks as if it should slide up and down the rear tube for leg length adjustment. Well, it does in a way, but it's not as straightforward as you may think. To make major adjustments you have to separate the two halves of that moulding, remove and reposition a pin which goes through the frame tube, then reassemble and bolt together the moulding. Minor adjustments are a little faster (the pin stays in place) but effectively, this means that it's just too much of a chore to change it over between riders on a regular basis.

The Strida manufacturers suggest that the one-size frame will fit riders from 5'4" to 6'4" (163 to 193 cm) tall, and there's a weight limit for rider and luggage of 110 kg (250 lb).

The rack is rated for an impressive 14 kg – but it's so small that it's hard to see how you could overload it. Strapping a saddlebag or the like to it is possible, but check leg clearance. As with most of these 'mobility' folders, your main luggage will normally be carried in a backpack or shoulder bag.

Ingeniously the same mudguard moulding is used both front and rear, and the rear mudguard has a rubber flap.

Weight as tested was 9.98 kg, showing the manufacturer's quoted 10 kg to be impressively accurate.

THE RIDE

Jump on the Strida and your first impression is that the steering is, well, strange. With the 'headset' right between your legs (if you're tall at least) and the long stem and narrow bars, it just doesn't move the way

you expect. And as the single speed seems rather high for setting off, it all feels remarkably unsteady.

Thankfully, things improve quickly. You learn to shove off with a foot on the ground, rather than relying on pedals alone, and this helps greatly, though as a singlespeeder you'll never be as quick off the lights as a rider with good gears. And it does take some practice to tame the starting-off wobble. Steep uphill starts are a bit tricky, too, with the danger of lifting that front wheel.

I found that after a few rides I was relaxing into the riding position, which if you're tallish like me is very upright indeed. And once you're riding along, the handling is stable and secure: the wheels roll well and the brakes are effective. I never managed to get the belt drive to slip, even with some fairly hard pedalling. Climbing out of the saddle, by the way, is really rather tricky...

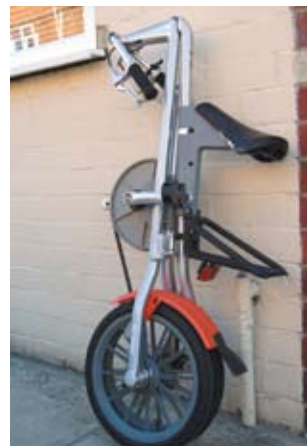
The Strida also passes the 'ride one-handed while indicating' test – and it's more stable here than the Mobiky, for example. But do take it

INSET ABOVE RIGHT: The Strida 5, not available in the UK.

LEFT: A light touch on the catch releases the Strida frame.

BELOW LEFT: Magnets at the centre of the wheels hold the folded bike together.

BELOW AND BELOW RIGHT: Folding handlebars. Note the 'parking brake' loops which keep the bike stable when leaning against a wall.



case: taller riders are positioned a little closer to the centre of the wheelbase, dividing the weight more evenly between front and rear wheels. In the lower saddle position you're closer to that back wheel. Then again, you'll have a more natural 'reach' to the bars...

THE FOLD

Folding the Strida is very quick indeed. Just touch the latch on the 'pin' at the frame joint near the front wheel, and it releases. Swing the two wheels together (they click together with magnets), then lift the other beam (with the chainset attached) and it will wedge into place against the other two. At first this does seem like it would be easier with three hands, but after a while (and the instructions are good) it really is the work of seconds.

If you got the 'Performance Kit' you can now fold the pedals (if fitted) and handlebar, too. The handlebar fold does cut down the width of the folded package considerably. First undo the quick-release under the stem, then press in the little brass pins to release each bar. Pull out and they fold down. Pressing the pins in can be tricky if you've got big fingers unless you get the angle just right.

This takes the folded size down to around 114 x 51 x 23 cm (45" x 20" x 9") – rather long, but quite narrow.

With the bike folded, the wheels are still free to rotate, and it can be 'trolleyed' along easily, held by the stem or saddle. This certainly makes station platforms and the like much less of an arm-wrenching ordeal.

The Strida won't stand up when folded, but you can lock the brakes using the little loops on the ends of the bars, so it will lean against any wall or corner without running away.

CONCLUSIONS

As a clean, smart urban runaround the Strida is actually surprisingly good. The riding position and handling certainly takes some getting used to, especially if you're at either extreme of the size scale, but the decent-sized wheels, low weight and stiff frame mean that once you're underway it's a very reasonable ride.

With its 'trolley' function, clean

belt drive and designer, non-bicycle looks, it can be taken places where another folding bikes can not – despite the large folded package size. The long thin shape is practical in many urban situations – standing next to you in a crowded train, or upright between the legs in a bus.

At £335, including the highly recommended Performance Kit, the price is not unreasonable. You could get a decent more conventional folder for the same money, and possibly it would be a more capable pure cycle. But in the right situation, the benefits of the Strida's unique design will outweigh the quirky ride.

Strictly as a bicycle, the Strida has its flaws, but as an urban mobility aid it does a lot of things well – perhaps uniquely well. It tackles much the same problem as the Mobiky Genius, but achieves its solution at a much lower weight and cost. That's got to make it worth a closer look.

Peter Eland

AVAILABILITY

Via Strida dealers in many countries, or direct from Strida: see www.strida.com. In the UK, Tel 0845 002 0190 or see www.strida.co.uk.

SECOND OPINION

Joasia Semper borrowed the bike for several weeks for her commute, a couple of miles each way with a hill at the end.

I really enjoyed riding it. I found it very light and nippy, which made it a pleasure to use for getting about the place.

The gearing suited me fine. It worked well for going uphill – the gear seemed quite well chosen and I found I could zip up hills due to the lightness of the bike. Going along the flat, it was only on long stretches that I occasionally felt I ran out of gears. As to flying down hills, it was exciting enough hanging on – no additional speed required.

I had it out during our July monsoon, and I was a bit concerned about how the hub brakes would handle the water – but they were fine. My husband Jonty says he thinks the mudguards worked great. In the monsoon every part of me got wet, so I couldn't really say.

Clearly I didn't carry too much on it, other than my shoulder bag, which worked well. I did manage once to get home with two large bags hanging off me as well as a large bouquet of flowers. I proudly cycled back with one hand all the way home including down a steep hill – exciting and much to the alarm of passers-by.

The boys in the local bike shop thought it was great, but we probably shouldn't admit to all the wheelies it did. Other colleagues thought it intriguing and like something you would see on Tomorrow's World.

I generally just did the minimum fold which worked fine. I managed to get it in the office without the facilities manager raising an eyebrow. I liked the rubber belt – you do still need trouser clips, but it's great when you wheel it around to avoid things getting dirty.

Setting up the seat took some faffing. We left ourselves ten minutes but it took nearer 30. For Jonty and me it's a shame that changing it round is not quicker, so that we could both use it. But I guess that's just life if you're a foot apart in height.

Finally, caution! Don't ride with your thumbs in the brake loops – although it's very addictive! Really, don't try this at home...

Joasia Semper

