



Together on tour

With the right machines, cycle touring is totally egalitarian. Two CTC members with disabled partners explain their cycling solutions

PETER AND ANGELA MYNORS: SEMI-RECUMBENT TANDEM

In 1997, for the first time in 30 years of marriage, my wife Angela and I began to go on cycling holidays together. Angela has scoliosis, a spinal problem. She can't walk far and cannot ride a conventional bicycle. But that year we tried and then bought a Hase Periscop tandem, so called because both riders have 180° vision. The front rider sits in a recumbent position, which Angela found comfortable, while the rear rider (me) pilots the tandem.

Since then we have toured every year in Europe. Initially we took the Periscop with us by car, abandoning the car at the start of the ride. Every few days we would return to

the car by train and move it forward to wherever we had reached on the Periscop. We would then carry on with the next stage of our cycling trip.

Great getaways

We started with trips in Holland, Denmark and France. Our favourite touring areas became Austria, southern Germany and Switzerland, where the long-distance cycle paths alongside rivers provide ideal conditions for traffic-free cycling holidays.

The gradient is generally gently downhill, with occasional climbs to reach nearby villages. Paths we have ridden include the Drau, the Inn, the Mur, the Danube from its source to Budapest (see articles by others in Cycle magazine

Feb/Mar 2009 issue), and the upper Rhone starting from Zermatt.

We ride up to 50-60km per day, staying at village inns, private houses and the occasional smarter hotel. Part of the fun is discovering each stopping place. On the way we find our unusual transport makes it easy to meet people, whose comments range from 'cool' (or 'kuhl' in Germany), to a more erudite 'ah... Leonardo!' from an elderly gentleman in Croatia. Wherever we travel we seem to raise a smile. We often pass tour groups whose luggage is transported by van, but we prefer the flexibility and independence of carrying our own kit.

The cycle paths near each river source are usually purpose-built. Further on there are often flood protection dykes, along the top of which one can ride with a wide slow-moving river on one side and panoramic views of the countryside on the other. The paths pass through farmland, forests and villages where one can sample cider, sausages, cherries and apricot spritzers. They are usually asphalted, allowing use by farm maintenance vehicles and preventing damage in wet weather.

A tandem for the train

Our start point is often sufficiently far away that we have taken a car sleeper train to or from Düsseldorf or Köln. It seemed ridiculous to put the bike into the car and then put the car onto a train, but Eurostar did not – and still does not – accept tandems.

To take a cycle as walk-on luggage on Eurostar, or on similar trains such as TGVs and Thalys trains in France, Belgium and Germany, it must be dismantled to fit in a bag of maximum dimensions 90 x 120cm. This size is determined by the dimensions of the luggage racks at the end of each carriage, as well as the width of the x-ray scanners at Eurostar terminals.

After we had bought our Periscop, bike designer Marec Hase refined his tandem concept and produced a new version: the Pino. We visited Hase's new factory in a historic building in Waltrop in 2003 to see if we could have a Pino built that would fit into two bags of the specified dimensions. In 2005 we placed our order through London Recumbents, and in early 2006 we took delivery of the first Pino built with S&S couplings.

Two small bags under the front seat contain the TGV-standard bike bags, into which the dismantled cycle will fit. In this way we can travel to one station on the outward journey and return from another, taking our bike bags with us. Once we have reached the departure point for a standard German sleeper train (Paris or Köln), the Pino can be reassembled and loaded into the train's cycle van in the normal way, with a pre-booked cycle ticket. It can save money to book Eurostar and sleepers well ahead.

We carry a collapsible chair on the Pino. That's the cylindrical pack above the rear pannier bags. Angela can sit on this when we stop somewhere without seats – for example, the Gare du Nord station concourse – while the bike is being dismantled. This isn't difficult but it can take up to half an hour to do.

Once packed into the regulation bags, the Pino can pass through security and be loaded into the baggage racks on Eurostar. It is even possible to fit both sections onto a single baggage trolley at the Gare du Nord. To split the Pino for carrying in a modest estate car takes only couple of minutes.

Further afield

We have not yet felt the urge to take our Pino further afield by air. This is partly because there are so many places now within reach by train, and partly because the dismantled Pino needs more careful handling than airline baggage. We did take the Periscop twice by air to Greece, but only certain aircraft holds could accept such a cycle, and onward transfer from the arrival airport could present problems.

On one trip we had to cycle out of the new Athens airport along the motorway hard shoulder at 5am, because the airport railway had not yet then been built. But we did enjoy the crowd's round of applause as we pedalled off an inter-island Greek ferry.

In an ideal world there would be good quality traffic-free long distance cycle routes in the UK too. Until that happens, we are making the most of the large number of long distance paths already available in northern and central Europe, just a day away by train.

Fact File Our Hase Pino

MANUFACTURER: Marec Hase Spezialräder, www.hasebikes.com. The site lists UK dealers, such as London Recumbents (www.londonrecumbents.co.uk, tel: 0208 299 6636) who advised on VAT exemption for cyclists with special needs.

STANDARD EXTRAS FROM HASE: Rohloff 14-speed gearbox, front pannier rack, deeper front seat, shorter front cranks. **NON-STANDARD EXTRAS:** S&S couplings, ratchet parking brake, smaller chainring.

PRICE: A basic Pino Tour with the standard extras listed above currently costs about £3100 + VAT. The S&S couplings were expensive, but the latest aluminium-framed Pino launched in October 2008 has frame dismantling as standard. **RIDE QUALITY:** Superb, even at low speed. The Magura hydraulic disc brakes are smooth and powerful. The Rohloff gears are a revelation for tandem riding.

ANY NIGGLES? We still haven't mastered how to start on uphill gradients of more than 5%, unless there is a kerb or handy roadside boulder. Once moving, much steeper gradients are possible with our 43T chainring, and we don't miss having a very high gear.

UNEXPECTED BONUSES: The child attachment for the front pedals makes it possible to ride safely with grandchildren – a five-mile trip across west London is no problem.





Photo: Clive Andrews

MIKE AND RHONA COPP: LIFE ON FIVE WHEELS

Our leisure time and holidays were transformed when my husband Mike – quadriplegic from a spinal injury in 1971 – decided to buy a hand-bike. Up to that point we used our motor caravan to visit places in England and Europe, catching glimpses of beautiful places through the windows. Since then we have had lots of great cycling holidays and weekends, getting to places we never thought we could.

We realised from the beginning that we needed a means of equalising our speed. Mike devised a clever idea whereby a bar connects the back of his wheelchair to a bracket on the head tube of my bike. On each end is a ball-joint, which enables me to swerve past potholes or go round bends. We can both steer but Mike has final control, being at the front.

Freedom in the city

Going uphill is a slow process. Mike has loads of gears but only so much oomph. He also has to take his hands out of the U-shaped handgrips to change gears, as he does not have any finger dexterity. So when we slow down too much I get off and push and Mike keeps hand-cranking. Downhill we can easily pick up an amazing amount of speed, which we need to keep in check so that Mike's trike remains stable.

We have had cycling holidays throughout England, Wales, France and Holland. Our two-week trip to Holland was car free, using trains and bikes only. All our possessions were in pannier bags and under the wheelchair. Amsterdam was great as we could zoom from one end of the city to the other so easily. In fact, cycling in cities such as Amsterdam, Paris and London has given us so much freedom as public transport is often out of bounds.

Group holidays have been great fun too. We did several in Wales with Bicycle Beano (www.bicycle-beano.co.uk) and one in Yorkshire.

Expanding horizons

We always attract attention. Young boys always give us the thumbs up and want one themselves. Most people are

delighted to see what we do. The question most frequently asked is: 'Who's pushing and who's pulling?'

We've done the London to Brighton ride several times. The first time we did it we were encouraged and supported all the way, and when I had to get off and push up Ditchling Beacon several people helped to push the wheelchair, which was very welcome.

We've had some adventures along the way. Steeply angled paths are a problem for Mike on three wheels, and with me pushing from behind he has found himself in a bed of nettles, close to the edge of a canal, and once suddenly airborne after hitting a speed hump on a descent in Snowdonia. (He landed safely!) We are often frustrated with so-called cycle tracks in the UK that have barriers that are difficult or impossible for us to get through or surfaces that are very bumpy, rutted or sandy.

We have been on holidays where joint cycling has not

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been the prime focus. While I have been doing triathlon training Mike has explored the local area on his trike. This worked really well in Alghero in Sardinia and Porto Pollensa in Mallorca. Mike has amazed everyone with the distance and terrain he could cover and felt a great sense of achievement himself.

For weekends and holidays in this country we have tried to camp near to cycle routes. Now we live near to the New Forest in Hampshire and are getting to know the forest tracks much better. We recently took part in a CTC audax ride, which took in some beautiful parts of the forest around Brockenhurst, Burley and Lymington. It was brilliantly organised, we had good weather and there was delicious rejuvenating food to welcome us back.