



With the seat removed and the frame folded, the Grasshopper fx measures 96x50x70cm

DICK WOLFF'S GRASSHOPPER FX

A folding recumbent solved the 63-year-old's search for a comfortable, portable touring bike

Recumbents have pros and cons compared with uprights but, as they're rarely hired, it's hard to know if they're for you. So I bought one in 2012: a short-wheelbase Velotechnik Grasshopper fx. I use it in and around Oxford, where I live, and have toured France, Holland, Cyprus and the south coast of England on it.

I could ride it straight away, but would occasionally get into a turn I couldn't get out of without stopping. After a couple of hours, I was reasonably confident. It took six months to feel as confident on it as on a conventional machine in heavy traffic, or

through cycle barriers (except the ones you can cycle under!). It's now my machine of choice on a ride of any length because it's so comfortable.

It attracts a lot of attention: kids love it and drivers generally give me wide berth. If there's a problem, it's when you come to a junction with a sight-line blocked by parked cars: your head being 1.5 metres or so behind the front of the machine means you can't see round the corner – and, of course, you can't see over the cars either. So I tend not to use it on the narrow, congested streets of East Oxford.

The rear-view mirror is a must. It's harder to look behind you on a recumbent than on an upright, because you've only got head and shoulders to balance with. One mirror is enough; it adds 6cm to the width of the bike, which is already quite wide because of the tiller handlebar.

Provided it's properly adjusted, comfort is the huge advantage of this machine – and is the main reason I bought it. After cycling all day, you feel as if you've done nothing: no pressure points, no jarred wrists, no cricked neck. The Airflow seat is very comfortable but acts like a sponge in the rain. I splashed

out on a fairing for that reason, and have improvised an oversized waterproof that fits over both me and the seat to avoid the sponge effect. Not pretty, but effective.

They say recumbents are not good at climbing. It's true, I suppose. It feels hard work because balancing at slow speed is more effort. However, I've never enjoyed hill climbing, and at my age if a hill is sufficiently steep to require standing on the pedals, I get off and push anyway. But it goes like a rocket downhill, and riding into a stiff wind (especially with the fairing) you hardly notice it. Riding in a group, I'm content to allow the others to get well ahead of me on the ascent because I know I'm going to catch them on the descent.

Being a folding machine is a major advantage. It drops into the boot of the car easily, folding in about two minutes. In Amsterdam, we stayed in a second floor flat. It wasn't much trouble to cart it, folded, up two flights of very steep and narrow stairs. I've had no more trouble taking it by train than any conventional bike; even unfolded it's the same length. For aeroplane journeys, HP Velotechnik sells a lightweight bag in which to stow it, folded, with the seat enclosed in the package.

I've written a full review of this particular machine online: bit.ly/2aurtV0

Tech Specs

MODEL: HP Velotechnik Grasshopper fx (2012)

FRAME & FORK: aluminium frame with DNM DV22 coil suspension, Spinner Grind suspension fork

WHEELS: 20in wheels with 40-406 Schwalbe Marathon Racer tyres, Sram DualDrive rear disc hub, front disc hub

TRANSMISSION: Sram DualDrive (3-speed rear hub, 7-speed cassette), clipless pedals

BRAKES: Tektro Auriga hydraulic disc
STEERING & SEATING: BodyLink seat with Airflow cushion, above-seat tiller handlebar

ACCESSORIES: Mirrycle mirror, rear rack, mudguards, LED lights, kickstand

Share your story

If you've got an interesting bike that's been chosen or customised to suit you, email cyclinguk@jppublishing.co.uk