



Photo by Jeff Pailey

Eugene inventor Jan VanderTuin (above) hopes the utility bikes he created will catch on as practical alternative to fuel-run vehicles. VanderTuin demonstrates (below) how

the specially-designed bikes have a great carrying capacity.

New bikes introduced

By Soo May Wong
Emerald Contributor

If Jan VanderTuin has his way, the local definition of biking will take on a new meaning.

Instead of perfecting the concept of biking for pleasure and recreation, VanderTuin, a local bike builder, is introducing the notion of utility biking with a purpose.

VanderTuin's utility bikes — large enough to sustain a 180-pound load and small enough to be maneuvered in the streets of New York — are built for purposes as varied as food delivery, child carrying, street vending, touring and camping.

More importantly, these bikes offer an alternative to fuel-run vehicles, VanderTuin said.

"Americans rely too heavily on fuel-run vehicles. This often results in inefficient use of resources," he said. "Often, you'd see a big van transporting two bags of groceries and lot's of empty space. If a bike is used to deliver those bags of groceries or pizza around the neighborhood, an enormous amount of resources, energy and money can be saved."

VanderTuin, who has been studying the concept of utility bikes for more than 10 years, became involved with the bikes while working with a market-gardening



cooperative near Zurich, Switzerland. He was looking for utility bikes or cycle-trailers to haul produce and milk but found the commercially-made bikes inappropriate.

Members of the co-op then decided to design and

build their own bikes. This started a process of research and networking that VanderTuin became involved in.

Using utility bikes for urban delivery services is an old concept that can be traced back to the late 19th century in Western Europe, VanderTuin said.

A classic 1920's model from which VanderTuin adapted "Long Jan," a 9-foot-long utility bike with a load capacity of 180 lbs., has been plying the European streets for more than 60 years. This Danish creation used for delivery purposes, has remained unchanged over the years and is still popularly used today.

Curiously, despite the widespread use of utility bikes in Europe, America has been slow to catch on to this concept. An obsession with automobiles seems to be the reason for this, VanderTuin said.

"Automobiles are still worshiped in America," he said.

However, this does not seem to daunt VanderTuin's desire to promote utility bikes among Americans.

In the following months, VanderTuin will be presenting slide shows and give talks to promote his utility bikes. He is also exploring the possibility of working in cooperation with a professor or graduate student at the University to study the advantages of utility bikes in the city.

VanderTuin's slide show will be held Aug. 15 at the Eugene Water and Electric Board from 7 to 10 p.m.

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