

Tandem riders stoking up interest

VIE Velo tandem riders are stoking up interest in Edinburgh in their bright pink club kit.

The organisation is a cycling club for blind and partially sighted people, with a sighted person riding in the pilot position at the front of the tandem.

Tandem riding is all about trust. Trust is crucial when you are visually impaired, riding as a 'stoker' on the back of the tandem, especially if you have not met the pilot before. The stoker relies on the riding and communication skills of the sighted pilot. That is why new pilots at the club try out the stoker role at their training sessions. They need to experience it for themselves to get a sense of how it feels.

Of course, tandem riding with VIE Velo is about far more than trust. On their regular thirty-mile trips, riders enjoy companionship, conversation, fresh air, bird song, a physical work-out, and freedom. Shona Black, one of the club founders, talks about her massive grin when she's out as a stoker, especially going up steep hills. This love of riding uphill is, apparently, not shared by everyone!



Cycling UK Scotland Vie Velo – Sat 6 August 2022 – Edinburgh, Scotland (© photographer – Andy Catlin www.andycatlin.com)

Ken Reid, Chair of VIE Velo and a founding member, says he particularly enjoys getting out into West Lothian to discover new territory. He also talks about the pleasure of feeling the airiness riding across the Forth Road Bridge without vehicular traffic, the sound of the gulls, and the long downhill runs. The cake and coffee stops, beloved by all cycle clubs, provide a great opportunity to chat to the rest of the group.

The club encourages riders to vary their partnerships so that stokers are not riding regularly with the same pilots. Imogen Williams, a pilot in the club, stresses the need for good communication between pilot and stoker. Pilots ask their stokers how they like to cycle to ensure they have a great experience. The stoker might want a running commentary of sites and colours on the route, or they may prefer essential communications only, for example stopping and starting, turning left or right, warnings about rough surfaces, and changes in gradient.

Club rides depart from Saughton Park in Edinburgh on the first Saturday and third Sunday of every month. There are also fortnightly evening rides on Wednesdays in the summer. Riders enjoy trips in Edinburgh and the Lothians as well as Fife. While there are excellent routes, Edinburgh City Council could make the rides more comfortable by removing chicanes and improving road surfaces.

VIE Velo was set up in 2018 with the support of Cycling UK. Funding has been provided by the RS Macdonald Charitable Trust and Transport Scotland. The club currently has thirteen tandems.

If you're over sixteen, and you'd like to try out a pilot role, or a stoker role if you're blind or partially sighted, do get in touch with VIE Velo. They're a friendly welcoming club. The club would also appreciate financial donations, as it has to buy, maintain and insure its fleet while keeping the cost to its members affordable.

Contact [vieveveloridecoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:vieveloridecoordinator@gmail.com) or visit www.facebook.com/VieVelo.edinburgh to find out more.



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