

THE FAST FREIGHTER

York courier Chris Hamm puts Mike Burrows' new workbike, the 8 Freight, through its paces – both at work and as family transport.



Mike Burrows. Most of you will recognise the name. If not, well... perhaps you should. Designer of human powered machines? Recumbent racer? Inventor? Engineer? Craftsman? Yes – and then some.

The 8 Freight seems like a bit of a departure for the man who gave us the Windcheetah, the Ratcatcher and the monocoque carbon-fibre time-trial bike. The 8 Freight isn't carbon-fibre, isn't recumbent and it isn't built for speed (strictly speaking). This is a two metre long load-carrier. So why a load-carrier? Has Mr. Burrows chosen a new direction? Not likely. The 8 Freight still features the Burrows trademark one-sided design and it is impeccably finished.

I think that possibly Mike has had a bit of a 'bee in his bonnet' about two-wheeled load carriers for some time. Several years ago I met Mike briefly at a show in York. I arrived at the venue on a Kemper Filibus, which at the time was the most frequently-used bike in our courier fleet. I don't remember how it came up, but Mike began extolling the virtues of loads being carried low and behind the rider; something about a bike he had seen in Vietnam that could comfortably carry cargo on singletrack trails through the jungle. Very exotic. I like to imagine that I was thus instrumental in the early development of Mike's intention – but I am sure that he had been toying with the idea of load bike design long before our brief encounter.

When the 8 Freight was offered to me as a test vehicle, and for potential purchase, I jumped at the



chance, borrowed a van and took my children to Mike's workshop in Norwich to collect the bike. We got home late Sunday night and the bike was put to work at 8.30 Monday morning for the trip to school, with my 5-year-old riding in the back. Then off to its first load job; 1.5 metre long bundles of willow. Easy, very easy...

Since then it has carried 18 gallon

barrels of beer, washing machines, a chest of drawers, headboards, more children (every morning!), and lots of boxes of print. I called Mike before carrying the first beer barrel (which weighs 100kg). We normally use a Cycles Maximus trike for the brewery jobs but I didn't have one available.

"Hi Mike, what do you think about the 8 Freight with 100kg of sloshing

beer on the back?" I asked.

"Don't know, find out. Let me know how it goes", he confidently replied.

It went well, a bit bouncy maybe, some flex in the frame. I try not to do it regularly, so as to not fatigue the aluminium main tube. The 8 Freight will quite happily take 100kg of boxes though – the frame rack over the rear wheel allows for nice distribution of the load.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The frame of the 8 Freight is built of tough 6063 aluminium. The main tube is 2 1/8" diameter, with the basket frame built from 1 1/16" tubing. It looks a lot heavier than it is: I was amazed to discover that it weighs just 20kg. The Filibus (with cargo box) weighs 25kg and has a carrying capacity of less than half that of the 8 Freight.

Wheels are both 36 hole, 20" BMX rims and come fitted with stainless spokes. My bike (I am already sounding possessive) came with Schwalbe Mad Max Freestyle tyres. I have had no trouble with these, but Mike tells me that he is now fitting ARC Sirens as standard. These are a 'knobbly' road tyre, but Mike has assured me that they are an improvement on the Schwalbes.

I have had minor difficulties finding 20" Presta-valve inner tubes at my local bike shops. "We can order them for you..." Usually a cycle tube is needed now or not at all. Anyway, Mike has found a reliable source for 20" Presta tubes, so I would recommend that any future 8 Freight buyers get a couple of spares at the time of purchase – or specify that the rims are drilled for the more common car-type Schraeder valves.

The 8 Freight is also equipped with mudguards. They do the job for which they were designed, enough said.

The bike has SRAM 70mm drum brakes, front and rear. Great all-weather brakes, lots of power. No barrel adjusters though. I have also had recurrent problems with brake squeak: a useful noise as a back up bell, but rather annoying otherwise. The front brake has also been binding at inopportune moments lately, unpleasant in the extreme since I have replaced the ATB platform pedals with SPDs.

SRAM drums are relatively easy to maintain, though, and I am sure that a little adjusting will fix the problems. Of course, the fact that both wheels mount single-sided rules out most other braking systems. Yes, it's a monoblade loadbike, with one beefy front fork and a Windcheetah type wheel offset at the back.

170mm cranks are fitted to a



ABOVE LEFT & TOP: One-sided wheel supports are a Burrows trademark.

ABOVE: A Klik-Fix bracket is welded solidly onto the headtube for mounting baskets and the like

LEFT: With the stand down, the bike is stable enough to act as a mobile desk...

BELOW: The 'Powermatic Deluxe' stand uses a gas-spring, controlled by a lever on the handlebars



46 tooth chain ring. With the 11-32 cassette and SRAM seven-speed mech and shifter, I have found the 8 Freight has a more than ample range of gears (around 28 to 85 inches). I have also learned the hard way to watch how I come down off curbs. If you come off a curb heading to the left, you put the rear mech in a very vulnerable situation – unless you're lucky it'll be destroyed, basically. The same can happen at the barriers that we see on cycle paths – those little horseshoe-shaped mech bashers.

The canvas lined cargo area measures 70 x 54 x 25cm. Perfect for a base layer of four A4 boxes of print (copier paper) and four more on top of those, and a couple of more on the back rack. I am looking into a Rubbermaid box with a lid to fit into the cargo cage for improved weatherproofing and security, but tying a waterproof cover down over a load is made easy thanks to the numerous fixing points for bungees and straps. A finished piece of half inch thick plywood lies on the bed of the cargo area.

On mine the fabric underneath has several small tears from rubbing on the kickstand brackets fitted to the basket frame underneath. I mentioned this to Mike and he has already sorted this out for the current production model.

The head tube has braze-ons for the Klik Fix system, a very useful rack and carrying system for which a variety of boxes and bags are available. Burrows Engineering can get you a Klik Fix catalogue.

Working as a courier, I have ridden and worked with a lot of loadbikes. The versatility of the 8 Freight's cargo space is quite extraordinary, especially in light of the fact that it is the first bike of this type that Burrows has produced.

PROPSTAND HEAVEN

Now, introducing the Powermatic De-Luxe Pneumatic Propstand. You're going to love this. The best way for me to describe this special device is to demonstrate its function by way of some guided imagery. Ready?

Imagine you have got a heavy load on the back of the 8 Freight: children, shopping, mother and

father, dining room table... you are merrily pedalling along in an enviably well-balanced fashion. Until you come to a stop. Here's the great bit, you casually swing off the bike, flick the thumb shift lever on the handlebars and down swings the double-legged prop stand. You then engage the parking brake and unload, help your family disembark or just walk away.

The Powermatic Deluxe uses a cable-released gas strut to lower the stand. To raise the stand back up is a motorbike style manoeuvre: brace the foot of the stand with your toe and roll the bike forward while at the same time lifting up and back with you foot. Raising the stand back up can be a struggle for those with shorter legs (or weaker ones) as lifting outward and up while under pressure with the right leg can be painful. It is possible to release some of the pressure in the gas strut to make it easier, but I have secretly enjoyed the sight of my wife struggling. This difficulty with getting the stand up is another thing that I have mentioned to Mike, and he has tweaked the design to make the stand more user friendly. Shame really, as it has been amusing to watch the uninitiated...

I must admit that I thought it was a bit unnecessary when I first heard about it. Who needs an automatic kick-stand? The Powermatic De-Luxe has changed my mind. I want one on all of my bikes. I want one on all of my trikes!

THE RIDE

The 8 Freight is a pleasure to ride when it's loaded. But when you first ride it, the steering can feel quirky. I suggested to Mike Burrows that this 'quirkiness' – a 'steering the bus' sort of feel – was the result of the steep, 80 degree head angle. This configuration makes steering very 'immediate'. I mentioned my idea of a more laid back angle and was quickly put to rights. My mistake apparently.

I was referred to several esteemed design publications (the 1896 book *Bicycles and Tricycles* by Archibald Sharpe, and another book of motorbike design theory) which suggest that in fact, a full 90 degree

head angle is ideal! I was also told that I would have understood this better if I had properly read the related chapter in Mike Burrows' own book on bicycle design (*Bicycle Design: Toward the Perfect Machine*). Besides all that, Burrows has himself experimented with myriads of head angles over the years.

OK, I now accept that a two metre long bike is going to have some idiosyncratic handling characteristics and that it's got nothing to do with the head angle. I just ride the things, perhaps I should know better...

Initially, the fact that the rear wheel tracks off centre caused me some misgivings. I soon worked out the



ideal way to balance a load, and I no longer notice it. Any load-carrying bike is going to take some getting used to, and the 8 Freight is no exception. Everyone who has ridden the 8 Freight has found it an easy bike to adapt to. It is unusually quick for a bike of its size, and standing up on the pedals creates an unexpectedly comfortable posture both with and without heavy loads.

Unloaded the 8 Freight feels much like any other 20" wheel bike, honest. I have found myself taking it home every night after work. Sometimes to take my children to school the following morning, but more often because

it is simply a very comfortable ride.

Payload? I feel comfortable with 100kg. As always, with 100kg on two wheels, some care must be taken. The 8 Freight handles beautifully under load. Better at speed, but it balances quite well at slower speeds also. There is something about 'pulling' rather than 'pushing' the weight that I prefer. Psychological maybe, but I find it easy to forget that I am riding along with 50-100kg behind me. I don't want to look at the bulk of my load, it's demoralising. Beyond the intangible though, it definitely rides better than the Filibus with equal loads. Low and behind, definitely.

All of those who have ridden the

big problem once you're used to it.

I came off a couple of times during a recent icy spell here in northern England and discovered an unforeseen strength in the 8 Freight's design: the cargo cage took the force of the fall while also allowing the bike to slide away from me rather than onto me. During the icy spell, the 8 Freight was in great demand from all of the couriers. It felt safe and solid in the ice and snow. 'Grounded' was how one rider described it.

CONCLUSION

Since the 8 Freight has been with me, it has rarely been off the road. Versatility is an important asset for a work bike, and the 8 Freight is an amazingly versatile bike. It has asserted itself as the backbone of our work fleet. At the end of each day I wonder how we ever managed without it. Small furniture load jobs that previously would have required an unnecessarily large trike have become easier and much faster. The 8 Freight is also quick enough to serve as a messenger bike when required.

The 8 Freight has also become indispensable as domestic transport: children, shopping, recycling – everything really. I believe that the domestic load bike market has been overlooked for too long, and the 8 Freight is perfectly suited to fill this growing niche.

What's more, it's a bargain in workbike terms with prices starting at just £950. And Mike Burrows gives first-class response and backup. As you may have guessed, I definitely recommend this bike!

Chris Hamm, Cyclone Couriers

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Thanks also to Jess at Cyclone for modelling.

AVAILABILITY

The 8 Freight is available direct from the manufacturer: Burrows Engineering, Bunkell Road, Rackheath Industrial Estate, Rackheath, Norwich NR13 6PX. Tel/Fax 01603 721700.

Please note that Burrows Engineering do NOT have email or a website.