



Cyclisme en France

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Solexity and VeloSolex designed by Pininfarina as well as the Ferrari



Getting around the famous 13.5km *Circuit de la Sarthe* can be a challenge, especially when you are carrying camera gear and you need to criss-cross the huge compound during the week-long activities in search of people to interview, or to capture that perfect shot. As in previous years Virtual Motorpix (VMP) was there from the Tuesday of race week, this time though equipped with two ebikes (a folding VeloSolex and a larger Solexity) for getting around the place - what a win!

For those racegoers who know their cars, the Ferrari 458 Italia is designed by Pininfarina, who also designed the Solex ebikes. This was one of the reasons why it was important to get the bikes photographed with their stablemates.

Arriving at the circuit late on Tuesday afternoon it was decided to relax and as there wasn't much going on that evening we set up our HQ in the car park, had a quick bite followed by a glass or six of the nation's favourite refreshment and settled down for an evening of watching the goings-on around us. For the journey we had a VW California campervan in which we could cook, relax and also sleep in relative comfort for the week, while the two ebikes fitted easily on the bike rack on the back. Around us we had many of the race teams and media crew with their huge mobile homes with every possible extra, including hot and cold running chambermaids!

Next morning it was off to the media centre where we set up camp for the week, with Elke posting reports, blogs and uploading the photos that I was taking around the track. With the ebikes safely secured to the railings at the bottom of the stairway with the substantial Bikehut shackle locks with 180cm extender cable (it is essential to have adequate security for higher valued bikes like these - available from all [Halfords](#) stores), we were free to get on with our work in the media centre.



Bike shackle lock and extender cable from
Bikehut

You see, the Electric Bike Company (**EBCO**) is run by an ex-Le Mans team mechanic who knows what it is like to get around at race tracks, and to get places quickly. The pit lane, paddock and surrounding area has bikes, mopeds, quad bikes, mini-bikes and everything in between rushing back and forth throughout the day ferrying race car parts, people and just about anything else that you could reasonably shake a stick at. So the Solex ebikes fitted in just perfectly, as we zoomed back and forth around the paddock, as well as to and from our California in the car park.



Cycling around Le Mans with the VeloSolex was comfortable and easy

Much of Wednesday was spent attending press conferences in and around the media centre and that evening saw the first night practice for the cars. The following day was much of the same but included an interview session with the boys at Shell who supply all the fuel for the event. So it was onto the Solexity, around the back of the paddock and over to the Shell compound where I spent an hour with the chaps before returning to the media centre for the second of the night practice sessions.



The great thing about both bikes is that they are obviously multi-gearred, but the rider can vary the degree of electro-assist required depending on the terrain, with 'low' assist being 1 and 'high' assist being 5 - this helps to extend the battery life as you then don't drain the battery unnecessarily. They lasted pretty well and we did not have to charge the batteries at all for the duration of our stay at Le Mans.



Solexity twist-grip gear change was very easy to use

On the Friday evening I made my way over to one of the manufacturer's hospitality centres where a new road car model was being launched as there was the promise of dinner and refreshments. So I cycled over to the other side of the Le Mans village in the pouring rain, and once again with absolute ease. This great race happens but once a year and if a wet saddle is all I have to complain about, then there is nothing to complain about.

Over the race weekend we were unfortunately not allowed to take the bikes onto the service road that follows around the entire circuit, either on the inside or the outside of the circuit,



and so the bikes were used simply to commute back to the 'Hotel California' each evening. Following the end of the race on Sunday evening, we packed everything up and headed south and west towards the Loire Valley where we would spend the next few days relaxing after a very hectic few months. We had a campsite booking just outside of the town of Brissac-Quincé which suited us perfectly, so much so that we didn't actually move from that location until Thursday, the day before our ferry crossing to return home.



Solexity and VeloSolex parked up in front of the stunning Chateaux de Brissac

Cycling into the town of Brissac each day for the next four days showed the versatility of the Solex ebikes, as we were able to potter around the town and stop for coffee, while also heading out into the country. On the one day we headed 'off map' so to speak as we took a wrong turning some miles out of town and no amount of questioning of the locals seemed to help as English wasn't spoken by the country folk. For that matter, German didn't help either as my wife is German and my Afrikaans also didn't produce a positive result, so it was good old hand language that got us back into the town. Mind you, by taking that wrong turn



we did come across a wine co-op where a quick wine-tasting session turned into a rather long wine-tasting session, but that is what holidaying is all about. And perhaps it was just as well that we had not arrived by car...



Using the VeloSolex and Solexity to get into town for coffee

Back at the campsite each evening the bike batteries were removed and charged up which



gave us more than enough 'juice' for the following day, although the batteries did have a life of between 30-40 miles (we didn't cover anything like that distance each day). However, it is always better to have them fully charged just in case, because without the electric assist they can be quite heavy to pedal as the batteries add extra weight, while the bikes are sturdier than normal, and therefore also slightly heavier. Not having done much cycling in many years, at no stage did we feel exhausted as the electric assist worked wonders. No steep incline was too difficult and the path along the river was a doddle.



The French countryside was easily handled by the ebikes

We had become quite attached to our bikes during those two weeks and were extremely sad to see them handed back. If we had the space, the combination of the folding VeloSolex and the Solexity would suit us perfectly - so we had best start saving!

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