

Published March 16, 2011

Pedaling for a Greener Tomorrow

Cathy Dausman



Greg Thomas in his velomobile Photos Cathy Dausman

recumbent bikes dates to the late 1990's. He first rode recumbents in 2001, and switched to riding a velomobile in 2008. He commuted on his first model for a year before buying the Mango Sport.

Thomas participated in the Portland, Oregon, Left Coast Velomobile gathering in May, 2010 and joined the Niagara, Canada Velomobile Happening last September on a borrowed velomobile. His most challenging ride to date will no doubt be his participation in this summer's Roll Over America (ROAM) adventure.

In late July, Thomas and four dozen velomobile riders will gather in Portland, Oregon and pedal across country to Washington, D.C. to raise awareness for this eco-friendly transportation. Riders from Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, and Italy will join a contingent of North American riders. Thomas explains his commitment to ride on the ROAM (<http://www.rolloveramerica.eu/>) website: "Roll Over America will be an opportunity [to] challenge myself to attempt my dream of crossing the U.S. by human power while being surrounded by remarkable people and machines. This will be an amazing event." Thomas is the only Lamorindan making the ROAM trip.

To prepare for the trip Thomas commutes to work in Walnut Creek two or three times a week along the Lafayette Moraga trail. "Velomobiles are incredible machines that satisfy my need for exercise, efficient transportation and beautiful engineering design," he says. He has made over 200 round-trips since he bought his first velomobile, racking up 3500 miles. But he's got to ramp up the mileage considerably in preparation for this summer's trip; the group plans to ride an average of 200 km (124 miles) a day for four weeks.

Thomas says the velomobile is the "ultimate in efficient transportation. It's also a vehicle for social change. People should be doing [HPV] trips."

Look, up ahead! Is it a kayak? Is it a plane? Is it a banana? No, it's Greg Thomas in his yellow velomobile! A velomobile is a three-wheeled recumbent bike (two-wheel steering in front) covered in a fiberglass shell. Thomas currently rides a Dutch built Mango Sport model, which weighs 65 lbs and is 8 feet long.

Human Powered Vehicles, or HPVs, are still fairly new in the U.S. Thomas estimates there are only a dozen such vehicles scattered across the Bay Area. Velomobiles (velo rhymes with yellow) are quite common in Europe, even in the colder climates. They can be fitted with a kayak-like neoprene "skirt" and bubble top windscreen to keep the driver warm. They have electric lights and a bell and/or horn. Some are fitted with a small electric motor to assist on uphill climbs. Velomobile drivers can easily maintain a 20-30 mile per hour pace on flat pavement, keeping pace with residential street traffic, but Thomas is careful to observe the 15 mph upper limit on local bike trails. "I try to be a good trail user," he says, but "as with any bike you drive defensively."

An Orinda resident and Cal Berkeley graduate, Thomas is a Senior Project Manager for American Mechanical. He was a college gymnast and has done "lots of paragliding and kite surfing." His interest in



Velomobile cockpit

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