

Finnish velocars

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Human powered vehicles were almost the only way of going fast in after-war Finland. And fast we went - in many different ways! The velocars were every boy's dreams in the late 40's and early 50's.

During and after the war there was shortage of everything in Finland as well as most of the participants of the war. Motor fuel was scarce and car ownership beyond the reach of almost everyone. It was not only that we didn't have cars or gas or new bikes. We also didn't have tyres for the old bikes. So we began to produce wooden tyres. There are 36 individually suspended blocks of hard wood on a wheel as you can count in the picture.

But already before the war human powered vehicles were introduced to the Finnish public. The magazine Nuori Voima (Young Power) published in 1926 drawings of Manfred Curry's velomobile that based on the idea of rowing. The next year several Finnish variations of the theme were introduced in the

One of the few advertisement pictures of a velocar. Harrastelija Magazine 1949.

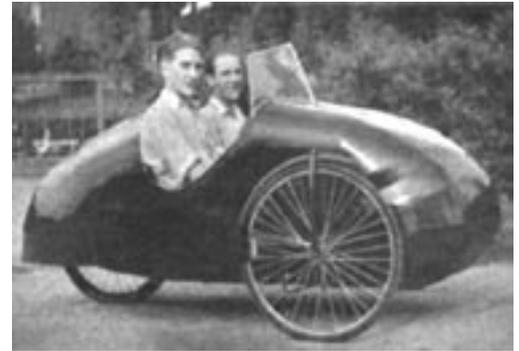


War time tyres were made of birch. Veteran bike rally 2004.

Curry's rowing bike in the winter of Finland: skates at the back. Nuori Voima Magazine 1927.



Brothers Sarjakivi took part in a competition in Sweden already 1946.



Kinneri Special of the Joka Poika Magazine 1948 with a drawing of the Karpio amphibike.



Legendary trip: Karpio and Näränen crossing the Baltic Sea in 1949.

magazine, for instance one with skates instead of rear wheels.

After the war many young boys had to take care of the family, the mother and younger sisters and brothers. Boys had to be grown to be men. As your father couldn't teach you, magazines and clubs helped to get information and knowledge. It was not only bikes for commuting to be made. Radios, boats and furniture also were self-made.

The kind of velomobiles that were built in France in the 30's were probably not known in Sweden or in Finland. It is hard to follow the route of inventions: the new kind of velocars was taken to use in Sweden in the early 40's and in Finland in late 40's. In Finland the vehicle was soon called kinneri.

Brothers Sarjakivi, who took part in competitions in Sweden the following year, built the first kinneris in 1946. The year 1949 was to be the breakthrough. First of all, Reino Karpio and Matti Näränen won international fame as they pedalled from Helsinki to Stockholm across the sea with their amphibibike. The drawings of the bike were published in 1948 in a hobby magazine, and Mr. Karpio was tempted to make a bet if the thing was really sea compatible.

The guys got a month's passport, which was enough for them. They were having some troubles as the propelling gear was broken and they had to paddle to Åland. The problem was solved and the 30 km open sea part was pedalled in calm wind without any other problem than weariness. Mr Näränen was in deep sleep as they were wellcomed on the Swedish coast. Prince Bertil himself was fetching them in Stockholm, and they were treated like heroes.





Above: Sammalisto's Soppu was advertised with with special features: speace enough for two grown-ups and two children, two pairs of pedals, three gears and windscreen. Max. speed 50 km/h. Drawinds with either 3- or 4-wheelers.

Left: The frame of Soppu Junior as found in 2004.

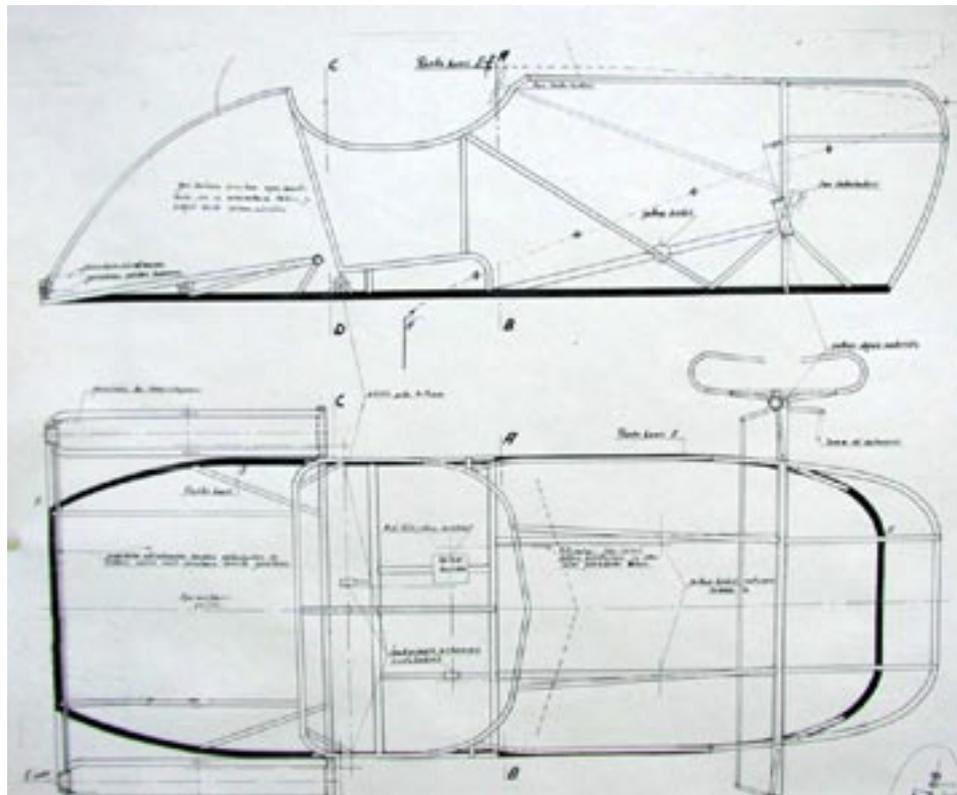
Below: Drawings of Soppu.

The fame of the Swedish Exon velocars also crossed the Baltic Sea and Exon club was founded in Helsinki in January 1949. The aim of the club was not only to promote velocars, but also other human powered vehicles, mainly in a competitive manner. The membership of the club gave you four different velocar design plans.

The first event to be organised was the first and only one ever Nordic Championships. They were held in Helsinki in June 1949. Participants were invited from Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. There were five categories, a mile for both men and women, and also tandems, and 5 kilometres for singles and tandems.

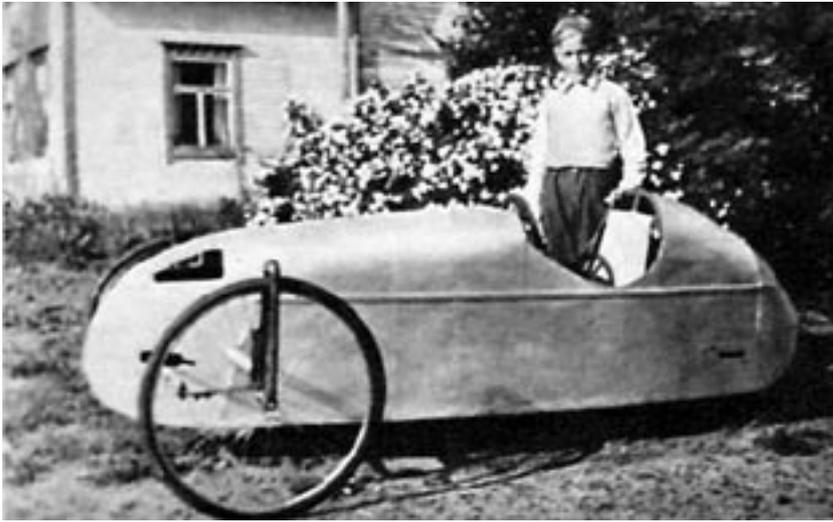
2000 spectators were eagerly present at the stadium in the middle of Helsinki. The race itself was a bit of a disappointment. There were only 4-5 competitors in each category. Besides that, the newspapers told that the great inventor Josef Svedberg was the only one to show some speed and skill. Actually the women's event was funniest and the most exciting. Small grown Ms Peltonen won with courageous pedalling.

Harrastelija Magazine introduced itself as the promoter of velomobiles. It published a few pages of pictures in 1949, one advertisement in 1950, but after that nothing. Mr. Sammalistos ad is though interesting. He is selling drawings of two different kinneris: Soppu is for two pedallers, it has gears, windscreen, indivudually suspended wheels and space enough for four to stay overnight! The other model was Soppu Junior for the young ones. Sammalisto sold more than 200 drawings, but he doesn't know if many of them were actually built. Anyhow, he kept on advertising them



The Swedes who had been developing their velomobiles since 1940 were quite supreme in the first ever Nordic Championships in Helsinki 1949.





Different kinds of kinneris were built from the parts you could get. But Mr. Ijäs from Lempäälä won his own in a competition of the Harrastelija Magazine in 1950.



several years. As the first kinneris were heavy made of timber and plywood, Sammalisto was using aluminium both in tubes and plates. His gears could both make the thing go fast and climb steep hills.

The amount of kinneri type of velomobiles in Finland is not known. At least they were not a long success, but like ordinaries of the 1880's they were kept in mind of those who saw them. In Sweden there were around 10000 velomobiles in the 40's because gas was not allowed to be used for private cars during the war years. In Finland the amount of kinneris are estimated to a couple of hundreds. Possible reasons for the disappearance were bad roads, poor winter maintenance, heavy structure, lack of gears, and invasion of cars, but also some other things. I think velocar was launched in Finland thinking it would be as popular as it was in Sweden. But the circumstances were far from similar, as the Finnish men were busy fighting the war and later reconstructing the country as the Swedes could concentrate on their hobbies.



Section of the amphibike showing how the propeller is adjusted to the rear wheel. It is most simple.

