

## [WARNING! Blind Man On Bike!](#)

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Came across two revolutionary advances just recently, one technological, one medical, but both relating to blindness. The first could be regarded as “an enabler” whilst the second, if it works, would surely negate the need for the first! Let me explain.

If you asked me to make a list of the things I miss by being blind, riding a bike would certainly make the Top 5.. behind seeing the faces of my wife and children of course! So, when I was sent to Bristol by BBC Radio 4 last month to do a report on something called the “Ultra Bike”, I was more than a little intrigued.

Tandem riding is a very popular pastime for many blind people but, of course, you need a sighted person to be up front to steer. With the “Ultra Bike” though you’re completely solo and relying on the same navigational techniques used so effectively by Bats Any bike can become an “Ultra Bike” when it’s fitted with the special sonic unit: “Transducers” located on the front of the bike, emit sonar signals to detect any obstacles in a wide arc, which sends an electronic pulse back to the “Tactors” on the handle-bars if something is detected. If you feel a pulse in your left hand, you steer slightly to the right, and vice versa, whilst if you feel a signal in both hands you know there’s something directly in front of you and it’s time to hit the brakes! However, the beams detect objects up to 8 metres away so you do have time to react – providing you’re not going too fast!

To put the technology to the test, a 6 metre-wide track with two bends and two straights was laid out for myself and other budding blind bikers to negotiate without crashing through the metal barriers. Now, on paper, it sounded easy enough but, even after 30 minutes induction to get familiar with reacting to the information you were receiving through the pulses, I found it very difficult to master and hit the afore-mentioned obstacles with alarming regularity!



Photo by Harry Shearman

Others though were much more successful including 12-year-old Rosie who flew round the course, quite literally, “Like a Bat Out of Hell” Proof of the fact that youngsters have no fear – not even blind ones! Be assured though, the technology has not been designed to allow blind cyclists out on the roads on their own. Rather more, the designers hope that blind Solo Cycling may become a future Paralympic sport which would certainly be something to see!

Listen to my report on the Ultra Bike broadcast on BBC Radio 4 by visiting the Latest news page of my website [www.canebutable.co.uk](http://www.canebutable.co.uk)