



The lid has no windows



Ken on his way to clocking 51.58mph

My Bike

KEN TALBOT

Cycling UK member Ken Talbot broke the handcycling land speed record this year in a remarkable HPV. He spoke to **Dan Joyce**

LAST SEPTEMBER, ON a long, flat stretch of Highway 305 in Battle Mountain, Nevada, 46-year-old Ken Talbot became the first handcyclist to break the 50mph barrier. He clocked 51.58mph in the 200 metre flying-start event, adding nearly 6mph to the record. Fellow Cycling UK member Karen Darke set a new women's record at the same venue and on the same handcycle: 46.54mph. Karen is an established handcycle racer; she won a Paralympic gold medal in 2016 in Rio in the time trial. Ken, by contrast, has been riding handcycles for less than four years.

'I used to ride upright bikes before my disability,' he said. 'I'd been away from cycling for seven or eight years, then a friend of a friend told me about a group just outside Glasgow, at Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, that had handbikes to try. The first ride out, I was hooked. I thought: "I've got to stay on these."'

He now owns a Top End Force RX handcycle, as well as an off-road machine. Yet aside from some time trials with his local club, he's done no competitive handcycling.

'My disability, complex regional pain syndrome, is one the UCI will not assess,' he said. 'So I can't race within the normal structures of handcycling.'

In 2017, he began following the speed record attempts at Battle Mountain. 'It was something I'd dreamed of as a child. Then I discovered they had an arms-only category. I thought: "I'm gonna go for it now." I started to work on a design for my own bike and even found a builder.'

His plans changed earlier this year after he came across an advert from The University of Liverpool Velocipede Team (ULV Team). They were looking for a second rider for their attempt at Battle Mountain, having already secured Karen Darke. Ken was one of a number of handcyclists to get in touch. 'Most didn't seem to grasp what was going to be involved,' he said, 'whereas I'd been doing calculations on aerodynamic drag, rolling resistance, and power levels, and actually working on bike designs.'

The ULV Team's fully-faired handcycle, Arion 4, was designed specifically for the record attempt. 'Lucky Karen and I are both about

the same size, although she's much slimmer, so it fitted us reasonably well. The shell had to be a lot larger than the team wanted it to be. One of the difficulties they had, from the aerodynamics side, was providing us with enough room for our elbows and the cranks. Whereas the leg-powered bikes are incredibly tiny, with the riders squished in like sardines.'

What was it like to ride? 'Very strange,' said Ken. 'The riding position is much flatter than I'm used to, so when the top of the shell is off, you're looking up at the sky. Once the lid is on, your view to the world is through cameras: two on top of the shell, and a pair of video screens right in front of your face. You lose your sense of speed, your depth perception. It's completely dark except for the glow coming off the screen, so you can't see anything else at all. And it's deafeningly loud.'

Having broken one world record, Ken has set his sights on others. 'I know there's an hour record, and I think there are six and 12 hour records as well,' he said.

Ken's blog is kenslandspeedrecord.com. For more on Karen Darke's record ride, visit: cyclinguk.org/karendarkerecord.

ULV Team Arion 4

SIZE: 2.5m long, 0.8m high, 0.6m wide
WEIGHT: 36.7kg

FRAME AND FORK: Custom built. Titanium support frame, carbon fibre fork, carbon fibre shell.

WHEELS: 650B front wheel with Schwalbe Pro One tyre, 406 rear wheels (camber angle 8°) with Schwalbe Ultremo tyres.

GEARING: Front-wheel drive, step-up drivetrain with a top gear of 83/11 (approx 191in). Shimano Di2 shifting.

STEERING & SEATING: Custom built. Only has a few degrees of steering.

ACCESSORIES: Cameras, onboard screens, power-measuring 'pedals', etcetera.