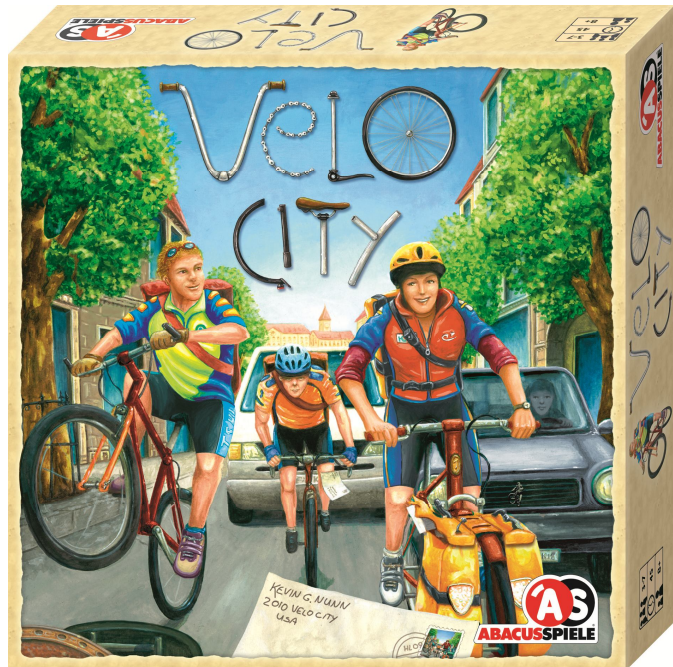


Shut up and keep pedalling!

Pevans reviews *Velo City*

Kevin G Nunn is the man who devised *Nobody but us Chickens*—a fun little card game of bluff and counter bluff that is a huge hit with every child I have introduced to it (and some of them are quite old children!). So a new game with his name on has to be worth a look. It's called *Velo City* and it's a race between teams of bicycle couriers.

The board shows the racetrack—a winding route across a townscape. The cyclists start at one end and the aim is to be the first to get three of your team to the other end of the track. Along the way there are hazards—loose manhole covers—and opportunities to pick up energy drinks. These are very useful boosters to help your cyclists on their way.



The drinks are represented by blue cans—wooden cylinders—and the cyclists by wooden silhouettes. Each team is a set of shapes and the first job on opening the box is to add stickers to these to show the cyclists. This is not a trivial task, since you have to match the correct picture with each shape!

As well as a team of cyclists in their colour, each player gets their own die, in the same colour. To start with, the game is simplicity itself: roll your die and move one of your cyclists that number of spaces. If it lands on an energy drink space, you pick up a 'can'. If it lands on a manhole cover, it goes back to the next empty one (and collects an energy drink) unless you spend a can to avoid this.

There are other options, though. To begin with, there is an extra die. You can roll it with your own if you spend an energy drink at the start of your turn. You can then choose either number to move a cyclist—a useful way of increasing your options. Whether you use the extra die or not, other players can spend an energy drink to slipstream (or "draft" as it says in the rules) along with your cyclist. Anyone who has a piece on the space you just moved from can spend a can and move with you. The better news is that you can do the same for any of your cyclists on the same space. In other words, you are moving several of your pieces in one turn, which is so much faster than moving one per turn.

Another option, where you have a cyclist in a mixed group on a space, is the 'group move'. Having chosen to do this for a specific space, you roll all the dice for the teams on that space. You then choose which one to use. If it's someone else's die, you move their piece as well as your own. Again, this gives you more chance of getting a decent die roll, with the down side that you may be moving someone else as well. And the others can always slipstream you, too.

A final option is to pay two energy drinks for a cyclist to break away. You roll your die with the extra one and can move a cyclist using either die roll or their sum and no-one can slipstream. The cost of two energy drinks makes this an expensive option. In my experience it isn't used much, but can be very useful in the right circumstances.



As you will have noticed from this description, an important part of the game is stocking up on those energy drinks. However, the number available is limited, the exact number depending on how many are playing. If all the cans have been taken, a player who needs to pick one up takes it from another player! You have to take it from the player with the most cans, though; you can't just pick on someone. This mechanism is less of a spoiler and more of an incentive for the player with the most cans to actually use some up and move a cyclist or three. This way the game doesn't stagnate, even though the emphasis in the first few turns is on picking up energy drinks. This is helped by the first six spaces all being ones where you pick up a can.

Velo City is a highly tactical game. It's about taking advantage of the opportunities as they come along. Of course, to be able to do this, you need to keep up your stock of energy drinks. Ideally, too, you should try to get several of your team on the same

space so that they can slipstream each other. Slipstreaming other players is useful, but the most efficient tactic is to get your team working together. Hmm, does that sound like a cycle race or what?!

This is a neat race game. The different options give players something to think about and provide tactical opportunities. Okay, it's not a deep game (an alternative track on the other side of the board would have been a useful addition—perhaps a circuit which can be played over varying numbers of laps), but it is fun and doesn't outstay its welcome. It is a great family game and makes an enjoyable filler for gamers.

Velo City was designed by Kevin G Nunn and is published by Abacus (in several languages). It is a tactical board game of cycle racing for 3-7 players, aged 8+ and takes about 45 minutes to play. It gets 6/10 on my highly subjective scale.

© Copyright Paul Evans 2010. All trademarks acknowledged.

This review was first published in *To Win Just Once* 108 (September 2010)