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Helping cyclists carry the load

Mac students win design award

ROB FAULKNER
The Hamilton Spectator

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Raised in Toronto, Lindsey Kettel was no stranger to cycling: The fifth-year McMaster student says bikes outnumbered people at her house.

So, when a McMaster industrial design course asked students to examine ways to improve the grocery-carrying experience for people without cars, she got into gear ... with two wheels and a dream.

"One thing I noticed is a problem with unplanned stops," Kettel says of cycling. She recruited fellow fifth-year mechanical engineering and management student Cory Minkhorst, of Milton, to turn her idea into a prototype.

They created an award-winning collapsible carrier for commuter cyclists -- a type of trailer with soft sides that folds so well that it packs as tight as a close-fitting rear bike pannier. For a demo, they put it on Kettel's mom's 25-year-old bike.

And last weekend, the 22-year-olds took first-place in the innovative design category at the Ontario Engineering Competition at the University of Guelph. It saw about 200 competitors from 15 universities.

They won \$3,500 and a chance to go to the Canadian Engineering Competition March 5-8 at the University of New Brunswick.

Kettel and Minkhorst did their research and saw that lots of fixed trailers existed, like the ones rented on campus. But none folded away with such a small profile that a cyclist would keep it on a commuter bike, they say.

Large packs of toilet paper, or cases of beer, are hard to haul in backpacks or bike panniers. Their carrier -- which has a name they can't reveal as it nears copyright protection -- fits two cases of beer.

The pair, who have had people suggest they get on the CBC entrepreneurial TV show *Dragons' Den*, are still refining their carrier. First up, they may create a whole new prototype for the national contest.

By April, they will submit it as a thesis project at McMaster. And as they both anticipate spring graduation, they are toying with the idea of turning the carrier into cash.

Some of the Guelph engineering contest sponsors were informally interested in funding their work, but the duo plan improvements.

The prototype cost \$160 to make with some donated materials. A better cinch-sack, bolts, a bit of carbon fibre and more, with manufacturing efficiencies, may cut it to \$125. It'll sell for about \$300.

"That's actually at the lower end of the range of products like this," says Minkhorst, noting that their engineering contest pitch this weekend had more commerce than most. "This project really is a great thing, to combine both parts of our degree."

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