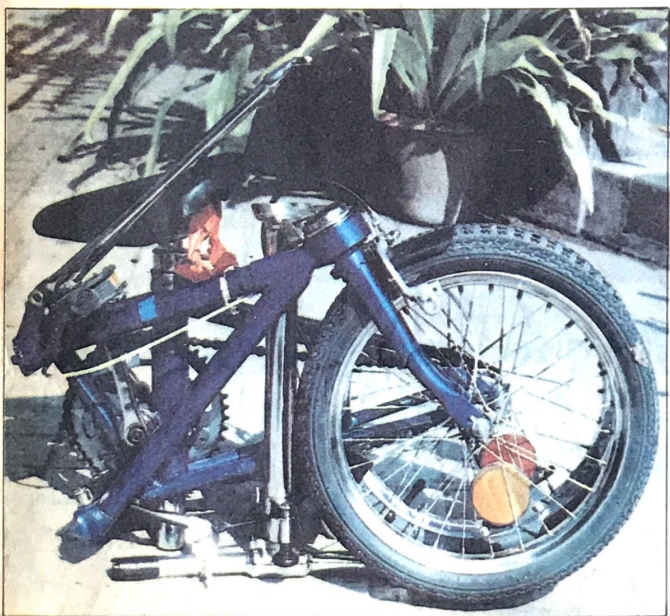


The magic bike

The American made Dahon Bike is a cycle with a difference. It has a quick release handlebar and seat so that the bike can be shortened to suit a child, or extended to an adult size and the cycle can be used by the entire family.

For the office-going man or the busy traveller, it has an extra wheel which can be fitted in the centre, to help convert the cycle into a miniature trolley for wheeling in light luggage. For the busy housewife, there is a basket available to seat a toddler, carriers for both front and rear and the handlebars with their straight contour are sturdy enough to carry at least 40 lbs. of shopping. For the school boy who is worried that his bike may be stolen, or for the harassed commuter who has to use several



means of public transport in order to reach his destination, the Dahon Bike is ideal, as it folds away easily into the size of a compact carry-on suitcase which can be carried around in a bag. For the school girl, the bike is quite comfortable for riding in a skirt and the quick release system can be used to shorten the seat so that the feet can rest on the ground while the bike is stationary, as perhaps at traffic lights.

The bike costs around \$27 (Rs 4,900 approx.) Its wheels are 16 inches in diameter and

when folded it weighs around 32 lbs. only. There are other varieties of portable bikes available in America which weigh even less, some of them just 16 lbs. The tyres of the Dahon are tough and one needs to pump in air into them only once in about six months and a puncture is a rare occurrence, perhaps once in about two years. The handles can be further shortened for easier manoeuvrability through narrow spaces and there are three gears which build up to a speed of 50 m.p.h.

Ms Mary Francis Dunham who owns one of these bikes is an avid supporter of the Transportation Alternatives Society of New York, whose aims are to keep automobiles off the roads in America. They believe that bicycling is ideally suited to dense urban environments and is an antidote to traffic congestions, street accidents, noise and air pollution. They work towards expanding and maintaining bicycle-friendly streets, bridges, greenways and bikeways. Considering the hike in petrol rates and the daily headache of traffic snarls in the city, this bike could well be the answer to one of the many problems that face us Calcuttans. Certainly Ms Dunham seems to think so. She does not possess a car and has not only travelled all over the world with her Dahon bike (the dahon meets all standards for hand luggage) but she has also cycled all around Calcutta with it.

Recently the Durwan outside one of the banks in the city stopped her when she attempted to wheel bike into the bank; but he quickly relented when before his astonished eyes, she proceeded to fold her bike into a neat package and tucked it away into a white bag which she then carried with her to the bank's cash counter.

RUBY RADHAKRISHNAN