

Kaye Walker or Nimbo?

(Robert Henshaw, September 2012)

It is hard to give an unbiased view as we have invested much time and energy in the ongoing development of the Kaye Walker since its introduction in 1989. But I will try and be as objective as I can. We do not have any statistical evidence, but we continue to receive concerns such as yours as well receiving regular feedback from our sales team.

Potted History :The Kaye Walker was first conceived in 1986/7 as a gym based gait training aid, and for the first two years it was used in the UK, it remained pretty much gym equipment only. It's success then saw it's use extended into the community and daily use for general mobility, giving thousands of children a new lease of independence as well as a better posture when walking.

Community use grew exponentially over the next five or so years and this brought challenges to the original design. Challenges to its materials and form. The walker was no longer confined to controlled environments, it was now used in all weathers and situations including football fields, ice rinks and walking across streams. It was/is sometimes abused and used as anything from a bike trailer to a camping table (we know and we have the pictures!)

The walker had to be changed, a second U bar was added to the frame in the early 90's. This extra component was added to all sizes originally but was found to be overkill and adding too much weight to the infant sizes. Sizes w1/2 and w1 still have original design, whilst larger models feature the second tube feature. Wheels were changed and through assessment some children had reinforced walkers, fully welded walkers and such things as bolted legs rather than poppers. This is still the case, although re-issue and the advent of generic cheaper copies has reduced the number of invitations to assess children for Kaye Walkers.

Many things have shaped the Kaye Walkers as they are today and therefore they have evolved based on understanding and experience. It will continue to evolve in response to new challenges.

Nimbo and Quest 88

Firstly Drive Medical approached Quest88 several years ago, asking if we would represent Nimbo in the UK. They told us that they had an aggressive pricing strategy for the Nimbo based on their low manufacturing costs in China as a means of establishing themselves in the UK and gaining market share quickly.

The prices they spoke of we're over a third cheaper on some sizes. At that time they had very rudimentary accessories and no real idea about the clinical benefits of posterior or posture walkers, or any historic experience to draw from. This became apparent as the frames we brought in to look at, whilst looking like a Kaye, it was a poor imitation, a clone, which is significantly structurally different in terms of frame reinforcement, tube thickness and aluminium grade.

We refused to take them on, on safety grounds but also because the prices were so cheap and margins so small, and offered no means of covering our running costs, costs which included assessments, stocking and service calls. The accessory range proved to be very limited and upon close inspection, failed to deliver the right positioning, for example forearm gutter height. Simple things like the Nimbo wheel rubber compound revealed that the manufacturer just didn't get it, as the wheels skidding rendered the the rear locking mechanism useless. Nevertheless, the price argument won over many PCT's even though therapists in the main reluctantly accepted the change imposed on them due to financial considerations. A number of contracted providers such as Millbrook adopted the Nimbo as it helped them to remain competitive on tenders for regional contracts.

continued..

Quest 88 went through a period of continuing to do assessments in order to identify sizes, however contracted procurement companies substituted the Nimbo at time of order. In some cases we had quoted for extra reinforced aspects for specific children with challenging gait and behaviours, sometimes weighted frames, features of the Kaye Walker and Quest88 approach that could not be provided with the Nimbo. But still the Nimbo was substituted and a very small number of therapists abused our good will in order to establish size relevance. I have some sympathy with them as they had no means of getting a Nimbo assessment.

For a short time and because the Nimbo was impacting our business, Quest 88 conceded to supply Nimbos in small numbers to Millbrook only on the basis that they be used for light duty users and only in the smallest sizes where user weight and lifestyle would not put undue strain on the Nimbo, basically the under 7's. Quest 88 provided 30-40 small frames on this basis to Millbrook and Millbrook only, until they later sourced the Nimbo direct from Drive.

Over a two year period, we watched a percentage of our walker sales be lost to the Nimbos since they had been embraced by the likes of Millbrook and NRS, always on a price basis. There was however, towards the end of this period, a gradual return to the Kaye Walker as customers experienced product failures, no assessment provision and general dissatisfaction with service. This culminated in a field safety notice telling Nimbo Clients not to use the walkers outdoors. Given that the Kaye Walker is used extensively for everyday community walking, this was a big problem for Drive and the Nimbo.

The field safety notice is still not known about in many areas of the country. Drive then looked at the Kaye Walker as a source of inspiration in order to address their FSN issue and now advocate that all Nimbos must be supplied with oversize front wheels for outdoor use. This has never been the case for the Kaye Walker, both our standard wheels and activity wheels can be used outdoors, the larger diameter front activity wheels are aimed at those using walkers on stony paths and gravel drives etc. Drive missed the point entirely.

As the new health care reforms take shape, again cheap clone equipment is having its day. However, based on user reports and ongoing experience Quest 88 can make the following claims:

1. Over the useful life of smaller Kaye Walker, you will, in many cases, need to purchase 2 Nimbos over the same period - due to hidden structural issues, frames incorrectly provided for children with Ataxia and inferior components. For larger Kaye walkers such as the W4H you will be replacing Nimbos on a 4-6 monthly basis in some cases where weight and 'clumsy' gait puts extreme strain on frames. I am not privy to statistics here, but our sales team receive feedback regularly and nationally. We also have similar reports from the US.
2. The Kaye Walker albeit initially more expensive, will provide better value longer term and will enable providers to re-issue with more confidence. The Buy Cheap, Buy Twice motto rings true here.
3. The argument that Drive uses, that if a Nimbo breaks, they are so cheap, they are easy to replace, makes no sense. It means extra admin, extra hassles for parents and physios and puts children at risk.
4. Assessment flags up potential incidents and enables us to find solutions for individuals, solutions which improve clinical outcomes and which promote user safety. Cheaper generic products do not allow for assessment.
5. In supplying the Nimbo, you are restricting choice and reducing the number of tools (accessories) you can use to achieve the best clinical outcomes.
6. Non-assessment equipment provision removes dialogue with manufacturers and slows down innovation and new ideas/solutions coming to fruition.
7. The USA is slightly ahead of us and has seen this whole issue go full cycle. Kaye Walkers have held out and have increased in popularity as people realise they are dependable.



w1/2 Kaye Walker

More observations and points for conversation ref. Kaye Walker V Nimbo

Pharmaceutical model does not work in rehab market. Not a like for like comparison. Example: Ventolin Salbutamol Inhaler and generic salbutamol inhaler, have same compound and treatment characteristics.

Although it is not immediately, or visually apparent, structurally the Nimbo and the Kaye Walker are very different, materials are different, frame geometry is different, 5 sizes of Nimbo v 7 in Kaye Walkers. Kaye walkers have been reinforced in certain areas based on 20 years experience in the field and through all kinds of user activity, warranty and service experiences. Failures already being realized nationally with Nimbo.

Nimbo is being substituted at a management level in some regions much to the disdain of therapists. We believe that for the NHS ongoing costs are higher – repairs, incident reporting, longevity likely to increase, also Nimbo does not support/sustain more vigorous use especially when children have behavioral issues.

Nimbo combines the Kaye W1/2 – W1 size range into one walker – stability issues on highest setting. 3 Kg difference on tiny models is very significant when learning to walk and steer.

No demonstrations - no allowance for this in price - dictated to by Manufacturers RRP. Quest 88/Kaye accessories not transferable, doing so contravenes MHRA and CE Marking. It is unsafe to do this, legs in particular cannot be swapped over with Kaye legs as tube Material) retention within the frame is completely different.

NOT A 'LIKE FOR LIKE' ALTERNATIVE

Other drawbacks with the Nimbo which highlight that this is NOT a like for like alternative:

1. Each corresponding size is heavier than Kaye Walker equivalent, due in part to fewer Nimbo sizes covering the height range.
2. Bulkier frame (more tubes) on W1/2/W1 equivalent
3. Cannot be reinforced or altered by Quest 88 for individuals.
4. Only 4 sizes, no heavy duty models
5. Only a marginal increase to the footprint when extended to full height, Customers need to be aware of the differences and risks.
6. Hand grip widths are different to Kaye Walker.
7. Effect of grips on hands (Kaye have high silicone content). Nimbo handgrips can cause blisters more easily.
8. Harder to turn and manoeuvre due to incorrect wheel compounds and treads.
9. By suggesting that these products are the same, promotes the idea that parts are interchangeable. They are not.



Nimbo fitted with Kaye Walker wheel extensions, leaves very little material inside frame which may lead to failure.