

Recumbent Cyclist

Issue No. 72
Nov./Dec. 2002

News



Gardner Martin and the Sun EZ Sport Limited

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BikeE Is Gone . . .

BikeE has joined the ranks of several other recumbent manufacturers and has closed its doors. In mid-August we started hearing reports that the BikeE website was down, e-mail was not getting through, and the phones were no longer being answered.

On Monday, August 26, the story was confirmed. An RCN reader, Rich Westerman, had ordered a part from BikeE that was drop-shipped for his dealer, Rapid Transit, in Chicago. Inside the package was a statement that was meant for Rapid Transit. Rich called the number on the form, which had the BikeE logo but was not BikeE's phone number. The number connected to a collection agency that apparently had been assigned BikeE's receivables. When questioned, the collector told Rich that BikeE was no longer in business.

On Wednesday, August 28, *Bicycle Retailer* (trade journal) announced, "BikeE Ungracefully Bows Out of Business." The magazine reported that stocks of certain models had run out and were not being reordered. BikeE had told many dealers that they were out of product until October. The company's director, Bob Brown, cited a sluggish post-9/11 economy and two costly recalls as reasons for the company's demise.

We received the following e-mail on the same day: "As a result of continued operating losses, on August 23, 2002, BikeE Corporation ceased operations and terminated all of its employees. Collection of accounts receivable and liquidation of remaining inventory is being handled by agents of secured creditors. Questions regarding receivables may be directed to 541-738-4327. Questions regarding inventory may be directed to 541-738-4390."

In April of this year an RCN reader announced to the recumbent news groups that she had met a former BikeE principal who said something to the effect that the company was reorganizing: laying off people, moving to a new headquarters, and would be coming out with a new cheap recumbent very soon. It took a few days for BikeE to respond, but when they did they denied the rumors (except that they were moving, which they did) and continued to paint a rosy picture of their future. Over the next several weeks this rumor started seeming more like reality.

BikeE had as many as thirty employees but had recently been laying off personnel. Most of the key BikeE personnel had left the company in mid-May and June. The final four left on August 23.

BikeE was the country's largest recumbent manufacturer, with estimated sales of \$6 million last year. They claim to have sold 10,000 recumbent bicycles last year—though we're not sure if we believe this number.

We are saddened by the loss of BikeE, of jobs and careers for our friends, and of warranty support/parts availability for our readers and friends. BikeE's absence will leave a gaping hole in our industry and another black eye for the world of recumbent bicycles. Despite reports that BikeE had \$500,000 worth of inventory, it appears that none of this was complete bicycles.

Our original editorial ended here. Just before press time we added the following update:

. . . Well, kind of

In early September, we started to hear rumors of a new recumbent bicycle company located in Corvallis, Oregon. A prototype was spotted in and around Corvallis and was described in the following way, "It is a short wheelbase 26 x 20 with the seat suspended instead of the rear wheel."

In the first few weeks of September, our community of recumbent sleuths tracked down the Bigha website and the domain owner. Within hours it became fairly clear that this organization was managed by former BikeE investors and employees.

Within a week, the Bigha prototypes were seen on Cycle Oregon. These were SWB/MWB prototypes with varying wheel sizes (26/20 and 20/20).

At the request of online recumbent enthusiasts, Bigha's Jonas Acres posted this to the alt.rec.bicycles.recumbent newsgroup in early September 2002:

Hi Guys,

I've been following the discussion on our company here in alt.rec.bicycles.recumbent and I just thought I'd go ahead and post a few clarifications on some questions and concerns.

1. BIGHA?

First, the most common reaction: "What a stu-

pid name!" Yep, I admit it: we've got a silly name. I kind of snickered the first time I heard it, too. It grows on you, though.

"Bigha" means "Because" in Apache. That's the spirit we're aiming for with our products ("Because," that is, not "Apache Warrior"). You don't buy Bigha because you want to race. You don't buy Bigha because you want to tour. You buy Bigha because you just want to ride. Why do you want to ride? Because.

Bigha is also a fitting name for the English reasons. It's all about fun and enjoyment. Of course, all exercise means straining yourself, but that's not the be-all and end-all of Bigha. It's an enjoyable means of entertainment, not an instrument of torture.

2. BIGHA AND BIKEE

Bigha is not BikeE. Bigha does have some former BikeE people, and as others have noted, two of those people are Bob Brown and John Acres, former executives of BikeE. However, John Acres and Bob Brown aren't exactly old-school BikeE people—they didn't come to BikeE until a year or two ago.

Bigha and BikeE have very different business plans. BikeE was a recumbent bicycle company—Bigha is an outdoor activities company whose first product happens to be a 'bent.



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3. THE BIGHA RECUMBENT

The bike shown on our site isn't for racing, as you might have guessed. I can't go very far into technical details on it, since they're all subject to change.

Is this bike a touring bike? Yes, but it's not meant to tour with. It's meant for a commuter or someone staying around town—not someone who wants to get up and ride across the state. The Cycle Oregon team was happy with the way their bikes were holding up, but were pretty aware of the fact that what they were riding wasn't quite as well suited as others.



Photo courtesy of Bigha

4. THE PROTOTYPES

As noted on our website and above, 6 prototypes have been touring Cycle Oregon. None of the prototypes have had the electronics installed yet. Also, they're missing some of the detail work, like front fenders.

5. ARE WE FOR REAL?

There's been some concern that we're fake. We're totally real. I admit, our bike is a bit unusual, and I can see how it might make cause for alarm.

I hope this helps clarify some things!
Jonas Acres, www.bigha.com

RCN Update: The BikeE/Bigha story is still evolving. From what we know about the bike, the prototype is a MWB (bottom bracket at head tube) OSS 26/20 with a molded plastic seat and a SRAM 3x8/9 and

will have Avid mechanical disk brakes. The seat is high—perhaps 25 inches off the ground. The bike is slated for a spring 2003 release date.

The following former BikeE key employees are now working at Bigha: John Acres, Bob Brown, Lee Eckroth, Paul Atwood, and BJ Strass. When newsgroup readers found out about this, there were some critical comments and people wondered what is going on, what with one month BikeE going strong and folks getting the pitch to buy BikeE's, and then the next month they are gone and everything is totally quiet, and then seemingly overnight Bigha appears. Bigha became a company with a fleet of prototypes before the

dust settled from BikeE's demise. Other than the quoted reference to BikeE in this article, nobody seems to want to talk about BikeE anymore—only Bigha.

It will be interesting to see how the recumbent industry, dealers, and customers will respond to the fall of BikeE and rise of Bigha. I'd say that these former BikeE folks will have their work cut out for them in finding dealers and dodging questions about BikeE. Many dealers still have BikeE inventory and continuing warranty/replacement part concerns. This will be a burden for these former BikeE dealers.

Rumors from Cycle Oregon suggest that the bike will be in the \$2,000+ range and will be sold direct (no dealers). Bigha's John Acres had this to say right before we went to press, "I do want to emphasize that price, introduction date and distribution methods have not been chosen." We will report updates as they become available.

Viva Recumbency!

Bob Bryant

bob@recumbentcyclistnews.com

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FastBack Hydration System

FastBack Designs of Fort Collins, Colorado, has introduced a unique seat-mounted hydration pack for most Bacchetta, RANS, and Barcroft recumbent bicycles. The FastBack System has a long list of features:

- The FastBack hydration pack carries the weight of a full hydration reservoir much lower behind the seat, where it is less likely to affect a bike's handling.
- The hydration pack opens on the side, making it easier to insert a full reservoir.
- The system will accept most existing reservoirs, including Camelbak and Platypus 70- and 100-ounce models.
- The drinking tube can be routed either under the rider's arm or over the shoulder.
- The detachable gear bag is made of water-resistant neon yellow fabric for high visibility, with a large reflective strip for nighttime safety.
- A pump holster, rear-light mount, and tool-and-tube pocket on the FastBack allow it to be used by itself without the gear bag, if the rider prefers.
- The pump holster will accept most minipumps, including the Topeak Road Morph.
- A strategically located zipper permits access to the interior space of the seat for additional storage.
- With its sleek design, the FastBack blends into the bike and doesn't look like it was cobbled together with parts from a hardware store.
- The price is competitive with other hydration products and recumbent seat packs.

Company owner Mike Vogl had this to say about his new hydration system, "The

FastBack System was developed to give recumbent cyclists the kind of hydration options that upright cyclists enjoy. When I started riding recumbents five years ago, I would lash an early model Camelbak to the back of the seat. But I had to take the whole thing off and put it back on whenever I wanted to insert the reservoir, and that was time-consuming and a nuisance. Plus, it had no pockets for a jacket or lunch. And the bigger packs I tried from the local sporting goods store, if they fit at all without dragging on the tire, looked like they belonged on a camping trip, and not on the back of an expensive bicycle."

The FastBack System fits most RANS, Bacchetta, and Barcroft models that have at least three inches of clearance between the tire and seat, or a rear fender. It will even fit the RANS Vivo and Screamer, because the hydration pack wraps around the single seat brace in the center of the back of the seat.

Barcroft owners may find that while the hydration pack fits with virtually all seat positions, the detachable gear bag cannot be used when the seat is extremely reclined. The FastBack does not fit the older model low-back RANS seats.

A model for the Bacchetta Aero is under development, and FastBack to offer versions for other recumbents in the future.

One unique feature of the FastBack is the GhostPocket, which provides access to the interior of a RANS or Bacchetta seat. We call it the GhostPocket because it's not a pocket at all, though it appears to be, Vogl explains. It's just a zipper that opens to the space inside the seat. That's a great place to put a jacket or rain gear, so we wanted to maintain the access to it, he says. As far as we know, no other seat-mounted pack does that.

The FastBack Systems neon-yellow gear bag is intended for the kinds of things someone might want on a day trip or century ride—



food and a jacket, for instance, but not heavier, bulkier things like a laptop, thick binders, or textbooks.

For that bigger, heavier stuff, there are some better options available, like racks and panniers, Vogl says. That's not what the FastBack is for. "We were looking for the best, most aerodynamic way to carry a hydration system and a little food and clothing. When we couldn't find just what we wanted, we decided the best way was to build our own," says Vogl.

"Because there are many individual reservoir preferences among cyclists, the system does not include a hydration bladder. We like the two-liter Camelback Omega, but other riders prefer Platypus bags. So we felt it would be most versatile to leave the bladder out and let riders choose their own," Vogl says.

FastBack Designs will initially sell the system direct, although several recumbent dealers have expressed interest in offering it. The company's website is under construction. The phone number is 970-221-4033, and the e-mail address is mvogl@webaccess.net.

Suggested retail price for the FastBack System is \$84.95 plus postage.

Source: FastBack Systems Press Release

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Recumbent News & Rumors

SRAM 3 x 8/9—This new 3-speed internal x 8/9-speed cassette gears is now hitting the streets. The good news is that the new hub is supposed to have less friction and shift better, and there is a disc brake version. The bad news is that it's heavier, you can't tow a B.O.B. trailer anymore (adapter doesn't work), and in early reports from some owners we hear that the shift box (plastic piece that routes shift cable into the hub) is less intuitive to use and owners are having more trouble figuring it out.

Wheel & Sprocket—Harry Wozniak reports to RCN that they now have a Haluzak Horizon SWB USS equipped with Avid hydraulic disc brakes, front and rear, for \$1,988. For more info, call Harry and tell him Bob sent you.

BikeE Notes: Parts are going to be tough to find. At one time, RANS produced a BikeE seat. We're hoping that they still do. BikeE Evolution seat bases can be purchased from Calhoun Cycle. Mueller has BikeE fairings for sale. Bicycle Outfitter has delrin seat sliders (it might be a good idea to have some spares). At least one dealer may be parting out BikeE recumbents. Contact The Bicycle Man (these contacts are all RCN advertisers). Many recumbent shops stock SRAM 3 x 8 hubs. RX mid-drives can be removed and replaced by a 3 x 8/9 rear wheel, or a Schlumpf Speed Drive. Contact your local/regional recumbent specialist for more info.

Easy Racer Panniers—The New "Easy Reacher" Under-Seat Pannier/Rack Set is now available through Laurie Smith of the Easy Rider Recumbent Club (ERRC).

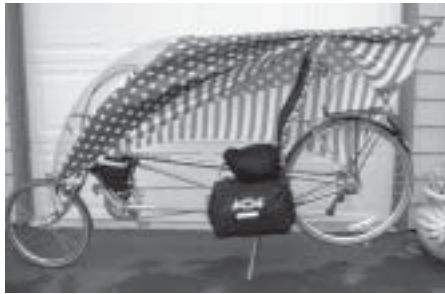
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Laurie worked with Inertia Designs to create this under-seat pannier set specifically for the recumbent rider. They measure 15" x 10" x 6" and weigh in at 22 ounces each. With a shorter bag, even in a sweeping corner, there's no problem with scuffing the bag bottom on pavement. With both front and rear mesh pockets, extra water bottles (or cans of soup) can be stowed easily. A large mesh pocket along the length of the bag can hold items for easy access while riding.

The TerraCycle-designed under-seat rack fits perfectly under Easy Racers seats and is both lightweight (15 ounces) and easy to install. All you'll need is a 4 mm Allen wrench and something to cut zip-ties with. This rack was designed to be highly adjustable, which allows the opportunity to use this rack system with any Easy Racers frame style or size.

HPV Stickers—Check out these waterproof magnetic stickers. They cost \$3 each postpaid. Order from OutYourBack.com.

Econ-Bent Plans Available . . . Again—Back in 1990 Gaylord Hill designed a recumbent which he named the Econ-Bent. The basis for the design was mating a recycled road bike frame to a muffler-moly main tube which formed the backbone of the frame and turned what was left of the wedgie into a poor man's



P-38 (SWB ASS).

As homebuilt recumbents go, the Econ-Bent was fairly successful. At the time, designer Gaylord Hill operated a bike parts supply business, and he sold many specialty parts and prebuilt systems that made Econ-Bent fabrication easy for the first timer.

It has been a dozen years since the Econ-Bent plans were first made available. The design still looks current. Low SWB's are still popular, and there are no other homebuilder plans available. The plans are well done. They consist of thirty 8.5 x 11" spiral-bound pages along with two 11 x 17" folded diagrams.

Our only criticisms of the plans is that some of the parts needed may be more difficult to find these days as compared to 1990. Good recycled road bikes are not as plentiful, and importantly, the Econ-Bent relies on a mid-drive fabricated from old freewheel parts. I am not sure how easy this will be to accomplish. However, the builder can easily substitute a chain idler or chain tube and opt for a derailleur post or SRAM 3 x 7/8/9 hub instead.

The plans distributor is planning to offer steering riser assembly kits, bottom bracket assembly kits, and possibly seats. They will be looking into the mid-drive situation.

The plans are \$35 postpaid. They are now offered by Jeff Longtin of Cyclogical Recumbent Bicycles in Owatonna, Minnesota. Visit www.cyclogicalrecumbents.com, e-mail cyclogical@II.net, or phone 507-456-6177.



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Movie Review

Bike Like U Mean It

RCN Rating: ★★★★★ 1/2 (out of 5)

Directors: Rusty Martin, Susan Kirr
(Not Rated, 46 min.)

Bike Like U Mean It is a new documentary about the Austin, Texas, bicycle scene. The film was directed by local Austin cyclists and filmmakers Rusty Martin and Susan Kirr.

The film isn't exactly about recumbent bicycles, but its heroine—Austin bicycle advocate and sometimes RCN cult hero Amy Babich—does ride a one-of-a-kind BikeE.

If you've ever been run off the road by an SUV behemoth, had somebody cut you off or give you a one-fingered salute just for being on the

road, or if you're worried about our urban streets, roads, and bicycling safety—or even our right to bicycle—see this film.

The film covers the entire Austin cycling scene, including

- Austin's Yellow Bike Project
- The attempted crackdown on Critical Mass by Austin Police
- Amy Babich's incessant, anti-car letter-writing campaign to the local Austin's daily newspaper
- The inherent hazards of sharing the road with cars

This is a thoughtful short film that will hopefully succeed in making viewers question their transportation choices and perhaps make the move from recreational/sport cyclist to commuter/utility cyclist. We all need to consider the environmental consequences of our out-of-control automobile addiction.

This film is a real-world story—a portrait of Austin's bike culture, those who ride their bikes for transportation, defiantly going up against motorists and actively promoting alternative forms of transportation.

If any readers want to order a copy of the film, they should write a check for \$25 made out to Conspiracy Films Inc. and mail to: Susan Kirr, 403 Lisa Dr., Austin, TX 78733, or e-mail: runsarisk@aol.com

Note: There is a scene in this film that includes a topless Critical Mass rider. ♦

Note: Watch for Amy Babich's VeloRution III in an upcoming RCN. If you haven't read Amy's book, check out the ad for *The Age of the Bicycle* in the classified section of this issue.



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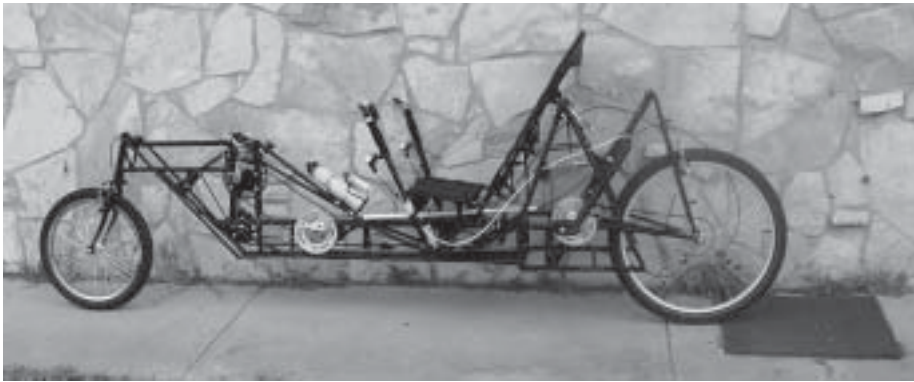
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Recumbent Mail



A Monster Bike

Got the monster together. It measures 9'9" from tip to tail. On the next evolution, I hope to shave at least one foot off. The bike weighs nearly 100 pounds. I've got about 60 miles on it so far, and the only significant squawk is the push rod that goes from the back to the front pivot. For a heavyweight, this bike cruises pretty good—it reminds me of driving a limousine. Average speeds on the shakedown cruises have been 10 to 11 mph. The push-stick under-seat steering requires a completely different body English. It is also a bit top-heavy when not loaded with a driver. I am quite pleased with the results. I've not yet developed my "outrigger" system or my variable steering mechanism, but the bike was ready to ride and I was chomping at the bit.

Paul
deezyne27@juno.com

RCN 70

Great RCN 70 issue—jam-packed with informative and interesting stuff. Also—a thumbs up to the "Alternative Cyclist" column. The only non-'bent cycle I have is a folder—a 20-year-old Dahon that I love. However, the hinges are loose and rattle. I am in the market for a new folder. Like you, I love both the idea and fact of human-powered cycles.

Roger Fuller

Lightfoot Responds

RCN did a great job on the review of the Lightfoot Ranger. We felt it was very fair, and pointed out things we need to work on without losing sight of the good aspects of the machine. Thank you. The biggest change since the review was the appearance of the new medium size, made possible by a new front geometry. The 2002 medium is substantially smaller than the old standard (which you reviewed), which is now our large size. This trimming of the frame combined with our new seat brace configuration to reduce the size of the Ranger significantly; the medium is still a big bike, but not so "huge" as last year's was.

The new seat brace accomplishes the stur-

diness of the old seatpost style but leaves the space behind the seat open for more cargo, including a larger backpack; I think your backpack idea is great.

I now have my own Ranger. I have never had a bike I could just jump-on-and-go so readily; any errand, any invitation to ride (road or mountain riding), any day. I can ride it hands-off. I feel like I have accomplished something; I wonder if my mom thinks so too.

The last 18 months have been a bit difficult, but things seem to be smoothing out for us. I look forward to getting you more cycles to review, and will put them on the work-order list when possible.

Rod Miner
Lightfoot Cycles
info@LightfootCycles.com

Cycle Genius Feedback

I have a Cycle Genius and enjoyed your review on this bike. I found most of what you said to be true of my experience also. The bike handles well and has a lot of get-up-and-go. I really like the durable mesh seat with the supporting springs; I think it is the best feature on the bike. I have left all my seat springs in and experience optimum comfort.

I ordered mine direct and had no trouble putting it together, although (like you) I did have to tap out the derailleur hanger threads because of the paint in them.

Of the three recumbents I own, the Cycle Genius is my favorite. I originally bought it to be my "beater" bike, since I thought it was too inexpensive (OK, cheap!) to be very good. I was surprised by how good a bike it is for the money.

One other thing. The folks at Cycle Genius have excellent customer service. I had a run-in with a fence and bent my fork. They sent out another fork pronto and I couldn't believe how securely padded and packaged it was. You could have dropped that box off a three-story building without damaging the contents.

Susan Townsend
sgtown@jps.net

Giant Halfway Review

Thanks also for the great article. It's nice to be compared so favorably with such prominent folding bike companies. I'm trying to get that info on the Halfway's rear wheel you requested, but I have not yet heard from the engineers in Taiwan. It would seem you are correct that a symmetric wheel would be stronger, but even though there are no left-side stays, there is still a chainline issue that is just like any other bike. It's likely the zero dish on the right side is for chainline and clearance issues. We've had no problem with the wheels to date.

Mark Langton
Giant Bicycles

"Alternative Cyclist"

I really like your new "Alternative Cyclist" column. As you mentioned, there is a gaping hole in coverage of other-than-mainstream bikes, and this column should at least partially plug it. I too like to read about all manner of human-powered vehicles, and specialty bikes are always of great interest. Keep up the good work, and thanks. I know how hard a small magazine is to run (I did it for five years) and appreciate your efforts.

Dick Schmidt
rschmidt02@earthlink.net

"Alternative Cyclist" & V2

The idea of the "Alternative Cyclist" column is a good one; boats, unique wedgies, aircraft, etc. Count me in. Thanks for publishing my letter defending the handling characteristics of the Velocity Squared.

Sandy Mitchell
sandalwood@southport.net

Folders
I read the latest issue and enjoyed your article on the folding Giant. I have been curious about/interested in a folding bike for a while. I also liked your past article on the folding recumbent (bike SatRday), and test-rode one. Like you, however, I am less interested in one that seems to require an afternoon and possibly an engineering degree to figure out.

You seem to be the man with the experience. This might be a good article for RCN—a folding bike comparison.

Glenn Garland

Editor Comments: We're working on getting Dahon and Brompton test bikes.

Kal-Haven Kudos

Three cheers for John Rome and his story about the Kal-Haven Trail ride in RCN 70! For years now I've been reading tales of rides from here to there and it's always "we cruised along at between 15 and 18 mph and had no trouble doing 20 mph for long stretches." Yeah, right. And I'm Spiderman. I remember one story a while back where the writer talked about riding

in temps in the nineties with a stiff headwind and they could “only” do between 12 and 15 mph! Give me a break! John Rome in my opinion has written one of the most real and honest stories of trail riding ever printed in your fine publication. He wasn’t afraid to say they started off at 11 mph and it dropped off later in the ride. That’s the way I ride. I’m a healthy 49-year-old and at 6’0” I tip the scales at around 169 lbs. So I’m not fat and I’m not out of shape. But on any given ride I have never ever cruised above 15 mph for any length of time, and I’m usually right around 12 mph. OK, so I’m not a racer. But I’m an average rider and I’d be proud to cruise along with John Rome any day. Good for him for turning in an enjoyable honest read without all the macho posturing. Also God bless his 16-mile trips to the local donut shops. Not everybody is into these short “55 mile warmups” I see mentioned all the time. After about 16 to 20 miles everybody wants a donut in my opinion. John Rome has the guts to say so. Thanks, John!

Larry Ripp
rippx001@tc.umn.edu

Editor Comments: Donut? You mean round power bar.

New Layout

The new masthead and cover are a definite improvement. It would be great in full color. . . I know, too costly. Keep up the good work.

Bill Levy

Doesn’t Like the New Look

I’m writing you about RCN’s new look. I have to say I don’t like the new cover design. Three different type styles in just three words is overdoing it; it makes your magazine cover look like a preteen’s first web page. The original RCN script is much more distinctive, and I hope you’ll consider switching back. I’m also no real fan of paddleboats or even exotic, folding wedgie bikes, but as long as the recumbent cyclist content of RCN isn’t diminished I’ll put up with, and even skim through, the non-cycling articles. On the plus side, your Road Test, Bike Tech, and readers’ stories are informative and entertaining. I’m planning to ride the Kal-Haven on my V-Rex, and your readers’ story in RCN 70 was perfect timing for me. Keep up the good work, and congrats on retaining a copy editor.

Duane Larkin
dlarkin@todaylink.com

Editor Comments: There are actually just two type styles in the title: “Recumbent” and “Cyclist” are in Helvetica, and “News” is in Times. The new cover was designed by me (Bob). It is a simple layout. I was inspired by a similar design I saw on a very professional independent magazine similar to RCN but produced on a much larger scale. Since I can’t

even design a basic website, perhaps I should take this as a compliment.

Where Are the Letters?

I just received RCN 70. I like the format in some respects, because it seems more organized—more businesslike. However, I do miss the more zine-like format of the previous issues. Also, there don’t seem to be as many letters as before.

Lloyd Abrams
lba@hoflink.com

Editor Comments: The difference could be that we are now using a professional copy editor who is editing the text files prior to layout. The quality of the text is vastly superior. This is the biggest prepress expense we have, and it adds a month to the prepress schedule. The alternative would be a minimally edited, more zine-like publication. We’ll have to see if it’s worth it. Hopefully, the layout will organize the issue better and make it easier to read and navigate. As for letters, we print as many as we receive. We’ve been receiving fewer letters lately, so we print fewer. This tends to change with the season and according to what is being printed in RCN (controversial items bring more letters). We love letters and reader submissions and will continue to print them and make them a big part of the magazine.

Numb Feet

A friend of mine gave me issue 68 of RCN. Two articles in it described me exactly—“Pedal Height Wars” and “Numb Feet,” to be exact. I purchased a RANS Rocket and have about 1,000 miles on it. I can only ride about 15 miles (many times less) without feeling like I have clubs attached to my legs where feet are supposed to be. I tried a lot of things before I read your publication. My questions is: Should I just turn the bike in for another model now and quit trying things that my physiology still won’t accept, or is there a possibility it will fix itself (yes, I am in denial—I like the Rocket). I am 58 years old (typical bad back), overweight, 6’, former bike racer who still has his Colnago road racer hanging in the garage. I am the type of rider who likes to get on, ride 75 to 100 miles, and then get off. Bathroom and water are the only reasons to stop. Bottom line is, should I go back to my dealer and trade now?

pdittman@rochester.rr.com

Editor Comments: Some riders never get ac-

customed to recumbents with high bottom brackets. I’m one of them. I can ride for one, perhaps two hours without any problems, and then my toes start to tingle. Nothing I’ve ever tried, in 15 years of recumbent riding—all type of recumbents—has helped. Every rider is different, though I would guess that at least of 10% of riders experience this. However, here is what you might try:

- Clipless pedals with enough float
- Powergrips or no clipless pedals
- Position your clipless cleat as far back as you can (toward the middle of your foot; some riders have even filed the adjustment slots in their shoes longer)

For me this problem is related to bottom bracket height. It affects me with anything higher than a RANS Tailwind (medium bottom bracket height). However, individual riders may differ. I’ve even heard LWB low bottom bracket riders complain of this (though not many).

Some people in the recumbent world do not believe that “numb feet” (or toes) is an issue at all. It is my experience that these people usually have something to do with selling bikes with high bottom brackets.

Trashing the RANS V2

I’m not sure why you dislike RANS so much. I have two and they are great. I was amazed to see the bikes you compared the Cannondale to, while ignoring the obvious RANS Vivo. My “unrefined” V2 has 8,000 problem-free miles on it (the seat back did tear). It rides, handles, and shifts flawlessly, and I am seldom passed.

Yes, it is true that my V2 was built overseas, but at least it was designed by an American. For some unknown reason Cannondale used a foreign designer which you chose to highlight while at the same time snub manufacturers that go overseas.

My 1986 RANS Nimbus was repainted professionally using Imron paint and scratches quite easily. The finish on my V2 is perfect, and I don’t baby it.

It seems funny how the steel-framed V2 with a fairing was a slug at 33 pounds and the Cannondale gets an A+ for weighing 40.25 pounds, having no fairing and having that toy store front wheel.

Our recumbent group rides year-round here in Florida—6,000 miles per year. We talk to a

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If you have something to say, a differing viewpoint or experience—we want to hear from you! **Please limit letters to 300 words.** No charity ride sponsorship request letters. RCN reserves the right to edit submissions for clarity, content, and space limitations.

Send to bob@recumbentcyclistnews.com

or RCN, PO Box 2048, Port Townsend, WA 98368

lot of people. The first question they always ask is: "How much do those things cost?" When asked for a recommendation, I say get a RANS Wave or Tailwind. For most people that is all they will need.

I would love to ride a Easy Racers just to see what kind of bike makes such an impression on you. Unfortunately, our local dealer does not give test rides.

Happy Trails
Butch DiLorenzo

Editor Comments: RANS has had years of positive reviews and good press in RCN. In fact, the V-Rex has had more press than most any other recumbent. The Stratus has been tested twice. Back in the late 1990's, RANS was sending us test bikes quite frequently. We haven't had a RANS test bike here since last summer (Vivo), and prior to that it was a Rocket/Tailwind the previous fall.

RANS has had some problems with their seats in their move to Taiwan production. Randy Schlitter and the folks at RANS have taken our criticism graciously. They are truly good sports. We fully expect all of the problems to be taken care of. We are looking forward to reviewing a bike with the new seat clamp sometime soon.

The V2 is an excellent choice for many riders, and I'm very happy that RANS is building a LWB that is different enough and gives LWB buyers a choice.

Judging by the amount of feedback coming from V2 owners about RCN's less-than-stellar coverage of the V2, we have clearly missed the mark on this bike. Most owners seem to really like the bike.

It was because the Cannondale recumbent is a compact long wheel-base (CLWB) that we didn't compare it to the SWB Vivo. The Cannondale received high marks for its finish quality and suspension. The Vivo is clearly an exceptional buy. RANS's mission is for good value, which is great. We need more bikes like the Vivo. It is my hope

that, rather than comparing bikes like the Vivo and Cannondale, readers will decide on the style of bike that suits them best before they start looking at individual models. The Vivo has received good press from RCN. I rode the Vivo prototype for 18 months and wrote about it often back when the bike was first introduced. ♦

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Curvy Style: The Sun EZ Sport Limited

by Bob Bryant
bob@recumbencyclistnews.com

The Easy Racer-designed Sun EZ Sport is the affordable classic LWB ASS recumbent we've been waiting for. The original EZ Sport (CroMoly version) is priced at just \$899. The new aluminum EZ Sport Limited is \$1,199. These are by far the best LWB values the recumbent world has ever seen. Thanks to their Easy Racers heritage and Gardner Martin design, they are very refined for brand-new bikes. The use of a curvy-tube cruiser-type frame was originally motivated by style. This new aluminum version sheds a few pounds while improving performance.

Systems

The extended cruiser-style frame is a work of kinetic art. Long have we waited for such a frame. If you're like me and have fond memories of Schwinn Stingrays and beach cruisers and are now drawn to the Easy Racer look and style, this is your bike. A few years back RCN's John Riley wrote an article about how cool it would be to have a cruiser-framed recumbent—and now we have one!

Both the CroMoly and aluminum frames are built in Taiwan in the same factory that builds the durable Sun EZ1 and EZ1 Lite. Our EZ Sport aluminum is more refined than the EZ1 Lite we had here just one short year ago. Most

notable are the seat, seat slider mechanism, and frame build. Perhaps it is the round tubes that add to the visual appeal.

The frame design is unique. From the head tube, twin smaller-diameter top tubes come back and down to create the seat stays. The front derailleur tube rises vertically and is bent rearward where it comes in between the twin top tubes. A few inches rearward, the derailleur tube goes from round to square and becomes the seat slider. At the end of the square tube is the rear rack mount. The seat sits on top (and slides on) the square tube.

The build, paint, and finish quality are excellent—on a par with recumbents costing much more. The EZ Sport and Limited frame quality appears to be every bit as good as the USA-built Easy Racer models. The Limited gets a slick two-tone paint job that has a very retro look—the available color combinations are silver/blue and silver/red. The Limited also gets an Aluminum frame (Sport is CroMoly), upgraded components and an improved, lighter seat.

Our EZ Sports had two water bottle cages, one mounted on each side of the handlebars. For water bottle fans, this is an ideal and handy mount. I've always had trouble reaching behind the seat for water. A hydration pack could

be mounted on the seat back.

The EZ Sport weighs 39 pounds (CroMoly frame). The EZ Sport Limited weighs 35 pounds (Aluminum frame). The CroMoly version will be tougher and easier to repair if you tweak the frame. The aluminum is lighter.

Steering

The Sun Easy Racer bars are a bit wider in stance than those of the Tour Easy and Gold Rush. They are undoubtedly more comfortable, though riders don't tuck in behind a fairing as well. The handlebars and stem are very simple and straightforward designs based on over 20 years of building experience. The tall stem can be raised up or down to refine the handlebar position (and help direct airflow over the fairing).

Drivetrain

For such an affordable bike, the EZ Sport aluminum has great componentry. The Shimano 9/27-speed Tiagra triple crank is shifted by a Deore XT derailleur (the CroMoly Sport is an 8/24 speed). About the only component enthusiasts may not like is the SRAM Verio twist shifters with the dial indicator. Though rather loud (clicking into gear), they worked perfectly for our review, though I question the long-term durability of such parts (for serious enthusiasts). This bike will take just about any kind of shifter, so it's not that big of a problem.

Chain Management

The EZ Sport does not have a spring-loaded chain idler like the Tour Easy and Gold Rush. Instead there is an Easy Racer skate wheel mount. It is quiet and smooth, but it doesn't offer as wide a gear range as the upper-line Easy Racer models.

Braking

The Tektro V-brakes offer exceptional stopping power. These affordable stoppers work better than some higher-spec brakes (e.g., ESP 7.0) and are easy to adjust. The LWB format makes full-on braking power a no-brainer.

Wheels and Tires

Both the EZ Sport and EZ Sport Limited have a 26-inch rear wheel and 20-inch front wheel. The wheel quality and build was very good. The wheels held true during our review. The hubs are Shimano LX and the tires are new Kenda Kwest 1.5" 100 psi. These are perfect all-around tires for the bike.

Comfort

Seat—The Sun recumbent seat is an imported version of the popular Easy Racer Kool Back seat. It has a mesh back laced to an aluminum frame, with a composite seat base with Lycra-

covered foam. The EZ Sport seat is lighter and more refined than the similar EZ1 seat. The mounting system is similar but also more refined. The two simple quick releases locked the seat down firmly. Adjustments were very easy, and we had riders of several heights riding the Sport with ease. This is one aspect of the Sport that is even better than the Tour Easy and Gold Rush—no tools are needed for seat adjustment and removal.

The Sun seat is not quite as comfortable as an Easy Racer seat. Rather than the contoured, layered, and glued foam from Easy Racers, Sun uses a more generic molded foam. Lighter and medium-sized riders shouldn't have any problems, but those over 200 pounds or those who like to take long rides might find that they bottom out. Modifications appear to be doable. I had thought of adding a piece of closed-cell foam but opted to go on a diet instead.

Like the Easy Racer Kool Back, the Sun seat has a dramatic lumbar bend in the seat frame. Though I love these seats, the bend is too much for my back, and I find my back separating from the seat just above the midpoint of the seat back. The seat has several sliding strap/buckle tension adjustments. After an hour shakedown ride, I had them all loosened up to where they fit my back perfectly. Compared with laced or zip-tied seat backs, the strap/buckle type is vastly superior for the simple reason that not everyone can agree on a lumbar placement (or if a lumbar is necessary at all—a la Vision).

Ergonomics—The EZ Sport has a fairly upright riding position—even more so than the Tour Easy or Gold Rush. If you recline the seat too far, the position will be inefficient and you may have a problem reaching the controls.

At 25.5 inches, the seat height is higher than that of any of the other Sun or Easy Racer bikes. The bottom bracket height is 15.5 inches (10-inch differential between the two); the EZ1 has a 24.5-inch seat height and a 14.5-inch bottom bracket height (10-inch differential); the Tour Easy/Gold Rush has a 22-inch seat height and a 13-inch bottom bracket height (9-inch differential). Despite the closeness of the numbers, the EZ Sport seat feels taller.

On the Road

Ride and Handling—Despite the new frame design and higher seat, recumbent enthusiasts will know right away that they are on an Easy Racer. The Sport handles confidently and tracks well. The tracking was spot-on, and better than its competitors', but not quite as good as the pricier Easy Racers. The handling seemed optimized more for all-around low- to medium-speed riding. The bike was easy to handle in traffic and felt very maneuverable, even with a trailer.

The Sport is a great choice for riders who, like me, ride on varied terrain. I rode the Sport down trails, on singletrack, on rail-trails, and



Our EZ Sport Limited prototype was a refined and attractive.

on about every type of pavement you can imagine.

Maneuverability—While not as maneuverable as Sun's EZ1, the Sport is fairly compact for a LWB. With its low bottom bracket, the bike is surprisingly maneuverable. Some shorter riders may have a difficult time with the rather high seat, though this is the only aspect worthy of criticism as far as user-friendliness is concerned.

Performance—The EZ Sport Limited's high-speed manners were not as good as those of the Tour Easy/Gold Rush, but that is to be expected. It was not as rock solid at speed as a Tour Easy or Gold Rush. There is still a reason to upgrade to the upper-line Easy Racer bikes. In saying this, I will also add that the Sport's handling traits surpass those of any other LWB in this price range.

The higher seat position makes the bike slightly less aerodynamic than a Tour Easy. The seat height/bottom bracket height differential is a less efficient riding position. The bike is also a bit heavier than a Tour Easy, so it won't perform quite as well. Despite all of these Tour Easy/Gold Rush comparisons, the Sport is no slouch. In fact, it should eat most compact LWB/MWB recumbents for breakfast.

Climbing—The Sports do not climb as well or as fast as their Easy Racer cousins. Despite the other differences, it seemed mainly to be seat height and aerodynamics. I also found the low gears to be too high for steep hill climbing (especially when towing a trailer). One climbing benefit of the Sports is that the shorter wheelbase makes low-speed zigzags on steep hills a bit easier.

Owning

The EZ Sport can do most anything. It is stylish, fast, ready for a long tour, and can also be

considered a sport bike. The EZ Sport is our first choice of any Sun or Easy Racer model for a commuter or utility bike. It is possible to put panniers on a rear rack, some more on the underseat rack, throw more junk in a rack bag, some more in a seat bag, and even tow a cargo trailer with ease. Front panniers would probably mount as well. Next to a cycle truck, this is the most utilitarian LWB recumbent we've ever reviewed. While most manufacturers like to build skinny-tire faux racers that barely have room for a patch kit and a banana, Sun has really come through for us utility cyclists.

The Sports are shorter than the (larger sizes) Tour Easy and Gold Rush. Combined with the taller seat height, this makes for better urban and off-road (rough terrain) handling and low-speed maneuvering.

Options and Accessories

Sun, in conjunction with Easy Racers, is developing an excellent suite of accessories for their bikes. There is a new universal seat bag (Pyramid Pro seat bag) that fits all Easy Racer/Sun recumbents and should fit most recumbents with a mesh-back seat and enough clearance between the seat back and rear wheel (won't fit Burleys).

Easy Racers offers a small Zzipper fairing for the Sports model (\$229). A Super Zzipper with T-brackets and clamp-on lower mounts (purchased from Zzip Designs) will mount without much problem.

Our test bike came with a Pyramid Pro computer (\$45), an underseat pannier rack (\$29), a rear rack (\$29), and a kickstand (\$19).

Market Competition

The EZ Sport's closest competition are the RANS Tailwind (\$995) and the Burley Canto (\$1,295). The Sport has them both beat in style,



Note the curved top tubes and front derailleurs tube that turns into the seat tube.



This shows the optional computer and Zipper fairing. The computer on our test bike stopped working during our test. A Super Zipper will fit this model, but you'll need Zzip Designs' T-bracket upper mounts and clamp-on lower mounts.

looks, and design refinement. The Tailwind is a bit more compact with its 20/20 wheel combo, but the smaller drive wheel has tradeoffs (a 26/20 Tailwind is rumored for 2003). The Canto is a different animal altogether, with its higher bottom bracket, much more laid-back seat, and linkage steering.

The EZ Sport is such a good value that we'd suggest that those looking at RANS Stratus, Tour Easy, and Cannondale recumbents check it out. It is a worthy competitor for all of them. The Sport doesn't need suspension because of its larger wheelset, and it will perform better than a small-wheel CLWB.

While not direct competition for either the Tour Easy or the Stratus, the EZ Sport Limited may suit some riders even better—for a lower price.

Buying such a recumbent has never been easier. The Sun EZ Sport is distributed by J&B Imports. Most all bike shops deal with J&B and have a catalog. In the back of J&B's cata-

log you will see photos of the Sun recumbents. Most any bike shop can order them. If you don't have a dealer who will order it, you can also call Easy Racers and order a bike from the man himself, Gardner Martin.

EZ Sport vs. Limited—These are both great bikes. Certainly the CroMoly model is tougher and more durable. The difference between the two is \$300-\$400 and four pounds. The fork, seat, handlebars, stem, pedals, headset, and tires are the same on both bikes. The Limited brings you better rims, bottom bracket, shifters, hubs, and brakes. The most notable upgrades are the hubs and brakes, which move from Shimano Alivio to LX.

How to Decide?—If you're a beginner, commuter, or urban rider, the standard EZ Sport is the way to go. If you plan to keep the bike for awhile and care about performance, buy the Limited. Serious performance riders should consider the Tour Easy and Gold Rush as well (both are faster than either Sport).

INFO AT A GLANCE

Specifications

Model—EZ Sport Limited
 Type—LWB
 Steering—ASS
 Wheelbase—63"
 Wheel sizes—26/20
 Seat height—26.5"
 Bottom bracket height—15.5"
 Frame sizes—One size fits most
 Weight—35 lbs.

Frame—7005 TIG welded Aluminum
 Fork—CroMoly
 Seat frame—Aluminum
 Seat material—Mesh back with foam base

Components

Crank—Shimano Tiagra 30/42/52
 Bottom bracket—Shimano sealed
 Headset—1" aluminum
 Derailleurs—Shimano Deore XT (rear) and Shimano 443 front
 Shifters—SRAM Verio twist (with dial)
 Cassette—9-speed, 11-32
 Chain—KMC Z
 Gear inch range—24-118
 Pedals—Wellgo platforms
 Wheels (f)—406 mm 20"
 Wheels (r)—559 mm 26"
 Rims—Alloy black CNC sides
 Tires—Kenda Kwest 1.5" 100 psi
 Hubs (f/r)—Shimano Deore
 Brakes (f/r)—Shimano Deore LX V with Tektro levers

Incidentals

Price—\$1,199-\$1,299 (varies by dealer)
 Warranty (frame)—5 years on frame (lifetime for steel frames)
 Colors—Red or black

Critique

RCN Rating—★★★★

Pro

Most stylish cruising LWB ever
 Frame is nearly as nice as a Gold Rush
 Fully adjustable seat (including mesh back tensioning and Q.R. slider)
 Great accessories: fenders, rear rack, underseat pannier rack, computer and seat bag

Con

Not a lightweight
 Tall seat
 Low gears not low enough
 Lumbar placement incorrect for me (though straps are adjustable)
 Seat foam not as comfy or layered like Easy Racers models

Contact

Sun Bicycles
 Web: www.sunbicycles.com
www.jbimporters.com

Easy Racers, Inc.
 Tel. 831-722-9797
 Web: www.easyracers.com



The EZ Sport underseat pannier racks. Be sure to get the EZ Sport model and not the EZ1 model, which will make for some chain slap.



The new Sun seat bag is very nicely made and will accept your laptop computer.

Verdict

I haven't been this excited about a new recumbent in years. The Sport is the LWB for everyone. It's stylish, affordable, and of excellent quality. While nobody was looking and while some other manufacturers are apparently having problems, Sun and Easy Racers are quietly becoming the industry powerhouse. The new EZ Sport and Limited are certainly the most popular new recumbents of the season. Though they are not getting the buzz of some more extreme designs, lots of people are buying Sun recumbents. With BikeE now gone, they are certain to become the driving force in entry level/recreational recumbency. Watch for a new Sun LWB tandem coming very soon.

I knew Gardner Martin was a smart man, but I never really understood the Sport until it arrived here. The combined lines of Sun and Easy Racers are carefully spaced in price, component level, and performance. The bikes are durable and mostly trouble-free. The designs are refined, not radically changed every few years in a "back to the drawing board" sort of way that outdates previous models. If there a downside to the Sport it's the weight of the bike.

Customers can just wander into their local bike shop (though we still recommend looking for something resembling a recumbent specialist) and look in the J&B catalog for color photos and specs.

These recumbents are exceptional values. This means good resale as well. There aren't many recumbent riders out there who wouldn't enjoy having a Sun recumbent for themselves or somebody in their family. I give the entire line—especially the new EZ Sports—two thumbs way up! ♦

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The Spirit is suitable for people that are from 5' - 6'7" tall with one unisize frame. This is possible through our practical quick seat adjustment. You can move the seat on aluminum saddle rails and adjust the backrest angle as well as the seat base position independently with a quick release. This means every member of the family can get on and ride in seconds.

Not that this means you have to sacrifice performance. It will carry a full load of luggage with no adverse effect on the handling, and the suspension makes it ideal for rough tracks and off road trails.

Check out www.hpvelotechnik.com now for details, and arrange for your test ride soon.



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The Reynolds T-Bone: Extreme Titanium

By Bob Bryant

“My objective is to make high-performance bikes for the 21st century that will routinely outperform the modern road bike (ref: 19th-century designs).

T-Bones are designed (1) to be road-worthy; (2) to minimize the power losses inherent in the recumbent position, with a stiff light frame with short boom, Euro carbon fiber seat, ergonomic and aerodynamic USS; and (3) to maximize the recumbent’s inherent aerodynamic advantage.”

—George Reynolds

If you want to go fast on a recumbent, there are just a few folks to see in the USA. One of them is George Reynolds. George is basically a one-man custom shop. He builds Euro-style performance machines with a unique American style.

The Reynolds T-Bone is an all-new design. In mid-2002 George discontinued his Wishbone in favor of the lighter, more racy titanium T-Bone. T-Bones are very custom bikes built to suit the owner. George can build them with dual 650c, dual 26” (559 mm), dual 700c, a 26/20 or George’s favorite, a 700/20. All of the T-Bones are light, fast, and a bit on the extreme (very laid back) side. They are also the most refined bikes we’ve ever seen from Reynolds.

Systems

Frame—All T-Bones feature an oversize ovalized 2” x 3” titanium main frame that weighs less than 3.5 pounds. The frame is ovalized on the front to accept an aluminum boom tube. George is a master metalworker. Our T-Bone was expertly welded and a very

attractive bike.

There are some detail aspects of the bike that might raise some eyebrows:

- Our 26/20 USS version has continuous cable housing (no cable stops or naked cable).
- There are just a few welded-on cable guides (hence cable routing via zip ties).
- Some of the component mounts are not threaded (and use bolts and nuts).
- The T-Bone logo is just basic black stick-on lettering (though, in contrast, there is a beautiful brass Reynolds Weld Lab masthead on the boom).
- Seat struts still have 6061 industrial-brand marking on them.

Though these items detract somewhat from the appearance (refinement) of the bike, they are items that are all functional—and serve this small custom builder well. In the style of Steve Delaire of Rotator, George Reynolds designs bikes the way he feels they should be designed. This type of builder is all too rare in the bi-

cycle world these days. They deserve our respect for doing what they do.

The T-Bone is an exquisitely simple bike. Like the Bacchetta Aero, the T-Bone is designed to accept the best components that the diamond-frame road racers can offer. Our T-Bone came with a CroMoly fork, though George can fit a much lighter carbon fiber road racing fork to his dual-650c/700c models.

Steering—Our 26/20 was outfitted with Reynolds USS. Unlike most USS, it should not negatively affect performance. It works best with the laid-back Euro seat (which doesn’t like to go very upright). Our bike came with custom-width aero-shaped linkage USS. The bars themselves are the shape of an airplane wing. “L”-shaped bar-ends are attached to the ends of the custom bars, and Shimano bar-cons do the shifting. The linkage appeared very robust; micro adjustments are made through a threaded rod. The steering geometry of this bike had a distinct road bike feel that took a few minutes to get accustomed to and then felt very natural.

The Reynolds seat forward mount/USS mount is Velcroed and hose-clamped to the bike’s frame. It was rock solid once tightened down. Hose clamps aren’t my favorite mounting device for \$2,600 bikes, but they work well.

We did note about half an inch of vertical play in the USS handlebars. Though this initially concerned me, it’s not noticeable while riding.

OSS steering is also available. With this system, the cables are routed inside the titanium frame.

Finish—The T-Bone comes in a natural titanium finish. The aluminum on the boom had a fairly rough finish.

Components

Drivetrain—Our drivetrain was a high-end mix of Ultegra (rear derailleur + bar cons), XT hubs, Campy Veloce crank (a classy touch), a Sora front derailleur, and a Ritchey Logic headset. The only marginal component on the bike were Tektro brake levers. They work great, but this bike deserves better.

George can sell you just the frame (\$1,900) and let you build up the bike, or you can choose every component on the bike and build it to suit. My suggestion is to start with the basic specs and list upgrades on your purchase order, as some component substitutions may be made (as they were on our test bike).

Gearing will also be something to strongly consider. The stock gearing is fairly high on the low end (27-118 gear inches with an 11-28 cassette and 30/40/52 crank).

Chain Management—For such an extreme/laid-back design, the chain path was

managed very nicely and with no drastic bends or angles. The chain travels over a superb Reynolds-built dual-groove chain idler in an X-path (bottom chain over the top, upper chain under the bottom of the idler). The tolerances between the chain and chainstays are tight, and I would guess that there might be chain scratches on the frame at some point. To address this you might want to discuss gearing changes with George.

Braking—The T-Bone's stretched-out SWB frame with a low center of gravity offered excellent braking. The front brake was an Odyssey A brake, the rear an Avid disk (\$150 upgrade). Stopping power was exceptional. A front disk is also optional.

Wheels and Tires—Our wheels were of excellent quality: Sun rims mated to XT hubs. The rims or spokes did not match on our test bike. The rear rim/spokes were black, and the front were silver—a match would be better looking. The Vredestein S-Licks 1.3's were fast and smooth. I was impressed with these tires. The only downside was that a reflective strip on the 26" rear tire was peeling off.

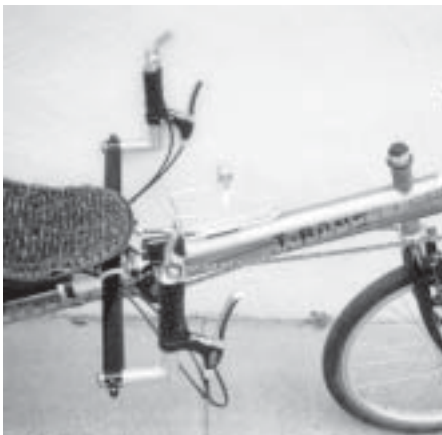
Comfort

The stock seat on the T-Bone is an Optima or M5 carbon fiber Euro shell. They are light and easily mount to many recumbent models. Our test bike had an Optima seat with George's stick-on Astro Turf pad (no kidding). George likes this, and I honestly had no problem with it either. George says it is heavy and adds about 1.5 pounds to the bike. He had this to say about the Astro Turf: "I like the Astro Turf for a seat material, it's not the lightest but it is the best for three reasons: (1) it breathes very well, when your coasting you can almost hear it; (2) it holds me in place very well, all 10,000 blades working together; (3) it cushions me good enough. Most of my customers love it; and a few hate it. One recent customer, Ed Calcutt, told me 'the crab grass has to go,' and now he is using a light poly foam pad. Ed's a strong Cat 2 roadie."

"Laid-back Euro shell seats like the M-5 carbon fiber work best for top performance, but I can put your favorite seat on if you choose," says George. He has also installed aluminum-framed Lightning P-38 mesh seats (OSS model only). These sit more upright (less laid back) and offer more comfort, though perhaps less performance on this bike. George had one customer who used a Rotator mesh seat as well but eventually went back to a carbon shell seat for performance.

Ergonomics

Look up the word "extreme" in my recumbent dictionary, and there will be a picture of the T-Bone. This is not a negative comment, just a descriptive term. The bike has a 55" wheelbase (off the charts as SWB' wheelbases go), a 19" seat height, and a 28.25" bottom bracket



The T-Bone controls are fixed position custom bar-ends



The Optima seat comes with an Astro Turf padding. This was the most upright we could position the seat with the USS model.

height. This means that your footies are more than 9" above your hiney. I'll bet you all thought this was against my religion. Well, I actually enjoyed riding it, and if you're so inclined, this bike works as intended.

I adapted to the seat angle and even the bottom bracket height. What I couldn't handle was the lack of neck support. With this super-reclined position, you must drop your chin to your chest to look straight ahead. Having a neck/shoulder injury from my previous career, I just don't adapt very well to the added neck strain. A headrest or slightly upright position would have helped a lot.

George says, "I recommend to my customers to start doing sit-ups and set the Euro seats at a maximum of 30 degrees and then gradually lower as they adapt to the more efficient position." He continues, "The human body is amazing in its ability to adapt. I have and can comfortably do centuries with this position; my heart legs and lungs seem to fatigue a lot faster than my neck. The passive rear suspension of the T-Bone helps smooth things out. The Wishbones were a much harsher ride."

I'd wished I could have tried the OSS version with a Lightning seat (more upright riding position) and/or George's headrest option.

User-friendliness—This is not the forte of the Wishbone. This is an all-out performance bike. However, it was not as difficult to ride or get accustomed to as it might appear. I was able to get going on my first attempt, and I rode it all over town in traffic and out into the county for a good test.

Ride and Handling

Stability—The T-Bone is a very stable SWB. Initially it may feel twitchy, but this is mainly because of the upright head tube angle and linkage steering, and I quickly got used to it. The bike then becomes steady, stable, and very fast. Even with our requested "fat" tires, the T-Bone ride will rattle your teeth. This is a very stiff bike. George says the T-Bone offers a less stiff ride than the previous Wishbone. He had this to say about the ride, "On the T-Bones I prefer the 700 rear. Notice the titanium chain stays are much longer (21" T-Bone vs. 15" Wishbone) and seat supports connect further forward from the axle. This, combined with the springier material, greatly reduces road friction. On the big bumps I sit up and let the bike absorb the shock."

Maneuverability—I didn't find maneuverability to be one of the T-Bone's strong points. Being that far laid back with feet skyward is not the most maneuverable or user-friendly riding position. Though it is not advertised as such, this is an all-out performance bike.

Weight—At just over 26 pounds (no pedals), our T-Bone was not superlight. George says that you can cut 1.5 pounds by *not* using Astro Turf, 2 pounds by going to lighter racing wheels/tires, and even more weight by opting for a carbon fiber fork and the lighter handlebars. The listed weight for a T-Bone is 23 pounds, but this will vary according to how you set up the bike. One owner of a dual-650 T-Bone with a Lightning seat (lighter than the carbon seats) claims that his bike weighs just 20 pounds.

Performance

The T-Bone is a very fast bike, certainly one of the fastest I've reviewed. It is most likely faster than any of your average CLWB, LWB, SWB, LWB, OSS or USS, trikes, or tandems. The only bikes that may be faster are the ones in its own league—which are actually quite difficult to find, as most lowracers are heavier than the T-Bone. From a different design standpoint, the highracers will give the T-Bone a run for its money, and the folks who can't (or don't want to) adapt to this rather extreme and aggressive machine can opt for more traditional fast recumbents like an Easy Racers Gold Rush with a Zzipper fairing. Many would argue that the GRR isn't in the same league, and perhaps it isn't, but for some of us "non-adapters" it will still be faster.

"There is no question in my mind that my 700/20 USS T-Bone is the fastest," says



This is a dual 26 T-Bone with OSS and Optima Euro seat (George Reynolds)

George. He also admitted that this is the heaviest T-Bone configuration. George says the 700/20 version is 1 mph faster than the dual-650/700 versions. He also says he can get an additional 3 mph by adding an optional M5 tailbox. He says that the tailbox performance increase is better on the USS model than on the OSS model. I wanted to clarify this, so I asked if a T-Bone USS with a tailbox (adds 4 pounds, for a total of about 30 pounds road-ready) could be faster than a dual-big-wheel ultralight model that might be 10 pounds lighter. "Yes," George replied.

Owning

I rode the bike in downtown Port Townsend traffic from the first minute I climbed aboard. I never had a bit of trouble negotiating stops, starts, or climbs. However, the low stature of this bike makes it more difficult for traffic to see you, and for you to see traffic (find a good mirror). There are no cargo-carrying options. I carried nothing on my test ride, not even my house keys. A small bag could be strapped to the seat struts without much problem. I could have hitched up my Burley trailer, but this isn't really that kind of bike, now is it.

Options and Accessories

George will do anything he can to option out your bike to suit your needs. You have your choice between several wheel sizes, different seats, USS or OSS, handlebar widths (and weights), and components.

If you're looking for fenders or bags, you're on your own—though both seem possible, even if it means fabricating coroplast fenders.

Market Competition

Though expensive, the T-Bone is an excellent value for a titanium bike. The Bacchetta Ti-Aero is \$3,900 and the TiRush is over \$5,000.

The price competition is the Euro lowracers,

most of which are heavier than the T-Bone. Also worthy of consideration is the Bacchetta Aero, another hot rod American SWB.

Verdict

The critics of Reynolds might tell you that his bikes are a bit experimental-looking. In the old Wishbone days I might have agreed. However, the new T-Bone, with its titanium frame and M5 (or Lightning) seat, has come along way. Sure there are nitpicks (as outlined above under "Systems") and lacking refinement details, but George has moved upscale a bit and his bikes are looking very nice. If you don't like some of these more functional bike details (or lack thereof), ask George to do something different. As George says, "I'm a custom builder—you can have it your way." He is easy to deal with and wants happy customers who tell all of their bike-riding buddies how fast they are on their Reynolds recumbents and how they kicked hiney all over the pack of roadies in their neighborhood.

Kudos to George Reynolds for one of the nicest road-test experiences I've had this year. As we've found with small builders like Steve Delaire (Rotator) and Rod Miner (Lightfoot), the custom bike experience can be unique, enjoyable, and satisfying—surpassing the "out-of-the-box" stock bike-buying experiences that sometimes cost nearly the same. George was attentive to our every question or concern by both e-mail and phone. We had absolutely no problems with the bike or any aspect of the review.

If the T-Bone ends up at the top of your list, the bottom line question to answer is whether you can handle the more extreme ergonomics and very laid back seat angle. The T-Bone is more reclined than the Bacchetta Strada/Corsa/Aero and is more comparable to Euro lowracers. If the answer is yes, this could be the bike for you. ♦

INFO AT A GLANCE

Specifications

Model—Reynolds T-Bone
 Type—SWB LowRacer
 Steering—OSS
 Wheelbase—55"
 Seat height—20"
 Bottom bracket height—28.25"
 Frame sizes—Custom to suit
 Weight—19-26 lbs.
 (ours weighed #26 w/o pedals)
 Weight limit—#260

Frame—2" x 3" Titanium mono-tube with aluminum mini-boom
 Fork—CroMoly
 Riser—Reynolds
 Handlebar—U bar (knees in between) with custom bar-end control mounts
 Seat—Optima Euro shell or optional Lightning P-38 aluminum or your choice

Components

Crank—Campy Veloce 30/40/52
 Bottom bracket—Campy
 Headset—Ritchey Logic
 Derailleurs (f/r)—SRAM 7.0
 Shifters—SRAM
 Cassette—SRAM 11-28 8-spd. (9-spd. opt.)
 Chain—SRAM
 Gear inch range—27-118
 Wheels (front)—406 mm 20"
 Wheel (rear)—559 mm 26"
 Hubs—Shimano Deore XT
 Rims—Sun CR-18
 Tires—Vredestein S-Licks 90 p.s.i.
 Brakes—Odyssey A brake

Incidentals

Priced from—\$2,600
 Frameset—\$1,900

Warranty (frame)—Lifetime (orig. owner)
 Colors—Natural polished and waxed
 Options—Disc brakes, seats, custom component upgrades, custom wheels

Pro

Nicest Reynolds bike to date
 A very simple design that works well
 Handmade brass boom badge
 A fast USS bike (cool microadjust USS)
 Lots of custom features

Con

Ovalized boom can be difficult to slide
 Hose-clamp seat mounts
 Continuous cable housing & zip tie mounts
 Rough finish on some parts
 Some vertical play in USS
 Some riders won't care for astroturf

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This is an OSS T-Bone with OSS and an optional Lightning P-38 aluminum seat. This combination will set more upright than version the Optima seat with USS. George can build the bike as a dual 26" 559 mm, dual 650c, dual 700c, 26"/406 mm or 451 mm 20" wheelset. There are also many custom high performance wheel options. (George Reynolds)

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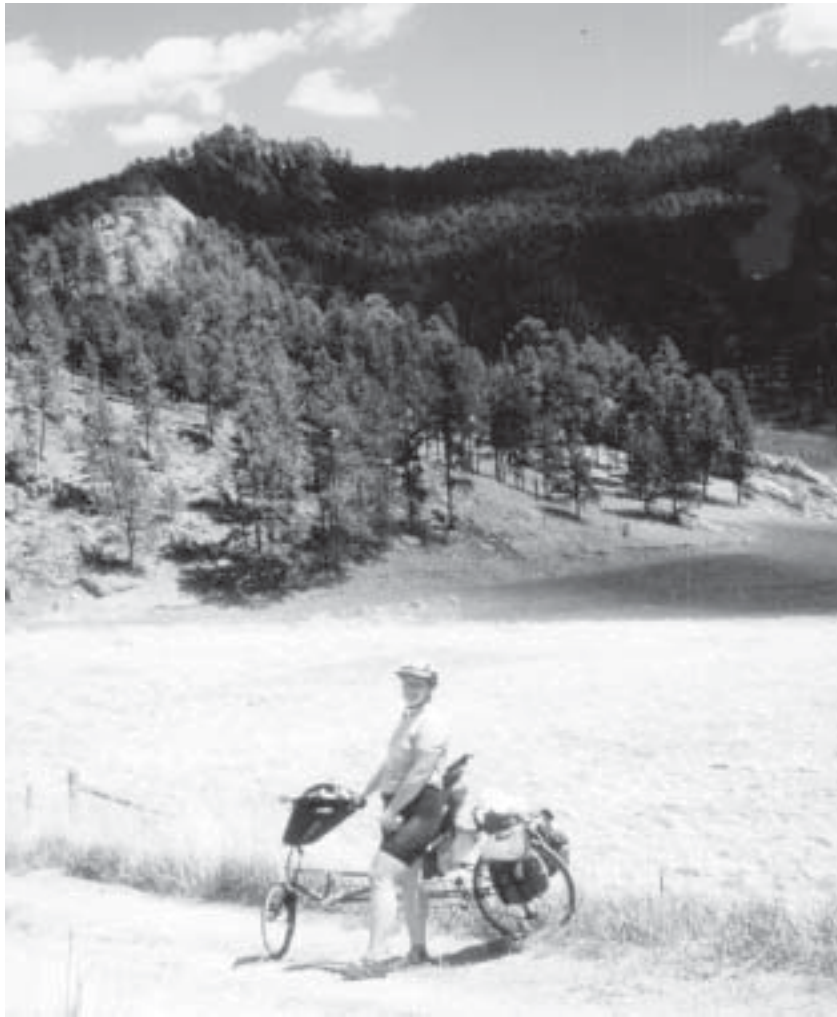
"Recumbent riders are NOT off the shelf, they are off the wall" - Author unknown

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Left: Kelly's 2001 RANS Stratus was retro-fitted with the old-style RANS C-bars (closed loop) and cloth fairs by John Cunningham of Recumbent Brothers Cycles in Peyton, Colorado. The stock Primo Comet tires did well on the sometimes soft trail. This is another example of the gorgeous Black Hills vista along the Mickelson Trail.

Touring the Mickelson Trail

by Kelly Iniguez
kiniguez@sopris.net

Without a helmet or his top four front teeth, the towheaded boy rode alongside us. “Boy, those are funny looking bikes. Where are you going?” When I asked our escort if he knew where the trail was, he replied he would ride along as he would like to know also. He continued to pepper us with questions; “How long have you been riding?” “Four days,” I replied. Incredulously, he stared at me. “You’ve been looking for the trail for four days?”

The 114-mile crushed limestone Mickelson Trail from Deadwood to Edgemont, South Dakota, is an excellent tour, especially for beginning and/or reluctant cyclists. The trail is very scenic, and there are many off-the-bike activities. This was my eleven-year-old son Luis’ first tour. We rode the trail the last week

of May, in the lull between Memorial Day and the end of school in mid-June.

Monday, 5/27—Memorial Day

Luis and I arrived in Hill City, South Dakota, after a nine-hour drive from our home in Rifle, Colorado. We stopped by Rushmore Bicycles (605-574-3930, www.forestcityadv.com) to confirm our tour departure in the morning and purchase a few last-minute items. I bought my traditional souvenir water bottle. Their bottle wasn’t the preferred squishy Specialized type. The shop logo on the bottle was attractive, with the famous Mount Rushmore presidents mounted on bicycles. The eye-catching design made up for the lesser-quality bottle. Owners Jesse and Petra were very congenial and made

us feel welcome.

Luis and I set up our new Walrus Velo tent at Horse Thief Campground. Seventeen dollars per tent site with pay showers. The campground has a huge grassy tent area and was a good advertisement for the beauty of the Black Hills. Our Velo (“bicycle” in French) tent is so named because it has a huge vestibule that will fit two bicycles—well, not two bicycles the length of my XL Stratus, but it is indeed big enough for two bicycles.

We were hardly tucked in when the black clouds that had been threatening all evening let loose. At times it was raining so hard we couldn’t hear each other without shouting. I had been worrying all week about the rain forecast. It hardly seemed fair to wish the rain to pass by the drought-stricken area, but riding in the rain wouldn’t be an auspicious beginning for Luis’ first tour. Luckily for us, the rain quit by morning and the dry ground had sucked all of the moisture up. I was happy, as I’ve heard riding on wet sand trails compared to riding through wet cement. When I woke up at 2 a.m. the full moon was so bright I thought it was morning. What a great night to sleep outdoors.

Tuesday, 5/28—Deadwood to Carsten Cottages (Dumont)

18.39 miles, 5.42 mph average

We arrived at Rushmore Bicycles in plenty of time for our 8 a.m. shuttle departure to the trailhead at Deadwood. Jesse asked me if I had any mechanical concerns and spent considerable time trying to get my new Stratus to shift into the smallest cog (more on this later).

Petra drove Luis and I to Deadwood and filled us in on area history and geographical features. Deadwood Cycles is located in the Mickelson Trail museum building at the trailhead. Petra took our photo at the mile marker sign and promised to leave our dinner, breakfast, and lunch in the cabin refrigerator. I wondered what kind of dinner would fit in the fridge. Caviar and champagne? I had been envisioning eating at a little café when our tour description said meals were included for that day . . .

Luis and I purchased Mickelson Trail T-shirts. Our trip was official—we had the T-

shirts to prove it! I paid the \$2-per-day trail user fee for myself. Kids under 12 don't pay. Deadwood Cycles had only been open two days and didn't have a personalized water bottle to add to my collection.

We ate lunch at the Hickock House. While chatting with the waitress we discovered that she was also from western Colorado and that her husband had managed the movie theaters in Gunnison. We run the movie theater in Rifle. What a small world!

Finally we were off on our adventure. The steepest section of the trail starts at the Deadwood end. The trail at this point had about a 2% grade according to Luis' Incline-O-Meter. The first 16 miles were basically all climbing, with the first 5 miles running along the river and highway. We stopped to cool off by soaking our feet in the river, a touring tradition started by John Orlowski on the Slumgullion Tour. The river ran below the Homestead Mine at this point. According to Petra, the mine is the largest continuously running mine in the world, but now it is running on only a skeleton crew and locals anticipate it will soon close.

At the Kirk Trailhead we chose the 2.4-mile climb rather than the shorter, 2.0-mile alternate, which had a steeper grade. I used my granny gear only on the first switchback. After that the trail was back to its usual 2-3% grade. I felt the fuss about the grade on that section was much ado about nothing. Jesse pointed out later that we were used to altitude and climbing and that people from the Midwest had difficulty. Even if it would be necessary to walk that one short section, I don't feel the hype should scare anyone from riding the trail.

The forest was thick with black hills spruce and ponderosa pine. We were on a mountain looking across the valley. The top of the steepest part of the climb was a perfect spot for lunch—peanut butter and jelly on bagels. We ate sitting on the first of many benches placed along the trail. While we were eating, four mountain bikers passed us.

We continued climbing on a slight grade far away from traffic. Silence rang loudly. Did I mention it was beautiful? The entire trail was drop-dead gorgeous, but the remoteness of this section, coupled with the bright blue sky, fluffy white clouds, and thickly forested mountainside, made it our favorite area of the trail.

The air was hot and black flies buzzed. On the sand trail our average speed was half of that on pavement. We couldn't get going fast enough to outrace our annoying companions. Around mile 16 we hit the downhill. Yee ha! Dinner here we come! Now we started watching for our cabin. We whizzed past heavily treed areas and small open meadows with horses grazing next to a pond and we bumped over a bridge. Had we passed the cabins? We would hate to turn around and climb again. Finally we spied Carsten Cottages down a slope and across the road. It was tricky navigating our bikes down the hill. I fleetingly thought of the climb back up in the morning.

Our cabin was snug. Real beds with real sheets. All of the comforts of home: magazines, videos, a microwave, frying pan, and a small refrigerator. Oh, yes, our next three meals were in the fridge. Hmmm, let's see. Well, not exactly what we had in mind. TV dinners. My thoughts of BBQ disappeared in a laugh of disbelief. Instant oatmeal for breakfast. Chip beef and french bread for lunch. Milk, juice, fresh fruit, and chocolate chip cookies rounded out our next three meals. We wouldn't starve, but this sure wasn't our typical indulgent cycling vacation food.

Luis flopped on the bed. His butt was sore. A sore butt on a recumbent? He specified that his butt muscles were sore from working. Luis had trouble sitting or walking. A little more training would have been good. Luis didn't bother showering right away, instead relaxing with a book. For me, a shower was in order. When I returned to the cabin, Luis and I parceled out the cookies evenly. He ate his all at once, while I savored mine slowly throughout the night and the next morning. You would have thought we would never eat real food again!

Dan Carsten (605-584-2248, carstens@mato.com), owner of the cabins, stopped by to see if he could do anything for us. Dan said that in the summer there are so many cyclists on the trail that you would



Luis posing near one of the many gates on the trail. The weighted gate closes after the trail users pass through.



On the porch of our cabin at Plenty Star Ranch near the Pringle Trailhead. Luis' older RANS Wave with the 16" front wheel is a zippy little 'bent. I find it much more lively than the newer model.

need a clicker to count them. He was thinking of adding a small store/café to cater to cyclists. Dan did say he would buy people's groceries or run them to Lead to do shopping. An outdoor BBQ would have been just the thing for our dinner. We turned lights out early and planned on an earlier start in the morning to beat the heat.

Wednesday, 5/29—Carsten Cottages (Dumont) to Hill City 33.67 miles, 7.96 mph average

We were out the door at 9 a.m., having quickly finished off our oatmeal and orange juice. An 18-mile downhill to Mystic started our morning. What a life! We rattled over many small bridges. Recumbents are just right for viewing the Mickelson. My head swiveled left and right, taking in the pine-covered hills. We saw aspens, but they weren't leafing out yet. Wondering if there was a problem with the aspens consumed many miles. We did see them leafed out later in the ride when our altitude was lower. Mystery solved.

We zipped along through four different tunnels. Luis was looking forward to panning for gold with a genuine crusty gold miner. He was impatient while I chatted with two men from Pennsylvania who were riding the trail out and back on Montague folding bikes.

We were riding the 2% downhill grade at a max of 10 mph. More than that and I was afraid I might wash out. I'm sure more experienced trail riders would not have been applying the brakes.

Luis made frequent stops to pick up assorted rocks and pieces of

slate. It's a shame he had such ordinary items as clothes and food in his bag to waste room. We passed a mountain bike and a BikeE heading the other direction. I would have chatted, but they only waved. That was the only other recumbent I saw on the trail.

We were keeping our eyes open for The Glory Hunter. Our directions were not too clear. Our original confirmation and the current day's itinerary could not even agree on which side of the road the gold panning was located on, much less the distance. We were 20 minutes late. Surely Lew allowed a few extra minutes for bicycle riders. We did see a sign next to an open pit with machinery and buckets around. No sign of crusty miner types. We continued on down the road, worried about having to retrace our route uphill. By the time we reached the trailhead at Mystic, we knew the open pit had been the place. Luis was highly disappointed. The best I could do was promise to check in with Jesse when we reached Hill City.

Luis and I ate lunch in silence sitting in the shade of the shelter at the trailhead. Most trailheads had very nice wooden shelters. Others had only a sign. Some had their benches placed outside rather than inside. With the heat, it didn't make sense to us. We frequently chose to sit inside on the dirt/gravel rather than on the bench in the heat. Some trailheads had portable toilets. Most of them were very clean, but the one in Hill City was disgustingly dirty. Some of them were actual portable toilets, but others were permanent buildings.

We were down the trail about two miles when Luis discovered he had lost his sunglasses. I was grouchy as we backtracked uphill to our lunch stop. Luis was grouchy about the gold panning. What a pair we were. No sunglasses—he must have lost them further back. Oh, well. We turned around, intent on getting to the shop and checking on the gold panning. We rode in silence uphill for six miles. I ran over a green garden snake, mortally wounding it. Now our day was really bad. A downhill put it all in perspective. Who would have thought a 2% downgrade could improve life so much?

Luis turned his front wheel too sharply when stopping and dumped in the sand. Luckily he wasn't hurt. We stopped next to a beaver pond, and Luis picked up a large chunk of aspen that the beaver had been ready to move. I imagined a confused beaver when he came back for his next log and found it missing. Luis carried the log between his Camelbak and his seat. We were close to Hill City when we ran out of film. We had been averaging a roll of film a day.

We rode straight to the bike shop. Jesse checked on the more commercial gold-panning tour in town. The last tour was at 4:30. Good. We would eat and do the tour. Somehow both Luis and I were confused about the time. As

we were finishing our hamburgers at the 16th Street Diner, we discovered that it was almost 5 p.m., not 4 p.m. We had missed the second gold-mining opportunity. All we could do was laugh. It seemed that gold panning wasn't going to happen for us. Now our evening's activities were all mixed up; we had been planning on dinner at the Alpine Inn and the



Crazy Horse Monument is near the Mountain Trailhead. We almost missed seeing it as we approached from the back side.

evening light show of Mount Rushmore. We had just finished eating, so we ended up not being hungry for dinner at the Alpine Inn. The waiting line was an hour the first night we were in town. This night, we had just eaten. Had we realized the correct hour, we would have gone to the Alpine Inn. Their steaks and desserts are legendary. No gold panning, no gold-mine tour, no steak. We did go to Mount Rushmore. Entrance is free for people, but cars pay \$5 to park. The free parking lot down the hill was full. The ranger's talk and slide show were quite moving given the recent events in the United States.

Luis and I spent the rest of our evening drying out our tent and shopping for the next day's snacks. I left both bikes with Jesse for tune-ups. Our hotel was a Best Western. It was clean, but the walls were paper thin. Luis and I agreed that we liked the cabin much better. Staying in a cabin seemed to fit the rustic Old West atmosphere of South Dakota. Plus, staying in the cabin we couldn't hear when our neighbors were peeing . . .

**Thursday, 5/30—Hill City to Plenty Star Ranch (1 mile before Pringle)
27.07 miles, 6.75 mph average, 15.9 mph high speed**

We ate breakfast at the Best Western and drove over to pick up the bikes. Jesse and I had a lengthy conversation about why he couldn't

adjust the rear derailleur. He ended up using a washer as a shim. Jesse said the only reason he could imagine this would be happening is if the rear hub had magically scooted over. Hmm, well, actually this isn't the original wheelset. I didn't even think of the new wheelset being the problem. The original wheels both had unacceptable rim seams (in my opinion). I don't like having people stare at me in wonder at the loud thump, thump every time I use the brakes. I did return the wheelset to RANS. Mark Fischer at RANS told me he installed the wheelset on his personal bike and felt that the wheels rode fine and I was getting a thump from the extreme braking conditions with the steep downhills in western Colorado. RANS returned the wheelset to me. They are now sitting in my basement, still in the box. I ended up buying a new wheelset from Joe Young in Texas (830-997-6376, joe@youngwheels.com). Joe's wheels come with a lifetime truing warranty. We did wait a considerable amount of time for the hubs to come in from Phil Wood.

I also talked to a German fellow who was helping out at the shop. I originally thought he was Petra's brother. It turns out he has bicycled 27,000 miles so far on a multi-year/multi-continent cycling journey. He was heading towards Alaska and had spent the past two months in South Dakota. I would have chatted more, but it was already 9 a.m. and getting hotter.

We had trouble finding the continuation of the trail in Hill City, but we were finally on the road with a nine-mile uphill to start our day. The grade was very gentle. The vista had opened up with lots of green meadows and wetlands. Hearing frogs ribbit now reminds me of South Dakota. They were our companions along almost the entire trail. We saw old fallen-down cabins along many areas of the Mickelson. The trail was rougher with small rocks and patches of sand. My front wheel turned on me twice, but I managed a quick recovery both times. We stopped in two different cement underpasses, pretending they were the cool tunnels from yesterday.

We ate lunch at Heritage Village's \$7.00 buffet. They should have charged me extra for all of the ice water I drank. We almost rode right past the Crazy Horse Monument. Luckily we had stopped to photograph something else and saw the monument behind us.

We didn't stop in Custer (one of the largest towns on the trail). Luis and I were still full from eating the buffet, and our Camelbaks were full of ice water. We had get-down-the-road-itis and didn't even stop at the Trailhead Bike Shop to see if they had a water bottle for my collection. We continued the slight upgrade for another three miles. Then the trail sloped down. Down, down, down. We stopped to fix the battery door of my camera with medical tape. Down, down, down. Life was sure feel-

ing easy. There weren't as many trees. It was getting later and hotter. It's a good thing the downhill continued. We saw many horses grazing and a few cows. There were too many scenic areas to photograph. In no time we were at our night's lodging: Plenty Star Ranch. We had our choice of a cabin or a teepee. The cabin was far nicer and had thick foam pads on the bunks for the sleeping bags. Isa (the owner) provided. Jesse had recommended we ride into town to eat at the Hitchin' Post Restaurant. We had showered and were feeling lazy. Isa's Ranch offered Navajo Tacos for dinner (\$6.95). It was rather like eating in someone's home, as dinner was served in the dining room of her house. We chose to eat outside at the picnic table in the shade. It was obvious that the fry bread had been cooked ahead. Dinner was OK, but again not what a hungry cyclist had in mind. Our breakfast was included the next morning, or we wouldn't have bothered. It was yogurt, cereal, and German quick breads. Since it was free it was fine, but I wouldn't have been happy paying the \$4.50 otherwise.

We did like the two-room cabin with its couch to lounge on and read. The bathhouse was large and clean.

Friday, 5/31—Plenty Star Ranch (Pringle) to Edgemont

34.83 miles, 8.63 mph average

We started out early, intent on beating the heat. Luis and I hadn't gone five miles before he saw a rock shop that was open at 7:30 a.m. Luis was entranced with all of the rocks. While he was window shopping (and I was reminding him he had to carry whatever he bought), the sun rose higher and higher. I tried to remind myself that this is how he felt while I was chatting with people on the trail or checking out the bike shop. Luis finally ran out of money and did manage to buy smaller rocks.

The entire ride to Edgemont was one long downhill today, with the exception of one or two short uphill. I was happy we weren't riding the trail out and back. The ride from Edgemont back to Pringle would be a long one. The surface of the trail was rougher on this end. More ruts and large rocks. There were frequent areas with red landscaping-type gravel strewn across. There were also small areas of soft sand.

Early in the morning we paused to photograph a cattle drive going down the road. Not much further down the trail we stopped for a woman on horseback. The horse didn't know what to make of us. The woman did keep a tight rein on her mount as he danced past. This was the only horse we saw on the trail, and it solved one of our mysteries. Frequently along the trail surface we would bump through closely placed small depressions. As we rode along the trail where the horse had just walked, I realized that the small depressions were slightly-filled-in hoofprints.

This area of the trail reminded me of western Colorado. More open with sagebrush, yucca, and sparsely placed pine trees. Mesas and buttes in the distance. There were flowering chokecherry trees lining much of the trail. Their perfume was so strong that the scent quickly went from being fragrant to overwhelming. I took to holding my breath when we passed through large patches of the bushes. I never thought I would find the scent of a flowering bush to be unappealing, but there you are.



Luis prepares to ride through one of the four tunnels on the Mickelson Trail. They were short enough that lights were not necessary. The tunnels were also refreshingly cool inside. Three of them had benches just inside the entrance.

The Sheep Canyon area reminded me of Utah with red sand and interesting red rock formations. The Sheep Canyon Trestle was the largest on the rail line at 126 feet high and 700 feet long. Local historians tell about the danger of the old trestle. It was so dangerous that the engineer and the person in the caboose would walk over the trestle instead of riding on the train. Luis wondered who was "driving" the train and how the engineer and caboose person managed to get back on after walking across.

We passed through many small gates on the Mickelson Trail. Most were connected to a post by a weighted chain. After we pushed the gate open and let it go, the weight pulled the gate shut again. Many of these small gates were set next to large cattle gates so local landowners would have access to their property. The large gates were locked shut. At Sheep Canyon we found both gates locked together. We had to lift our bikes over the fence. Luis and I felt quite strong because we managed to heft the

bikes over without taking off our bags.

We had one last sweeping downhill into the valley. The last few miles ran between the highway and the train track. It wasn't a pretty finish to our spectacular trip. This is the only area of the trail that we had to ride on the road. We wanted to ride to the actual trailhead, but we couldn't find it. This is where we met our tow-headed escort. Edgemont is a town on its last legs. The last mile or so of the trail is on streets. Luis had obviously been trail riding too long. Not only did he ride in the center of the lane, but he rode down the street in the center of the wrong lane. For his sake it's a good thing the main street consisted almost entirely of empty buildings. We asked directions to the city campground and found our pickup parked there. Luis and I had chosen to have our truck delivered to the end of the trail rather than get a shuttle back to Hill City. The showers at the campground were basic, but they were free. No complaints here. I spoke with the women manning the campground and told them about the locked gate. They knew just which gate I was talking about. They said one of the landowners didn't think the rules applied to him.

I would ride the Mickelson Trail again in a heartbeat. It was worth the drive to ride four days and 114 miles. This area would be a good compromise for those who think every trip should be a cycling trip. There are many, many activities in the area. Our family has agreed that we all need to go back and see more of the tourist attractions. Prices on food and lodging are very reasonable. Our trip with Rushmore Cycles was \$450 for both of us. It included a shuttle, three nights lodging, and four meals. This trip was self-guided. Rushmore did the planning, but they did not SAG us. I found this to be the perfect degree of help, and I plan to do a self-guided trip again. The locals know the area best, and I think it's worth paying them a little extra for their knowledge. Luis and I didn't need someone to hold our hands or fix flat tires.

For more information on the Mickelson Trail, call the Black Hills Trail Office (605-584-3896) or check www.mickelsontrail.com. You can also South Dakota tourism info get info by calling 800-732-5682 or going to www.travelsd.com. ♦

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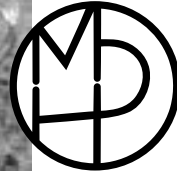
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The Recumbent Shop



Luke Breen working on bikes at Calhoun Cycle

Calhoun Cycle— Viva la Evolution!

by Don Picard

Calhoun Cycle is the largest recumbent bicycle dealer in Minnesota. It has been a recumbent-only specialty shop since owners Luke and Mary Breen opened the doors four years ago. How Luke went from a hard-core touring bicyclist on a wedgie to a recumbent zealot and co-owner of one of the largest recumbent shops in the Midwest is a story about evolution . . . of a bicyclist and a business.

Luke always thought he'd be running his own business. He grew up in a family that owned a local drugstore, so entrepreneurship was practically in his genes. After touring for years, he figured he'd exercise those entrepreneurial instincts in the bicycle business.

By about 1990, after a few post-college years working as a mechanic for two local bicycle shops, he was starting to lose his enthusiasm for the bicycle business. "The traditional bike business was more about bikes as toys and commodities," he says, "where a customer might go to a competitor to save a few dollars." It just wasn't fun anymore. Then one day he noticed a bicycle rental shop for sale near

the extensive bicycle trail complex along one of Minneapolis' lovelier urban lakes, Lake Calhoun. He then decided to gamble that buying a service-oriented bike rental business would rekindle his enthusiasm. And it did.

Four years later, with the bike rental business thriving, Luke and Mary decided to rent a booth at the national HPV Speed Championships in Minneapolis. The purpose wasn't to rent bikes, but to sell boomerangs that Luke, an inveterate tinkerer, was designing and manufacturing as a sideline. While there, they noticed people lining up at a booth selling some really odd-looking bicycles (RANS recumbents). Hey, if this many people are interested, he said to himself, it might make a good addition to the rental business. So he and Mary added a pair of Vision recumbents to the line of rental bikes.

The Visions proved popular, and when renters expressed interest in purchasing, Luke and Mary decided to start selling recumbents. Sales started slowly, with just six bikes the first year, but grew rapidly each year.

Within a few years, increasing recumbent sales made it clear that the business would have split in two parts: rentals and sales. So, four years ago the couple remodeled a nearby former small print shop into Calhoun Cycle, a recumbent-only shop in Minneapolis' revitalized uptown area. Sales have continued to increase, and Luke now has fourteen employees between the two businesses. The rental business remains one of the keys to the shop's success. Luke says that "people who experience recumbents for the first time at Calhoun Rental often become customers of Calhoun Cycle."

Luke is a tall, lean, hard-core bicycle tourist who has toured from Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Santiago, Chile (a tour of some 1,600 miles, part of it over the towering Andes Mountains). He has also toured New Zealand four times. Originally a wedgie rider, he is now a devoted recumbent enthusiast. That's not just because he sells them, but because one day several years ago he noticed that the touring recumbent riders didn't seem to have the same aches and pains at the end of the day as other riders. So he experimented with a Vision R44 on a tour, and has been a recumbent user ever since.

The Evolution Revolution

Part of Calhoun Cycle's success is due to Luke's engaging personality, honest approach, and dedication to serving his customers, not to mention the steadily increasing popularity of recumbent bicycles. But another part of the shop's success has been Luke's bent for invention.

Luke, who apparently has more than a little Thomas Edison in his veins, seems determined to improve recumbent bicycling without waiting for manufacturers to improve their products. Calhoun Cycle markets a creative and intriguing line of ingenious recumbent accessories Luke has designed, all lumped under the name Evolution (you can check them out at the Calhoun Cycle website, www.calhouncycle.com).

Calhoun Cycle's Evolution line of recumbent accessories started five years ago with recumbent jerseys. Conventional bicycle jerseys with rear pockets may be fine when you're crouched over the handlebars of a road bike, but they don't do you much good when you're leaning back on a recumbent seat. So Luke worked with a clothing manufacturer to come up with bike jerseys with side pockets.

There's nothing wrong wearing MTB shorts on a mountain bike, with your legs pointed downward. But with your legs parallel to the ground on a recumbent, the flaring shorts make good bee-catchers. So Luke came up with a line of recumbent shorts with straps that prevent you from finding an angry yellow jacket

in an area you'd rather not be hosting him.

Recumbent-oriented clothing remains Calhoun Cycle's most popular part of the Evolution line, though Luke soon branched out to other accessories. One BikeE tourist complained of recumbent butt after long rides, so Luke designed mounting hardware to install a RANS seat base to a BikeE seat. The popular BikeE line didn't have a kickstand two years ago, so Luke designed and installed them for his BikeE customers. With BikeE now out of business, the Evolution seat base will make a great replacement seat pad for BikeE owners.

The Evolution line of accessories keeps growing. The latest addition is a stem/handlebar combination for a RANS Stratus that will make it much easier to handle at low speeds. The stem/bar will also fit the Tailwind, Wave, and V2.

Luke has retooled so many accessories for recumbents that he sometimes can't remember them all. When I bought a BikeE RX from him last year, the new Evolution handlebars placed the bar-end mirror in an awkward position, so I asked Luke what he could do about it. He provided another mirror that mounted smoothly on the sharply slanted handlebars. Only when I interviewed Luke for this article did I discover that the new mirror wasn't a stock item but one he'd quickly whipped out in his shop to solve the problem.

Growing Business

Calhoun Cycle has been growing steadily since the shop opened, a result both of the increasing popularity of recumbents and the shop's growing reputation as *the* place to buy a recumbent. Customers come from as far as 200 miles away. The shop currently carries RANS, BikeE, Vision, Bacchetta, and Burley recumbent bicycles and Catrike and Trice recumbent trikes. Luke isn't looking to expand the lines he carries, though he will if a manufacturer of a quality recumbent gives dealers good support; instead, he counts more on increasing sales of the current lines, along with the Evolution products, to keep the business profitable.



Calhoun Cycle in Minneapolis (photo by Don Picard)

He is adding one line of products, however, that isn't recumbent-oriented: folding bicycles. Calhoun Cycle currently sells the Dahon, Airimal, and Birdie brands. This gives the shop a start on a another unique niche.

Luke and Mary have three daughters, ages 1, 4, and 6. The odds they'll grow up to be recumbent bicyclists are pretty good. He and Mary have already taken the older two on a bicycle tour of New Zealand, towed behind a tandem in a Burley d'Lite trailer. This year Luke is putting his tinkering genius to work on a new family project—creating a family tandem where a 6-year-old can pedal along with the adults and add some power to the operation. You might call it the evolution of tandem bicycles, a la Calhoun Cycle. ♦

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Easy Racers: Our Customers Speak

SUBJECT: How Does That Thing Climb? April 4, 2001

Just a quick update on the Gold Rush Replica that I purchased about two months ago. Great!!! The weather in Cincinnati is just starting to break. I have over 900 miles on my trainer since February, and about 120 miles on the GRR. With the weather breaking the GRR should see about 150 miles a week.

The GRR becomes more of a blast the more I ride it. I did my first climb out of the river valley where our major bike path is located. Everyone warned me that I would be in trouble on a climb. So I was somewhat apprehensive as I started the 1.5-mile climb out of the valley.

First, I never got out of the mid chainring. I think I could have stayed in the large (53). I held between 13 and 17 mph for most of the climb. I never dropped below 11 mph. I was very impressed. I have climbed this hill hundreds of times on my Trek OCLV and felt far worse at the top of the climb than on the GRR.

As a matter of fact, I felt great on the GRR!!! No back pain; nothing. The ride back down was a hoot. I had a friend with me (about 5 minutes behind me up the hill) as I descended down into the valley. I was hitting 40 mph without moving my legs, and using the brakes into the turns because I was not sure what to expect from the GRR at speed around the turns. My friend had to pedal like a madman and he still couldn't keep up. The GRR felt like a sports car going down the hill. What fun!!! I wish I had started



*Double Century Man, Ron Bobb
out training for the Terrible Two*

this 30 years ago instead of my mid fifties!!!!

Best regards,
Doug Pendery

**SUBJECT: GRR Update
April 25, 2001**

This past Saturday I rode with a few friends that have conventional racing bikes (Wedgies; I think you call them). We climbed out of the valley up the Route 48 hill. This climb goes for about 1.5 miles. I pulled my friends up the hill at about 18 miles per hour and crested at over 20 mph. Needless to say they were out of their saddles trying to stay up. I must say I was winded, but so were they. Their comment was, "I guess your recumb-bent doesn't have a problem going up hills."

In my younger days (about 8 years ago) I would have pushed myself to my limit to go 18 miles per hour up this hill on my Trek OCLV. My point is the GRR is a great recumbent. I enjoy going up hills on it more than my OCLV. I am more relaxed, my back doesn't hurt, and my legs aren't killing me from being out of the saddle trying to lever the OCLV up a hill.

By the way I had a tailwind on one stretch of the ride. I managed to get up to 36 mph in the flats. Nobody passed me . . . It was a real hoot!!!

Best regards,
Doug Pendery

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