

## NIGHTRIDER, WINTER FUN?

In the early 70's when 10 speeds hit big in our little town, my group of peers practically lived on our bikes. Many a late summer eve was spent racing about at break neck speeds in under-lit madness. At night, all seemed to move faster, adding to the thrill of riding. Of course after a day of 100-degree plus temps it was sheer comfort to ride in the cooling night air. We stumbled into night riding simply because we wanted to make every summer day count. We knew eventually we would all grow up and become like our parents, sitting at home watching the tube. That seemed much less exciting compared to exploring our little berg in the cover of darkness. We rode bargain basement 10 speeds without helmets or lights. At night we could move swift and silent, almost invisible. How we survived such hazard prone conditions is probably just a mix of dumb luck, quick reflexes and good night vision. A couple of traits bound to be wearing thin as I now approach my 50th birthday.

Despite the onset of years the allure of night riding is still there. The peace and quiet that becomes a small Kansas town is there for bikers, walkers and runners alike to enjoy. So I am not alone with this pleasure, only few to none seem to be out in this after 5:00 PM darkness in the depths of winter.

The winter night ride is something a recumbent rider can enjoy with a little investment in lighting and clothing. You don't have to go spendy on lights or clothing. For less than \$100 I found a good head and tail light. Clothing you most likely have, but if it is typical biker colors, predominately black, you may want to consider some lighter colors, and garment bound reflectors.

For my headlight I use the NiteRider Road Rat. It provides over two hours of bright beam and comes with a charger. The instructions say to charge after every use for the best battery life, and to NEVER go over three months without a charge, or the battery could be damaged beyond repair. Charging is convenient; just keep your bike near an outlet, and leave it plugged in until the next ride.

A Serfas LED type taillight clips right to a strap on the Streamline tail pack. It features 3 settings, on and a slow and fast blink. I am not sure which pattern to use, but currently prefer the slowest blink setting, thinking it attracts the most attention and extends battery life.

Of course the back of my bike seat is adorned with reflectors, which provide even more rear illumination, which I feel is the more important of the two. My reason is simple; you have more control over what is coming at you than what is coming from behind.

My night rides are short sprints, typically 20 to 30 minutes. Pushing hard for a few minutes so I can be home just about when the sweat starts to be a factor. To keep warm I wear tights under warm-ups, with a light T-shirt, a light fleece jacket and a Gore-Tex breaker. A thin stocking cap under the helmet and a pair of gloves round out the outfit. If it is really cold I wear a light weight parka over a long-john top, and T-shirt. There are times it is just too nasty out to ride, then one must be content with alternate forms of riding such using a wind trainer.

Winter night riding can be enjoyable, but please respect it; there are some real hazards. I only ride on well-known streets free of snow and ice. To make things even safer, try riding laps in a well-lighted vacant parking lot. My favorite spot is a couple blocks away, and belongs to the local Hospital Physical Therapy Group; they don't seem to mind. During the laps I find it easy to let the stress of the day roll off, and my mind drift, since traffic is not a factor. After about 20 to 30 laps it is time to depart.

I still marvel at the great handling the low center of gravity the recumbent offers. I whip around the light poles at steep angles. Always a few cars slowly troll by wondering what idiot is out on such a cold night, but from where I sitting I am plenty warm and feeling totally alive. Night riding in the winter, not for everyone, but fun for a few, try it only if you can do it safely, because we want you around this spring.

Footnote: Bike used for this riding RANS V2 with the new riser and bar set up, other wise stock.

Randy Schlitter

*INTO THE RIDE*