

INTO THE RIDE #11

The Emerging Recumbent Rider

By Randy Schlitter

A war is waging. You know the war between the roadies and recumbents. Shame on us for being at odds, why be at war when we should be at play? Anyone out riding should be treated with respect, regardless the type of bike. Still the battles wage, but we are winning. Winning the clever way, by truly enjoying our mounts, by riding them a lot! By being very visible, and sometimes too vocal. But the true secret weapon is the modern production recumbent! It's a great bike, and getting better!

The advent of higher and higher performance bikes has brought the athletic rider into the picture. On the surface it may not look too big, but it is. It is the movement we have been waiting for.

With the emergence of the performance rider, a new level of development will ensue. As in any sport the degree of refinement and value is directly in proportion to the number of participants. Think about it, up-right bikes are a great value. They weigh less with fancier components for less cost compared to recumbents. They bristle with innovations and hardware created specifically for them. There are few items in the cycling world that are recumbent specific. Why? The numbers don't make sense. Not yet anyway. But it is starting to sway. As this new recumbent rider emerges, the hardware will follow.

You will see brakes, cranks, derailleur, chains, and all types of new items designed just for the recumbent. It means a future filled with exciting new ideas and increasing purchasing power from the recumbent dollar.

At InterBike 2003 I talked with several manufactures about recumbent specific hardware. All were very receptive, and curious about what our specific needs are. To design something specific for recumbents simply fascinates them. Take helmets for instance. They are in general made for riders who hold their heads in a forehead low position. A recumbent rider's head is just the opposite. Why not make a helmet that takes this into consideration? As much as manufactures hunger for something new to toot about, I would think this would bring about a bountiful opportunity of 'new'.

Of course there has to be merit for it to sell. Just sticking on a label is not enough, but actually analyzing the problem for the recumbent environment will result in new solutions.

Helmets are not the only things I would change. Our brakes are either an ATB rooted devices or an orphaned road brake. At least one recumbent bike maker is making a brake with their name on it. And from the looks of it, is recumbent specific.

Demand for supply works because there are other examples of recumbent specific hardware. Look at the fine selection of 20" and 26" tires. And 20" forks in carbon trimmed to the barest, lightest form are also recumbent specific items.

I pitched to a crank maker they ought to be making us a recumbent crank and he asked why or how could it be different and I dryly said because we are sitting down!

Such a basic observation made by a group of intelligent designers is bound to create some great hardware. The only way it can become real is if the numbers keep climbing. Here is where we, the die hard, the veteran recumbent rider come in. We need to be true to our sport, invite in the roadie, and make them feel welcome. Don't knock their current choice in riding device. Instead be ladies and gentlemen, and politely share our wares. You can't believe the profound effect a light bike has on people. At the close of InterBike I was wheeling two bikes out the door. I was stopped at the top of the steps, getting ready to take both bikes down. A young man offered to help. Just from his build and clothing you could tell he was a to-the-core cyclist. I intentionally let him carry the V2 Formula, he quickly ran it down the steps and on the way up I heard him tell his buddies, "Wow that thing was light, I bet it goes like hell!"

"Going like hell" has got to manifest itself into a racing organization. Such an organization would exist only to promote recumbents and racing them. The IHPVA is a fine organization, and covers a whole spectrum of wonderful machines, but the production recumbent still has no society for its promotion.

With a Recumbent Cyclist of America (RCA) staging races, the ingredients for advancing the sport would be in place. Racing inspires and justifies ideas; the ideas that work in racing often trickle down as benefits for all riders. It would result in more recumbent for your money.

Racing would bring depth and unity to the sport of recumbent riding, it would be the added element the athletic rider could not resist. It would remove one of the last sacred territories road bikes enjoy, a large and strong racing organization. What then would be the excuse?

Depth to this sport has long been needed. Organized racing is a natural direction. This is my plea for someone or a group to step up to the plate and take a swing at it. I know our firm will support in both sponsorships and aggressive R&D to bring about more and more advanced forms of recumbents. We want this war to stop; a recumbent racing organization could do the trick. With such an organization the emerging recumbent rider will have more than a fast, comfortable bike; they will have honor, prestige, and reward, in addition to a wonderful lifetime activity.

INTO THE RIDE