

INTO THE RIDE #20

FUSION EVOLUTION

By Randy Schlitter



I must confess...I have been cheating on my recumbents. Another bike has managed to further ignite the simple sheer fun of cycling. Sure the sleek and sexy Force 5, the formidable Formula, and the time honored Stratus diligently wait for my attention, and try I do, but the attraction is undeniable. The bike causing this pedal attraction is the Fusion! Yes, this humble little bike has grown capable and prow by way of constant evolution... “tweaking” as we say. The stock model is a potent machine that has caught owners by surprise. Most purchase the bike for want of a comfy riding, short haul rig, but are finding the Fusion has an appetite for the open road.

The latest addition to our line of Fusions features straight tubes and dual 650 wheels. In this form the hunger for road miles was grumbling too loud not to be satisfied. And that is how it began, just the two of us, alone on the open road, almost a happenstance entry into my heart, but one soon earned by surprising performance and undeniable comfort.

The test rides through the flats, hills, winds, and combination through of, produced average speeds of 15 MPH. My excitement was hard to contain, and I knew this affair would soon be public. Sure enough, having been discovered, I was joined by my trusty riding partner, who has also succumbed to the Fusions seductions. With a little drafting, coupled with our competitive nature we soon were turning in 17 MPH plus average speeds. This is very encouraging since the bikes are far short of an average road bike in component pedigree. And the riders? Well it should suffice to say, we are still working on getting in shape.

But that is the part of the attraction, getting in shape has been fun. Spending several hours at a time on this bike has also let us become intimate with the comfort factor. The cushiness of our standard foam seat is replaced with the firm foam of our featherweight cushion. The added firmness can call for some “recirculation” moves. It is a small trade off for the comfort.

The love affair deepened as I relearned the joy of body English, something that can only be in minor play on bents. That long ago engrained body English used when riding conventional cycles comes flooding back on the Fusion. With the latest Dual 650 version I can ride standing up. It is clumsy and *not* going to pull you up a hill, but the point is: I can stand up! Jumping on and riding is retro to my Stingray days, as is the flat-footed stance at stoplights. Those all conspire to make a user-friendly bike, and for short people, extremely user friendly.

Standing on the pedals is not for climbing, that is inherent to bar placement, but I have had minor success hopping the bike over potholes, and in time I should have both tires levitating. Where is all this leading is to? Perhaps the most attractive element of this style of bike: it has no learning curve. You simply get on and go. Add with the ease of adjusting seat and bars, and fun handling, you get a bike that is not only comfortable, but super fun to ride. The speed adds “the piece ‘de resistance”. Most ride the Fusion just for fun, speed or not, but add in the some speed, and well the fun factor hits the roof.

Why or how could such a modest bike be speedy? Several factors combine: 1. Low center of gravity, this helps by making it faster in the corners, and less aerodynamic drag, your legs are at least 8” less vertical, reducing the plate drag area. 2. It is a light machine, compared to bents; it is easy to make it weigh less than 28 pounds. 3. Fast to climb, since it is light, you can fly up hills, the bars set just above the knees allow you to pull into the pedals. The effect is an outstanding aid in climbing and near equal to standing on the pedals. 4. Less chain to keep moving, it requires more energy to keep mass moving, again lighter is better. 5. Great engine cooling! When sitting upright your torso is 90 degrees to the breeze, you are cool and powerful. 6. You can get “aero” provided your belly is small, pedaling in the “tuck” position is not super efficient, but possible. The drag picture is very low, lower than on a standard road bike.

What does this all really mean? It means you are having a blast, riding is fun and convenient, easy to access, easy to load, carry, put on work stands, and all the while my body is not protesting. The clever geometry of this bike keeps pressure off my hands, the seat is huge, so the rear of things is not splitting in half, my back and abs are getting in better shape than ever, see # 15 in the summary. It means there is a new way to ride on the block, and you will enjoy it so much you will find it hard to stay on the block. Yes the bents are great machines, and yes I do feel them glaring at me for cheating on them, but I remember a time about 3 decades ago, I got the same look from my two road bikes...ah! Love is such a fickle thing! Until next month, stay safe, and stay *into the ride!*



Author's Note:

Does this infatuation with the Fusion place recumbents in less of the lime light? Of course not. The simple fact remains more ways to ride and actually enjoy cycling help grow the sport. The affair slant of this article is merely to dramatize the big kick we are getting out of developing cycling products, so ride on, the recumbent still creates a gleam in my eye, and provide a hard to beat mount for comfort and speed.

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Summary of Fusion Test Ride Impressions as of 7-21-04

1. Easy to climb hills, no need to stand on the pedals to climb, simply pull back on the bars to "dig in" and up you go. It has been giving my shoulders and biceps more definition from doing this! Standing is possible, I use this move to air out my fanny every hour or so, and try to bunny hop holes.
2. Easy to get on and off.
3. No learning curve, just jump on and ride.
4. Handling is like a DF, but lower so more fun to corner.
5. Sprints easy, so start ups at lights are fun too! This is big in instilling rider confidence, many bent riders dread starts in heavy traffic, and this bike is like old times, sprints at stoplights, weaving in and around traffic like a messenger in NYC.
6. You can use most the "body English" that you use on a DF.
7. More effective "engine" cooling. This plays big on hard rides in heat, and long climbs, where speeds are low that drag is nil-factor.
8. Low seat height makes reaching the ground easy.
9. A little more streamlined than a DF since crank is fwd, the legs produce less drag, you can "tuck" for even less drag and still pedal if your belly is not too big!
10. Cost, this type of bike should be lower in cost to build, since on bents a big part of the cost is the seat frame and attachment hardware. The Fusion sports a simple seat adjusts that is very fast, rugged, and reliable.
11. Transport, it is a compact unit, and fits in normal DF racks, both on cars and in the bike shop for service, easy to carry up stairs!
12. Light in weight. The Fusions are easily less than 29 pounds. Fusions in the less than 20-pound range are within easy reach. Even around 17 pounds will be not out of the picture.
13. Very acceptable performance, ride comparisons between bents and DF's show the Fusion holding its own. Part of the performance is how fast riders adapt to the bike, they are confident pushing the bike to the limits within minutes of riding it for the first time.
14. Safety: The Fusion has a lower CG; this makes it corner well and be very tough to do a header. See 17. Don't see 18!
15. Back savers, the seating position will at first, if you do not have any tummy muscles, result in some minor lower back pain. This is primarily due to the workout it can give your abs. Every time you pull on the bars it contracts the abs. This results in some lower back pain from the muscles prior to getting in shape. Please ride through! In a few hours of riding, especially in hills you will notice a flatter stomach and the back pain will be gone. Of course you must take care in setting up the bike that you

are not over or under reaching for the bars. I have found leaning forward will bring relief for any back fatigue. Be careful at first not to pull too hard when climbing, your back may not be in shape, this will increase potential back discomfort.

16. Without a backrest you remain more comfy, since you are not sweating and soaking your back

17. Loves gravel and sand roads. Even with not really the best tires for the intent, the long wheelbase and low CG make loose surface riding hardly a challenge, although you have to still pay attention. Look for a whole ITR on country road riding with Fusions in the future.

18. Hey look mom, no hands, you can say that just about anytime on a Fusion.

*Look for exciting new offerings for the Fusion model this fall.



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