

INTO THE RIDE #21

Force 5: End of Season Reportcard Triangles Rule!

By Randy Schlitter



You can tell me until you are blue in the face about all the virtues of mono-tube frame design, but ask “How many mono-tube frames were raced in the Tour de France?” You cannot beat the power and beauty of the triangle. It literally holds up our world! Simply put, triangles rule, and the Force 5 is the odd man out in the current high-racer offerings. I like to think that sort of separation will last, but that would be extremely naive.

The triangle frame is the answer when it comes to low weight and high strength. Tuning such a frame is an art that has been ongoing since road bikes hit the road. Ride quality is a direct outcome of such tuning, and with a trussed frame it is easy to tune, predict and react. Triangles rule in this regard over other structures just in the predictability and economy of experiment. Odd section tubes take tooling and added cost, slowing the process, and maybe committing a firm to over selling virtues whether they exist or not.

An article in a bent magazine quoted a designer about how “draggy” a trussed frame is because the tubes “hang out” in the slipstream. Actual drag off these tubes can be measured and shown that extra power is indeed required to push them along. But the total bike drag may not be any different at all. When you factor in turbulence of two feet cranking away, in combination with the front wheel, and fork assembly: the rest of the frame appears to be drafting off this bow wave; therefore you could make a few drag sins and still not lose performance. In our case we can build a responsive frame that will handle a wide range of rider weight. Some of the heavier riders have raved about the feel of this bike. The most noted comment is the energy transfer.

Owner feed back indicates the great handling has been realized. However something noted by many riders is sprint brace shock. It was the one thing we had in common with ALL brands of high racers using the extreme laid back position. It places more of the upper torso directly over the loading point of most seat braces. Thus you will get more road shock transferred direct to your back. Bottom line score: high 90’s, higher if you could insulate the sprint brace shock.

The Z-seat was a 50/50 deal to begin with, so our score here is very high. Many opted to try it over the proven offering and did not swap out. Noting continued rides they developed a liking for the seat. It was never sold as a cure all for bent seating. It is a racing seat, and the bottom line is it works for some and not others. We are ok with this and provide options, such as the Formula seat at no extra cost.

Hard shell seats? Sure why not. We are testing an adaptor kit that may mount to several brands of such seats. A posting to this extent will be provided once a conclusion is reached.

This is a light bike, within 3 pounds of ti-framed units. So the score again was high. In one case an owner reported a lower weight over a ti-frame fitted equally for a ride. This may be due to different weights in bags, but the all up ready to roll weight was one pound less! The fact is the F-5 XP is light and cost effective to boot. We are proud that we can peel back a bit of the cost barrier and enjoy this fine sport. Thanks for the support and feedback on this. High marks in this case since steel rides and cost nice.

Climbing: The F-5 excels here, and again a good score. The odd thing is the weights are three pounds more than some ti-frame bikes. Yet it goes uphill like it has reverse gravity. It comes back to the frame and the wonderfully tuned power transfer. You can dig in and let it rip, the thing goes up the hill without giving up the thrust to flex. Nice trait in any bike, even better in a bent.

Low and high speed handling: At the bottom end this bike is getting lots of good comments. The instant rider friendly feel has first time F-5 riders zipping about demo rides like veterans. This makes the F-5 a great first time bent. It does not have the huge learning curve of something with lots of wheel flop and over steer. As speed builds the handling stays the same, responsive and light. It does not stiffen much at all at speed, staying predictable throughout the speed range. Handling may be personal when it comes to bents, but we tried to follow standard design angles on head and rake to allow use of the many forks offered for 650c wheels. This has been largely successful as several frame set owners will concur. Freedom to customize is the American way.

Drive chain: No idler on the pull side would have been great, but that would have put the seat too high. Instead there is as minimal deflection possible in the top chain. The end result...the best drive system among the high-racers as one ride test journalist emailed us. There were some issues with idlers being eaten by a few hammerheads. To you guys, thanks for showing a weakness that may never have come through with the puny HP I muster to the pedals.

Bars and Risers: The forward bar position scored well into the 99% range. A few sales were undoubtedly lost due to not having a flip-it option. I still hold fast to not needing to add such a feature. Having a solid steer tube connection helps in the climb by better load transfer and lower weight. Most were able to find a fit with the standard issue bars, however wider bars may be in the offering to better fit the larger leg sizes.

So where is it all leading? The F-5 has almost one season behind it. Our report card looks good, not perfect but good. We pleased most, and tried hard in all cases, giving it our best. Frustration on having slow production vs. high demand is a problem we hope to solve in the off months. We are producing a number of bikes now, hoping we have plenty of stock for 05. It was an exciting year for RANS, the F-5 brought in many new and old clients and ushered in a new age of performance riding. One that you can bet I will strive to massage into even more fun and exciting products. Thanks for the feedback, ride safe and stay into the ride. - RJS

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