

INTO THE RIDE #23

Back Road Adventures by Randy Schlitter



A favorite form of riding in our parts is back road treks. These wonderfully quiet routes are interrupted only by the occasional tractor, truck or farm resident sedan. Out on the back roads you can really get into the countryside. Kansas is always belting out some subtle beauty no matter the time of year. Because of the sand top surface, back roads can be a challenge for the average road bike. A set of cycle cross tires will pretty much set you up for such riding, however one bike RANS now offers, that seems made for the job, is the new Dynamik. This bike is a curious blend of cruiser, MTB, and semi-recumbent. Sounds like a strange mix of concepts, but the end product is quite versatile and well adapted to many riding venues.

To prove the potency of our new Dynamik we attended a couple local rides. Our first ride was a group of 16. A mix of mountain, cross, cruisers and one tandem recumbent made the field. Location: a few miles north of Russell, Kansas, in the midst of the Saline River Valley. Hills would be par for the day. Distance one-way: 21 miles through hilly sand roads. The mission: Ride to a café in Paradise, Kansas for lunch and return. The course out and back would be different, so new sites the whole way. It would be a fun ride, with lots of ups and downs and a test for handling as sand thickened and down hill runs end in sharp turns.

With two Dynamiks on the ride it would be a great way to compare first hand handling and overall performance against conventional bikes. To measure our personal performance against a handful of young bucks on cycle cross bikes was going to be challenging. Either way my aircraft engineer and I looked forward to a few hours of riding in the beautiful Saline River Valley. Autumn was doing its thing to the tress, winter wheat was a deep green, and feed crops were adding nice rust, so it was colorful and pungent with fall smells.

Off at 10:00 the first three miles soon separated out the stronger riders, hills have a way of doing that. The Dynamiks were in their element, and we hung with the lead pack, which soon dwindled to my lone self. It was a ride not a race, so the pace was not as keyed up. However, I wanted to see what kind of average speed I could hold, and in the end compare it to the other riders.

Road conditions were varied, from hard packed to deep, loose sand. I noticed the smaller tired bikes were leaving some interesting furrows in the deeper stuff. We all sought out the thinnest areas to avoid the energy bleed. No doubt the very in shape riders had me, but they were not interested in being first into Paradise, so after about 10 miles I was a lone rider way out front. Later we would learn our average times were pretty close. What that translates into is the Dynamik is not only well suited for

this type of ride, but efficient at an average speed of 12.6 MPH through 21 miles of hills, curves and often thick sand. What was also very impressive is the high-speed handling. Highest trip speed was 34 MPH; speeds near this were often experienced on the many downhill runs that also dished out loads of loose sand at the least desired points. To my joy the Dynamik took it all in stride, the long wheelbase and low CG help to keep it stable. You do need to keep it loose that makes control easy and much more fun. Getting uptight on any high-speed descent is a recipe for a crash. Stay loose and in control.

Our engineer rolled in on the tail of the lead group, which was more or less playing tag with the lone tandem recumbent on the ride. This was a new experience for him, and the months we spent riding and testing the new bikes paid off with a pretty impressive performance. He stated the bike was easy to climb through the hills and control on the descents. I bugged out of Paradise before the group of hardcore riders and kept at least a 15 minute lead. The average speed this return leg was approaching 13.2 MPH, the hills were just a tad less, and the winds mostly cross.

The second group ride occurred a couple weeks later and was much more grueling. Taking place in and around Great Bend, Kansas, a location that would offer up river paths, a trail at a dried up lake, and an amazingly twisted trail in and around a creek on private property. The course was indeed a nice variety pack. The concept of the ride was simple: Ride 45 to 60 miles some on country roads with stops at off road trail sites to run as many laps as you cared. Conditions were ideal, mild temps and a stiff westerly breeze. The wind was only a drag on the 5 and 8 mile hauls between the off road junkets.

Over 50 riders were at the start of a purely mountain bike equipped crowd. I was a little leery about the trails, but experienced riders were describing them as mild. The Dynamik attracted plenty of positive comments. Many had a hard time placing it in a category, most were happy to qualify it as a cruiser.

I hung with the lead pack until a low tire needed attention. The leak was slow enough that an occasional pump up was still less time invested than patching or replacing. The roads were the familiar sand-topped dirt roads. Compared to the off road segments they were merely the dues paid to get to the next fun spot. Our first trail segment was along the sandy banks of the river that borders the city's south edge. This trail was well within the Dynamik's capacity, being easy to stay with the lead pack.

The road dash to the dried lake was when the slow leak started costing me position. At the dried lake the whole group reconnected as we did laps. Again the Dynamik was right at home. The lead group however was long gone by the time I finished the two laps around the lake.

The long haul to the next play zone seemed to drag as the wind took its toll on cruise speed. This trail was new and rough, with pronounced washboard. The stiff fork on the Dynamik was sending strong messages to my hands and shoulders. Adding a suspension fork is something on the list, and highly requested. I can understand the need, but it was a fun experiment to go without. The second off road trail was tougher on me than the bike. Not being as fresh, I gingerly navigated the route at a pace more becoming of my age, letting the under 20 crowd discover what parts of their bodies were or were not bullet proof. Actually the only segment that hampered progress was a near vertical drop into a creek bed. I had strong flash backs to the days I challenged identical terrain on a simple ten-speed.

Test rides of the Dynamik with the shock fork are proving a blast. The bike becomes a much more capable off road machine. I would still restrict it to mild trails and you won't be disappointed. The front sprocket clearance is better with suspension fork, but not as good as you get with a shorter wheel based MTB. So

stay off the mountains, unless you like dragging your crank.



Connected directly to the second off road zone was the third off road trail. This was a great place to play, fairly flat with back winding trails, neat little dips and climbs, and all through, the Dynamik remained a faithful ally. Only a couple hairpin turns were a little tight for my extended wheelbase. The biggest worry was striking the front sprocket, which happened on several log jumps. I must say Truativ is building one tough crank, even after several strikes it turns true. More crank clearance will be created with the addition on of a shock fork.

Standing to climb or control the bike was no problem; however I tended to stay seated more than on a standard MTB. The large seat would on occasion impact my seat, but never with enough force to cause concern. Shifting my weight to the extreme aft position for steep descents was no problem once you learn to slide your thighs over the top of the seat.

I ended the ride with a total of 50 miles and an average speed of 11.9 MPH. I was pretty blown by the time I rolled into Great Bend; an early season knee pain was back in force. This seems to crop up when doing a lot of hard climbs, no matter what I am riding. I do not claim to be a hammerhead, or a world-class rider. What is nice to know, I am about average or a little below that of a typical bike enthusiast. So the performance I managed from this bike is realistic.

The bike I rode on the rides is exactly like what we will be shipping, so this is a very valid experience. The conclusion is the Dynamik is going to be a great bike for mild trails, as it was intended. It is not a full out replacement for your MTB, however if you are looking for a fun change of pace, this bike will offer you a whole new feel and ride that just may become your primary rig, especially if seeking a bike that will treat your fanny and palms with less pain and suffering. Until next time ride safe and stay into the ride! - RJS

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