

## INTO THE RIDE #26

**Tailwind**  
*The*  
**Original Compact Wheel Base**

**by Randy Schlitter**



11 years old the prototype Tailwind is still going strong.

In 1993 a design effort was launched to create a recumbent bike that would break the price paradigm, have entry level handling, and still retain good performance. The effort culminated into a recumbent called the Tailwind. The original Tailwind was based off a 1.5" x 1.5" square tube. The bike was sheer simplicity, MIG welded and powdered coated in single stage color, decked with good functioning components the humble little Tailwind carved out a niche, creating the compact wheelbase market.

The bike was stark. The single thin square beam gave it a utility look, and added to the spunky attitude. Test rides showed it to be an easy bike for beginners, many first time riders took their turn, quick to adapt. I remember tearing about our back 40, topping the small dam behind the plant. I later learned one of our sales team had been making regular trips into the rough. This was also accompanied with an admission of trail riding. I should have guessed as much, since the prototype was sporting a pair of knobby 20" tires.

Our local creek has some trails that add up to some respectable off road riding. Dotted with many small climbs and twisting turns, it does not seem recumbent friendly. I was both not believing and hoping it was for real at the same time. In the end it turned out that humble little prototype was very capable of off road excursion. Although it was no mountain bike just the fact we could make it up the knob hills, scamper down, corner in loose dirt, all without crashing was pretty darn satisfying! The only thing was the pounding your back gets, since there was no suspension or the chance to stand over the seat. From that impression of the early Tailwind we knew it had a character that would be well loved.

Those first Tailwinds were outfitted with fiberglass bucket seats, but that soon gave way to the mesh seat, and other changes. The square tube frame was something people were not accepting as well as they are today, and it was a bit heavy. We loved it for production ease, but shaving off some weight and making the bike look less like a stick was appealing. The new frame sported a 1.5" round main tube with chain stays that ran all the way to the bottom bracket. The presence of the chain stays helped with the addition of something else the very simple Tailwind was missing, an idler. To top it off the bucket seat was replaced with the mesh seat, and the basic form of today's Tailwind was born.

The refinements were very well received and soon some shops were ordering impressive numbers. The price point, quality, great features, and fun handling made it an easy sell. More nice changes were to

come, along with a little brother.

RANS began producing bikes in Taiwan in 1997. The Tailwind was a perfect design to break in the new source. At this point Taiwan was searching for the next big thing in bikes, and was very receptive to building our product. Better bikes, lower prices, and more products was the outcome of our Taiwan connection. Today we run a split mix, producing many bikes in Hays to reinforce inventory and keep our production skills sharp.

With so many bikes getting into the hands of eager riders, we soon had some great feedback, recognition, and even a category. Coined a CWB by RCN, the Tailwind was the original compact wheelbase. The feedback carved out an even nicer bike over the years, and recognition happened to come from some pretty high profile sources. In the May/June 1999 issue of Consumers Digest the RANS Tailwind earned "Best Buy" status from publisher Randy Weber as having outstanding value for today's consumer. In 2004 Bicycle Magazine the Tailwind made editor's choice.



*The 2005 Tailwind is a well defined and refined machine, which still compliments the original goal of a simple, fun, value packed bike.*

Now our humble bike was boasting a bossy 2" main tube and nicer components and still priced under a grand. That was when its little brother the Wave came along. Based on the Tailwind, the Wave started life with a 16" front wheel and a 20" rear. I always loved the way the smaller front wheel made that bike handle. The Wave was even lower in price, and all-out fun to jinx about. It was not a speedster, and we soon found people preferred to spend a bit more and get the Tailwind. So much like its namesake the Wave came and went, the Tailwind remained.

Today's Tailwind sports a bit higher price. It took a while but we finally had to slip over that one grand mark. Today we are exploring ways to improve the Tailwind even further. I see many bikes there now, but few have the quality and features of a Tailwind. Often cheaper will not workout over time if quality is not there, so we are slow to jump into a pricing war, and remain on target, aiming to make the best bike for the bucks.

What is in store for the future of the Tailwind? We have tested a 20"x 26" and the feedback was interesting. The result was a lower priced V2. A large contingent of riders love the 20 x 20 format. It makes the bike a bit more compact and therefore remains one of the few truly compacts out there.



This concept bike, a 20 x 26 Tailwind never hit the market, but resulted in a down priced V2.

The prototype Tailwind is owned by one of our employees. It still is a fun ride just the way it rolled out of the plant so many years ago. Maybe what is welded into that stark and simple frame is a bit of that grass roots savvy that has always been a big part of our design work. I remember drawing up the Tailwind and showing it to our crew, it had a warm fuzzy feeling, we liked it, it was instantly friendly, and so “doable”. That is the essence of such a bike, the attempt to create something that would be more affordable to ride, and help spread the fun. Just like its name the Tailwind has been a bike that has helped push RANS into the forefront of recumbent design, and what was so interesting no pretense was made about it being ground breaking, record busting, or otherwise a super hotrod. Only a simple bike you can afford to buy and fun to ride. Maybe that is the best performance in the end.

Until next time stay safe, and stay into the ride! -RJS

*INTO THE RIDE*