

## INTO THE RIDE #28

### ***Our Short Wheel Base Family*** **by Randy Schlitter**

Our family of short wheel base bikes includes a well- rounded selection. Based around three distinct frames styles, there is the Rocket with its spunky size sporting dual 20” wheels, the very refined and loved V-Rex, and our newest addition, fast pacing Force 5 in two versions, the LE and XP.

RANS started making short wheel base bikes in 1994 when the V-Rex entered production. As our first short wheelbase, the V-Rex honed our skills at addressing the problems and tributes associated with this configuration. Designs popular at the time featured fixed seat locations and moving booms.

A different approach was to give the seating a CG range (center of gravity). We got quite a bit of criticism how the bike would drastically change handling from one size rider to the next. Actual experience showed otherwise. The ease of seat adjustment, plus a longer wheelbase, was a hit with the riding public.



A longer wheelbase than other short wheelbase bikes of the time made the moving seat concept work.

Moving the seat also allowed above seat steering to become mainstay among short wheel base designs. Limitations imposed on a short wheel base designs by under the seat steering included wheelbase, increased aero drag, weight distribution, and seat height. Fixing the seat and moving the boom is typical of under seat steer, to allow the front wheel to be close enough to steer without extended tiller. You can make all the fun of the V-Rex Praying Hamster hands position you want, but by practice, it is a position most know only too well from driving a car. Above seat steering is the more practical, lighter, and less failure prone choice. NOTE: Some Rocket and V-Rex owners flip the riser around, so the curve points forward. This opens the cockpit, and extends the arms a bit. If you try this, be ready to re-cable the handlebars, since the stock cable on the bar itself are not long enough.

We had tremendous help creating the V-Rex; it was a product of several minds pooling together, and my brother John’s overwhelming enthusiasm for short wheel based bents. One of those minds belongs to Mark Colliton, then an avid RANS rider and fan. Mark practically twisted our arm to make the V-Rex by sending us his artist rendering of a mutated Stratus. The drawing showed the main triangle section of a Stratus with the front triangle removed, and a head tube placed about 13” back from the cranks. It was clever; according to Mark all we had to do was take part of a Stratus frame, plug in a head-tube here, and viola! You would have a dandy short wheel base. As they say, the rest is history, but actually, we drafted a design based around the concept, rather than slicing up a Stratus.

John and Mark are still fully immersed in recumbent design working at Bacchetta. I believe Mark is still a closet fan of RANS. This is based on reports of a man looking a lot like Mark riding a V-Rex at

night in Southwestern Florida near the Bacchetta head quarters, singing softly as he passes “zoom, zoom, zoom”.

At the time Mark was fanning his art work in front of us I was busy drafting up what would become our second intro into the short wheel base world, the Rocket. Putting the Rocket on the back burner to develop the V-Rex only made it a better bike.

Beginning life as a MIG welded square tube frame with a price that busted paradigms. Embodied in the Rocket was all the same design ideas proved out on the V-Rex, the most outstanding aspect was the 20x20 wheel combo. It set the bike apart from the others, and still does.

Rockets have criss-crossed the nation, are first time bents, sold and woefully sought after by former owners. Former owners looking once again to experience that special ride that only a Rocket can give. From what you read among the owner postings, never sell your Rocket. Almost all regret such insane action, and within months are scanning the ads for another or making a visit to the local bike shop. If you are a Rocket owner, do not say I didn't warn you!



A MIG welded frame and square tube allowed the first Rockets to be mass- produced at our plant in Hays at a very reasonable price.

With two solid short wheel base designs in our stable we have offered various version of each. One short lived but very interesting bike that was a direct descendant of the Rocket was the Vivo. Full suspension bents are here to stay, but our offering never mustered the sales to warrant continued production. It remains a solid bike, and has a small and loyal fan base, which from time to time urge us to revive the Vivo. It could happen, I still love the cushy ride. The suspension is a must for many who live in areas where roads are constructed in a manner to massage your back and neck to the beat of pavement gaps.



This full suspension short wheelbase, the Vivo, is no longer offered, but continues to have a loyal fan base.

With two very successful short wheelbase designs under our belt we began to concentrate on other designs. The ATP Company making the Vision recumbents had dazzled many with the Saber. Our chances to ride the bike at various events left an impression of a bike with great speed and potential. For some it took a greater degree of concentration to ride, hindering the joy of the experience. But the bike did scoot. The Saber planted seeds in many designers minds and would prove to be the catalyst for not only another RANS design, but for a new category of recumbent, the high-racers.

It was on New Years Eve 2004 when we posted INTO the RIDE #13. The article announced the existence and approaching release of a new bike: the RANS Force 5. The Internet was a-buzz with speculation about the bike, and soon what began as a point blank discussion about the bike's design intent, took on a life of its own. The bike had not even hit the streets and it was made certain by the many fans of high-racers, it had a tough act to follow. To our relief the Force 5 has lived up to our claims. And even to our greater relief it is selling well.

The range of people who have been purchasing the F-5 is broad, from first time recumbent owners, to aficionados. The bike is very attractive, with its lines and performance speaking to the roadie crowd; it's handling friendly for first time users.

Embodied in the F-5 are the years of lessons learned from making short wheel base bents, plus a good helping of poetic license. A lightweight stiff trussed frame brings out the some of the most outstanding character of this bike. They are great climbers, and have cruise speeds that shrink distance. In short the F-5 is beautiful to look at, exquisitely crafted, and lovely to ride. The bike is gaining both a large following and a longer list of options and possible versions. As a high racer it is almost obligated to prove its worth in the racing arena, and even though bent racing is, at present, a very micro sport, I believe you will see F-5's taking home some wins.

As we move through our 11th year of short wheel base production I look back at the many changes, but still can see the basic solid plan form of each model. Refinement is sometimes about the small things... or is it? New materials, components influence change, yet the most profound element of design is desire. To want to push the envelope, just to see how far we can go. It is in this process we discover the new, and sometimes respect more the old, tried and true. For change for the sake of change is a hollow endeavor, now change for the sake of a better bike, well that is something we can all appreciate.

Options to modify your Rocket and V-Rex are offered. Seek past articles [I/TR#7](#) and [I/TR#10](#) where we hot-rodged the bikes with wheel, seat and handlebar changes and mods.

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

*INTO THE RIDE*