

INTO THE RIDE #32

Advantages of Crank Forward Bikes

By Randy Schlitter

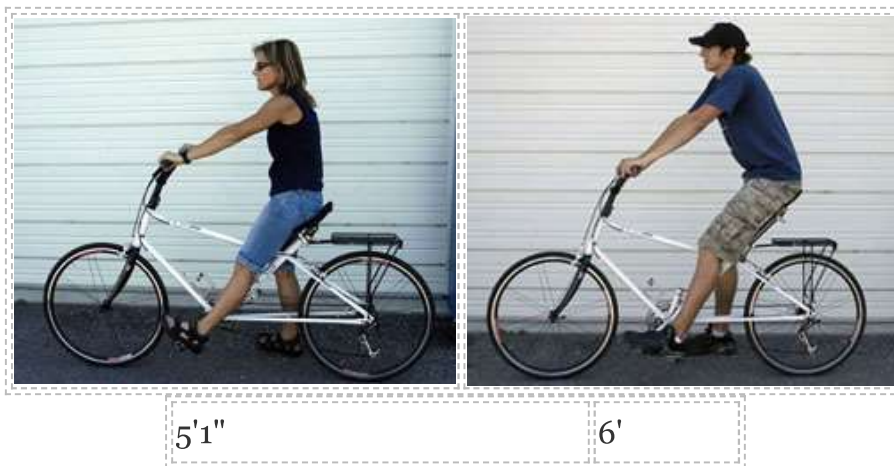
With our four models of crank forward bikes we have enjoyed many positive responses from owners. After exposing them to the general public it has been interesting to note how many “get it”. It seems the world is filled with people not happy with conventional bikes. The seat on our CF bikes just beckons to them, and many are disappointed to learn simply installing the seat will not work. Because the seat tube on a conventional bike is steeper, the angle of the seat would be too vertical, causing the rider to slip off. The frame is the key that ties it all together. The frame geometry results in the following advantages:

The Seat

Perhaps the most outstanding sign that this bike differs is the seat. It is what attracts people to the bike. The seat is actually a spin off from our recumbent seat, only it is less wide, and fitted with a dense foam cushion. The cushion and fabric are designed to allow the rider some grip, to feel more attached to the bike. It is not an ordinary bike seat pumped up in size, like on many flat-footer comfy bikes; this is a purpose-built seat that actually dictated the frame geometry. Other non-standard attributes of the seat are tilt and height adjustment. Both are through quick release levers, so it is easy to dial in the fit. The seat tube is large in diameter because of the low angle it projects off the frame. A groove is machined into the seat post, and a key on the seat clamp. This key and groove keep the seat from rotating and make it simple to adjust since it is always lined up level.

One Size fits Most

Because of the dramatically slanted seat tube the frame grows in length as the seat is raised. This is a win-win feature for all since dealers need only stock one size, and owners can share the bike among many sized riders. Of course sizing has its limits and riders less than 5' may need to consider the more laid back of the four models, the Fusion and Cruz. These two models seem to favor the shorter riders since the seat tube angle is more laid back, allowing flat-footed stance at proper seat height.



No Learning Curve

Looking mostly “normal” the CF bike attracts the timid, those not wanting to make the jump to recumbents. They are welcomed by a bike that rides without the checkout ride. You simply set the height and tilt, and ride. No learning curve is prominent since the handling is standard. In fact the

handling is more than likely to impress as easier. The lower CG and flat-footed stance contribute to the fine riding qualities.

Great Climbers

The first ride on a CF will instantly reveal the power stroke. With the crank forward it creates an automatic “dig in” effect when pulling on the bars. In fact you can apply more than your own weight to the pedals, making standing to climb optional. To get the best effect the handlebars need to be adjusted to just 1” or 2” above the highest point of the knee.



Swift Bikes

“Comfort bikes are not supposed to be this fast” is a common comment when expressed by new owners of our CF bikes. It was an intended design aspect, and why not? Bikes that are efficient are more fun to ride, and just as easy to ride as ones that dog along. We call it zoom factor and all of our CF bikes have ample amounts.

Flat Footed Stance

With the seat in the proper position the rider can stay seated and reach the ground with both feet. This has been a big winner with the less tall crowd. It also brings a great safety aspect to the bike in way of a lower center of gravity. The low stance offers a secure feeling, inspiring confidence. This is crucial for those who have experienced mis-adventure groping for the ground with tippy-toes.

Little to No Palm Pressure

The number of riders or would-be riders who suffer from numb palms is outstanding. Conventional bikes simply place too much weight on the arms and hands. The laid back seat post design places the upper body more vertical, thus removing the pressure. The price you pay for this feature is aerodynamic drag. Yet riders have shown ways around this potential performance robber by tucking, or hanging low on the bars. Such a riding position is not comfortable for all, but on the downhill it is a blast to tuck and let the bike fly! Riding while tucked is OK for some, but most find in high winds that the semi-tucked position will offer relief from drag.

Relief from Neck and Back Pressure

Without the torso laid almost flat between bar and seat, the back and neck are now happy. For some this is the only option for riding. A standard road bike with flat bars still does not offer the ideal position of a CF.

The Future of CF

We are very pleased with the response to our line of CF bikes. No doubt copies of our bikes will appear, as this market is way bigger than us. However we will strive to maintain the leading edge in quality, developments, and service. We enjoy the bikes on a personal level and a business level. This project has been rewarding from the aspect of creating many new riders, who are now doing extended rides, and getting into cycling. Without the CF design many would have not re-entered the world of cycling. Many have expressed interest in trying a recumbent, and others are actually coming away from bents. What the bikes do is bring people to cycling in a way that is enjoyable to the point of holding interest. In our minds at RANS we say “mission accomplished!”

What lies directly ahead for '06 is some real excitement in the form of pushing the CF envelope. Until next month stayed tuned and stay into the ride! -RJS

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