

## INTO THE RIDE #35

**High Racing the Fat Tire**

by Randy Schlitter



Maybe NOT being dressed for speed has its merits...

Why is this bike so much fun? The fat tires do not speak of speed, the disc brakes are far from “roadie appeal”, the loud orange color, far from subtle, yet there it is, the F-5 Enduro, looking totally ready to take on broken pavement, dirt roads, and maybe a trail or two. “What a strange thing to do to a high performance bike” some said, then they rode it and rode it and rode it, surprised at the handling, the cushy ride, and yes, the all-out-fun factor.

Fat tires go a long way toward forgiving the less perfect road; maybe that allows the riders to relax and just enjoy this bike. But wait, you can chuck the fat tires and put the skinny to the rim. But will you? Think about it; with the disc brakes having a second set of wheels, perhaps lighter ones, maybe 650’s, fitted with some low profile, high pressure tires, you can, with the flip of a QR, transform the Enduro into a whole new ride. For the price of another set of wheels/tires/tubes, one can literally have two distinct bikes (more on this later).

After the Demo Days at InterBike it became clear the bike would have a strong following. The big smiles, the bubbly comments, but mostly the number of dealers who previously ignored high-racers latched onto the Enduro concept with open arms. So many thought the fat tires made them feel confident and rightly so, just from doing a swap from fat to skinny tires, this bike changes personality.

In my mind it’s a grown-up rocket. Similar to the twist we just put to the Stratus, adding the 26” front wheel and dubbing it the Stratus XP, the Enduro is really a dual 26” Rocket. It has that spunky handling famous to the Rocket, but with gearing and wheel size to maintain higher cruising speeds, with a smoother ride. Despite the larger wheels the seat heights are within an inch (less if thin cushion is used), and nearly as compact overall. The increase in dimensions is small, considering the advances.

The bike keeps in sight why most ride bents: to be comfortable, but a slug it is not. This means you will probably be hearing singing from the fat tires since they will be pushed to speeds beyond most comfort

bikes. I guess an F-5 is hard to slow down, even with the big tires.

You are not restricted to the 26x1.95. The frame and fork will actually take 26x 2.3” tires, although that will raise you off the ground even more. I use the thin cushion with any tire setup just to drop the seat height as low as possible. For me it seems to enhance the cornering, but I am sure it is mostly an impression, since the actual height difference is only a couple of inches. Consider the Short Stop Seat option for easier ground reach. This is a much-overlooked option that could mean the difference of a less leggy person owning a high-racer or not. The seat is shorter in pan depth fore and aft allowing the legs to reach the ground better from a greater height.



A slight twist to the frame design over the original F-5 allows big tire clearance, try a pair of 26x 2.3”s!

OK, enough about fat tires. Let’s explore the skinny tire and other wheel options. First off, without spending more than the cost of tires and tubes, the stock wheels can be fitted with a narrow, high-pressure tire. Both fat and skinny tires are offered as no cost additive choices. We will be happy to build your Enduro up either way. Note the seat cushions options too, this may be important to the less leggy in getting that seat height under 22” and 24”. This is a “Swiss army knife” bike. You can fit 650 and 700 size wheels, and as long as the hubs and spoke pattern are set up for disc, you have braking. But wait there’s more! On the frame is a rear brake mount for 700 wheels. Slip a 700 fork up front, and you now have a road bike, and the immense selection of tires, brakes, wheels lie ahead. There is only one fly in the 700 soup, if the front brake is a road-style caliper it will hit the chain. A front disc is required, but you can still go caliper for the rear, strange, but a solution. Even 650’s set up with disc brake hubs is an option, making a true broadband selection of wheel choices and changes to your bike’s handling, speed, and comfort. Such tinkering could be loads of fun; then again the stock Enduro is an excellent choice too!

Back to fat tire fun. Because the fork is standard MTB you can go crazy on custom fork selection too. Imagine hot-rodding an Enduro toward the Mad Max end with Big Apples, and a White Brothers fork. You may end up with a bike more akin to military equipment than a pedal craft, but being street smart takes a good basic setup to survive.

A set of fenders, a rack, lights and panniers and the Enduro is ready to do serious commutes. It becomes, despite the stateside source, very “Euro” Enduro. There is nothing wrong with making it a

tool for daily duty, a green option in light of the rising cost to burn your way to work.

My personal F-5 Enduro is less the fenders and rack. In fact the only customizing (so far) has been to chop off and re-slot the riser by 3". I like the B-39 bars to be even or below, and ahead of the knees. In this position the elbows are still bent, so there is plenty of control. It feels very sporty like this, and not having the bars in the field of view is a big plus.



With the riser trimmed down 3" it keeps the bars out of view.

Note: this may work for those in the 5'9" range and under.

We went with the Flip-it on this bike, being a clean install for the riser to the stock MTB forks. Adjusting the tilt of the riser is one great aspect of the Flip-it, and this little bit of tweaking does a LOT to make the bike fit an individual. Careful adjusting of the riser tilt can mean the difference of being impressed or not impressed with the bike's handling. The more aft you place the bars the more odd the handling since it introduces some tiller. However a too-far-forward tilt will make the steering light and quick. The cool thing is how easy it is to adjust. I carry a 5mm wrench and adjust, ride a few feet, adjust, ride, until you hit the sweet spot. You will know when, it is that distinct.

The reason why to buy an Enduro is clear. It is about being practical, comfortable, versatile, high value, and everything an F-5 is famous for, climbing, speed, handling. Having a machine that is not picky about road quality is a tremendous asset. That is what fat tires are good at, when combined with the sexy, speedy F-5 frame, you end up with an amazingly fun ride that not only does the corner store duty, but also can tour, and maybe even lead the pack in a group ride. Dare I say the Enduro will "rocket" into the hearts SWB bent lovers? Delivery starts in a couple of months, this is a home brew machine, meaning we traditionally take a while to fill the pipeline, but expect a decent supply throughout the 2006 season. Until next month ride safe, and stay into the ride!

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