

INTO THE RIDE #47

Rolling Nirvana

by Randy Schlitter

A Stratus XP is a fine machine. Refined from the long running, and still in production! Taking this bike to an even higher level would be a challenge, since the stock form is a healthy combination of lightness and speed. The list of major things that could be done to further increase the pedigree of the XP was short but worthy of pursuit. It really came down to choosing how to add lightness and toss to the wind what it would cost!

Three materials were studied: carbon, aluminum and titanium. Each a viable candidate for frame materials, in the end we decided frames of aluminum and titanium were worth testing. Carbon may enter the picture, but at this point there seems to be little advantage in terms of saving weight. There may be some advantage for dialing in a specific ride quality, as it is a wonderful thing about carbon, since section shape and thickness determine those properties. Carbon also means a substantial investment in molds, meaning less flexibility for changes when and if they become warranted. In the end the cost to go carbon for the apparent benefits was not enough at this point in time to go for it. Perhaps this will change, and most likely to happen since there is substantial activity in reducing tooling cost.

7005 Alloy



Starting with the 7005-alloy frame, the Stratus XP can weigh in at 23 to 26 pounds. The climb is very nice, but the bike also retained the wonderful handling and smooth ride. The alloy Stratus XP is near the weight of the Ti bike, when spec'd the same, but the weight goes up with brake choices, when building it from a frameset. Brake choices result in the several ways to build too, since disc, canti and 700-brake bridge are standard on the alloy frame. When ordering a frameset one must specify which fork is desired, either the stock XP fork that has provisions for canti and disc, or the XP Road Fork, which only mounts the road brake for the 650 wheel.



The Stratus XP AL rear dropouts feature disc mount, plus the fender bridge can double as a mount for a road brake when set up with a 700 rear wheel.

Titanium



Hooded dropouts adorn the rear triangle of the Stratus XP Ti frame, making for a clean compact look. Sprint brace tabs are double holed and tapped to provide rack and fender mounts.

In titanium the XP changes into a road machine by both spec and frame features. Hooded rear drops feature a tab for mounting a rack or fender and the sprint braces. We understand how custom this bike may need to be and offer it in combos when it comes to brakes and wheels.

Combo 1: Features road brakes front and rear. No canti mounts. The rear brake bridge is set at the 650 position, limits tire sizes to mostly high performance road types. The fork in this case is what we call the XP Road fork, and has only mounting provisions for a road brake.

Combo 2: Front and rear canti brakes with the American Classic 350 Sprint 650c wheels. Brake Bridge is located at the 700 position to allow for larger tire sizes.

Combo 3: Rear 700 no canti, with the XP Road fork. The wheelset in this case is a 700 rear, and 650 front American Classic 350 Sprint. It is an odd combination, and some will cry foul about having to carry two tube sizes, but hey! we have been doing that for years with the 20" front wheeled models. The big advantage is speed, and more gear inches.

About Dual 700's

This is often requested, but frankly I do not like what it does to the bike in terms of the front wheel and foot overlap. It may be a great way to go, but the fork would have to be milled open to allow the tire to clear. At this point we are not pursuing this combo, or making any forks to make it happen. Maybe in time, but for now it is on hold indefinitely.

Handle Bars

Handlebar options on both the aluminum and titanium bikes include your choice of the 3-way chopper, or the T-bar setup with the B-37 and three sizes of risers. I prefer the B-37 with the B-32 mid-sized riser. This seems to fit me the best, since I have skinny knees, and I like how the bar grips are just even with the knees, and down low; it is a very similar hand position as on the F-5 Enduro. Of course the 3-way chopper is the king of the hill in terms of fitting the most riders, since it actually can adjust in 4 ways to suit. Choice of handlebars is provided at no extra cost.



The crank of choice is the Stronglight Pulsion triple crank. It is the only truly all-carbon crank and as a result of its unusual design happens to be one, if not the lightest, and most stiff, and velvety smooth. I was impressed with how this crank feels (almost as if it is not there), but you notice the bike bolting forward when you hammer it. It is a very different experience to spin up such a light crank; the enhancement to performance has, at least, been notable for me.

I can see both the alloy and titanium XP's being ultimate touring machines, or great performance mounts. The XP in steel has a strong following, and many positive reports on the bike's speed, good climb, and fun handling. With certain aftermarket fairings the bikes are real burners. As to what fairing or full sock is best, or which one even is fitted for the bikes, you will have to enlist the help of the chat boards and make a few calls to suppliers. We simply have too much wind to venture out with more than the handlebar fairing we offer.

A Special Ti Finish

At InterBike we showed our new titanium bikes with a novel finish. We call it PEP for polish, etch and powder coat. The method allows a protective coating, not to provide corrosion protection, but abrasion. Titanium is a sensitive material in terms of stress risers; a surface scratch deep enough could eventually turn into a frame crack. A tough coat of plastic at the price of about .125 pounds seems reasonable for a bike in this caliber. A nice side benefit is no polishing of the titanium is required, a task some Ti-bike owners reported as less fun than riding. I went around the show visiting other titanium bike makers that I have come to know over the past few years, and announced our entry in to the Ti-world, and explained our method of finishing. All the companies we had talked to during the process of learning the art of welding and finishing titanium were very open and helpful. They were very intrigued with PEP and seem to agree with the logic. It is cost additive to clear coat the frame, but a tough protective film to keep your frame from harm can only enhance the value of an already fantastic bike.

Fireproof

I would love to brag up the bikes fast cruising speeds, but after last month's flaming by none other than the competition (go figure!) I will decline. However I am totally flattered at how "Into The Ride" has become a source of comic relief for that group. At least we have their attention, which may be the first step to selling them a really good, nicely-trussed, titanium or aluminum bike. Until next month ride safe and stay into the ride.

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