

INTO THE RIDE #49

Cycling to Live

by Randy Schlitter

It has become easy to see that the average American has gotten heavier. This means an up-scaling of products from dinette sets to Chevy Tahoe's. The added weight of drivers and passengers in autos affect everything from seating size and comfort to safety-restraint systems. This cannot be ignored and is vitally important because increase in force is squared for every pound gained. That can be an outstanding increase in structural loading, especially when it comes to high velocity impacts. You can bet car makers are keenly aware of the weight and size of their buying public.

Aircraft manufacturers also have to factor in the increase in weight, and even more difficult is the increase in size. The planes of 40's and 50's must have been designed for not only smaller people, but more flexible. Try to crawl in and out of Piper Cub; you will know what I mean. More recent designs feature larger cabins, with easy entry and exit. The average American is also 4" taller compared to a century and a half ago.

Furniture makers have also responded. Chairs and sofas are not only oversized and overstuffed, but designed to take the increased weight being lounged on their product. Lucky for them they should have few worries about restraining clients during high velocity impacts.

But bicycle manufacturers have largely ignored this onslaught of increased body size and weight. Take a quick look at several sites of the major bike manufacturers; you will find nothing about what any of their bikes are meant to support in terms of rider weight*. Sizing however is apparent due to the fact bikes are sold in many sizes.

I find the lack of information about recommended loading strange. Even stranger is not seeing it appearing in any warranty information. I guess these manufacturers are assuming nobody overweight wants to ride? But that is far from the truth. Cycling is a sport that has been responsible for saving thousands of lives due to the health benefits of exercise. Cycling is fun, and it is good for you, but if you are too far out of shape, apparently the major cycle makers want you to slim down first.

Cycling is just too darn fun to be ignored, no matter what shape you are in. That is the beauty of this sport, you can start out in pretty bad shape, slowly improve, and have fun doing so. We get many e-mails from people who have reclaimed their bodies from the onslaught of weight gain and aging, in essence gaining a whole new lease on life. These people are truly cycling to live.

If car, plane, and furniture makers are adjusting, shouldn't bike manufacturers as well?

Mountain bikes are made to sustain greater loads than traditional road bikes. They are often recommended to riders seeking heavy-duty mounts. But again my search for published rider weights did not support this assumption. I can see the logic; MTB's are beefy looking machines and do take a beating. The durability of a product cannot be judged based off looks, mountain machine or not. It is something that has to be designed into the bike based off the predicted ultimate loads for a given scenario.

The good news is there are few bikes out there. www.supersizedcycles.com is a site that caters to the heavier rider, and even has a few custom-made bikes to boot! This is a start. We hope to add to this selection with our introduction of the Formula HD. This is a well-tested mount capable of supporting riders up to 325 pounds. To create the HD we added tandem strength wheels, Kevlar belted tires, large disc brakes, retro sprint braces, and memory loc to the seat rail. To say the least the HD is a conservative machine, and should allow a large margin of safety while carrying the higher loads.



The [memory loc](#) marks where seat setting is, handy for when removed. It also prevents slippage. There is one slight drawback. You will lose 1 inch of aft seat adjustment, but if you are that close you could be against the stop anyway.

The specification changes can't hide the fact the bike is still a performer. And why not? If you want to carry more, why not do it with a mount that is designed to make some speed, and be fun to ride? Cycling to live is easier when the bike is fun to ride. A quality machine that has good, long-lasting components will also go a long way toward the rider's continued use. The HD should fill the bill nicely. We are excited about what this segment of the market will do.

We welcome the rider seeking a bike made specific to this mission, and are excited about possible new designs that may happen if this idea catches on. Helping resize America one rider at a time is something we are proud to be involved in. Until next month, stay safe and stay into the ride!

Author's Footnote: You may wonder how special the HD is since it is based on the venerable Formula frame. Well the story goes: when we asked our frame maker to go to an aluminum frame, and submitted our design, we knew it was way over-built. This was because the frame maker was very shy about doing an aluminum recumbent, stating the low flat truss would have much more deflection than a typical DF bike. To increase the frame maker's comfort factor we purposefully over built the frame; he was happy, we were happy with the lighter frame, and were both confident about the frame. With the conclusion of an extensive study about cycling for the obese, we concluded the Formula frame with its broad margin for strength would be an excellent first entry into this developing market.

*Recumbent manufacturers have been very good about posting rider weight limitations. Why this has become a common practice among bent makers, I am not sure, but find it very responsible, and it must be handy for those seeking a bike to fit their weight range.

INTO THE RIDE