

INTO THE RIDE #52

Crank Forward Touring

by Randy Schlitter



The core of a good touring bike is a strong frame, reliable running gear, brakes, and strong wheels. Having something comfortable to ride days on end is what the Crank forward brings to the table, and in a format where performance will not be slacking. The average touring speed is 12 MPH. That is considering an average load of 30 pounds of gear, which in my mind is an outrageous amount of gear; I am more of a minimalist tourist as discussed below. The bikes I feel best suited for the range of touring style from taking little to taking it all are discussed below.

Zenetik Pro and Tour

The Zenetiks as a touring bike are for the “minimalist tourist”, the kind of cyclist who would ride a racing bike across the country with just the essentials. You know these guys, the mysterious riders who seem to cross the nation with little more than one water bottle, a half-filled set of panniers, and improvise everything else using a Swiss Army Knife, twine and tree bark. The bikes are well suited for this ultra extreme form of touring, since it is about not taking everything.

The largest tire you can install on either model is 28mm, and there is no room for fenders, certainly far from the normal perception of a touring tire size. But for the minimalist approach, it works perfect. The bikes are light, sub 19 for the Pro and 23 pounds for the Tour. The Tour has a bit tougher wheels

over the Pro, and is rated at 75 pounds more. In either case the wheels are ok for touring provided the bike is not over loaded. Both bikes have more than adequate running gear, and brakes.

Our standard rear rack comes with an adapter, and most panniers will fit, leaving room on the rack top for more cargo. Front bags are a challenge since the Z-Tour comes standard with the Deep V Bar. A handlebar bag can be fitted as long as a way to attach it to the brake levers is devised. The bars also present problems in mounting lights. There is however plenty of vertical riser for mounting lights, thus saving this space on the bar for a computer. Changing to flat bars like on the Pro opens more options for lights, bags and computers. Most readily available handlebar bags will fit the flat bars.



This bag by Axiom will mount to the Deep V Bar if you use a couple of Velcro straps through the bag's loops and around the brake levers.

On either bike there is only one set of braze-ons for a water bottle cage on the down tube, but using a bladder either carried or attached to the bike is the more preferred water loading anyway. What the Zenetik lacks is exactly what the minimalist tourist enjoys, the skinny tires, road crank, and little weight. This pays off big in climb, and average cruise speeds.

Dynamik

Ok, now back to the real world of touring and its rigors and demands. The stock Dynamik is a surprisingly capable touring machine. Tire clearance allows for a wide range of tires and fenders. There are brake mounts for cantilever and disc. The frame is very stout and reasonably light. The resulting stock bike is 26 pounds. Just a tire change from the 1.5 size down to 1" will turn the machine into a potent road machine. The stock wheels are smooth, well made, with plenty of spokes, tubular rims, and sealed bearings; all good things to have on the long hauls.

The running gear is reliable smooth shifting. The gear inches using the MTB crank offers plenty of bottom gears for climbing with a load. The Dynamik right out of the box is an affordable touring machine, needing only a dressing of racks, bags and lights to be long-haul ready.

Fusion

Considering this bike is essentially a Dynamik with the same components, and a more laid back frame, it too can qualify as a decent touring machine. Featuring almost the same tolerance for bigger tires, the fork being the only limiting factor, which will allow up to 1.95 tires.

What the Fusion brings to the table is a bike that works well for shorter riders, or those really sensitive to palm pressure, or back issues. The more upright position is why, but you will be a bit more draggy over the Dynamiks more upright placement. This is a fractional price to pay, if it brings the comfort you need to stay on the bike for 10 hours a day.

Many Fusion enthusiasts have been experimenting with all kinds of wheels, brakes, and gear, and find it a magical bike in about any combination. Disc brakes, higher end components, 650 wheels, all seem to work. So for a touring machine you can pretty much make the Fusion right for your specific taste, if out of the box form is not your exact desire. Either way you will end with a great ride that will do an amazing number of miles in a day.

Cruz

What the heck, why not? The Cruz is an upgraded Fusion with a sexy looking frame. Those curvy tubes do it, and if you want to tour a Cruz it can easily assume the role, just like the Fusion with little of as much as you want additions or substitutions. Both would be fun machines, and truly set a style and pace to your long miles venture.

700X

If I could not go with the Zenetik Pro, the 700X would be next in line. This bike is already being touted as a touring machine. The tough frame, disc brakes, 700 wheels all combine to make this a natural for the job.

Now lets get serious, how would I set up a 700X for touring? First dump the disc brakes, love them, but Tektro makes a nice big dual pivot side pull, that is light and powerful. Maybe I will wish they were disc brakes coming down a mountain, but remember I will be packing very little, so stopping requirements square down with the reduction of weight.

The stock wheels stay, the tires could be something lighter, with some tread, and slimed tubes. Despite what they say slime seems to work fine at above a 100 psi. I have slimed the tubes on the Z-Pro and not had a flat in three years, despite the hundreds of miles of back roads.

I would swap out the crank for the triple off the Z-Pro, and put some hollow pin chain, and a one-piece alloy cassette. In essence the bike would be a Z-Pro component level with a Dynamik frame.

As with the Dynamik the same rack would work. Again with the light panniers and gear, and the bike would be virtually tour ready.

Yes, the 700X would be a very good choice over the Z-Pro, and should be a great first choice for those who do travel and are not intimidated by packing on the gear.

Dynamik Duo

This is an obvious choice in my book. Already a tough machine because it is a tandem, the Duo is destined to be a great touring machine due to the high level of comfort and cruising efficiency. Tandems, comfortable tandems that is, are excellent touring machines. And like the Dynamik Duo they are made with tougher everything, wheels, frames, forks, and even tires in our case. This all adds up to be naturally suited for the task of extended play that touring imposes.

The tandem CF also sports rack attachments for both front and rear packs. Outfitting a tandem in my case blows the dream of traveling light, since my riding partner Kim would most likely pack items at a 4 to 1 ratio over what I think we need. It is just good to know, however, the bike would be capable of

taking the load. Now if we could get a 4 to 1 power output out of that stoker, this could be a fun summer!

Summary:

A touring bike can take many forms, and depends wholly on the taste, expectations, and strength of the riders. What works best is always what you are most comfortable, safe, and capable of maintaining to ride. Touring is a challenge on many levels and you owe it to yourself to be honest about what is the best bike, and not cheap out on the more important choices in gear, like good tires, tubes, pumps, and tools. Sizing the tour to the bike, the rider, and the budget all helps to roll it into one fun experience. Actually going on a tour and completing it will earn you bragging rights and the badge of accomplishment few other adventures will equal. It has been decades since I have taken a serious tour, but from what I have heard from those who have been out recently, it remains a positive experience that garners respect from all things using the road. If you decide to get out there this year stay safe and stay into the ride!

INTO THE RIDE