

INTO THE RIDE #53

Touring Recumbents - RANS Style

by Randy Schlitter



Recumbents are natural touring machines. They excel in riding comfort and cruise at respectable speeds allowing extended rides to cover great distance. In fact, many would have never ventured into the world of touring had it not been for a bent. For example: when Doud Bentz and Sam Reed set off on their 5,674-mile journey for the Make-a-Wish foundation, it was their first attempt at cycle touring. Having ridden regular bikes, these two young men could not fathom living on a tiny saddle day after day. They choose our Formula V2, which performed flawlessly, but there are many models in our lineup that serve well as touring machines.

Stratus LE

From the beginning the Stratus has been one of the primary bikes to shape the recumbent movement. It has racked up 100's of thousands of touring miles. It is quite possible the accumulated touring miles by this single model is enough to go to the moon and back several times. And it stands to reason, the stock Stratus LE is already in good form for touring, needing only the addition of a rear rack, panniers and tailpack. The passive suspension of the frame, the low seat and BB height, and long wheelbase, all add up to an excellent touring machine. There is a full array of items to outfit the bike for the touring mission. Racks, packs, and in a tradition started from the bikes introduction, a handy Fairing Cargo Bag fits to the 3-Way Chopper Bars.



The fairing doubles as storage for small items

The Stratus XP

The Stratus XP has been going strong since the introduction a couple of years ago. The success is supported by the bike's versatile mission profile. This dual big wheel speedster has an exceptionally plush ride, and a knack for holding cruise speeds with little effort. The bike is a natural touring machine, and like the Stratus has been an inspiration for many to try touring. Same wheels front and rear mean common tires and tubes, a nice convenience for the tourist. The big front wheel is forgiving, since touring is not always on ideal roads. It tracks naturally straight, reducing rider workload.

Choices in two more frame materials hit the streets this year, offering lighter and higher performance machines. In alloy or Ti the XP retains the fine riding qualities, but enhanced by lighter overall weights, and even more plush rides. The Ti XP would be my choice for touring. The ride of Ti is very pleasant in all ways: it accelerates easily, climbs like a sub-25-pound bike should, and is lovely to look at. The alloy bike is exceptional value and only a mere pound more, leaving plenty of funds left over for some indulgences on the road. The stock alloy and Ti bikes are setup for performance riding, and not so much for touring, but with tire changes, seat options, and the 3 combos offered the XP can easily be customized to the specific mission of touring.

In any frame material the XP is very easy to customize for touring, able to take several tire sizes, and brake options.



Perhaps the most exotic touring machine from RANS.

The Stratus XP Ti has the ride and performance to please the most discriminating tourist.

Rocket

An unlikely candidate for touring, with the small wheels and funky gearing, the Rocket has all the pretenses of a causal-use bent, yet they are out there, towing trailers, loaded with racks, packs, and being pedaled by riders who appreciate the spunky handling, light weight, and overall fun ride. Many racks, fenders, bags, lights and other accessories will work on the Rocket. Its compact size, and same tires and tubes front and rear make it a good choice for casual short haul touring where one may want to load the bike on car toppers, buses, or truck racks.

V-Rex

The V-Rex is a bike that does many things well, and touring is definitely one of them. V-Rex's have been a popular touring choice because of their performance, comfort and excellent handling. Touring demands a lot from a rider, and as mentioned before workload as a result of keeping the bike on track varies among different designs. The V-Rex falls into a very low workload; it tracks true with little effort, and becomes second nature within a few hours of riding. The V-Rex is the kind of bike many come back to after trying many others. It offers that just-right feeling in the ride, which encourages touring. In ranking our best touring machines I would place the V-Rex second only to the Stratus XP.

F5 Enduro

This bike is a natural for touring due to the larger clearance for tires. It can be equipped with 25mm to 50mm plus tires offering a wide range of riding properties. For fast touring on good roads the smaller higher pressure is the obvious choice, and for all around conditions something in the 1.5 range with 90 PSI and up would be ideal. For back roads throw some small knobbies and get a grip to explore places you thought only reached by MTB. The Enduro is also a stout frame with a higher rider weight over most high racer types. The handling is V-Rex like, and just as low in rider workload to maintain a daylong track. Racks, fenders, tires choices, and stocked with disc brakes, the Enduro has 'touring' written all over it.

Formula 20X26 and V2 and V3

Even though the V2 20 x 26 and Formula 20 x 26 are off the '07 menu, they are still available, and make great touring machines. The Formula and V2 share the same frame geometry parting only in frame material. The Formula began life as a top of the line high performance machine and is held in high regard by those who both ride them for performance and touring. It is a unique bike in that it is long wheelbase but high bottom bracket. This is a geometry you see popping up in other manufacture's designs; it is nice to see more and more validation of this configuration. It offers speed, good handling, and simple frame construction.

The second generation of this frame geometry is evident in the V3 series. As for these being touring machines, well for me, I would say for sure, but I have an ultra-light approach to touring, where skinny tires and light-as-possible bikes make sense. So officially I will not spout off about how great the V3's would be for touring, and let the riders prove otherwise. I know I sure would have a tough time deciding between the V3 in Ti over the Stratus XP Ti for a summer-long tour. I think in the end the Stratus would win just because of the lower BB.

Formula HD

The load rating on the HD is 325 pounds, making it a super durable touring machine for those who like taking everything. The HD features many touring slant items such as a set of extra strong wheels, Kevlar tires, large disc brakes, super duty sprint braces, and the famous stout V2 frame. Racks will adapt, bags are available, along with fenders, and handlebar fairing bag.

Screamer and Seavo

Our tandem recumbents live for touring. Since they are tough enough to be tandem, touring is a natural expectation. The frames feature tabs and braze-ons to accept many packs, racks, and assorted gear. Recumbent tandems are the true cruisers of the touring world. Making a tandem light but serviceable is always a great challenge, and often an exercise in trade-offs. Where would you cut the weight on the basic bike? Lighter wheels could mean more trouble than it is worth. Gearing needs lots of inches to surmount hills with relative ease. Brakes need to be very strong and fade resistant. It really comes down to the frame. A lighter frame would be nice, but not at the price of durability. Ultimately the tandem bent works because it is tough.

Of our two tandems I feel the Seavo makes the better touring machine if the riders are on the tallish side. The dual big wheels bring all the benefits to tandem touring as they do for the singles, true tracking, easy-to-maintain cruise speeds, and needing only one size of tire and tubes for spares. The captain position is almost a carbon copy of the F5 geometry, with the stoker in more of the Stratus layout. The Seavo is the faster bike, but again only for the taller rider, and those partial to the high racer riding position.

Our Screamer is an interesting blend of two very successful bikes: the captain position is from the V-Rex and the stoker the highly regarded Nimbus. The Screamer remains with a faithful following and a secure position in production. It has become an iconic classic, of the under over bent tandem layout. As a highly successful touring machine it will remain a solid investment.

As many of our bents, both the Seavo and Screamer can be optioned with S&S couplings allowing for more transit friendly packages. In fact one of the most impressive Screamer couples I know lives in town and they and their tried-and-true tandem have graced the roads of many European countries, lending credence to "Have Tandem Will Travel".

It does tickle the heart of this old inventor to know many of our designs have crisscrossed not only the USA but also other continents. And someday one encounter I hope to experience is a random meeting of a RANS tourist. I think at that point I would be able to make a much-understated comment about staying into the ride.

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