

INTO THE RIDE #62

A Simple Red Bike

by Randy Schlitter



Just finished a nice ride around town on my Citi. I ran into my second oldest son and his wife cruising to their art studio on their Dynamiks; this was the second time we chance met within a week. They are pretty much lifestyle cyclists, in their 20's. They love the body friendly aspect of the bikes and ride them everywhere, using racks and panniers to haul cargo, leaving their car parked almost 90% of the time.

They will soon leave town and take graphic design jobs somewhere in California. I will miss them dearly, but look forward to visits and possible rides in the west coast state. The whole point of this post is how bikes create community. I hope they can find that wherever they land. In either the inner city or small town, a bike is ideal; it provides reasonable speed of transit, and that wonderful feeling of contact with the people and environment. Something you only really understand after you have experienced it.

The Citi is a simple red bike very reminiscent of my Western Flyer. Its fat tires are a little harder to push around, but the ride is cushy, and is so darn sure-footed. It is fun to hear the tires patter over bricks and the soft bounce when dropping off curbs. The red color is important, almost iconic, (has not everyone had a red bike?) and can recall wonderful summer days tooling about. Like so many on this forum who have said they feel like a kid again, I too, know this feeling every ride on the Citi.

How can a simple red bike do this, when in my garage hangs a Z-Pro, a Ti V3, and various other speed demons? It is the kind of riding it encourages, that free style cruising, where you get a gentle work out, yet still take the time to enjoy the surroundings. Sure it is a blast to speed about, dropping roadies, and making high average speeds, but it is also a measure of something greater than the sum to ride a simple red bike on a nice evening in small town America that leaves you feeling connected and alive at the same time.

That phrase “a simple red bike” has stuck in my head ever since posted this last June. And it still rings true in my heart today. Literally the red bike happened. My father brought it home from the hardware store, its white “gas tank” framed by bright red tubes, painted out to hide the brand name. The bike was bent (not recumbent, that would come much later), and he got a deal, and I got an iconic ride that created a love for cycling, and

launched this company. It also was a good imprint...saving a bent bike from the dumpster, and what better device to be rescued?

Yes, I am deep in warm memories this morning as I write, as the snow continues to pile higher. It is February in Kansas, and winter is in style like there is no end...but there will be an end, and simple red bikes will be in fleets on streets, hopefully smiling buzz-cut (or whatever the hairstyle) boys, and curly-haired girls are riding them.

But winter has not let go and with thief-like action we steal a riding day here and there. Just last Saturday and Sunday the weather was a balmy 40 degrees, and the winds under 15kts. It was good enough to re-discover the legs and continue testing bikes.

To get to the point of building the simple red bike there is usually a line-up of prototypes. Those bikes that have oddball project names, or re-cycled names, or just awful nick names. And they need road miles, lots of them.

In our proto line up are some exciting machines. The Xstream is now in its third draft, having been made in steel, Ti, and aluminum. We are getting closer to settling on what this bike will be. We think we are gaining, and the bike will be fun.

In the other corner is extensive high-racer work. The F5's are stacking up in the assembly racks, awaiting final details like the Hoagie seat and new V-clamp before they are unleashed to the shops. The F5's rebirth has been an experience in itself; all the designs aspects of building a stick bike are proving out in actual production. The paint staff loves them: easy prep, sandblast and powder coat. I am slowly learning to like the high-racer (again) but there is another lady taking my attention; she is more like the girl next door, sweet, predictable, presentable to Momma, and able to give a great performance when you get serious...yep, still talking about a bike here!

The girl next door is a special Stratus XP Alloy. Special because it is red I suppose; special because it is set up with modest components (in fact, stock); and finally, special because it fits me so perfectly.

I rode the XP after taking out a rather not-to-be-named unruly test bike. I had to jump on something to bring back the perspective of what we are trying to do here, and the XP did a perfect job of bringing home that point. It did a perfect job of being a simple red bike.

I rode it on purpose over the same roads where an hour earlier I was being shredded by the other bike, something meant to be fast, compact, and sexy. All the things the girl next is not, and all the things you miss when the chips are down: confident handling in traffic, a good position to see the traffic, and sure-footed handling to react to the traffic. I was glad to be back on the XP so soon after tracking down the same avenue. It was here that feeling came rushing back, that same feeling I had last June, riding the Citi and coming across my son and his wife.

I guess the feeling is summed up best as keeping your perspective. Sure, we will keep pushing the envelope as much as possible; it is our nature. And yes, those bikes will be faster, or do this or that better, but there will always be room for a bike that is predictable, does it all the best it can, and never quits giving you that can-do spirit. Bikes like that get my label "a simple red bike", and also get a permanent spot in the stable. They will always be the ones we take home too, and create the best stories with.

In a few weeks the weather will break, I will be in a better mood to tackle the R&D riding, the cold may be somewhat subsided, and I will be out thrashing it up a hill and ready to brag how great this new machine is, which ever new machine it is. But one thing will remain: that Stratus XP in candy apple red will always be in high regard, and waiting to remind me what we really ride for...

Until next time stay safe, and stay into the ride!

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