

INTO THE RIDE #65

Teaching the Art of Zen ... ZENETIK, That Is!

by Randy Schlitter



Really getting to know a bike takes time and miles, in all conditions, seasons, loads, and body conditions (the latter probably being the most determining how attached you become to a particular piece of machinery). Because after pushing a piece of metal through the thick and thin of seasonal and body changes, there is a bonding (or something akin to) that finds one choosing to ride a particular bike over another.

The Zenetik Pro is a successful embodiment of as much performance, road, and comfort bike as possible. The thinking was, and still is, that aging road warriors, if given a jazzy enough mount, would switch to a body-friendly bike.

This has been the target market, and I must report that, 3 years into it, we are seeing it start to turn. In fact dealers are hoping we will cook up an even higher-end Pro. That bike is on way (Ti frame and decked out with choice road gear), but until we have this super Pro to brag up, I wanted to share what I have been experiencing on my trusty Z-Pro.

I have become another person riding the Z-Pro, but someone I seem to recall. It is my younger even-more-cocky self. With every day riding, even when the weather is far from “rideable” I am out there grabbing the miles, just like I was in the 1970’s pushing my Italian racer. I practically lived on that bike, since it was my only wheels, and now I find myself being teasingly close to a lifestyle cyclist, practically living on the Z-Pro. It has become an extension of myself, evidenced by how I can smartly handle the bike in tight quarters, or the ease I work the traffic. The good part is the more I ride, the better it feels to be on this bike.

The poor thing is showing signs of becoming a tool: spawning lights, frame bag, whisker bars, and a healthy coating of road dust. I want to clean it, but the dirt is a badge of sorts, stating clearly this is a well-ridden, not babied, machine. Other cyclists look upon my lack of attention to the bike in horror. I can only comfort them with excuses... “this is abuse testing...we have to know how the un-cared for bike holds up”. They nod, and still insist I show the machine more respect. Ok, so I oil the chain, and religiously maintain tire pressure, and brakes.

The typical usage profile for the Z-Pro is to run errands, ride for fitness, and commute to work. The latter is only .6 miles, so fitness riding in the act of doing errands is the bulk of the action. A typical ride could run 15 to 25 miles at average speeds of 16 to 19 MPH. A lot depends on mood, weather, temperature, and time. I have issues when presented with doing errands suited up in Lycra...patrons at the local grocery still think I am an escaped ballet student, or some old geezer with a tight clothing fetish. I look forward to the day my sleek body is apparent enough to bolster my confidence to shop in tights. Heck I may even start shaving my legs!

There has been progress. This old 54-year body feels not a shade past 28, the belly has receded to the point I almost ride full time in the low position. The whisker bars help here. These custom fitted handles place me in a perfect drop to cut the ever-present wind. Plus I have found the bars of great importance for rapid acceleration. I have found just slightly lifting out of the seat and pulling on the whisker bars jack rabbits me up a hill, or across an intersection equal to any road bike. That is a glorious feeling, so welcome, and so missed! I swear it causes flash backs to riding my first real racing bike.

There is no thinking about the bike under me; it is so much a part of me, an extension of self. It is apparent in the no-hands riding, text messaging or talking on the cell phone, chasing traffic to the next stoplight, and heading up to the front of the line. It is this cavalier travel, that says the bike is one with the rider. Hopefully this rider will always be just a bit ahead of the bike, and avoid the ever-present crash potential. But I think more riding actually increases safety, since you are so at home on the machine, so intimate with its quirks, and steeped in the laws of physics that never excuse. Riding Zen on the Zenetik, just as its namesake says. It is there, in that simple function of rider and machine, that one finds a way to truly enjoy self-transit, and above all...to stay into the ride.

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