

INTO THE RIDE #72

Higher Racer Heaven

and

X-Stream Part III

by Randy Schlitter

Higher Racer Heaven



The F5 and F5 Pro are nearly the same frame, with the exception the Pro is set up for 700 wheels. Both bikes feature an oversized joint, constant chord rear stays, integrated idler mount, and tight boom length, all of which are finding favor among high racer fans. They both are made of steel, so the "steel is real" fans can now applaud, and for good reason. Steel often makes both structural and economic sense. The pair of bikes are rather light 26#'s for the F5, and 24.5#'s for the Pro. Riding a fine-tuned steel bike is a pleasure many will appreciate.



The F5 for 2009 sports some upgrades, like harder working brakes, and injection molded V-clamp seat attach, and hot-looking bladed spoke wheels. The flashy two-tone paint is now a blazing silver and red. The bike feels compact and nimble, and getting the perfect fit takes only some fine-tuning of the seat position and handlebars. The bike comes with a tall-ish riser, but many may opt to trim it down; I did on my test bike. I like the bars well ahead and below my knees. The B-39 bar has medium depth, and fits most.



What is becoming about the bike is how well the whole package works together; the components, wheels, and seat mesh well together and become more than an additive sum of parts. They become the synergy that is often defined as a bike's personality. The stock F5 has plenty of that all wrapped up in a

fine looking package at an attractive price. Currently the bikes are made in Hays, although we are looking at importing the frame by late 2009 as demand keeps building. The imported frame will be identical, and will feature our famous lifetime warranty.

The seat on either bike is the Hoagie. This lightweight steel-framed seat attaches to the bike with our new V-clamp system. The system features a highly criticized (by the competition, go figure!) quick release pins. In seconds you can remove the seat. The system is tight in all the right places. Look a little closer and you will see the system is precisely made to avoid such play. The fit of the attach angles is within a couple thousandths. Clamping performance has been trouble free. This is due to having two top crossing bolts, to maximize the clamping pressure for the given area. I am glad to see the B-Boys have adopted the same idea on their seat clamp. The convenience keeping your seat location is well worth an extra bolt. We are always glad to help!



A set of dual 700 wheels and the same basic frame and you have the F5 Pro. The substantial price increase is mostly for the upscale components. Sporting American Classic 350 Sprint wheels, and Ultegra crank, front derailleur and 105 road brakes, the Pro expands upon the synergy of the F5. From my personal experience on the bike, I always come away with how smooth the 700 wheels meet the road. There is the typical extra effort to kick them up to speed, but as many know, once accelerated the 700's are easy to keep at speed. Going with 700's however was not for speed, although many high-racer fans will argue just the opposite. What the 700 wheels bring to the table are many attributes beyond simple speed increase: smoother ride, more effective braking, and a huge selection of tires, wheels, and forks. The greater part of the road biking world runs on 700's, so the practical aspect remains an overall advantage. The disadvantage is seat height. At an average seat height of 26" the Pro

will be literally out-of-reach for some. An offering we have bantered about the shop is to build a 650-wheeled Pro, just to cater to the crowd that cannot get comfy on the 700 version. If the public demands it, I am sure we could find a way to comply.



Either bike is a piece of high racer heaven, with stable predictable handling, light all-up weights, and solid but lively frame feel.

X-stream Part 3

This month we started shipping the long awaited X-streams, and we are happy to say the response is good. The beta testing, and refinements along the way, has hopefully created a great first-issue bike. As we came to know the X-stream it showed us its versatile nature and drawing power. At events it garnered the attention of many sage bent riders, and surprised them with handling unexpected in a long wheelbase. The fact is the X-stream is fairly compact for a long wheelbase bent, and that contributes heavily towards the bike's manners. The bike appeals to those who want a 'go fast' machine, and favor flying at lower altitudes.



I have not been shy about where I have ridden X-streams, and one particular test ride impressed me. It was last summer after a heavy down pour; I found myself on a sandy county road. Normally these

roads are pretty stable, but enough rain had fallen to turn the road base into a massive mud bed. I pressed on, leaving a winding set of grooves; just waiting for the spill...it never came. With a bit of alert steering, I managed to mush through 3 miles of the sandy mud mess. I should have photographed the bike; it looked like an MTB after a ride through liquid dirt. By the time I returned most the big chunks had departed; however, there was still enough evidence of mud trauma to make Carl, our chief R&D tech, shake his head and cringe. Ah the things we do to high end bikes!



I think being the right height off the pavement (or sandy mud) allows a confidence factor that in turn translates into riding and handling ease. For me I think it is a combination of steering response, perceived seat height, and where in the heck the front wheel is. Those factors combine to create “rideability”. The X-stream has plenty of that.

Our line-up of performance recumbents is growing, and the F5, F5 Pro, and X-stream represent a fairly broad spectrum in configuration and price range, which is what it seems to take to please the ever-expanding audience of recumbent riders. I have always been vocal about my wish for recumbents to evolve into one or two styles, and if we are on the road to that happening, it sure seems like a long one! Stop in next month; until then stay safe, and stay into the ride!

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