

INTO THE RIDE #80

A Travel CF

and

More on the RANS Rally

by Randy Schlitter

The Oshkosh airshow was fast approaching and this year we had elected not send a road crew. Instead we shipped in two crates that doubled as our counter. The crates were sufficient in size to accommodate everything we needed at the airshow, but too small to include any bikes. Instead of shipping bikes by separate cover, I accepted the last minute challenge of making a traveling Crankforward.

For the past two years we have been testing new forms of the CF geometry, mostly pushing the seat post steeper to allow more nimbleness for MTB types. The frame geometry would be ideal for a compact travel bike so I commissioned our welders to create a steel road bike version. The result is a 22 pound road bike that packs perfectly into The RANS S-19LS Baggage compartment.

About the Bike

The bike features 700 wheels, road cranks and brakes, S&S couples on the top and down tube, and cable disconnects. Riding the Alterra Road is about as road bike as you can get and still be on a CF, even more than the venerable Z-Pro. This is due to pushing the geometry steeper at the seat tube. This also required trimming the seat into a narrow triangle. The shape supports the rider in the same way as the original seat, but allows the leg clearance required by the steep angle. The handling is nimble, predictable, and lively. It sprints well, digging in the bars, or standing, has the speed up in seconds. At the airshow I commuted almost everyday, and did some additional rides in the evening. Since returning, the bike and I have racked up many miles, and is fast becoming my choice bike. I do get some palm pressure, but the pain is very minor, and seems to come and go. Riding with the GPS shows a comparable average speed to my Z-pro. I do tuck on this bike when cutting into strong headwinds. There is no whisker bar, so I merely lay my forearms on the grips and hold onto the cables. This does allow a noticed increase in cruise speed. Perhaps the most outstanding ride quality is the natural ease to stand and ride; it is likened to a DF. One rider (who will remain nameless and is also another recumbent maker) commented during a local ride about how we almost have re-created a regular bike; and why not, if you can make a standard bike this comfy?

I do see some improvements coming for the production version, such as a 1.25" lower crank, a slightly short wheel base, and a degree or two of seat angle increase, all efforts to get the bike into a more compact space. A 650 version is also being considered, along with Ti.

More on the RANS Rally

To ride in rural Kansas may be a new experience for some attending the Rally; I will try to illustrate what to expect.

Wind: Not many are excited about riding into wind; everyone loves tailwinds. I have come to love into-the-wind rides, maybe for more than just the return trip speed. Maybe it is the rush of air - it can be really impressive - the force of the air when trying to hold 12 MPH into a 20 plus headwind. There

is the cooling factor; you stay pretty comfortable, even on 100 degree days. Then there is the noise going one way, and not the other. The noise stops and the heat comes up with the speed. If you like though, you can be lazy and let the wind push you home, and after a hard push into a strong headwind for an hour or more, maybe that is all you got left. But it never seems to happen, the tailwind begs for speed, so 9 times out of 10 you run up to the top gears, just to record a high max speed.

Open views and Deceptions: Out here you can ride and see for many miles; the horizon creates a subtle undulating line. When there is a bluff or “hill” it dominates. Such skimpy geographical features would be a dime a dozen in other states, but become intently observed out here.

The open views can deceive... grain elevators seem to be on wheels, looming large the moment you spot them, and shrinking as you close the gap (I caught one being towed by a farm tractor, solving that mystery. Just kidding!) The illusion is created by the lens effect of thicker clear air at the horizon. In fact the air used to be so clean that the whole world would look like a bowl when flying over at a modest altitude. I have not seen that effect since the 60's; it sure was neat though.

Thunderstorms: They can flash up in the distance, turning into a weather man's text book. They can build in minutes into 50 to 60 mile wide systems. These dramas play out more in the early spring, but Kansas, like many climates, is changing. Long range weather prediction becomes mere guesses at best.

Quiet: When you are riding downwind, or slow, or on a calm day there is this sudden squelch of all man-made sound, and you feel transported to another dimension. Then a car passes and reminds you, yes you are still in Kansas, not some other universe, but for a while...

Sun/Sky: The sun and sky partner to create this bleached light. It is powerful, and often the intense white hot light of the sun is contrasted with an empty blue sky. The combination creates a feeling of infinite space, flat horizon, bright sun, deep blue sky. If you try hard enough you can feel the Earth rotating not only on axis, but flying around the sun.

Cold: In September I seem to remember being imprisoned in sweltering classrooms more than the heat. There are exceptions, cold fronts bringing gray days, and tripping leaves off trees as if to hurry up the inevitable. September can bring that relief from the last dog days of summer almost too fast. I always welcome the first soggy cool days, and it is like a cyclist in recovery after a long hot climb. The plant life, the very landscape itself seems to sigh in relief, and the late blooming flora has the last gasp, and sends us off into fall. If you're packing for a September ride in Kansas and that is the South east corner of the North West quarter of the state pack a light jacket...at least!

Hot: The heat can linger, long after the beginning of school, and soar up to the high 90's, even 100. It is as if the furnace of summer refuses to quit...not yet, wait until we sweat a while longer. Be ready for anything in Kansas in September.

Hills: Our hills are few in terms of pronounced grades. 16% is about tops, the rides we plan avoid such hills. You have to go the back county chalk roads to find such aggressive grade. A few paved county roads offer a road cyclist grade challenges, but we will miss those this Rally (maybe next year?). What makes a Kansas hill tough is the subtle grade, and wind. Your head will be saying this is flat, and then look at your GPS and you will often see a 2 or 3% grade. Subtle and enduring, but not hard to overcome, and at the same time, you have that great view.

The rally will be an experiment both in drawing power, because coming to Kansas for some is a big adventure, and in appreciating the kind of riding we have to offer. I have ridden this country side for many years, in fact all my life. Maybe because it is my back yard I tend to always come home, but Kansas is where anyone with just a little desire can get into the ride...until next time, stay safe.

INTO THE RIDE

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