

INTO THE RIDE #84

Back Road Bomber

by Randy Schlitter



The Sequoia frame is set up for the taller rider, but I have always liked the feel of this bike. It must be the longer wheelbase, and the super-rugged frame with its excellent power transfer. The bike is sold both as a general-use bike and in a more off-road-oriented version. A cross bike version is something we thought would be fun, since I love to ply the back roads, which are literally a mile from my doorstep.

To set up the bike as a true cross bike was not important, so we used Avid BB7 disc brakes. The wheel set is a pair of Velocity 700c 36-spoke Cliffhangers. The fork is our own 700c Cross fork used on the Dynamik 700X. More SRAM goodies finished out the running gear for a bike weight of 26 lbs, which includes pedals and slime in the tubes.

For tires we used a pair of 700x35 Ritchey Comp Speed Max's. At first I was not so onboard with these tires since the tread seemed a bit aggressive, but the centerline of the tire features a relatively drag-free ribbed tread. This section provides easy rolling performance on the paved roads, and the knobby section engages in sand or when laying into curves. It turns out that they are an ideal combination, offering both stability and speed. I have also noticed they are sensitive to pressure, having experimented with "low" pressures of 60 lbs, and up to 75, where the speed change is noticeable along with the ride becoming harsh. A few rides at the 35 Psi were not as sluggish as you would think, and provided a definite cushion.

The handlebar setup is a forward-facing curved riser with the B-37. This is fast becoming one of my fave combos, since it offers a tuck position and two stand-to-ride options. To tuck, I grab the bars right at the stem with my hands barely 2" apart -- this stretches out the arms and allows you get your torso flat. I also find myself standing to climb in this hand position, but for really long aggressive stand climbs, I grab the grips. This is really where the B-37 with the curved riser shines, since it allows both plenty of room and aft reach at the same time.

A wheelbase of 52.5" means really predictable handling, easy no-hands riding, and a plush ride. It is definitely the combination of the carbon fork, 36-spoked 700c wheels, the special CF saddle, and wheelbase making it happen. The long wheelbase handling is exceptional in the role of back road bombing, since there is often deep sand or gravel at the bottom of hills. Hitting those mushy spots in

the road at speed is a non-event. The big 700c wheels with the semi-knobby tires slice and dice through.

Cornering is a fun sensation! The low CG helps, plus again the long wheelbase dampens the handling to the point where who is in control is never a question. I lost traction a few times in corners, but never went down -- corrective steering always saved the day.

The weather was perfect for riding over the 09' Thanksgiving Day holidays, and I took full advantage of the time off with the Sequoia! Road conditions varied greatly in just a few miles, going from dry and loose sand to sticky semi-muddy. The roads around here seem to "sweat" when day-to-night temps swing 60 degrees! This is where tire cross-section, diameter and tread design really pay off. Not once did the Ritchey's cry uncle. Each day I pushed both myself and the bike harder, eating up the miles, and enjoying incredibly mild weather.

Basically, the only two areas of weakness of this Sequoia build-up that I noticed were a) shifting and b) toe clearance. The Sram X5 trigger shifters are just not as crisp as some upscale triggers I have used -- but this bike is a bomber, with no need to go nuts on spec (since this is all about having fun), and the shifting has still been reliable. The toe clearance is a small problem for me, but for others could be an issue. It only catches when turning a lot at slow speeds, or if you need to power up in a sharp turn.

The crank is a Truvativ Blaze, which is a good solid crank, although not the lightest set to be lugging up a hill. However, between the cassette and crank I had the gear range to handle any grade. It might be cool to assemble an all weight-weenie version, but one set up this way is modest in price and long on reliability and performance -- in other words, a good bang for the buck!

Enough with the specs, and more about the riding! What this bike means to me is "access to fun," again which for me is literally less than a mile down the road. It is the kind of fun that you look forward to, and the side benefit is keeping in shape. The key to winning the "battle of the bulge" (especially during the winter holidays!) is finding that fun fitness activity that will keep you coming back for more. This bike makes it so much fun that I look forward to it -- even to the point where my former bike of choice, the Z-Pro, is now used for paved roads only. This is slightly disturbing to me, because I always got a kick out of taking 25mm 110 psi tires over those really ill-fit roads. The Z-Pro was lighter, which I could feel in the climbs, but relaxing on fast downhills was rare, and never would I venture out after dark. The Sequoia with this setup makes it easy to do it all, including the night rides. Day or night the sights around Hays are amazing, from wildlife sightings to overlooking the lights of town below. You can see for miles, often including where you have been, or you will be, and maybe best of all, there is the lack of traffic. All in all, "back road bombing" is excellent road therapy, and even though many bikes could suffice, the Sequoia is a perfect fit...

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

INTO THE RIDE