

## INTO THE RIDE #87

**A Great Bike! At An Amazing Price!****The Formula LE**

by Randy Schlitter



The Formula LE started out as a steel frame called the V2. It was one of the first long wheelbasers to place the rider in a fairly aero position, and thus broke a lot of performance paradigms. Long wheelbase bikes with no fairings were not supposed to be that fast - but the V2 changed all that, and started a genome towards an eventual RAAM victory when in 2009 the Xstream rolled across the finish line. It was the first time in the event's history an unfaired recumbent won overall in the 4-man field. The performance potential of an unfaired long wheelbase bent is well confirmed by such feats, and the V2 was the catalyst that started it all.

The bike was a work in progress when my dear brother John, (now of Bacchetta Bikes) left the company. At that point it was just not much of a friendly ride. I remember John and I discussing the nature of the beast and how he had talked with Gardner Martin, who was also toying with a similar design, complaining of the handling challenges. Gardner went as far to say we would never tame it because the weight was centered too high above the wheels!

The unofficial name of the bike was Limbo, which also effectively described its development program, as we lost interest and let the project languish (but not for long). Soon after John's departure I dusted off the prototype and began testing some ideas to tackle the handling issues. We went even as far as making both an adjustable fork and head angle.

All that work has paid off not only in the great bikes that followed the V2, but also in the fact that we now have a basic platform on which to build a great entry level bike. When you combine the new Sling Mesh Seat and T-bar set-up, it turns this bike into a hands-off ride. With the T-bar above your knees there is never contact -- this freedom of movement is very welcome to the beginning rider, and pays off big when crawling up a steep grade.

Speed wise the bike has a strong following who knew what the bike could do, even with the 20" front wheel. There are a number of faired Formulas turning up impressive speeds, and dual 26" versions also up holding the performance end of things. But what remains important to the entry level model is that the beginner can grow with the bike.

Set up with a mix of Sram X3 and X5 components and a MTB crank, the Formula LE is definitely appealing as an every-day bike, and with the low gearing, well-suited for touring. The Sling Mesh Seat is perhaps the most significant aspect of this combo. It lets us create at sub 30-pound bike (29 with pedals!). Along with the updated seat is the new V-Clamp system. Something this light and low priced and in a high performance frame is rare.

A first time rider should rapidly adjust, with only the higher crank making it interesting. What I have found enjoyable about the Formula LE is the handle bars. Set to sweep just above the knees you can turn on a dime, and when going straight your hands and arms are tucked neatly inside your leg width, making a nice low-drag profile. Which result of this handlebar setup helps most is not important; it just feels right, and never is there a doubt about control of the bike. Of course the seat lends a new feel to the bike, setting at 22.5 to 23.75 off the pavement, making for a bit more level position relative to the crank. This tames the ride a bit, yet, with this seat you can, when ready, lean back for less drag. That is the great thing about the Sling Mesh seat: it has a wide range of positions.

Take the full package into consideration: aluminum frame, light comfy seat, ergo bars, nice spec, light over-all weight, highly proven frame, and stellar good looks. You have a bike that will live up to our wishes as being a great way to get started in a sport that will pay back in many positive ways. Until next time ride safe, and stay into the ride!

*INTO THE RIDE*

