

INTO THE RIDE #98

Alterra 700X ... The Midnight Marauder

by Randy Schlitter



Bike tires on bricks at night make a special sound, like a million kitty feet pacing at an unnatural speed. The pavers transmit little vibration to the handle bars or seat. I am riding an Alterra 700X with Richey Comp Speed Max 700x 35c cross tires at 75 psi. The ride is hauntingly smooth and quiet. The sounds are only a mild confirmation of motion. Just released from men's yoga class, I ride into the darkness of early evening. The bike fits like a glove, hands are not numb, the seat feels as if molded to shape, frame size is dead on, ride and handling natural, intuitive. The timbre of the oversized aluminum tube frame should be rough, but the extra wheel base length inherent to the Crankforward design betrays the typical harsh aluminum ride. This is a good thing, because the Alterra frame is light, yet stiff in all the right places, and remains lively and fun.

Ok, so I am gushing with a lot of Alterra 700X love, but when you ride, it should yield a slice of nirvana. If not, maybe you are not riding the right bike. To figure out the right bike can be tough; it requires knowing your riding style. Tonight this is a perfect match of bike and style - the Alterra 700X has enough tread and tire size to handle the brick streets, even with a layer of sand or when wet. This is great, because when riding on dark streets you need a bike that is not finicky about road conditions. The Alterra 700X is not at all finicky, and that means you can bomb around with confidence. As I ride and I try to see the non-obvious pot holes and occasional uneven pavement, the bike takes the rough with solid control. 700 wheels and longer wheel base are accountable for this.

Handle bar position is high, like on a hybrid, and it is the one thing I may change. I have an Alterra Road with drop bars, which offers multiple hand positions; it is the one thing I miss. For my personal 700X, the drops may be the way to go. We currently do not offer any bikes with drop bars, but they could work their way into the 2012 line up as we get more rider feedback from those building up frame sets.

The CF-2 seat comes stock on the Alterra. Shaped more slender for the steeper seat tube angle, it offers support in all the right places, with absolutely no pressure in the wrong places. It is the kind of comfort that makes you feel like you can ride all night. I ponder that idea; nothing says I have to ride directly home tonight. Wandering around the heart of Hays is like riding in a bungalow-lined maze of bricked streets, humble hills, and lots of intersections. Traffic is light, passing a car maybe three times in 10 minutes. Just when it seems like I should head it home, the bike asks for more, and I give in to making yet another turn down a quiet dark street.

The intent of the Alterra 700X is a bike that can do limited off-road, dirt roads, pavement, and of course actual cycle cross. Having an Alterra 700X actually end up in a cycle cross competition is unlikely. Having the Alterra 700X end up being your favorite ride that fits your riding style, however, is a very likely possibility.

Construction of the Alterra 700X frame is 7005 alloy, top and down tubes of 38.1mm, seat tube is 40mm, and seat and chain stays at 22.2mm. It is fitted with both canti and disc brake mounts, and with three-way cable stops on the left side of the down tube. This is a curious arrangement of cables, but this location keeps the cable off the top tube. With no cable on the top tube, frame bags don't cause braking issues, and loading the bike on a frame mount rack causes less paint damage. On the side of the down tube the cables are also out of the main rain and dirt zone created by the front tire's rooster tail. The made-in-USA frame is expertly TIG welded and powder coated in a stunning metallic blue. Available as a complete bike or a frame set. The frame set includes seat, seat post, cushion, handle bars, stem, headset (with cups installed) and our tough-but-light carbon fork that has both disc and canti brake mounts.

My ultimate version of the Alterra 700X would include at least drop bars and the RAC system. This would make it a fast cargo hauler, and for hi-paced back road rides, I would take off the RAC. It is the kind of bike that could reduce the number of bikes you have in your garage to almost one, if group rides or low drag recumbents are not your flavor. The adventures you can have on this bike both rural and around town are unlimited, and the sturdy frame and hardware should make it a faithful performer. Thanks for stopping by this time, and as always, ride safe and stay into the ride!

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