

INTO THE RIDE #101

RAAM and Recumbents

by Randy Schlitter

This race has been graciously open to recumbents, and the efforts by our company and others have proven them to be viable racers. It still remains a mystery as to why some things are not developing, like better publicity and overall recumbent popularity (and sponsorship?). Could it be that the same old attitude that stunted the growth of racing cycling development in the early 1900's is still present today? Say it ain't so, but....

We won the 4-man division in 2009, yet even though we were the first bike across the line of the 4-man teams, we never got first place recognition. The official word was "first place in the recumbent division." That made it seem a hollow victory since we were the only 4-man recumbent team entry that year. The reason was "recumbents are a form of cheating", as explained by one race official. Wow, that really took the punch out of desire for continued RAAM entries!!! However, it WAS a great launch of the Xstream platform!

It is important for recumbents to be recognized, as well as permitted to race. Without a first place overall recognition in the 4-man, we did not make the hoped for statement. The dream was to change minds about what was needed to win in this race. By having the official standings "adjusted" there is no need to seek out faster mounts. It has since become my opinion RAAM is useless for advancing the bicycle form. It only serves to vent some testosterone for a very limited bunch of people.

Imagine if the overall winner for a couple of years in a row was on a recumbent. The message would be clear, that if you want to win this race, you'd better seek out the best that technology has to offer.

Imagine the records that could be set if the majority of entries were riding bents in RAAM. Imagine the paradigm shift possible to ultra racing in general. But sadly, we are still dogged with non-progressive thinking running this once (to me) important race.

Zoom Factor and the Grocery Getter

One day out front of my local grocery store a passerby commented "that looks like an awful fancy bike to ride to the store...". I reflected a nano second and quipped back, "yeah but it's too much fun NOT to take to the store!"

I love that riding to the local grocery store seems to be one of the more common tasks asked of a bike. Our Crankforward bikes are naturals for this mission. That is why we added to our line a variety of ways to haul goods. Of course the ultimate beast for extracting nutritional mass from the local vendor is our HammerTruck. This special-use bike can haul 250 pounds in cargo on the super stout rack designed just for hauling. Another hauling system is the RAC (ride and carry). In combination with our monster-sized panniers one can load up a full level cart of groceries.

What all these bikes have in common is zoom factor. Even our humble but best selling CrankForward Fusion has a performance heritage that makes grocery getting high in fun factor. Zoom factor comes from a markedly lighter bike, with good wheels and low rolling resistance tires. It's faulty thinking to dismiss performance just because the mission is so casual. In fact it should be more important to make the mundane exciting -- it will encourage more cycling. And that is the main point of building efficient bikes -- they invite people to cycle, rather than avoiding it.

Building in zoom factor takes careful consideration, from frame design to component selection. For instance: even with a bike like the Fusion ST (one of our lowest priced machines) there is still an attitude for performance. The frame is lightweight aluminum, same for the wheels, crank, brakes, and derailleurs. The tires are high pressure, light and fast. All this for a bike meant to just cruise about at an easy pace? Yes, why not? In fact this very bike has done some pretty impressive riding. One client has bought a Fusion two years in a row and each season crossed the USA from West to East. He then sells the bike and returns to Australia. He reported no issues keeping up with other riders in his group. This is a mission where you want zoom factor, and it is nice to know the Fusion has such broad appeal and success!

Climbing is Attitude

Someone coined the expression "Fitness Bike" and I can see this becoming a viable category. These are bikes not exactly light or with small section high-pressure tires. The obvious aspect of such a bike is that it provides a good workout to ride. It almost sounds like a good way to label a slug, because most of what the big box stores sell fall into this category, and having owned a few, none have ever exhibited any zoom factor. Like a lot of fitness equipment, few will remain in use after the initial burst of enthusiasm wears off. Too bad, because with enough zoom factor those bikes would be ridden a lot more, and the owners of a CrankForward "Fitness Bike" might just find themselves explaining to a passerby the virtues of riding a good quality (and comfortable!) bike.

Having made a lot of different types of recumbent and Crankforward bikes, I find some are better climbers than others. The science of climb performance is also fascinating, yet it all comes down to the engine, or more accurately, the will power of the engine. Hills bring out the true nature of a cyclist. Some hate hills, others are indifferent, and others - believe it or not - actually LIKE hills. I fall into the latter group. I do not know when this changed, but a big influence was riding with lots of younger riders. Hill climbing could be considered an old man's sport, because being in a hurry is not the best way to approach a climb. I have been known to yell out to someone while passing them uphill, who had sprinted past me earlier in the climb..."You don't climb the hill at the bottom..." I am sure this inspires and educates! I am glad my attitude towards hills has changed. Back when I was not in love with climbing you had to plan around hills, avoid them, worry about them, talk about how hard it was going to be. Everyone always points out the hills on a ride, and after awhile I just got tired of the hype and started accepting the damned things, and then even better, started liking them!

Once I changed my attitude towards climbing, all changed for the better. Now I ride with wild abandon not really concerned about climbs. And this goes for rides not in Kansas, as well. Out west in the Rockies I have enjoyed some long climbs. I guess for me there is a certain peace in knowing the job ahead. I simply sit back and slip into my climb mode. Before you know it you are at the top. And here comes the reward...the downhill runs! Just remember -- hills are only temporary, but the thrill of cycling can last a lifetime.

New Products



New Head Set Adjuster

We have made some subtle but significant improvements to our head set adjuster. It now features a single tension nut and better slotting. These improvements allow for easier and more secure installation of the adjuster. To order call your dealer or go to [ShopRANS](#). Part number is MPBK0093.



New Riser

For use on our recumbent line and possibly some CrankForwards we have added a new forged curved riser. The riser is more raked forward and longer. This will allow handlebars to be more forward on our high racers. The forged riser can be trimmed to the required height, and is sized to fit over 1.125 fork steer tubes. To order call your dealer or go to [ShopRANS](#). Part number is BPHB0083.

Thanks for stopping by and reading this June/July/extra topics installment of ITR. As always ride safe and stay into the ride!

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