

1994 TANDEM BUYERS GUIDE

TANDEM

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Destination:
Ireland
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Interview:
Frame Builder
Keith Lippy

Road Test:
Ibis Cousin It
Sterling
Deluxe Sport.

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THE FIRST RIDE

BY ROB TEMPLIN

I happen to be a big fan of the Calvin and Hobbes comic strip; probably because I can relate all too well to the fantasy world in which Calvin and his imaginary tiger live. Maybe you had a chance to catch a particular installment that ran several months ago.

In it, Calvin is getting ready for bed and lamenting to Hobbes that he hasn't done his homework for the next day. A typical Calvin dilemma. So he prays for snow, hoping school will be cancelled. As luck would have it, he gets his wish. But instead of using the extra day's reprieve to complete his school assignment, he spends the time playing in the snow with Hobbes. In justifying his actions, Calvin tells Hobbes that, "You've got to seize the moment."

I find myself in a similar bind. Let me explain.

You see, this is a busy time of year for my partners and me at Burley Design Cooperative. Because of time constraints, I was hesitant when Tandem Magazine called with a last minute proposal to put together a column for their inaugural issue. But I figured I could set aside a couple of weekends during what is a typically wet, dreary season here in the Pacific Northwest.

While these soggy, seasonal conditions cut into my saddle time, usually they also afford me the opportunity to catch up on all those projects, like a tandem column for instance, that I never seem to find time for. Ah, priorities. Even Calvin, in his own perverse way, could relate.

As the weekend approached, during which I was to crank out (quick, get the Pun Police) a witty and intelligent piece of writing for you, the tandem honcho, something unusual happened. The winter that had been a persistent guest here in Oregon for the past few months abruptly gave way to rare summer-like



conditions. Prime cycling weather three months early - even though this break was supposed to be short-lived.

So when Saturday morning rolled around, I did what you probably would have done. I made plans to get together with friends for a local group ride.

In my best Calvin rationalization, I figured that a long day or two on the tandem, combined with good company, great weather, and a heavy dose of cycling-induced endorphins would motivate me to new heights of inspired copy.

Have you found that some of your best ideas have come to fruition while pounding out an epic, all day ride on deserted and spectacular backroads? Topping off such an adventure with a couple of fat burritos, fresh salsa, and a cerveza has a way of stimulating the creative processes. At least, that was my plan.

But my weekend of two-wheeled fun, the kind that leaves you grinning from ear-to-ear as the day winds down, didn't result in any nifty story lines; only a bad case of sunburn and hammered legs. Braindead.

So I decided to take the easy way out, relying on a simple journalistic tool when all else fails: write about your first experiences on a particular subject. I figured you'd indulge me; since it was a few classic tandem rides that helped get me into this time crunch mess to start with.

My initiation to tandems began with the single-minded purpose of setting a transcontinental speed record with a group of racing buddies.

The year was 1979. This was in the days before RAAM. Before STI, lycra, or helmets that looked cool - unless you thought hockey helmet styles were fashionable. Wool was the fabric of choice. Because gas was selling for less than 60 cents a gallon, no one was thinking of bikes as an alternative means of transportation (including this writer, I'm embarrassed to admit).





Brooks McKinney had the somewhat unusual concept of four riders, on two tandems, establishing the record. My captain was to be Pete Penseyres.

I remember vividly that first long training ride. Our Schwinn Paramount tandems, state-of-the-art for the time, had just arrived. The plan was to break in the bikes with a big mileage weekend up the Southern California coast. We were proud of our shiny, two-person steeds and the places they, hopefully, were going to take us. Excited about new challenges.

And maybe, just maybe, the four of us were a bit too cocky - being racers we knew it all; thought we'd be able to learn everything there was to know about tandems in a day or two.

Since you're into tandems, you can probably guess what happened that day...

On the first small rise, just a few miles out of the driveway, Pete and I tried to stand up together. By the time we got the bike back under control, we had learned that it was indeed possible to get a tandem sideways. How inept the four of us must have looked in those early, shaky miles. We used various excuses to stay seated for most of the ensuing miles.

As the weekend dragged on, our collective energy began to sag. We did gain a different perspective about team-

work and communication. We had no choice.

On a particularly rough stretch of the Pacific Coast Highway, I was sure Pete wasn't doing as good a job as he could in pointing out the potholes and bumps. And his rough shifting technique felt like I was going to see my kneecaps removed from my legs. I let him know it. He, on the other hand, had to put up with a stoker, a whiny one at that, who was finding it more and more difficult to sit still - a result of dreaded "stoker's butt." And he let me know it.

Our mood wasn't enhanced by the rude lessons we learned as our tandems went through various stages of self-destruction. In the late 70's, tandem-specific components were more than a rarity. They just plain didn't exist. A tandem quality freehub cassette was just a gleam in some product manager's eye.

At regular intervals we had to play roadside mechanic with wheels that wouldn't stay true, stiff links, bad chains, and clusters waiting to blow. My stoker's cockpit was a cramped affair that had my face positioned inches from Pete's back. A curved stoker's seat tube aggravated, needlessly I might add, this tight fit. All were a part of the single-bike component and design mentality that defined tandems at the time.

By the end of our weekend introduction to tandems, all of us had the

same thought but weren't willing to say it out loud: 3,000 miles non-stop across the country was going to be a lot more interesting than we first imagined.

Of course we did, eventually, make it across the United States later that summer. By current standards, our time was slow. From the beginning, the four of us didn't kid ourselves. We knew all along that there would be speedier cyclists to come along. But that's not what really mattered.

I knew right away, even with those first dismal experiences, that I was on to something. Tandems are a blast. They're fast. A different way to explore, vacation, or take on the challenges of group rides.

You and I know all the right reasons to cycle. Health. Environment. In its simplest equation, cycling - tandeming - makes us feel good about ourselves. Unlike our single bikes, however, tandems allow us to share our passion with others in a unique way. No other sport affords such an opportunity. But I'm not telling you anything new, eh?

I'm still learning this tandem game; maybe you are as well. What started out as a curiosity, now continues to excite and challenge me in ways I never imagined; to help teach me the art of compromise, the ability to savor small victories like the thrill of standing up together for the first time with a new tandem partner. To take a weekend - when the opportunity arises - to do nothing more complicated than go for a bike ride with friends. That's the tandem experience. I think Calvin and Hobbes would understand, don't you? 

