

READER'S WRITE:

A couple of years ago I decided it was time for a new road bike. I had been a member of the International Humam Powered Vehicle Association for awhile and was aware of recumbent bicycles. A ride on a friend RANS Stratus convinced me, though I found the Stratus a bit awkward. The IHPVA Source Guide provided addresses and soon I had quite a collection of brochures and a few names of dealers in Florida. Fifty miles to Gainesville yielded a ride on the Lightning, a used bike. Two hundred miles to Tampa yielded a ride on a used Tour Easy and I looked at a couple of other models. I found both of these bikes easier to handle than the RANS. My first impression was that I preferred the Tour Easy for its handling. It is more stable than the Lightning - Or perhaps I should say less responsive. This is a matter of personal taste, of course, and I have always preferred the ease and stability of a touring bike to the responsiveness (dare I say twitchy) of a criterium racer.

Despite the slight preference for the handling of the Tour Easy, I bought the Lightning. The main reason was a friendlier dealer and my preference for the color blue. I have since fiddled with the gearing and added a ZZipper Experimenter Long Bubble Fairing. Both Tim Brummer and Karl Abbe of ZZipper were most helpful.

Now that I have lived with it for a couple of years and a fair number of miles I have formed some better opinions. First, I'm glad I got a recumbent. It really is more comfortable; no more neck and shoulder pain, and no more tired bottom, although I still get a little numb in my right foot on long rides. And it really is faster. I average about 15 mph on long rides

now, I used to do about 12 mph, I got about half the difference by switching to a recumbent and the other half when I put the fairing on. You can tell I'm a recreational class rider. I expect a strong rider would see a larger gain, as aero drag is a better part of his work load.

About the Lightning itself, I am pleased. It is nicely made of good material, a quality product. I like the mesh sling seat which is comfortable and allows air circulation to my back. I like the (upright) handlebar steering, although it is a bit close to my body, and having all the controls at my fingers. I am not so pleased with the size of the front wheel. There are two options, a 16" X 1-3/8" and a 17" Moulton. Both are difficult to find tubes and tires for. The 16" is a fairly low pressure tire and the Moulton is very expensive.

Since getting this bike, I have tried a few others for short first impression rides. I liked the RANS Nimbus better than the Stratus. It handles more like a Tour Easy. I also had a chance to try a classic Avatar, the only one so far with under-seat steering. It was as strange as I had imagined; a couple of passes through the parking lot and it was going where I wanted it to.

This year my wife admitted she wants a recumbent too, so we are back in the market. It remains to be seen what we'll get for her.

David R. Hoekzema
St. Augustine Florida

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