

RALEIGH PORT TOWNSEND

A light tourer that gets the job done

by Patrick O'Grady

I was prepared to dislike the Raleigh Port Townsend, in part because it seemed like the little brother to the more rugged Sojourn, especially after seeing the big brother at our local REI outlet a while back. The Sojourn offered Reynolds 520 chromoly frame, Avid BB mechanical disc brakes, SKS fenders with mud flaps, Shimano Octalink triple crankset with a Deore rear derailleur and SRAM 11-34 cassette, spoke holders, pump peg — and a pump to go

with it. What's not to like?

Alas, the Sojourn was on hiatus, according to Raleigh marketing guy Brian Fornes, who adds that the company will again offer a dedicated touring bike in 2012 as well as utilitarian, do-everything bikes like the Port Townsend.

"As of now, the Sojourn is in torpor, but it will be back," Fornes said. "It's the most requested bike for editors to test right now. The decision was almost made to discontinue the bike but, as we all loved it, we decided to bring it back in 2012. In the meantime, we've brought in the Port Townsend as a more be-all, do-all commuter/light traveler."

While the Port Townsend may be the wave of Raleigh's future, it has the look of a blast from the past — Reynolds 520 butted tubes, a basic black paint scheme, and graphics that are understated to the point of invisibility.

In fact, the Port Townsend doesn't tell you much about itself in an era when most two-wheelers are tarted up like NASCAR rigs. Unbranded parts include the headset, stem, handlebars, seatpost, metal fenders, front rack, front hub, and 32-hole rims.

The latter are apparently Weinmann TR18s, a slightly high-profile racing rim that Fornes says "have held up quite well under normal circumstances" on two



other Raleigh steel offerings, the One Way and Clubman. They held up well under normal circumstances for me too, including wintry spins on slushy concrete bike paths, poorly maintained city streets, the occasional dirt road, gravel paths, and construction zones.

Recognizable bits include the unlovely but functional Tektro R200 brake levers, 700C x 35mm Vittoria Randonneur Touring wire-bead tires, Shimano BR550 cantilever brakes and Dura-Ace bar-end shifters controlling a Sora drivetrain. The 50/34 chain rings and 11-25 cassette match the setup on my DBR road bike from the last-millennium — however, that elderly racing machine is about nine pounds lighter and thus better suited to hilly Colorado Springs than the burly Port Townsend.

But my DBR didn't come with braze-

ons and eyelets for racks and fenders. The Port Townsend has both and also boasts a smallish front rack very much like the Nitto M12, suitable for supporting a large handlebar bag, plus the aforementioned durable metal fenders — painted black to match the frameset — to keep the squish out of your shoes.

Speaking of shoes, you can drive this PT Cruiser home from the shop wearing your Stacy Adamses, Hush Puppies, or PF Flyers, because

it includes a set of Wellgo track pedals complete with steel toe clips and brown leather straps that accessorize nicely with the faux Brooks saddle (a brown Avenir Classic Series that proved surprisingly comfy in both Lycra and street clothes) and the brown handlebar tape.

"We do this on all of the steel bikes we're offering," said Fornes. "From our standpoint, toe clips give the consumer a bike they can use instantly out of the shop, a bike they can ride home straight off the showroom floor. And they can continue to ride it until they are ready to upgrade to whatever they feel suits their needs."

I saw this setup as an excuse for a downgrade to my old Sidi cyclo-cross shoes with their slotted cleats. My mad pedal-flipping skills were last used somewhere in the 1980s with a pair of Lyotard 460Ds, but they gradually came back to

me. It was just like riding a bike.

And despite its heft and decidedly unflashy components, the Port Townsend rides, well, just like a bike.

I got a comfortably upright position straight out of the box, which never happens, and there was no toe-clip/fender overlap, due in part to the medium clips. I wear a 42 shoe but liked a large Christophe toe clip and wide pedal back in the day, and the first custom touch I'd add to the Port Townsend is a different set of pedals, especially if I planned to use shoes I could walk in.

The ride was predictable but not lively. Once you get the Port Townsend rolling, it keeps rolling, but muscling it away from a stop sign takes a bit of effort, especially if you're having trouble flipping that pedal (reflectors butted up against a teensy tab don't make pedal flipping any easier).

And if wind or gravity adds a degree or two of difficulty to your ride, you feel every ounce of the bike's 28.75 pounds, especially with a low gear of 34x25 (37 gear inches). Add a handlebar bag, a rear rack with panniers, plus a kickstand, headlight, and taillight, and you have a real beast on your hands. I'm not a gram counter — the bikes in my garage are made of steel or titanium, save one featherweight kinesis-carbon weirdo — but I do live in Colorado, where every ride is uphill into a headwind, so I notice an extra pound or six. Your mileage may vary.

That said, the Port Townsend — unlike the Sojourn, which has more standover clearance, longer chainstays and wheelbase, and load-friendly gearing — is not intended to be “a full-on touring bike,” says Fornes. Think rather commuting, coffee runs, short and lightly loaded credit-card tours — in other words, a utilitarian bike.

So I treated it as such, riding it unencumbered in my old Sidis, lightly loaded as a commuter might, in street clothes and some Vasque hikers, and packed for a one- or two-day credit-card tour in Shimano touring shoes after switching the stock pedals out for a pair of Crank Brothers Candys (my knees, like the rest of me, are 57 years old and inclined to complain).

At every step of the process, I expected to sneer at the bike but never did, even when it bulked up to 46.5 pounds

Specifications: Raleigh Port Townsend

Price: \$910

Sizes available: X-small (50cm), small (53cm), small/medium (55cm), medium/large (57cm), large (59cm)

Size tested: Medium/large

Weight: 28.7 pounds with pedals

TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS

Seat tube: 21 1/2 inches (55cm), center to top

Top tube: 22 inches effective

Head tube angle: 72°

Seat tube angle: 73°

Chainstays: 17 1/8

Seat height above ground: 40 1/4 inches

Crank spindle height above ground: 11 1/4 inches

Fork offset: 1 31/32 inches (50mm)

Wheelbase: 41 3/8 inches

Standover height: 32 1/8 inches

Frame and fork: Reynolds 520 butted chromoly with 4130 chromoly fork. Threaded bosses for two water bottles. Cantilever brake bosses. Braze-ons front and rear for fenders; braze-ons at rear for rack. Fenders and front rack included (mounts to cantilever bosses). Cable stops for front and rear derailleurs and rear brake. Threadless headset.

Rims: Weinmann TR18, 32-hole

Spokes: 14g stainless, cross three

Hubs: Tiagra rear, unbranded front

Tires: Vittoria Randonneur Touring wire bead, 700C x 35mm

Crank: Shimano Sora, 175mm arms, 50/34 chainrings

Front derailleur: Shimano Sora

Rear derailleur: Shimano Sora

Shift levers: Shimano Dura-Ace BS77 bar-cons

Brake levers: Tektro R200

Brakes: Shimano R550 cantilevers

Pedals: Wellgo R025 track pedals with MT-16 steel toe clips (M) and W5 leather straps.

Seatpost, stem, headset, handlebar,

front rack: Unbranded

Saddle: Avenir Classic Series brown

Fenders: Alloy, unbranded

Cog cassette: Shimano HG50 11-12-13-15-17-19-21-23-25 9-speed

Chain: KMC Z narrow

Gearing in inches:

	50	34
11	123.5	84.0
12	113.2	77.0
13	104.5	71.1
15	90.6	61.6
17	79.9	54.3
19	71.5	48.6
21	64.7	44.0
23	59.1	40.2
25	54.3	37.0

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with a large Arkel handlebar bag, an Old Man Mountain Cold Springs rear rack, and Jandd Economy Panniers holding what I'd need for a short spring-break road trip — spare tubes, minipump and multitool, Click-Stand, snacks, water, wallet, camera, iPhone, foul-weather gear, shaving kit, civvies, and street shoes. Like Ol' Man River, it just kept rolling along.

Sure, the Port Townsend could be lighter and prettier. So could I. But a little simple tinkering could slash pounds off the bike. And, at \$910 ready to ride, it will leave plenty of weight in your wallet, say for a gym membership to bulk up those quads, or at least a 12-27

cassette.

Still not sold? Then just wait a while. Raleigh will be adding more utilitarian bikes to its line so there will be some new machinery due out in the 2012 model year.

“It'd be rad if we could maintain every bike in every line that we have — but, as we all know, to bring in the new, some things have to go,” said Fornes. “People will see more bikes from us that fill that do-everything category.” **AC**

Patrick O'Grady has written and cartooned about cycling since 1989 for VeloNews, Bicycle Retailer and Industry News, and a variety of other publications. The number of bikes in his Colorado garage is an exact match for the number of voices in his head.