



# What Kind of Bike Should You Buy?

By John Schubert

The American consumer in 2007 gets to be mighty picky when he buys something. We have a baffling array of choices. This is true even with touring bikes, even though the neighborhood bike shop is likely to have somewhere between zero and one touring bike in stock (and probably not in your size). Search a little wider and you will find a broad spectrum of nuances in touring-bike design.

But before I continue, let me remind everyone not to feel that you have to be too picky. Consider that forty-seven years ago my brother-in-law rode a camping transcontinental tour on a Schwinn three-speed, carrying much of his gear in a steel front basket, and he thoroughly enjoyed himself. Take inspiration from him. I'm not suggesting that you seek out a Schwinn three-speed for this trip, but rather that you should get decent equipment and then stop worrying about minor attributes your bike does or doesn't have.

We racked our brains and came up with the primary subcategories of touring bikes — general road touring, light road touring, heavy-duty road touring, mountain bike, recumbent, tandem, and folding — and spotlighted a good example from each category. As always, you could argue with our choice of examples, as did we. But we think we nailed a good example in each category.

### General Road Touring

Smack dead center in the touring bike's universe is the "typical" touring bike sold by, well, by several companies. You could be well-served by bikes from Trek, Cannondale, Fuji, Jamis, Rocky Mountain, or Bianchi.

A good example of a well-designed touring bike is the Novara Randonee, sold at REI stores. Its \$950 price tag and its specifications are typical of general road touring bikes. It comes with dropped handlebars (which many of us still prefer for their more aerodynamic riding position) and an REI aluminum rear rack. The rack saves you the trouble of buying your own, and it broadcasts a signal: this bike is made to carry stuff.

The frame is Reynolds 520 steel tubing. Steel is still popular among touring cyclists, partly because of its retro-grouch cussedness, partly because of its field repairability, and partly because it simply offers a great ride.

The Randonee comes with Vittoria Randonneur 700x32 tires. These are wide enough to be flat-resistant on pretty bad road surfaces, even as you bog down the bike with camping gear. It's my tire width of choice for unpaved rail trails. I'm currently testing a pair of Randonneurs, and they are very durable, long-lived tires.



Then there's the gearing. The front chainwheels are 26/36/48 and the cog cassette is a nine-speed 11-34, giving you a good low gear of 21 inches and an overkill high gear of 118 inches.

In this \$950 price range, you're paying enough to get an actual brand name on your components, and in the Randonee's case, that name is usually Shimano. Brakes, hubs, chain, crankset, crank spindle, and of course, the derailleurs. You'll also get a pair of unprepossessing platform pedals with toe clips. This is pretty standard: bikes either come with usable-but-inexpensive pedals, or no pedals at all, on the theory that most riders will want to use the clipless pedal system of their personal choice.

The Randonee, and other bikes like it, will go almost anywhere and endure for decades. There's a reason why bikes in this class have remained the staple for transcontinental and similar rides.

### Light Road Touring

But what if you're a confirmed credit card tourist? You need carry very little stuff for a multi-day ride (I've done it with an eight-pound rack trunk that held all my clothing and other stuff). You plan to avoid unpaved roads, or use some combination of skill and caution to ride on them. And you want your bike to be as spry as possible for this kind of riding.

Four years ago, Specialized reignited the choices for this kind of rider with the Sequoia, which is pretty much a hybrid



**REI Novara Randonee.**

between a racing bike and a full-on touring bike. For 2007, the Sequoia comes in a \$770 model and an \$1,100 model. It has skinny rims to fit skinny tires (It comes with Specialized 700x23C), but frame and fork clearance to fit tires up to 700 x 32C. Both models have carbon fiber forks (advantage: less vibration, less weight. Disadvantage: don't clamp pannier racks on those carbon fork blades); the more expensive model also has carbon seatstays. Both models have "Zertz" elastomer inserts to reduce vibration. You get three chainwheels, mounting bosses for a rear rack, a more upright (and more comfortable) rider position than you'd find on a true racing bike and cheapie resin pedals awaiting the pedal replacement of

your choice.

The more expensive model has nine-speed gearing, with a low gear of 31 inches and a high gear of 113 inches. The less expensive model has eight-speed gearing, 32 inches and 113 inches. If you're in good shape, these low gears may be tolerable for very lightly loaded touring. Some riders may choose to have their gearing modified at the time they buy the bike.

To underscore the core point: you get an almost racing bike, lightweight and spry, with good tire clearances and rack mounts. Don't overload it and you can have some terrific adventures.

Other companies have started to follow Specialized's Sequoia formula. If one of them intrigues you, double check the tire clearances and rack mounting capability, because the marketplace is full of otherwise-wonderful bikes that lack these two key attributes.

### Heavy Duty Road Touring

What if you are just plain hard on equipment? You carry a lot of weight, you bash through potholes, you ride on rough unpaved surfaces, your weight just has more metal bending karma than other people's weight. Maybe you plan on riding vast distances over rugged terrain in remote country. You want a bike that is overbuilt and reliability is your top concern.

While there are several good examples of heavy-duty touring bikes, the ones that many people will think of are made by frame builder Bruce Gordon, whose \$2,550 Rock 'n Road and more affordable \$1,849 BLT



**Specialized Sequoia.**

(Basic Loaded Touring) set the standard for bikes very disinclined to bend or break. Every one of his bikes is hand made in his Petaluma, California, factory, and he lives and breathes the needs of the touring customer.

One compelling reason to select a Bruce Gordon bike is to get Bruce Gordon racks. Gordon pioneered in the United States marketplace truly rugged racks that are extremely unlikely to fail in the field. (I was once privy to instrumented rack testing in which Gordon's racks clearly outshined every other rack of that era.) Other rack makers have caught up over the decades (or, in the case of Blackburn, simply de-emphasized their rack business), but Gordon still sets the standard. And Gordon's racks have special mounting points for your fenders, so you can have more rattle-free, rigid fenders than you thought possible.

On Gordon's web site, you'll find something few other vendors mention anymore: top tube diameters and wall thicknesses. Gordon correctly points out that touring cyclists with panniers need a more rigid top tube than do racing cyclists, to avoid steering shimmy. And so Gordon's top tubes have wall thicknesses 25 percent greater than the competing brands listed.

A Bruce Gordon frame is made from retro-lover's steel, shod with high-end Shimano components, and available in a huge range of frame sizes with your choice of 700C or 26-inch wheels. A 700 x 45C or 26 x 1.25 tire will fit in the generous clearances in the frame and fork. With 26-inch tires, you get an 18-inch low gear and a 102-inch high gear. I'd call that a perfect range. With 700C tires, you get a 19-inch low gear and a 111-inch high gear — perfect on the low end, a bit of overkill on the high end, and changeable if you want. The BLT is a "no substitutions" menu item; the Rock 'n Road offers more customizing and nicer components for its price premium.

Yes, you pay a price premium for having a bike handmade in the United States, but the premium is surprisingly small. If these are the specs that meet your needs, this bike is a great value.

#### Mountain Bikes

Beefy touring rigs like the Rock 'n Road are tough enough for extended off-pavement

## FAST RIDING ON A "SLOW" BIKE

When it comes to riding fast, touring bikes get a bad rap. I'm sure you have often heard someone say, "That thing weighs so much," or "The frame angles aren't right for hard cornering," or similar epistemological rubbish.

The true differences between a go-fast bike and a touring bike are much exaggerated. Do you want to have a one-unit bike collection and still go fast? Buy a touring bike. Put skinny tires on it for your go-fast days. Your misinformed riding companions will marvel at your moose-like muscles, but you and I will know that you really aren't overcoming a huge mechanical disadvantage.

Here's the weight difference: a go-fast bike's frame weighs two to four pounds. A touring bike's frame weighs four to five pounds. There's another half-pound weight difference in the fork, and a sprinkling of ounces here and there in other components. The most important of these differences is in the wheels and tires, and you can minimize that by using the lightest tires your touring rims will allow.

Your touring bike's rims will be a bit wider than a go-fast bike's rims. The touring bikes I've tested in the past few years have rim widths of 22 to 24 mm, and a typical go-fast rim is 18 mm. This means you can't fit the narrowest tires on your touring bike. Depending on your bike, the narrowest tire that works well may be in the 23C to 26C range.

tours, but for rugged dirt tours like the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route or serious singletrack touring, you'll want a mountain bike. With their upright riding position, wide hand placement, meaty tires, and terrain-smoothing suspension, mountain bikes give cyclists the ability to ride on roads and trails that simply wouldn't be possible, or at least wouldn't be much fun, on traditional tourers.

In recent years, full suspension technology has gotten so reliable, and its comfort benefits are so immense, that many people

But is this a disadvantage? I don't think so. A 20C tire may look cool, but a 26C tire handles better.

The Surly Long Haul Trucker I recently road tested weighed 24.16 pounds with its fat tires. I used to ride USCF races on 23-pound bikes. So I think the Long Haul Trucker is pretty good. Sure, today's carbon wonders routinely trounce the 20-pound barrier, but so what? You can go plenty fast on a 24-pound bike. The "additional" weight hampers your acceleration, but you won't notice that unless you're doing exhaustive sprint workouts. The weight doesn't hamper your top speed. It hampers your hill climbing, but only as much as the weight of a few more water bottles.

Finally, an anecdote: decades ago, I held a USCF racing license and I trained daily on exotic racing bikes. Each morning, I would time my commute to work. This commute was six miles long; it had 680 vertical feet of climbing, and it had 1,030 feet of descending. It had hard cornering, washboard pavement, and one memorable switchback climb. My stopwatch and I rode many a world championship racing machine over those hills, and yet my fastest time on that commute was on my Cannondale touring bike with fenders, a rear rack, and 27 x 1 1/8 inch touring tires.

So if you want to go fast, it ain't the bike that's holding you back.

feel a full-suspension bike is the way to go. The Specialized Stumpjumper FSR is my own favorite from that point of view. *Adventure Cyclist* deputy editor Aaron Teasdale has had good luck on all manner of dirt roads and technical trails, using both trailers or racks, with a Santa Cruz Blur. After riding the never-ending washboard roads of Wyoming's Great Basin, many Great Divide Route riders swear by the benefits of a fully suspended bike.

To get another expert opinion, I asked the man who's put the most racks on moun-

tain bikes that weren't made with rack mounting in mind: Channing Hammond, founder and major domo of Old Man Mountain racks. For long tours in remote

suspension has a small telescoping tube on the seat-stay, and no pivots anywhere. The rear triangle simply flexes upwards to absorb shock. Moots can do this with titanium,

bikes. Accordingly, there is no one price or component specification chart for a YBB, though you already know that titanium doesn't come cheap. But if you're looking for a sweet ride that'll outlast several sets of components you bolt to it, the YBB will be your loyal sherpa from the Arctic Circle to the Steppes to downtown Brooklyn.

### Recumbent

Say good-bye to the sore butt, numb hands, aching neck, and "watch my front tire" riding position. Say hello to armchair comfort, more daily mileage on less training, and a rider position that naturally puts your eyes watching the scenery, not your front wheel. Really, is there a rational reason why most of us ride "wedgies" (as recumbent fanciers dismissively refer to our bikes)?

The recumbent buyer faces a plethora of choices, and the differences among the various designs are very real. You can have your handlebars in front of you, or underneath your seat (my favored position, but a small minority in the marketplace). You can have a long wheelbase, a short wheelbase, or one in between. And these wheelbases vary by many inches, enough to make a real handling difference. (The millimeters by which



**Bruce Gordon's Rock 'n Road.**

places, Hammond recommended a bike that combines rear suspension comfort with no rear suspension moving parts — the titanium Moots YBB. This bike has a conventional suspension front fork, but the rear

because, when properly engineered, the metal has pretty much infinite fatigue life when flexed within its elastic zone.

Moots sells framesets and titanium components, and its retailers sell complete

## HOW GOOD IS YOUR STOCK GEARING?

For decades, touring bike buyers have found it necessary to replace the gearing that comes stock on the bike, to get gearing that properly meets their needs.

The good news is that this isn't as big a problem in 2007. But you still might want to know what all the fuss is about.

Touring bikes should have a low enough gear for the worst-case scenario: climbing a brutally steep hill with full packs at the end of a long day when you're dog tired.

And bike companies have often been reluctant to equip bikes that way.

(Any gear is expressed in "gear inches." The definition of gear inches is the chainwheel-to-cog ratio, multiplied by the rear wheel diameter. This gives you a single number, your "gear inches.")

What should your lowest gear should be, so you can comfortably pedal your

loaded bike up a steep hill at the end of a long day? Young strong riders may find a gear of 27 inches low enough. Mature riders may need the 19-inch low gear that comes stock on a Bruce Gordon.

Production bikes all seem to fall in between these two numbers. Fuji, Jamis and Trek have 25-inch low gears; the Bianchi Volpe, 24 inches. Cannondale has a 21-inch low gear. Many riders will find these satisfactory.

Since there was a time when production touring bikes routinely had 31-inch low gears, this is a big improvement.

At the high end of the gearing range, what you get is unusable excess—gears much higher than you can really use. Fuji, Jamis and Trek give you 128 gear inches; Cannondale and Bianchi give you 118. Here's why that's bogus overgearing: A high gear of 100 gear inches and a pedaling

cadence of 90 rotations per minute will get you 27 miles per hour. Very few riders have the strength to go faster than that, especially when an aerobically sustainable pace is a goal.

Changing your gearing is sometimes easy: you buy the smallest granny chainwheel your crankset will accept, and that lowers your low gear somewhat. It's a simple one-part swap.

Other times, changing gearing may be complex and expensive: it could conceivably involve getting a different rear derailleur with greater chain wrap capacity, a new cog cassette, or other complications.

If you are fortunate, your local bike shop will help you figure out the gearing options for your particular drivetrain components. If so, be extra nice to them. It can be a trying exercise for the shop personnel.

# TOURING BIKES FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

All prices and specifications may vary to some degree. Please check with the manufacturers before making any decisions.

**Bianchi** offers the steel Volpe (\$899), which comes with a wide, low gear range and 32C tires. [www.bianchiusa.com](http://www.bianchiusa.com), (510) 264-1001.

**Breezer Bikes** offers the Liberty (\$1,199) and Greenway (\$849), both with fenders, generator light, reflective tires, and rear rack. [www.breezerbikes.com](http://www.breezerbikes.com), (415) 339-8917.

**Bilenky Cycle Works** offers the Tourlite, a light tourer starting at \$2,050, and the Midlands, a traditional steel touring bike, in a variety of configurations. [www.bilenky.com](http://www.bilenky.com), (800) 213-6388.

**Bruce Gordon** offers the hand-built Deore XT Rock 'n Road (\$2,550, or \$2,820 with racks) and the Deore LX BLT, which is factory-made in California (\$1,849 or \$2,119 with racks). [www.bgcycles.com](http://www.bgcycles.com), (707) 762-5601.

**Cannondale** offers the rack-equipped, aluminum T2000 (\$1,599) and the T800 (\$1,299). [www.cannondale.com](http://www.cannondale.com), (800) 245-3872.

**Co-Motion Cycles** offers the Nor'Wester (\$3,295 to \$3,360), a light tourer; the around-the-worlder Americano (\$3,150 to \$3,325), and the beefy, upright Mazama (\$2,895). [www.co-motion.com](http://www.co-motion.com), (541) 342-4583.

**Fuji Bicycles** offers the traditional steel Touring model (\$910). [www.fujibikes.com](http://www.fujibikes.com), (215) 824-3854.

**Gilles Berthoud** offers highly customizable steel touring bikes from France (\$4,800 and up). [www.gillesberthoud.fr](http://www.gillesberthoud.fr), (818) 248-1814.

**Gunnar Bikes** offers the 26-inch Rock Tour (\$925 for frame, additional \$275 for a Vicious Rigid Fork). [www.gunnarbikes.com](http://www.gunnarbikes.com), (262) 534-4190.

**Heron Bicycles** offers the Wayfarer (\$1,300) and Touring (\$1,045) frames, which they describe as perfect for "true, loaded touring." [www.heronbicycles.com](http://www.heronbicycles.com), (815) 223-1776.

**Independent Fabrication** offers the Independence frameset (\$2,100) for self-supported, long-distance touring, and the light-touring Club Racer (\$1,995). Plenty of options available. [www.ifbikes.com](http://www.ifbikes.com), (617) 666-3609.

**J. Peter Weigle** makes custom steel touring and randonneur bikes. Email: [bikesjpweigle@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bikesjpweigle@sbcglobal.net), (860) 434-0700.

**Jamis Bicycles** offers the Nova (\$1,300) and the Aurora (\$850). [www.jamisbikes.com](http://www.jamisbikes.com), (201) 768-9050.

**Kona** offers the Sutra (\$1,499), a steel tourer with mechanical disc brakes. [www.konaworld.com](http://www.konaworld.com), (360) 366-0951.

**Mariposa** makes the custom steel Petite and Randonneur (\$1,700 frame and fork; \$4,500 average for complete bike) in Toronto with choice of fenders, lights, and custom racks. [www.mariposabicycles.com](http://www.mariposabicycles.com), (416) 423-0456.

**REI** offers the Novara Safari, a 26-inch-wheel tourer (\$849); the Randonee, a traditional touring bike (\$949); and the Element, a cyclocross/light tourer (\$1,099). [www.rei.com](http://www.rei.com), 800-426-4840.

**Rivendell Bicycle Works** offers custom touring frames (\$2,495 to \$2,550; or complete bikes for \$3,400 to \$4,000). They also offer the Atlantis frame (\$1,400; or around \$2,700 for a complete bike). [www.rivendellbicycles.com](http://www.rivendellbicycles.com), (925) 933-7304.

**Rodriguez Bicycles** offers the Adventure (\$2,199) and the S&S-equipped W2 (\$2,699 to \$3,199), co-designed by Willie Weir. [www.rodcycle.com](http://www.rodcycle.com), (206) 527-4822.

**Rocky Mountain Bicycles** introduces the Sherpa this year, a steel tourer that comes in two models (\$1,149 to \$1,399). [www.bikes.com](http://www.bikes.com), (604) 527-9993.

**Santana** offers a wide array of tandems suitable for touring (starting at \$2,995). [www.santanatandem.com](http://www.santanatandem.com), (800) 334-6136.

**Seven Cycles** offers three touring bikes – the titanium Vacanza (\$5,700 to \$9,000), the Vacanza Steel (\$3,200 to \$6,000), and the titanium Muse, (\$3,800 to \$7,500). [www.sevencycles.com](http://www.sevencycles.com), (617) 923-7774.

**Specialized** offers the light-touring Sequoia in two aluminum versions (\$770; \$1,100). [www.specialized.com](http://www.specialized.com), (877) 808-8154.

**Spectrum** offers custom, hand-made steel and titanium touring bikes and tandems (average frame price \$2,400). [www.spectrum-cycles.com](http://www.spectrum-cycles.com), (610) 398-1986.

**Surly** offers the Long-Haul Trucker frame and fork (\$420), Karate Monkey frame and fork (\$460), and the Cross-Check (\$410; \$930 for full bike). [www.surlybikes.com](http://www.surlybikes.com), (877) 743-3191.

**Terry Precision Cycling** offers a woman-specific, aluminum touring bike, the Madeleine (\$1,200). [www.terrybicycles.com](http://www.terrybicycles.com), (800) 289-8379.

**Trek** offers the venerable steel 520 (\$1,240). [www.trekbikes.com](http://www.trekbikes.com), (920) 478-2191.

**Vanilla Bicycles** offers custom touring frames (\$1,850, frame only). [www.vanillabicycles.com](http://www.vanillabicycles.com), (971) 570-3244.

**Vicious** offers the steel Casual Agent (\$1,775 frame and fork; around \$3,000 complete) with available disc brake-compatible rear rack (\$150). [www.viciouscycles.com](http://www.viciouscycles.com), (845) 883-4303.

**Waterford Cycles** offers the Adventure Cycle 1900 (\$1,600) and T-14 (\$1,299). The T-14 is available for both 1" and 1-1/8" steerer tubes. [www.waterfordbikes.com](http://www.waterfordbikes.com), (262) 534-4190.

**Recumbents**  
**BikeFix** offers the Street Machine (£1,430) designed for self-supported touring. [www.bikefix.co.uk](http://www.bikefix.co.uk), +44 (0) 20 7405 1218.

**Easy Racers** offers the Tour Easy in two models: Speed & Sport and Expedition (both \$1,995). [www.easyracers.com](http://www.easyracers.com), (831) 722-9797.

**Lightning Cycle Dynamics** offers the P-38 (\$1,900 frameset; \$2,800 and up for full bike). [www.lightningbikes.com](http://www.lightningbikes.com), (805) 736-0700.

**Longbikes** offers the Eliminator (\$2,699 and up) and Slipstream (\$2,599 and up). [www.longbikes.com](http://www.longbikes.com), (303) 986-9300.

**Rans** offers the long-wheel-base Stratus and the short-wheel-base VRex (\$1,595). [www.recumbent.com/rans.html](http://www.recumbent.com/rans.html), (714) 633-3663.

**WizWheelz** offer the TerraTrike recumbent tricycle in a variety of models (\$1,299 to \$4,499) including a tandem. [www.wizwheelz.com](http://www.wizwheelz.com), (269) 945-5581.

## Folding Bikes

**Airnimal Designs** offers the 24-inch, rear-suspension Airnimal (\$2,100 and up) in multiple touring configurations. [www.airnimal.com](http://www.airnimal.com).

**Bike Friday** offers a variety of folding bikes, including the New World Tourist (from \$898 to \$1,895), the Air Glide (\$1,998 to \$4,790), and the Sat'R Day travel recumbent (starting at \$2,950). [www.bikefriday.com](http://www.bikefriday.com), (800) 777-0258.

**Birdy** offers the Birdy Rohloff (£1,950) with a Rohloff hub, and the Birdy Touring (£1,080). [www.foldingbikes.co.uk/birdy.htm](http://www.foldingbikes.co.uk/birdy.htm) +44 (0) 1225 442442.

**Brompton** offers the P-type folding bike series (\$885 to \$2,105). [www.bromptonbicycle.co.uk](http://www.bromptonbicycle.co.uk), +44 (0) 208 232 8484.

**Moulton** offers a wide variety of folding bikes (\$885 to \$6,350). [www.alexmoulton.co.uk](http://www.alexmoulton.co.uk), +44 (0) 122 586 5895.

**Other Touring Frame Builders**  
**Pereira Cycles** (801) 209-9301, [www.pereiracycles.com](http://www.pereiracycles.com).

**Peter Mooney Cycles** (617) 489-3577, [www.peter-mooney.com](http://www.peter-mooney.com).

**Ramblumtick** (406) 721-6781, [www.ramblumtick.com](http://www.ramblumtick.com).

**Steelman Cycles** (650) 364-3939, [www.steelmancycles.com](http://www.steelmancycles.com).

**Willits Brand Bicycles** (512), [www.willitsbikes.com](http://www.willitsbikes.com).

one wedgie's wheelbase varies from the next have no such importance.) You can have a fairing, or not. Your chosen recumbent may have its own custom racks and panniers.

But even partisans of other brands will tell you that the Easy Racers Tour Easy EX (the "EX" stands for "expedition") is an excellent choice for a touring recumbent. Designed by the late, and greatly missed, Gardner Martin, the Tour Easy has a long wheelbase (about 66 inches, depending on frame size), gentle handling, and a plethora of innovative touring accessories.

The Tour Easy is made in the U.S., costs \$1,995, and has a 27-speed drivetrain with a stump-pulling 19-inch low gear and a knee-busting 113-inch high gear. It has a 20-inch front wheel, a 700 x 35C rear wheel, and it weighs 30 1/4 pounds. But these statistics don't tell the whole Tour Easy story: the Tour Easy can be had with a windshield-style fairing and also a body stocking fairing, so you'll look like a little cruise missile heading down the road. More significantly, you'll have a fraction of the aerodynamic drag of wedgie drivers.

Your panniers can be integrated into the aerodynamic shape defined by the stocking, and your dashboard under the fairing can have every electronic gadget you'd ever

want. Your seat is 14 inches wide, making it the envy of everyone who's gotten sores on a conventional bike seat.

Plus, you'll be invited into the fold. Tour Easy riders have their own club, their

delightful. Your companion is within easy conversing distance. Every pedal stroke is teamwork, which, when done well, makes you gush with good vibrations. The bigger, heavier bike is more stable over bumps, and



**The Moots YBB.**

own magazine, and their own annual rally. ("Look, Ma! Hundreds of those things cruising down the road.")

#### **Tandem**

Touring on a tandem can be utterly

a reasonably well coordinated team will ride faster on a tandem than they would on a pair of single bikes.

Most mid-price tandems are at least fairly suitable for touring. They usually come

## **BUYING A TOURING BIKE SIGHT UNSEEN**

Why should you be comfortable buying a touring bike sight unseen?

One reason is that you might not have a choice. There just aren't many touring bikes in stock in bike shops, and it's common to have to order the one you want. The reason why is brutal mathematics: a given bike company may make, say, 300 units per year of a given touring bike, with those 300 units divided among four or five different sizes. That company may have 500 or 1,000 retailers nationwide. So the odds are that your local retailer won't have your size in stock.

Another reason is that if you go upscale and buy a made-to-order bike, the bikes aren't even hypothetically available to look at before you buy them.

All this said, I'm pretty relaxed about

buying touring bikes sight unseen. Here's why:

- True turkey sightings are pretty much extinct. It isn't 1975 anymore, and today's product managers know what touring cyclists want.

- The major differences among bike models are all things you can find from manufacturers' web sites and/or catalogs. Want to know sizes available, standover height, maximum tire width, top tube length in your size, or gearing? All this information, and much more, is easily available.

- Do touring bikes of similar purpose ride differently? In a word, no. If you do an A-B comparison test between, say, a Jamis Aurora and a Fuji Touring, after first making sure the rider position is identical,

you'll be struck by how similar they are. Your choice of one over the other will hinge on component selection, availability, which dealer you like more, and cosmetics.

The one semi-exception to this rule is buying a tandem. If you are new to tandeming, you'll want the full demonstration by a good tandeming coach/salesperson. Without the skills imparted by a good demonstration, you are extremely likely to convince your tandem partner that tandeming stinks. But with the demonstration, you can learn how to experience the togetherness of bicycling bliss. (The reason this is a semi-exception is because you still might wind up ordering the tandem you want after riding a demo model.)

with rack mounting eyelets, plenty of low gears, and room for nice wide road tires.

Still, some tandems are more “touring friendly” than others. One of my favorites is the Santana Fusion SE, which Santana calls an “Enduro” tandem. It’s optimized for touring, Santana says, “whether or not there’s pavement.” At \$3195, the Fusion SE is not the cheapest tandem around, but then again, Santana has long been the Mercedes of tandems. You’ll be treated well for the money you spend.

The Fusion SE has 26-inch wheels, for which you can buy a plethora of tires, ranging from racing skinny to huge mountain bike, and the chromoly alloy steel frame is made to clear just about all of them. The 26-inch wheels are inherently stronger than the larger 700C wheels most of us use. The captain’s cockpit is made with an unusually low top tube, giving you gobs of standover height. Your gearing includes an 11-34 cog cassette and your choice of 24/28/48 all-terrain chainwheels, with a delightful 18-inch low and a well-chosen 113-inch high gear, or 30/42/52 road chainwheels with a still-respectable 23-inch low gear and an overkill 123-inch high gear. (Note: a tandem team can make good use of a somewhat higher high gear than can a single rider.)

S&S couplers are a thousand-dollar option, and with skillful disassembly and



**Bike Friday New World Tourist.**

packing, the Fusion SE fits into a single hard-shell suitcase you can take on an airline flight.

Santana’s Enduro comes in four frame sizes and is the right tandem for many kinds of riding. You can fit skinny tires for go-fast rides, or bring your camping gear on rugged trails, or anything in between. And you’ll have your spouse/best friend/parent/child along with you for the ride. It doesn’t get any better than that.

**Folding**

The sophistication of good folding bike designs is truly a pleasure to behold. There is nothing like a splendidly compacted folding bike to accompany your travels on public transportation (including those con-

sarned airlines), or in small cars, boats, and planes, where bringing a non-folding bike can be a hassle. The multimodal tourist with a folding bike can instantly shift travel modes: cycle one day, boat the next, hike the next, and then stay in a city with his bike unobtrusively stashed someplace small.

One could argue in favor of any of a number of different folding bike brands as being the most suitable folding bike for touring, but I give the nod to Bike Friday. The company has a dizzying array of models, but the two that stand out for the touring cyclist are the New World Tourist and its upscale lightweight cousin, the Crusoe.

It takes only seconds to fold either bike

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**Adventure Cycling Corporate Members**

Adventure Cycling’s business partners play a significant role in the success of our nonprofit organization. Our Corporate Membership Program is designed to spotlight these key supporters. Corporate Members are companies that believe in what we do and wish to provide additional assistance through a higher level of support. These Corporate Membership funds go toward special projects and the creation of new programs, such as our Outreach and Education Program.



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enough to stash in a car trunk or lug onto the bus. It takes longer to do enough disassembly to fit the bike in its airline-acceptable suitcase. If you want, you can buy wheels and a towbar, with which the suitcase can come behind you as a trailer.

But don't let all this folding technology keep you from seeing the reason why Bike Friday has such a devoted following: it handles like a big-wheel bike. Many an owner and many a bike reviewer has expressed amazement that the small wheels do not detract from the bike's performance. You can tow your possessions in the aforementioned suitcase/trailer or use Bike Friday's elegantly designed racks to mount your panniers.

Even though all Bike Fridays are made to order in Eugene, Oregon, the entry price for a flat handlebar New World Tourist with an eight-speed single-derailleur drivetrain is a very reasonable \$898. The 15 other models in the New World tourist/Crusoe lines range up to \$3,640. Along the way you get three choices of handlebar configuration and five choices of drivetrain. Weights range from 17.9 to 25.1 pounds. And the company loves to customize bikes for your needs.

Bike Friday's dizzying variety also includes folding recumbents, suitcase-able travel tandems, a go-fast bike that you could bring on the airplane as carry-on luggage in the good old days when bike parts weren't considered weapons, and numerous other configurations.

All bikes are sold factory-direct through the website. Since a lot of riders trade up to fancier models, the company also sells pre-owned Bike Fridays at lower cost.

Buying a Bike Friday also effectively gets you a club membership. There are actual Bike Friday clubs across the United States, and even touring events directed at Bike Friday owners. And Bike Friday owners are always very interesting people! 

*John Schubert is Adventure Cyclist's technical editor and shares his views about a wide variety of cycling-related topics in each issue. He can be reached for further comment or clarification at schubley@aol.com.*