

THE VELO ORANGE CAMPEUR

BY CHARLES PELKEY

→ IT'S BEEN A ROUGH winter in the high prairie of Wyoming; personally, professionally and, above all, meteorologically.

It was the latter that made my heart ache when I glanced over the classic lines of the 61-centimeter Velo Orange Campeur that I had just picked up from my local shop, realizing the thermometer was flirting with the 20-below mark. I'm sort of the default big guy, meaning that if the frame is anything bigger than 60 centimeters, my name invariably comes up. Unfortunately, the default big guy lives at 7,250 feet, in what the weather guys graciously call a "wind corridor," and January was living up to expectations.

Yeah, I know. Back in the day, my riding mates and I were brave enough, stupid enough, and excited enough to ignore mere numbers and ride in all sorts of conditions, even these. With enough wool and Gore-Tex, shoe covers, and ice-climbing gloves replacing the usual fingerless cycling handwear, we'd be good to go, right? Well, not so much these days. Now that I'm a bit older, a tiny bit wiser, and somewhat less adventurous, the Campeur would have to wait.

So, there it sat, taunting me with promises of long rides on quiet back roads under sunny skies on warm spring days.

My first weeks with the Campeur were spent looking at it. Reluctant

SPECIFICATIONS

Price: \$500 (frame and fork); \$614 (build kit). See store.velo-orange.com/index.php/frames/campeur.html for details.

Sizes available: 51cm, 53cm, 55cm, 57cm, 59cm and 61cm

Size tested: 61cm

Weight: 28.1 lbs. without pedals

TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS

1. Seat tube: 61cm, center to top

2. Top tube: 60cm

3. Head tube angle: 72.5°

4. Seat tube angle: 72.5°

5. Chainstays: 46cm

6. Fork rake: 53mm

7. Wheelbase: 106.8mm

8. Standover height: 85.5cm

9. Frame and fork: 4130 double butted chrome-molly frame and fork; Three water bottle cage mounts; low-rider through bosses and seat stay rack eyelets; Pump peg (on sizes 57cm and larger); kickstand plate.

10. Headset: Velo Orange Grand Cru, 1-inch

11. Rims: Velo Orange 25mm Double-Wall, 36-hole

12. Spokes: DT Swiss

13. Hubs: Velo Orange Grand Cru Touring, 36h

14. Tires: Clement X'Plor USH 35 x 700C

15. Crank: Velo Orange Grand Cru Triple 24x34x48

16. Front derailleur: Shimano 105

17. Rear derailleur: Shimano Deore

18. Shifters: Bar end

19. Brake levers: Tektro RL520

20. Brakes: Grand Cru Zeste cantilever

21. Pedals: None

22. Stem: Velo Orange Quill

23. Saddle: Velo Orange Sprung Touring

24. Seatpost: Velo Orange Grand Cru, long setback (27.2mm x 300mm).

25. Handlebar: Velo Orange Grand Cru, classic round bend

26. Accessories: Velo Orange Campeur front and rear racks.

27. Cassette: Shimano HG, 11-12-14-16-18-21-24-26-32 9-speed

28. Chain: KMC

GEARING IN INCHES:

	24	34	48
11	58.9	83.5	117.8
12	54.0	76.5	108.0
14	46.3	65.6	92.6
16	40.5	57.4	81.0
18	36.0	51.0	72.0
21	30.9	43.7	61.7
24	27.0	38.3	54.0
26	24.9	35.3	49.8
32	20.3	28.7	40.5

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to confess to my newfound wimpy, middle-aged approach to my favorite pastime, I simply categorized my first few weeks with the Campeur as the "aesthetic analysis phase" of the test period. My lord, this thing passed with flying colors, too. The Campeur, quite simply, is a classic beauty.

This bike took me back; back past my racing days, when light frames and skinny tires were the priority and to a time when bike rides lasted weeks, instead of hours, and the question of weight involved how much the darn thing could carry as opposed to how many grams you might shave off by adding ever-pricier components.

The lines reminded me of some of my old favorites: touring bikes made of silver-soldered, lugged Reynolds 531 frames with well-considered geometries and thoughtful placement of braze-ons. No, the Campeur is not a lugged classic made of British tubing, like my old — and greatly missed — Trek 720. It's built on a lug-less, TIG-welded 4130 frame that is more than capable of living up to the demands of loaded touring. But like that touring bike from Trek's golden era, it's a bike that reflects a thoughtful, even joyful approach to design.

The features would make any touring cyclist smile. Three bottle mounts, rack mounts in all the right places, solidly mounted fenders and racks, beefy cantilever brakes, and a unique selection of components that hearken back to the classic days of touring bikes, including an elegantly curved fork, crowned with — of all things — a quill stem.

It took a while to remember that the whole "sunny skies on warm spring days" concept was a fantasy in my neighborhood. We don't get "warm spring days" here until the calendar tells you it's summer, and even then, it's a fleeting concept. No, it was time to ride this riders' bike, no matter what the conditions.

Not to beat the whole I'm-getting-old-and-slow-and-cautious thing for too



long, but I do have to admit that one of the concessions I've made in recent years is that I no longer stake out an aggressive position on busy paved roads.

I used to assert my right to the road, demanding the same right-of-way and access to the entirety of "my lane" as

THE CAMPEUR IS AN INTELLIGENTLY DESIGNED RIDE THAT ALSO REFLECTS AN APPRECIATION FOR THE BEAUTY OF CLASSIC BICYCLES.

any vehicle plying the public right-of-way. These days, caution and the reality of bigger and bigger trucks, operated by increasingly distracted drivers, simply remind me that I could easily die in a legally defensible position. I would be in the right, but also in the morgue. I've simply conceded most pavement to the steel monstrosities and I derive great joy in finding alternative routes on back roads, eschewing smooth asphalt in favor of rougher roads.

The Campeur was made for my preferred style of riding these days. Over the years, I've learned to take a minimalist's approach to packing touring bikes. I recall my first transcontinental tour, more than 30 years ago now, for which I packed in anticipation of every conceivable need and potential emergency. It took a week — and two visits to the post office — to shed the excess and learn to enjoy a ride with only the most basic needs covered.

I think the worst example of over-packing I've ever seen was a fella plying the back roads on his way to Canada. He had fully loaded front and rear panniers, a handlebar bag, a substantial seat bag, a trailer, and a full-on rigid-framed backpack. Small wonder I didn't spot him out on the road, but rather in the local coffee shop, playing with his laptop and his iPad.

That said, I did load the Campeur to the hilt, just to see what sort of beast of burden she might be. Fully loaded, the bike tracks beautifully. The fork offers about 53 millimeters of offset, staking out a happy medium, something I ap-

preciated when I hit a downhill stretch, where, when I last rode it fully loaded, the bike I was on shimmied unmercifully. No such problem with the Campeur. For purposes of testing only, I took a short jaunt over hilly dirt roads, towing a loaded BOB trailer. Remarkably, the

dang thing still felt rather spry — not a word I would normally use in describing something akin to a two-wheeled version of a tractor-trailer rig.

My usual touring load is somewhat minimalist these days: food, a lightweight sleeping bag, tarp, street clothes, rain jacket, gloves and, above all, a credit card. For this purpose, it's simply just fun to ride. Unloaded, the Campeur is a perfectly delightful commuter or something one might use for a nice day ride.



Remarkably, despite its elegant lines, thoughtful design, and terrific component selection, it's priced at a more-than-reasonable \$1,600 — and that's for the complete build. If you want to ride the as-tested model, which includes racks and fenders, it's well worth an additional \$400. If on a budget, you can snag the frame and fork for just \$500 or add seat post, brakes, and headset for another \$114.

I would personally recommend going for the full, fendered, rack-equipped option. The Velo Orange-branded racks are exquisite and perfectly matched to the bike itself. It would almost be a sin to try to match up generic racks on this thing, when Velo Orange's design crew has put so much thought into creating a rack system so beautifully integrated into the frame itself. What struck me from the day I saw it was the creative use of the cantilever braze-ons as contact points for the racks. The resulting stability of the system is remarkable.

With a host of Velo Orange-branded components, designed with this frame in mind, the bike was clearly created by people who ride and, above all, by those who respect the integration of form and function. I tip my hat to Velo Orange's Chris Kulczycki and crew.

No, this is not the lightweight, 14-pound carbon racing bike one would see in the professional peloton — or at any master's race, for that matter. The Campeur is an intelligently designed, utilitarian ride that also reflects an appreciation for the beauty of classic bicycles.

Frankly, at this point in my life, were I forced to limit myself to a single bike, this may well be the leading candidate.

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SOUTHEAST ASIA I'm planning a self-supported trip around the Southeast Asian countries starting in November. I'm a 26-year-old male who completed a four month tour in the U.S. this past summer and am now looking at traveling internationally. I hope to hear from anyone who is planning something similar or has any advice or experience in this region. nzitz250@gmail.com

EAST TO WEST We plan on leaving Florida and taking the Southern Tier to California on August 31. We plan on riding six days a week, about 90 miles a day, then taking Sunday off or maybe pushing ahead a few miles or making up any miles, as needed. We'll be camping mostly, but open to suggestions. We hope to be back to North Carolina in early October. We're looking for anyone who wants to travel with us. We'd be willing to give you a ride from North Carolina to the start point as well. So far, our group consists of just two 45-year-old gentlemen looking forward to enjoying the ride and not racing. gordons4thcup@yahoo.com

TRANSAM I'm planning to ride the TransAm Trail, west to east, starting in late July and finishing in August. I plan to follow the trail to somewhere around Wichita, Kansas, meet up with some friends, and, from there, head down towards Savannah, Georgia. I'll be camping, using warm showers when possible, and occasionally a hotel room. I'm a 49-year-old female from Europe and would very much enjoy riding along with other cyclists, especially for the first part. cattajacobsson@hotmail.com

EASTERN EUROPE AND THE BALKANS I'm planning a three-week trip through the Balkans, starting and ending in Budapest. I plan to ride 40 to 50 miles a day through Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The trip should run from late August to mid-September. I plan on staying in B&Bs and

taking one or two train rides. I'm seeking one other experienced cycle tourist, age 36 or over. A Washington, DC, area resident would be preferred so we can go on some local rides first. bikeeire@yahoo.com

GREAT DIVIDE MOUNTAIN BIKE ROUTE I plan to start in August. My last big ride was the TransAm/Western Express route in 2009, mostly camping and unsupported. I ride regularly and my cycling style tends to be energetic. I like to push on but enjoy the breaks as they come. The plan in Michael McCoy's book *Cycling the Great Divide* looks good to me. I look forward to hearing from anybody who might be interested. I'm a fit 65-year-old English man who thinks he is 40! davidpenny9@tiscali.co.uk

NORTH IDAHO TO GLACIER AND BACK Join friends known and unknown on a ride departing Bonners Ferry, Idaho, for East Glacier Park, Montana, over Logan Pass, and then back to Bonners Ferry in August. We'll be riding self contained, approximately 50 miles per day. This is not a commercial ride, just friends riding the same route. Routing is US 2 east to Libby, MT; MT 37 north to Eureka; South on US 93 to Whitefish; then US 2 to East Glacier; North to St. Mary; then over the pass back to West Glacier and return. flyngoldwing24954@yahoo.com

GREAT ALLEGHENY PASSAGE & C&O TRAILS I'm considering riding the GAP & C&O Rail Trails from Pittsburgh to Washington, DC, and back, some time in late summer (maybe early August). I'll be riding fully loaded and camping along the way, eating breakfast and dinner in camp and lunch in restaurants. Perhaps one night indoors (motel, B&B?) around DC (halfway). I'm a 60-year-old male from Pittsburgh. I intend to average 70 to 80 miles per day for the entire trip, both ways, in 10 days. Let me know if you might be interested. dpitt75@comcast.net

RETIRED FEMALE RIDER LOOKING FOR ADVENTURE I'm planning a ride from Vancouver to San Diego, departing mid August and ending late in September or early October. I hope to average 60 miles per day with every fifth or sixth day off for fun and relaxation. I'm in the very early stages of planning and am looking for an adventurous riding partner. Overnights with Warmshowers-type folks, hostels, or camping. I'm flexible but frugal. One to three nights in hotels would be fine. It's all about the journey. jgrabbert@msn.com

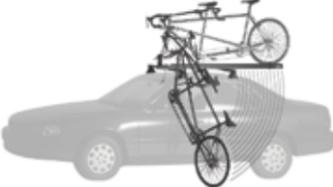
VANCOUVER TO LOS ANGELES I'm a 27-year-old female teacher currently living in Southern California, and I'm planning a one-month bicycle tour from Vancouver to Los Angeles. I will be leaving from Vancouver on August 19 and I hope to arrive in Los Angeles by September 14. I plan on covering 50 to 100 miles a day and, primarily, camping. Looking for fun companions to join me on this epic trip. kfjuten@gmail.com

SOUTHERN TIER AUGUST OR SEPTEMBER I'm in the early planning stages of a tour from Florida to Texas via the Southern Tier Bicycle Route. I have limited experience (a solo tour from Texas to Illinois last year). I discovered that having a touring companion would be more fun. I'm a 70-year-old male. I'm frugal but will consider motels as needed. dobbsair@gmail.com

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