



KONA SUTRA

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

→ **IN THE STORY OF BUDDHISM:** *A Concise Guide to Its History and Teachings*, Donald S. Lopez Jr. defines the Sanskrit word “sutra” as a discourse traditionally regarded as having been spoken by the Buddha or spoken with his sanction.

The Kona Sutra may likewise speak to you. Its discourse will probably go something like, “What are you doing sitting around under that tree? Awaiting enlightenment? Dude, enlightenment is like the cable guy — it shows up whenever, and if I know you, when it rings your bell, you won't be home. So while you're waiting, what say we go for a ride?”

The Sutra inspired me to get off my butt and onto the road with an assist from some unseasonably cold February weather in Colorado. Finding myself between deadlines, with no real need to just sit there and shiver, I loaded the Sutra, two seasons' worth of cycling kit, and a rucksack full of portable office equipment into the Subaru and sped toward Albuquerque for a pre-spring training camp.

Albuquerque is perfect for this sort of pilgrimage, especially if you define camping as “burning up the wife's Hilton points.” The Duke City has more than 400 miles of bike paths and trails, and the Hampton Inn University/Midtown sits right alongside one of them — the I-40 Trail, which connects to the North

SPECIFICATIONS

KONA SUTRA

Price: \$1,499

Sizes available: 47cm, 49cm, 53cm, 56cm, 59cm, 61cm

Size tested: 56cm

Weight: 27.2 lbs. (without pedals)

1. Seat tube: 56cm (center to top)

2. Top tube: 56.5cm (virtual); 55cm (actual)

3. Head tube angle: 71.5°

4. Seat tube angle: 73°

5. Chainstays: 435mm

6. Bottom bracket drop: 65mm

7. Crank spindle height above ground: 280mm

8. Fork offset: 43mm

9. Wheelbase: 1036mm

10. Standover height: 825mm

11. Frame: Kona chromoly, butted. Bosses for two water bottle cages (subsequent editions will have three sets of bottle bosses, said Kona product manager Ian Schmitt); one eyelet at each dropout to accommodate rear fender and rack; rack mounts at seat stays; fender mounts at seatstay and chainstay bridges; disc brake mount; cable stops and routes; chain hanger.

12. Fork: Project Two Touring disc, chromoly, 1 1/8-in. steerer; low-rider mounts; one eyelet at each dropout for rack and fender; fender mount at fork crown; disc mounts

13. Rims: Freedom by WTB Ryder 21, 36-hole

14. Spokes: Sandvik stainless 14g

15. Hubs: Shimano Deore HB-M525A, 36-hole

16. Tires: Continental Contact SafetySystem, 700C x 32

17. Bottom bracket: Shimano BB51

18. Crankset: Shimano Deore, 175mm, 48/36/26 chainrings

19. Cassette: Shimano Deore 9-speed 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, 21, 24, 28, 32

20. Chain: Shimano HG53

21. Brake levers: Tektro RL340

22. Shift levers: Shimano barcons, 9-speed

23. Front derailleur: Shimano Deore Mega 9 triple



- 24. Rear derailleur:** Shimano LX
- 25. Brakes:** Hayes CX Expert discs, 160mm rotors
- 26. Pedals:** n/a
- 27. Seat post:** Kona offset two-bolt, 27.2mm x 350mm
- 28. Stem:** Kona XC/Road, 90mm, 8° rise, 31.8mm clamp
- 29. Handlebar:** Kona Wet Bar, 44cm, flares to 49cm, 31.8mm four-bolt clamp
- 30. Bar tape:** Velo
- 31. Headset:** FSA
- 32. Saddle:** WTB Rocket V Comp
- 33. Racks:** Blackburn FL-1 Standard (front, 25lbs.) and TRX-1 Ultimate (rear, 40lbs.)

GEARING IN INCHES:

	48	36	26
11	117.8	88.4	63.8
12	108.0	81.0	58.5
14	92.6	69.4	50.1
16	81.0	60.8	43.9
18	72.0	54.0	39.0
21	61.7	46.3	33.4
24	54.0	40.5	29.2
28	46.3	34.7	25.1
32	40.5	30.4	21.9

Contact: Kona USA, 2455 Salashan, Ferndale, WA 98248; (800) 566-2872; konaworld.com.



Diversion Channel Trail, which leads to the Paseo del Norte and thence to the Paseo del Bosque, a lovely, sun-splashed, car-free strip paralleling the Rio Grande. It's ideal for mobile meditation and a very pleasant proving ground indeed. Winter, like enlightenment, would just have to wait.

The Sutra's earthy new look fit right in with the springlike conditions in New Mexico. Kona's venerable touring model now shares a little ferrous DNA with its gravel bike, the Rove, which I reviewed in the April 2013 issue of *Adventure Cyclist*. For 2014, both use the same muscular chromoly frame and Project Two fork, but the Rove has a touch less standover height and a slightly higher price (\$1,699 to the Sutra's \$1,499).

Don't mistake the Sutra for some kind of cheap date, though. Not only is it a real looker with that understated matte bronze finish and minimalist badging, it's nicely spec'd, and practically touring ready at the cash register, with 6061-aluminum Blackburn racks and full-coverage Sunnywheel fenders complete with mud flaps. Add your favorite pedals and bags and you're ready to roll.

Like its dirt-road cousin the Rove, the Sutra serves up a relaxed ride that gobbles up the miles, the way I did the combo plate at Mary and Tito's Café on 4th Street. But even with racks and fenders, it's maneuverable enough for a clipped-in 180 when the path ends abruptly (like the Paseo del Norte, which was under construction during my visit). Happily, the Alameda Trail a bit farther north also connects to the Bosque. And it's stout enough for out-of-the-saddle hill repeats, which I found myself doing regularly, because the North Diversion Channel Trail dives underneath several city streets and then climbs back out again as it rolls from the University of New Mexico to Balloon Fiesta Park.

Shifting was crisp and clean, the

bar-cons snapping like a big fella cracking his knuckles as they directed the all-Shimano, nine-speed drivetrain. If there's any down side to the phrase "all-Shimano," it's the front derailer, a bulky Deore Mega 9 dual-pull that intrudes deeply into the rear triangle from the seat tube. It works just fine, but the rear fender needs two 5 mm spacers at the chain-stay bridge to clear the mechanism, and as a consequence you'll probably have trouble running a rear tire much bigger than 700C x 35 if you like a dry derriere on damp days.

"The front mech' is kind of a hands-tied scenario," said Kona product manager Ian Schmitt. "We wanted to keep the full Shimano drivetrain, but the slow decline in the prevalence of 9-speed drivetrain options took its toll."

So, while the Rove rolls on 700C x 35 Freedom by WTB Ryders, and can fit 40s, the Sutra comes with a pair of 700C x 32 Continental Contact SafetySystems (which my caliper thinks looks more like 28 mm). It's a fine tire for pavement and plenty tough, like the 36-spoke Deore/Freedom by WTB Ryder 21 wheelset. While

cycling in Albuquerque, I saw plenty of riders squatting at trailside, fixing flats I suspect were inflicted by the legendary local goat-head thorns, but the Continentals never set me afoot. That said, if you ride a lot of gravel or are just a big-tire kind of cyclist, you might want to work your Kona dealer for a slimmer front derailer and bigger fenders so you can run fatter rubber.

The brakes are Hayes CX Expert discs with 160 mm rotors, operated by Tektro RL340 levers, which I'm seeing quite a bit and am really starting to like. They're not pretty, but they feel good in my hands, as did the short-reach, slightly flared Kona Wet Bars. And I didn't hear squeal one from the Hayes discs, which was music to my ears.

Stripped of its attachments and thus enlightened — that's a Buddhist joke, son! — the Kona Sutra makes a dandy daily driver. It's just a lot of fun to ride, the sort of bike you can spend all day with. Restore the fenders and racks, add panniers containing a light load — I rode with 12 pounds up front and 10 in the rear — and the bike hardly raises an eyebrow ("That's all

you got?"). Incidentally, the Blackburn FL-1 Standard low-rider is rated for 25 pounds, whereas the TRX-1 Ultimate can handle 40.

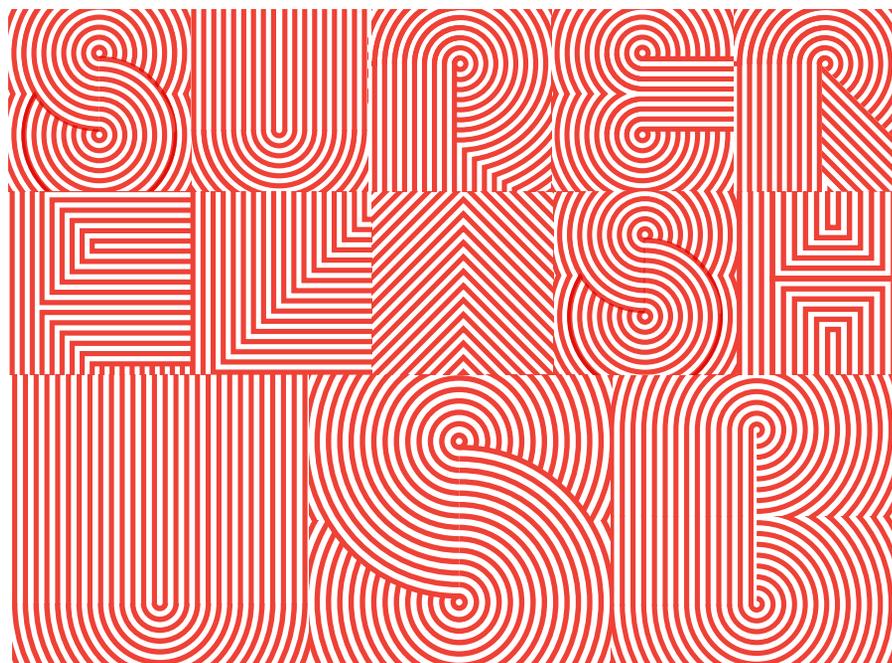
If you like a rack trunk for short hops, you may find the TRX-1 Ultimate a bit narrow at just 80 mm wide. A fat-bottomed Arkel Tailrider looked like an accident waiting to happen so I tried a Tailrider Expedition. Its drop-down panniers let me add two additional mounting points, and that bag stayed put. If you prefer panniers to a trunk — I used both Ortlieb Back-Roller Classics and Arkel B-40s — the TRX-1 has both high and low mounts, and Blackburn says the narrow profile that makes a trunk twitchy gives better balance with bags.

The three-piece FL-1 is slightly kludgy with its separate low-rider frames and V-stay, the whole pile held together by bolts, locknuts, and 5/16-inch clamps. And its sizable top plate, which includes slots and holes used to attach the V-stay to the frames and the frames to the fork's low-rider mounts, interfered with the locking swivel on my Arkel B-26 bags. An Ortlieb Front-Roller Classic was a much better fit, and I assume a Blackburn bag would be too, especially because Blackburn uses a Kona in a video touting its Interlock bag-and-rack system.

The FL-1 does provide a degree of adjustability for clearing the disc brake caliper, though with only one eyelet at the fork dropout, the stock bolts weren't long enough to accommodate frames, V-stay, and fenders. I needed much longer bolts plus one 5 mm spacer to move the rack away from the caliper.

But as suffering goes, this is a mighty small dose and one for your dealer, not for you. All you need to do is buy and fly. Screw in the pedals, snap on some bags, and hit the road, Jack. Where you headed? No place special? Then allow me to enlighten you — Albuquerque is nice this time of year, especially if you happen to be riding a Kona Sutra. **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. To read more from Patrick, visit maddogmedia.wordpress.com.



Plug into the evolution
of bicycle safety

with the new Superflash USB
& Superflash Micro USB.

25% of profits to bicycle advocacy



Better Bicycle Products for a Better World