Almost anything with wheels can be used as a touring bike. People have ridden across the continent on old-fashioned high-wheelers, unicycles, coaster-brake bikes, nervous high-strung racing bikes, and, in the case of my brother-in-law, a 50-pound 3-speed Schwinn with a big steel front basket. (There, Jim—36 years after this absurd accomplishment, you finally get your 15 minutes of fame. Bask in it.)

But why would you want to suffer needlessly? Knowing what to look for in a touring bike can get you improvements you didn’t know were possible. If you’re going to buy a touring bike, you might as well get one that’s designed for maximum comfort and safety.

Shopping for a touring bike, however, is complicated by three factors:

• Most bike shops don’t cater to tourists.
• Most bike companies don’t make touring bikes.

By John Schubert

THE TOURING BIKE LIVES!

Photos by Greg Siple

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The kind of technical information that separates okay touring bikes from really excellent ones is hard to find. Increasingly, it doesn’t show up in manufacturers’ literature. Moreover, not all tourists are the same. As framebuilder Bruce Gordon points out, just as there are different kinds of racing criteriums, time trials, etc. there are different kinds of touring. Bruce defines the kinds of touring as follows:

Type One: Sag-supporting touring—offered by most professional tour operators. You needn’t carry anything more than a pocket camera with you, so almost any road bike will do. Skinny tires will work well.

Type Two: Self-contained inn-to-inn touring. Now you’ve got panniers and maybe 10 pounds of clothes in them. For this, most people want slightly wider tires and a triple crankset.

Type Three: Self-contained camping touring—the kind the Adventure Cycling Association was founded to promote. Now you have more and bigger panniers. Your bike’s weight has tripled. And here is where you discover the inadequacies of a bike that worked well for types 1 and 2.

Bruce and I agree: if you like the idea of touring—and even if you’re new to the sport—you should buy a bike suitable for “Type Three.” Why? Such a bike does everything well. It will perform nicely for the unladen riding you do the rest of the year. It’s a good all-around bike. But that versatility doesn’t work in reverse: a bike designed purely for unladen riding will have serious drawbacks for “Type Three” touring.

Many bike shop employees will tell you, “If you want to go touring, get a mountain bike.” This makes me bristle. A salesman who makes that choice for you is lazy and/or ignorant and/or presumptuous. There’s a big reason to think twice about getting a mountain bike: Do you want to ride in one basic position all day long?

I really enjoy my mountain bike for an hour or two. After that, I crave the variety of hand positions and narrower hand spacing of my road bike, with its dropped handlebars. The more aerodynamic rider position from the dropped handlebars also lets you ride faster. Every long-distance tourist has had the thought, “The next 400 miles are nothing but cornfields. Let’s get ‘em over with.” On Adventure Cycling’s group trips, the riders with mountain bikes frequently have trouble keeping up with the touring bike riders, because the mountain bike’s more wind-catching rider position slows them down.

If you get a mountain bike, you absolutely should get handlebar extensions so you have a variety of hand positions for your long days in the saddle. (If the salesman doesn’t suggest that, you’ve just unearthed a clueless salesman.) Make sure your mountain bike has eyelets to support front and rear pannier racks, and don’t buy a bike that won’t take two racks. Mountain bikes are unquestionably stouter than touring bikes. Do you need that? Probably not. A good touring bike can take plenty of po-

TOURING BIKE MA

Advanced Touring Solutions, 2117 Delaware Ave., Suite A, Santa Cruz, CA 95060; (408) 457-4426 Fax (408) 425-3810, E-mail: rrgrggsb@hot.net Alex Moulton fully suspended APB bike with 20-inch wheels, $1250-$1850; add $500-600 for complete touring package.

Bianchi USA, Inc., 21371 Cabot Blvd., Hayward, CA 94545; (510) 264-1001, Fax (510) 264-2099. Volpe” touring bike comes with full braze-ons, Shimano RSX STI triple group, 700 X 28c tires, under $800; “San Remo” touring bike with full-braze-ons, Campagnolo Mirage triple group, 700 X 28c tires, under $1000.

Bilenky Cycle Works, Ltd., 5319 N. 2nd St., Philadelphia, PA 19120-3230; (215) 329-4744, Fax (215) 329-5380 Stock touring frames (“Midlands”) from $850 (lugged) to $975 (fillet-brazed); custom-sized frame $1175; complete touring bikes $1995 and up; tubular chrome-moly touring racks, $300 front and rear.

Boulder Bikes, P.O. Box 1400, Lyons, CO 80540; (303) 823-5021, Fax (303) 823-5025 Fully suspended “Tourstar” custom bike with Rock Shox Paris Roubaix road fork starting at $2900.

Bruce Gordon Cycles, 613 Second St., Petaluma, CA 94952; Phone and fax (707) 762-5601 Web page: http://www.velolinq.com/bruce-gordon Rock ‘n’ Road Tour” 700c touring bike (8 sizes) with Shimano XT group, up to 700 x 45c tires - $2145; $2320 with Gordon racks, front and rear. “Rock ‘n Road Tour-Ex” (5 sizes) 26-inch wheel touring bike for “severe conditions,” takes mtn bike tires - $2145; $2320 with racks; “BLT” (Basic Loaded Touring) (5 sizes) production touring bike, designed by Bruce Gordon and built in Japan (except for Gordon-built wheels and racks) - $990 with Shimano Deore LX components, $1165 with Gordon racks. Available March 1996.

Cannondale Corp., 9 Brookside Pl., George-Mariott, CT 06829; (800) 245-3872, Fax (203) 852-9081, E-mail: cdale01@interserv.com, Web site: http://www.cannondale.com Offers three models of aluminum touring bikes (T1000, 1700 and T400), ranging in price from $705 to $1354.

Co Motion, 220 Polk St., Eugene, OR 97402; (541) 342-4583 Touring bikes starting at $2500.

Croll & Degen, 1755 Market St., 1896, (415) 434-7276, California’s top bicycle company.

Dave’s, 96121; 11256 Pacifica, Mountain View, CA 94040.

Fat Cog Cycle, 300 Falls, New York, NY 12020. “Road to Ruins” touring bike made with Campagnolo sliding drop hoods, thru-axle, and custom saddle.

Fujita, Bruce Gordon Cycles, 300 Falls, New York, NY 12020, (607) 70436; $1499; custom touring bike with Shimano a series group and custom 35c tires, $900.

Gardner Bicycles, 7517 Road, Upland, CA 91786; (800) 536-8705, complete to your size and choice.

Giron, 5422 Shubert Avenue, Bridgeport, CT 06606; (203) 365-3960, complete to your choice.

Greenfield Cycles, Eugene, OR 97401; 887-0495; custom racing bike for the high-performance rider.

Mariano Bike Shop, 209 VT 54, Stowe, VT 05672; complete to your choice.

Marin Cycles, 6820 Shubert Avenue, Bridgeport, CT 06606; (203) 365-3960, complete to your choice.

Monterey Bicycles, 610 West Bridge Street, Madison, WI 53703; (608) 256-3343; complete to your choice.

Not all tourists are the same. As framebuilder Bruce Gordon points out, just as there are different kinds of racing criteriums, time trials, etc. there are different kinds of touring. Bruce defines the kinds of touring as follows:
reviewing in a future article, comes shod with Avocet inverted-tread 700x35C tires, which measure 32 mm (1 1/4 inches) across. (These are far bigger than nominal 1 1/4-inch tires, and that particular bike has enough extra room that it could probably fit the next-larger size, 700x38C.)

If you’re looking at a floor model with tires narrower than 35C, ask to see the 35C tires fit onto the bike before you buy the bike. True, you don’t need those wider tires for routine around-town riding. But when you’re self-supported on the road, and you come across a rough gravel section, you’ll just smile. (By the way, I heartily recommended the inverted tred design; it runs smoothly and corners terrifically on the road, and yet affords traction on unpaved roads and smooth trails.)

Shimmy: Regarding the nice stiff frames and forks, framebuilder Gordon aware

holes while supporting you and your luggage.

So what separates one touring bike from another?

• Some have plenty of room for wide tires. You want that.

• Some have nice stiff frames and forks that won’t sway or shimmy when they’re heavily loaded. You want that too.

• Some have more room between the pedals and the rear panniers (a function of chainstay length) than others. This is of vital interest to you if you have big feet, and some interest even if you have small feet.

Tires: You might find a bike already equipped with wide tires. For example, the Fuji Touring Series I, which we’ll be

E MANUFACTURERS

Croll Cycles, Inc., 718 Washington Ave. N., Suite 404, Minneapolis, MN 55401; (612) 339-1899; (800) 944-2453, Fax (612) 339-6722 Custom-built touring bike with Campagnolo components, $1350.

Davidson, 2116 Western Ave., Seattle, WA 98121; (206) 292-5374; Fax (206) 441-1815 Custom-built frames and bikes.

Fat City Cycles, P.O. Box 1439, South Glens Falls, NY 12803; (518) 747-8620, Fax (518) 747-0250 “Wicked Lite,” mountain bike frame and fork made with long-distance touring in mind, 17 1/8” chainstays, eyelets front and rear, two sets of water bottle mounts, $950 for frame and fork.

Fuji, 118 Bauer Dr., P.O. Box 60, Oakland, NJ 07436; (800) 631-8474 Touring Series I touring bike with full braze-ons, 700 X 35c tires and Shimano and Sugino components, $660; Touring Series II touring bike with full braze-ons, 700 X 35c tires and Shimano RSX STI triple group, $1900.

Gardin Bicycle Corporation, 3610 Mavis Road, Mississauga, Ontario L5C 1W1 CANADA (800) 527-4612, Fax (905) 279-1828 “Tour 400 CX STI” touring bike with 700x35c touring tires and clearance for fenders, full touring braze-ons, Shimano Touring/hybrid 400CX group.

Green Gear Cycling, 4065 W. 11th Ave., #14, Eugene, OR 97405; (503) 687-0487, Fax (503) 687-0493, E-mail: friday@11x.com “Bike Friday” Mountain bike frames and forks made with long-distance touring in mind, Lowrider rack mounts and fender eyes, rack mounts on rear, cantilever bosses, etc. $929 frame only; Complete bike: $1899 with Shimano LX, $2100 with Shimano XT.

Nevil Cycles, Rt. 1 Box 213-A, Vilas, NC 28692; (704) 963-4174 Custom touring frames ranging from $599 to $1119.

Original Otis Guy Cycles, 115 Ridge Road, Fairfax, CA 94930; (415) 456-4132, Fax (415) 453-9650 Custom-built touring bikes with Softride suspension system, $2500 and up.

Porter Custom Bicycles, 2909 Arno St., NE, Albuquerque, NM 87107; (505) 345-8441 Phone and fax Custom frames, steel silver-brassed touring frames with Columbus tubing, $1000-$1600.

Rivendell, 1547 Palos Verdes #402, Walnut Creek, CA 94596; (916) 342-4628, Fax (916) 342-2220 700x30c touring bike with 700x30c tires, $900.

Rivendell, 1547 Palos Verdes #402, Walnut Creek, CA 94596; (916) 342-4628, Fax (916) 342-2220 “All-Rounder” silver-brazed touring frameset $1475, $5524 Stock Touring frame (5 sizes) $1200, Full braze-on frames and forks, framebuilder Gordon 28c.

Steelman Cycles, 3600 Haven #5, Redwood City, CA 94063; (415) 364-3939, Fax (415) 364-4029 Custom touring frames starting at $1399; bike build kits - add $869 to $1700, Shimano or Campagnolo, offers Bruce Gordon racks.

Ted Wojcik Custom Bicycles, 4 Poplar St., Amesbury, MA 01913; (508) 388-4150, Fax (508) 388-7919 “Grand Touring Framespace” with full braze-ons and clearance for 700 x 38c tires, $1595.

Terry Precision Cycling for Women, 1704 Wayneport Road, Mace- don, NY 14502; (800) 289-8379 “Classic” bike features Campagnolo Ergopower shifters and TA Alize triple crank, $1670.

Ti Cycles, 824 Post Ave., Seattle, WA 98104; (206) 269-1578, Fax (206) 269-6934 Custom built, any color, any geometry, full braze-ons, steel touring frame $890; titanium touring frame $2145; complete bike - titanium $3500; steel $2200 (pedals not included).

Trek Bicycle Corporation, 801 W. Madison, Waterloo, WI 53594; (414) 478-2191, Fax (414) 478-2507 Offers Trek 520 with 700 x 28c tires, STI shifters, rear rack and full braze-ons, $1100.

Waterford Precision Cycles, 816 W. Bakke Ave., Waterloo, WI 53585; (141) 534-4190, Fax (414) 534-4194 “Model 1900 Adventure Cycle” frame & fork $1100, braze-ons including front and rear rack mounts and fender mounts, stainless steel rear vertical dropouts, and clearance for 700 X 40c tires plus fenders. Complete bikes: $1900-$2900. Designed with input from Adventure Cycling members.

Yamaguchi Hand-Made Bicycles, P.O. Box 10382, Colorado Springs, CO 80932; (719) 578-5524 Stock Touring frame (5 sizes) $1200, Full Order Custom Geometry $1600.

http://www.cyclelink.com/softride “Traveler” with Suspense System, Afco 1996 Model 4000 “STI” touring bike built in the USA (800) 346-2579

1996. USA patented 7672-97.

Cycles (800) 346-2579.

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likes to tell a story about that: Last year, he spoke at several bicycle clubs, and always had the following exchange:

“Who here has ridden down a long steep hill and had the bike start to shimmy?” There’d be a maniacal giggle, and everyone would raise his or her hand.

“And then, all the people would want to come up to me and tell me about the great touring bikes they owned. I’d say, ‘The one that’s hard to control on downhills?’ And they’d say, ‘Well, that’s only some of the time.’”

That “some of the time” could scare you out of 10 years’ growth. Or worse. It’s more likely to occur with lighter, less rigid frames — particularly if the forks and top tube are extra-light gauge. That’s another reason to avoid the “racing bike with triple” models. Unfortunately, few manufacturers publish their tube gauges anymore. The old standard in steel frames was to use a top tube of one inch outside diameter and 0.6 or 0.7 mm wall thickness (swelling an additional 0.3 mm at the butts at each end). The 0.7 makes a great touring bike. The 0.6 might work for lighter-duty touring. You can find bikes with 0.5 and even 0.4; those bikes shouldn’t ever touch a pannier.

Some bikes now use a larger, and therefore stiffer, top tube, of 1 1/8-inch outside diameter. That’s desirable. (So is a Cannondale, which, by virtue of its mega-stiff aluminum technology, will never have any of these problems.)

Similarly, you’ll probably see a variety of fork blades. Beefier is better — but once again, manufacturers seldom tell you how beefy it is. A fork made to look like a frail racing fork may have nice stout wall thicknesses. One made to look like a mountain bike fork almost certainly does. Insist on mounting bosses for low-mount pannier racks.

Heel clearance: Heel clearance depends on the size of your rear panniers, your shoe size, and chainstay length. Chainstays vary from a low of about 16 inches in racing bikes to a high of about 18 inches in some touring bikes. Gordon, ever outspoken on the issue, believes 17 1/8 inches (43.5 mm) is a minimum length for chainstays. It so happens that I have smallish feet (men’s size 8) so I can get away with slightly smaller chainstays than that (say, down to 16 3/4 inches) Your needs may vary. (You measure the chainstay by taking the distance from the rear axle to the center of the crank spindle.)

You’ll notice I haven’t said one word about gearing or frame angles. Why?

Bikes have gobs of gears these days. That battle is pretty much over. Frame angles have always been designed primarily to fit the rider, who doesn’t change shape whether he’s racing or touring. Years of measuring frames has taught me that even the steering geometry is similar between racing and touring frames, despite unending folklore about “the angles.” So instead of chasing these wild geese, focus on getting the tire clearance, rack mounts, and nice stout frame that you need.

And send us a postcard from some faraway place. It should read, “Now that I’m out here, I don’t notice the bike itself. I notice the scenery, the people, and the joy of riding. The bike is so reliable that I don’t have to notice it.” That’s what it’s all about.

Technical Editor John Schubert purchased “touring” bikes in 1965, 1972, 1979, 1983, 1986 and 1991. The first two proved to be not suitable for touring; the rest are doing fine.