

## Scooter-clogged aisles and a bike called "Scab"

*Our Technical Editor tries to make himself at home in Vegas*

By John Schubert

**I**t's hard for a touring cyclist to feel entirely at home in Las Vegas. First of all, there's the town itself. The garish lights. The leisure suits. The gambling thing. Then there's the annual Interbike trade show, where we and our style of riding are far from the core of the bike industry's focus.

Scooters clog the aisles. Electric scooters, ordinary scooters, scooters with Light Emitting Diodes (LEDs) in their little translucent wheels, scooters that fold, scooters that threaten to bash your shins.

Bikes are named to turn us off. Kona calls an otherwise-marvelous inexpensive mountain bike the Scab. Whether

they're referring to a strikebreaker or dried blood, I want no reminder of it every time I go riding. An 85-mph land luge (this wheeled thing in a fairing that you use to coast down steep hills) showed up in the aisles to bask in adulation after winning the X-Games on television.

And they still sell otherwise-splendid touring bikes with butchered gearing.

Due to strange events in the world of publishing, this annual trade show report was delayed until now. But there's a silver lining in every cloud, and here's this one: We are pleased to report that scooter sales plummeted at the end of 2000. The reported 500 electric scooter retailers nationwide are licking their wounds, and I ain't complaining. Maybe our shins will be

safe at next year's trade show.

As always, there were some excellent touring bikes and accessories on display. Here are my favorites:

The big news for 2001 is Diamondback's entry into the touring bike market. For a mere \$600 retail, their Interval — one of only two dropped handlebar bikes offered by Diamondback (the other is a cyclo cross bike) — sports an oversize aluminum frame, welded from the same 6061 aluminum alloy used by Cannondale. It has all the requisite rack bosses, hugely wide 700x38C tires with a nice inverted

tread, a suspension seat post, a saddle so well padded you may find it too cushy, a handlebar stem that allows you to adjust the stem angle, Shimano Sora drivetrain components, an eight-speed cog cassette and ... sorry ... somewhat butchered gearing. The good news is that an inexpensive switch of the small chainring will render this bike's 30/42/52, 12-28 drivetrain suitable for many loaded tourists' needs.

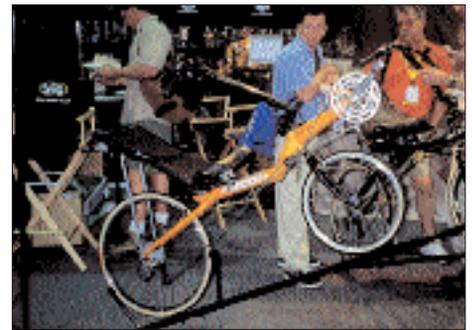
The Interval, with its terrain-friendly stock tires and wide tire clearances, is a knockout punch among inexpensive loaded touring bikes. I urge would-be buyers to go check one out. (Diamondback is owned by the Derby group, along with Raleigh and Univega, and all those brands are known for aggressive dollar-value competition.) And by the way, Diamondback shyly calls this great new entry an "event" bike. Tell them to come out of the closet and call it a touring bike.

The continued good news is that all the major touring bike brands are back for another year. The Jamis Aurora, the Fuji Touring Series, the Raleigh, the Bianchi lineup, the Trek and the Cannondale are all back for another year. A Fuji spokesman buttonholed me to point out that the \$850 bike has been spiffed up with improved gearing (30/42/52, 11-32 nine-speed) and a rear rack.

And look for something from Giant this year. Like those chickens at Diamondback, Giant is afraid to call their new model a "touring" bike. But Giant President Skip Hess told me they're doing a mid-year introduction of a bike that just happens to be set up for touring. Since Giant is no slouch in the design department (their road/sport/racing bike lineup is particularly strong) we expect great things from them.

At the top of the line, offerings continue to expand. In addition to touring bikes from companies such as Waterford, Co-Motion, Independent Fabrications and Litespeed, I noticed this year a splendid offering from Seven Cycles. Seven's Tsunami has a chrome-moly steel frame (because, by George, some tourists like things the old-fashioned way) and S&S couplers, so it can be disassembled for hassle-free airline travel.

Once you broaden beyond touring-specific equipment, the variety of items on display are at once impressive, and baffling. Want a 20-pound hybrid, designed for retired racers who remember the thrill of going fast? Canada's Devinci Santiago is the bike for you. Would you like dozens of different cyclo-cross bikes? Cyclo-cross bikes outnumber touring bikes at the trade show by about three to one, despite the relative scarcity of cyclo-cross riders. Want the heaviest bike of your youth? Schwinn's Heavi-Duty is back with bal-



**Burley's top-of-the-line Hep Cat.**



PHOTOS BY JOHN SCHUBERT

**Serotta's rear suspension without moving parts takes advantage of titanium's boingy properties. Travel is about 3/4-inch.**

loon tires, and spokes as thick as your thumb. The only thing that has changed is the country of manufacture.

Here are some designs that commanded my respect:

▼ Changing spokes on tour will now be effortless with the Shimano Nexave and Deore Directional Design hub. These hubs do away with the spoke hole flange; instead, spokes fit in keyed slots in the hub shell, and you don't have to remove the cog cassette to access them. The hubs are offered in 32- and 36-spoke versions, with 135mm rear hub width. And inside Shimano, Retail Promotions Manager Jessie Glascon, an avid cycletourist in his free time, is looking out for our interests.

▼ The handlebar — really a 19th-century piece of plumbing if you stop to think about it — has been reinvented by Sram Corporation. Sram's Smart Bar integrates handlebars, instrument readouts, mounting points and electronics. You can slap on accessory mirrors, a cycle computer, or a compass. They displayed one with two headlights, a bell, two mirrors, front and rear shift levers and the computer. Function buttons for electrically-controlled items need not be placed near the thing being controlled, since integrated wiring can be inside the bar. And the bar adjusts forward and backward six inches.

Sram's other ergonomic tour de force is a two-axis brake lever. The piece you touch rotates as you squeeze it so it feels more natural, and you don't feel your fingers slid-



**Just to turn heads: Specialized's drag bike.**

ing on the lever as the lever moves.

It Raleigh built a 21st-century comfort bike around the Smart Bar. The Raleigh Advanced Comfort Dual Suspension SC400 has rear suspension with an air shock, a Sella Stratus heavily padded seat with springs and the Sram Smart Bar.

▼ My favorite recumbent design has gotten about \$1000 cheaper. Vision's R64 Saber has two 24-inch wheels, and a combi-



**Raleigh SC400, the hybrid bike of the future.**

nation of weight distribution and steering geometry that gives an excellent "dialed-in" feel.

▼ Rear suspension continues to evolve toward blessed simplicity, and not just for mountain bike riders. Famed custom frame-builder Ben Serotta offers the DKS Technology titanium road frame. Radically curved seatstays flex under load, and the flex is controlled by an elastomer and steel strap attached to the underside of the seatstay. The elastomers can be switched for the suspension effect you want. Total suspension travel is about 3/4 inch. There are no hinges or bearings to maintain.

▼ Cat Eye's OS computer has no operator's manual: it sets up entirely with on-screen prompts. And, after it gets to know you, it congratulates you on your birthday and on your 100-mile rides. It can display bar graphs of your miles per week, per month, or per year, and remembers all this data for six years.

▼ Your entire concept of a shift lever may change soon, because no longer does the shift lever have to move the derailleur. Shimano's Nexave C900 front derailleur uses motion from the moving chainwheel to move the front derailleur. All the shift lever does is move an actuating mechanism into place. Say hello to buttons!

▼ Expedition touring cyclists (this means you!) will want to seek out the Safe Water bottle. Its filtering system removes all chemicals, pesticides and bacteria, so you can camp in remote areas and drink from streams. The bottle is \$45, and after purifying 60 gallons, you'll need a \$30 filter cartridge.

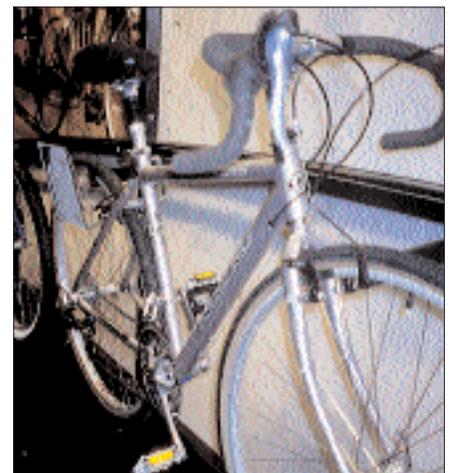
▼ From the People's Republic of Santa Cruz, a company named Wilder offers women-specific sized mountain bike components, such as handlebars with smaller diameter grip area, women-specific saddles, and stems to retrofit your bike that doesn't quite fit. Santa Cruz Cycles is offering bikes with these components as original equipment.

▼ Lower standover heights are becoming quite common. As we aging riders become less agile, bikes are getting

redesigned so we can mount and dismount with dignity. Specialized even does us the favor of marketing these design changes as performance-oriented.

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**Diamondback's hot new touring bike: the Interval.**