Hurray! True Classic Touring Bikes Are Made in Wisconsin

Almost every time we review a touring bike, the review is peppered with phrases like “racing bike in fat-tire disguise,” or “a frame this upright hasn’t been designed for load-carrying on bumpy roads.”

Almost.

The Trek 728 is here. It’s a 5715 exception that proves the rule. The 728 is truly designed for touring, and it’s one of the flashiest bikes you’ll find in its price range. Frame, components, and knickknacks are all first-class.

The frame dimensions are a touring cyclist’s delight: a fat, 42-inch wheelbase, 18-inch chainstays, and 72-degree angles. (By the way, the frame is a mere four pounds. 11 ounces, proving that a big touring frame can be quite svelve.)

The brazed-on knickknacks include the fuel bottle cage mounts underneath the down tube, a threaded hole in the chainstay bridge and another threaded hole on the underside of the brake bridge for easy rear fender installation, double eyelets front and rear for fender and rack mounting, and elegant rack bosses brazed onto the seatstays. Trek’s own brand of investment cast bottom bracket, Nikko lugs, and a Hoden Eureka investment cast fork crown are other nice touches. It’s hard to think of what Trek might have missed.

Despite the long wheelbase and the touring emphasis, the Trek 278 is certainly not sluggish. It’s surprisingly springy and lively. Yet, there are real benefits to the long wheelbase. On your first ride around the block, you note that it’s easier to control and better behaved on bumpy roads. The bike’s load-carrying ability is superior to that of shorter bikes.

Stiffness is good, and it also demands some discussion. There’s no way a bike with these dimensions can be as stiff as a full-on racing bike. However, Trek minimizes the difference with round/oval/round chainstays and larger diameter cylindrical oval fork blades. The result is a bike that most of us can stand on and thrash pretty hard. Only a competitive rider who has been training specifically to have a powerful jump could even notice the difference. And if that racer is touring, even touring hard and fast, he or she won’t be thrashing the bike hard enough to see that difference.

Other manufacturers have migrated toward very short wheelbases on their touring bikes because, they tell us, the shorter bike feels livelier when the customer test rides it. Therefore, the thought continues, the customer will usually buy the shorter bike.

That train of thought deserves to be derailed. First of all, the 728 is living proof that a touring bike need not feel sluggish. Second, the shorter bikes aren’t engineered for touring. They aren’t engineered for comfort over long days in the saddle, for easy handling and control over bumpy and smooth roads alike, or for carrying loads.

It’s nice to know there’s still an occasional exception.

Components on the Trek are tantalizing. The most avant-garde touring derailleur available—the steel Huret Eco Duopar rear and Duopar front—are paired with SunTour BarCon shift levers. It’s worth noting that Trek was willing to go to the extra trouble of buying one company’s levers and another company’s derailleur to get the...
best-performing equipment.

The new Sugino AT triple crankset combines "aerodynamic" styling with some real functional advantages. It's beefy and stiff; it's well made, the granny chaining interchanges with Avocet chainrings (down to 24 teeth), and the outer chainrings interchange with the reasonably-well-available Sugino Mighty Tour. Since the middle chaining can be as small as 34 teeth, all sorts of strange gearing combinations are possible.

Stock gearing is 28/45/50, 13-14-17-20-24-28, which adds up to half-step-plus-granny-plus-overdrive—a bit different from the bike pictured because we received an early prototype crankset that came with different size chainrings.

Suzue sealed-bearing hubs are not as familiar as some other brands, but they do come with a ten-year guarantee from the manufacturer. We took one apart to examine its construction. The hub uses stock sealed bearings pressed onto serrations on the axle. Locknuts position the bearings in the right place.

This hub design has two disadvantages: a ham-handed mechanic can overtighten the locknuts and damage the bearings, and replacement axles aren't readily available. The advantages are that a good mechanic can use the locknuts to take out wear-induced slop that appears in the bearings after miles of use, and the partially-threaded axle is slightly stronger than a conventional, fully-threaded axle.

The Dia-Compe 450B/210 centerpull brakes are attractive, give an unusually good feeling of progressive stopping control, and accept only Dia-Compe's own replacement brake shoes and pads. A consolation prize for the added effort in seeking out these shoes and pads is that the pads have excellent friction characteristics.

Contrary to rumor, this brake's caliper pivots don't have ball bearings. They use a brass bushing, which has fewer ways of failing and works equally well. Structurally speaking, that would be a silly place for a ball bearing anyway.

As we stated elsewhere in this collection of road tests, we prefer 27-inch wheels to the 700C wheels used on this bike because the tires are more readily available. But these tires are good, wide (32C) touring tires, and the Rigida 16-22 rims are strong and wide.

Hub spacing and wheel dishing on this bike are weak points—and they're the fault of the Huret Duopar's mounting bolt, which demands extra clearance inside the dropout for a locknut. Providing this clearance increases the dishing, weakening the lateral bracing strength of the wheel.

We'd recommend replacing this mounting bolt with the metric-thread shorter French bolt and a drop of Locktite. The French bolt is threaded 10 mm x 1 mm, versus 10 mm x 26 cpi for the Italian/English/Japanese bolt standard, so it fits snugly. With Locktite, it won't need a locknut to stay secured in proper position. Once you make this change, you can rearrange the hub spacing and reduce the wheel dish.

We've been trying, so far without success, to convince manufacturers to install Duopars this way in the factory. But the real solution is for Huret to start making Duopar mounting bolts with a shoulder to hold the bolt in proper position, without need for a locknut. Every other mounting bolt made, including other Huret mounting bolts, has this shoulder.

For those of you who don't have $700 for a touring bike, there will be a little brother to the Trek 728 selling for $455. The wheelbase will be 4.5-inch shorter—still longer than almost all competing "touring" bikes—on a frame with a Reynolds 531 main triangle and fewer dressy knicknacks. Components will be less costly, but at least one of the 728's outstanding components, the Sugino AT crankset, will be on the cheaper bike.
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THE CORNUCOPIA PROJECT doesn't profess to have any “pat” answers. Our goal is to develop a working dialogue with people from every region of the country, and by sharing ideas and experiences, map out together a new, more sensible direction for our wayward food system.

For more information, please write: Robert Rodale, THE CORNUCOPIA PROJECT, Rodale Press, Emmaus, PA 18049.

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TREK 720
Manufactured by: Trek Bicycle Corporation
801 W. Madison St.
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SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE: $715

SIZES AVAILABLE: 19, 21, 22, 24, 25 1/4 inches
Bike tested, 22 1/4 inches
WEIGHT: 24 pounds, 12 1/2 ounces, Bare frame without fork, 4 pounds, 11 ounces. Fork only, 1.25 pounds, 3 ounces

Wheels: 40 inches
Top tube: 22 1/4 inches
Chain stays: 18 inches
Head tube angle: 72 degrees
Seat tube angle: 72 degrees
Bottom bracket height: 10 inches
Fork rake: 2 1/4 inches

WHEELS
Rims: Riga 16-22 700c wide box section
Hubs: Suzue single-lane sealed-bearing quick-release
Spokes: 36 spokes, 14-gauge, cross three
Tires: Specialized Bicycle Imports 700 x 28C
Fender: 25 mm (Schwalbe valves)

DRIVE TRAIN
Derailleurs: Hurel double front, Eko Double (steel) rear, with SunTour ratchet style Bar-Con shifters
Chains: 1/2 x 1/8 Competition nickel
Crankset: Sugino AT triple
Crank arm length: 170 mm
Freewheel: SunTour New Winner Ultra-8

COMPONENTS
Pedals: SR SF 11 platform with Avocel medium toe clips and straps
Seatpost: SR Laprade one-bolt microadjust, 27.2 mm diameter, 220 mm length
Saddle: Avocel Touring 1 nylon with foam padding and leather cover, saddlebag eyelets
Handlebars: Cinelli Saito d'alle mezzo bend engraved, 40 cm wide. Cintia 11 cm stem, black cloth tape
Brakes: Gran Comp 450B/210 centerpull with Gran Comp levers. Gran Comp 500 or SunTour Superbike sidepulls may be on later models

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