

RCN Road Test: The Sun EZ Tandem CX

By Bob Bryant

Since the demise of BikeE, Sun has quickly taken the lead position as the world's largest selling recumbent bicycle manufacturer. Sun has an aggressive plan to introduce several new models over the next few years. The EZ Tandem has been in the works for years. In fact, I can recall riding a similar prototype years ago at the Easy Racers factory in Watsonville, California. The new EZ tandem is a recreational double that has an affordable price and is high in value.

The Sun tandem is a welcome addition to the world of recumbency. It's far more affordable than any other recumbent tandem and it's more user-friendly and should be readily available at more dealers.

Systems

Frame: The EZ Tandem CX's frame and fork are TIG welded CroMo. Both are made in Taiwan for Sun/J&B under license from Easy Racers (designers). We found the build quality to be fine, on a par with the EZ Sport.

Steering: The Tandem has EZ Sport style aluminum OSS "chopper" bars connected to a quill stem. The head tube angle is a bit more upright than the Tour Easy or Gold Rush, and the handling isn't quite as *sweet*.

Finish: The CX comes in gold powder-coat. The aluminum AX comes in silver.

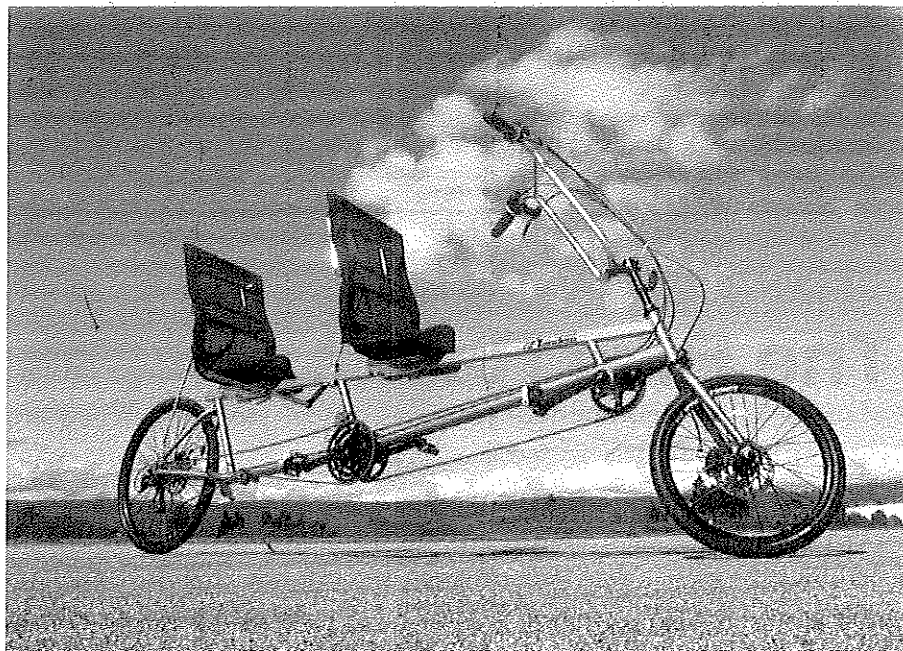
Weight: The EZ Tandem specs say it's supposed to weigh 59 pounds. We put it on our scale, which is what it weighed. It's no lightweight, that's for sure. Add racks and fenders and it gets worse. However, it's still lighter than a pair of EZ or Tour Easy singles.

Drivetrain

Components: While the bike is designed as an entry level recreational tandem, the components are better than expected. Highlights include:

- Deore rear derailleur
- American Classic hubs
- Sun Rims
- Tektro disc brakes

The most expensive component on a tandem is the crankset with cross-over. On the EZ Tandem CX, it's a generic alloy 30/42/52 tandem crankset 170 mm crank arms. If these are short for you, as they were for me, you're out of luck. The derailleurs are a Shimano FD 443 front and Deore rear,



The 2004 Sun EZ Tandem CX

For

1. Affordable
2. Better than expected
3. Durable
4. Decent componentry
5. EZ to ride

Against

1. Long
2. Heavy
3. Rattling seat parts
4. No drag brake
5. SRAM Verio shifters

Why Buy This Bike

This is clearly the best buy in tandem recumbency — by a long shot. It's a good utilitarian ride, despite a few minor production glitches.

Contact

Sun Recumbents
Web: www.sunbicycles.com

Specifications

Model: Sun EZ Tandem CX
Type: LWB tandem
Size: One size fits most
Wheelbase: 91-inches
Seat height: 26"
Pedal height: 19.25" (C); 13" (S)
Weight: 59 pounds
Frame: CroMo TIG
Fork: CroMo
Price: \$1,950

Seat

Back: Sun Aluminum with mesh
Base: Foam and lycra covered wood

Components

Crank: Alloy 170 mm 30/42/52
Bottom bracket: Sealed
Headset: 1-1/8" sealed
Derailleurs: Shimano Deore/443 (front)
Cassette: Shimano 11-34 9-speed
Shifters: SRAM Vario twist
Chain: N/A
Gear inch range: 22-118
Pedals: Wellgo LU 982
Wheels: 26/20 Sun rims/Am. Classic hubs
Tires: Kenda Kwest 100 spi
Brakes: Tektro disc
Colors: Gold

shifted by SRAM Verio twists with that silly little dial indicator. These shifters look a bit cheesy, but have worked fine on several of our test bikes. The rear cassette is a Shimano 11-34 9-speed.

Chain management: The CX's system is much like that of a conventional tandem. The chains may be a bit longer, but at this length, who's counting links, right? The one addition is a rear skate wheel style idler which was trouble free.

Braking: The tandem comes with Shimano Deore disc brakes controlled by Tektro levers. While the braking was fine for our recreational use, having descended rocky mountain passes, I prefer a 3rd brake for serious mountain riding. Unfortunately, a tandem drag brake cannot be added to the EZ Tandem.

Wheels and Tires: The wheels are better than you'd expect on an entry level tandem. The hubs are American Classic disc brake hubs (front and rear). The rear wheel is a tandem 48 spoke, the front is a 36 spoke. Rims are Sun SL-1 Singletracks. Our wheels were completely trouble free.

The EZ Tandem comes outfitted with Kenda Kwest 1.5 100 psi tires — a perfect choice for this double recumbent.

Comfort

Seat: The EZ Tandem is outfitted with a pair of Sun's aluminum framed Cool Back seats. The stoker seat has an under-seat handlebar (with bar-ends). The seat back is an adjustable mesh (straps) that is very comfortable. The base is not as comfortable as an Easy Racers seat. Foam sits on top of a wood base (updated for '05?). Heavier riders may find this isn't as comfortable as the Easy Racers seat for long rides.

The seats slide on top of the frame's rectangular top tube and each have dual quick releases underneath. The captain seat has a solo rear seat support, and the stoker is a double (a la EZ Sport). Both are adjusted with quick release pins.

One criticism we have about all of the Sun EZ bikes is that the seats are noisy due to rattling parts. A patient owner or knowledgeable dealer should be able to solve these rattles with some washers, rubber spacers and/or tape.

Riding Position: The EZ Tandem's riding position is about as user friendly and "EZ" as it could be. The upright seats and low BB's will have most anyone feeling right at home on this tandem. It's about the same riding position as an EZ-1 or EZ Sport.

Ride and Handling

The EZ Tandem is more a double EZ Sport than it is a double Tour Easy. The bike needs to be taller to fit the stoker pedals under the seat. The steering geometry isn't as fluid or graceful as a Tour Easy, but it feels good and I believe it's about as good as it can be. My ref-



Amy & Daniel Bryant test out the EZ Sport tandem

erence for this comment is riding previous Easy Racer tandem prototypes.

The EZ Tandem is stable and predictable to ride, and tracks well, again, more like an EZ Sport than a Tour Easy. Once you get accustomed to the length of the bike, you need to develop a good communication with your stoker (this is a must). Maneuverability can be difficult. However, you just need more room to turn it around. On our narrow street, we had to go to the intersection to take a big wide sweep to turn it around.

Performance: Flat land performance wasn't as fast as our Tour Easy test bike. The bike isn't as aerodynamic. However, you've got two times the power. We were impressed by our flat land and downhill performance.

Climbing: Tandems are slow climbing and the EZ Tandem's 59 pounds and 9.5 foot length complicate this even more. I rode all of my usual recumbent routes and never pushed up a hill. My kids (the stokers) said it was easier than riding their mountain bikes. I do feel the gearing (22-118 gear inches) isn't low enough for serious mountain climbing, however. This tandem could use a lower low gear.

Owning

Utility: This is a long bike. Any and all tandems are difficult to turn due to the additional rider and weight. The low bottom brackets (BBs) help to make this one user-friendly, but it's still 9.5 feet long. Carrying the tandem on your car will be difficult unless you opt for ATOC's new TT EZT rack tray designed to haul this big bike (www.atoc.com).

Options & accessories: Sun offers a rear rack, a stoker under-seat pannier rack, a rear seat basket, the EZ Messenger bag that will fit the stoker seat back, a fender set and a small Edge fairing (small, comes down to the top of

the head tube). I'm sure a Super Zzipper could be adapted as well.

Market Competition

Comparison: There is really no direct competition for the EZ Tandem. The only other competitor was the BikeE. If you don't want a LWB tandem, you can step up to the RANS Screamer Sport or Barcroft Columbia. The Columbia is the more user-friendly of the two, and weighs 13 pounds less than the EZ Tandem! There may be other tandems available, but they will take more detective work to track down and purchase.

The EZ Tandem offers value like no other we've seen. Used EZ Tandems can be found in the \$1,500 range and we've seen some on eBay as well. Just keep in mind that shipping can be costly. We shipped ours down from Washington to California for \$100. We had other quotes as high as \$250. Also, assembly can be time consuming, and it could cost \$100 or so to get it assembled.

A second model aluminum EZ Tandem "AX" is due out in 2004 (\$2,695). The AX is equipped with Vision IPS (independent pedaling for captain and stoker), has SRAM X.9 derailleurs and shifters, Avid disc brakes, Speed Lever handles and weighs 6 pounds less at 53 pounds.


Verdict

While the Sun tandem is a medium quality grade recumbent, it's quite impressive for the price point. Any criticisms we have can be quickly argued away by the bargain price. Minor nit-picks like the rattling seat parts can be corrected by owners and dealers. Overall, the details of the Sun recumbents are *not* on a

Continued on page 28

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EZ Tandem . . . Cont'd from page 13

par with the \$3,500-\$5,000 tandems, which is as it should be. If you need a tandem for an epic tour, have one built for you. The EZ Tandem CX is the tandem "for the rest of us." And it will get just as much attention as any other recumbent tandem no matter the cost.

Availability is quite good, perhaps too good. J&B Importers ships from several warehouses around the USA to your local dealer. Nearly any bicycle dealer can sell Sun Recumbents (they are listed in the J&B Importers wholesale parts catalog). Sun bikes have previously been discounted on the Internet (eBay). Sun recently announced that the warranty of any "mail ordered" recumbent that is not set up by a bicycle dealer will be void.

Sun doesn't act like a recumbent manufacturer as we've come to expect. There is really nobody to call with questions, or to be convinced to buy one — other than your local selling dealer. This could be good if you have a knowledgeable recumbent dealer. If not, you might get the shrug of the shoulders, and be asked to pay in advance because they've never seen one before, but would be happy to order one for you.

The bottom line is quite simple. If you're looking for an affordable, fun and easy to ride tandem to introduce the joys of tandem recumbency — there's no better choice than the Sun EZ Tandem. What's not to like about that? ♦

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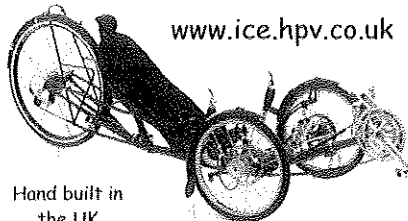


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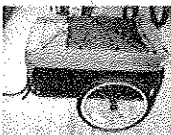
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