

Sun Bicycles EZ-1 Super Cruiser

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We've all been waiting for this one for quite some time. How many times have you wished for a decent recumbent that was in the same price range

as a decent upright? Not a superbike, just something that was low cost and functional. A bike that was within the price ranges of most potential customers and would suit a new rider's needs for at least a year or so. Almost all of us are pretty sure that everyone would be on a 'bent if they were only a little cheaper.

The recumbent gods have come closer and closer to answering our prayers over the last couple of years. First, BikeE moved most of their production to Taiwan and lowered the price of their CT 2.0 to \$650. That was pretty close. Then RANS introduced the excellent Wave at \$699. That was even closer. The RANS seat alone used to cost \$200. Well, now both BikeE and RANS have raised prices up to \$699 and \$799 respectively. Both bikes are still excellent bargains, but still are not quite in that true "entry-level" price range.

Then late last summer rumors began to trickle in about a new player. They sounded almost too good to be true. Were Gardner Martin and Easy Racers really going to build the EZ-1 overseas? Was it really going to be priced under \$500? Was it really going to be just like the old EZ-1?

As the fog began to clear, things only got better. It appeared that Easy Racers wasn't going to build the bikes themselves. In fact they had arranged to sell the design to J&B Importers, a very large wholesale parts distributor and owner of the Sun Bicycles brand name. The bikes would be available to anyone with a J&B catalog. This includes almost every bike shop in the country.

The new Sun Bicycles EZ-1 Super Cruiser debuted at the CABDA dealer show. Gardner Martin was there standing next to the bike with a big grin on his face. After talking to him about the bike I learned a few more details. Martin had negotiated a deal to redesign the bike for J&B with an emphasis on durability and predictable handling. J&B would distribute the bikes to dealers and Easy Racers would sell some of the bikes themselves.

The show bike had a real Easy Racers Kool Back seat that was not going to make it to production and the same components as our production test bike. The show bike was built from a pre-production prototype high-tensile steel Taiwanese frame. J&B said that the bike would retail for \$499-\$549.

The production bikes began hitting showroom floors in early March of this year and 'BentRider got their hands on one of the first ones. At first glance, the bike looks very similar to the old Californian EZ-1 and the CABDA showbike. The most noticeable difference is the seat. The Easy Racers version used a Cobra seat straight off the Tour Easy and Gold Rush. The CABDA showbike's Kool Back seat was a little too expensive for the Sun bike, but a very similar steel frame unit has replaced it. The new seat is almost as comfy as the Kool Back and much easier to adjust. There is one bad thing and two very cool things about this seat. The bad thing is that it uses a foam covered plywood seatbase. It works well and is comfortable, but I question its durability in a crash. The cool things are the pins that hold it in place. This little \$500 bike has the trickiest seat pins in the industry. They are easy to insert, don't come loose and don't rattle.

Fit
and
finish
on
the
frame
is
above
average.
The
EZ-
1SC
comes
in
either
metall
red
or



blue. Our red version's paint was very good for a bike in this price range. This new, more wallet friendly version of the classic EZ-1 comes equipped with a mostly Shimano Acera 21-speed groupo. A pair of basic V-Brakes do a good job of slowing the bike's 34 pounds.

One of the other major changes that Martin and Sun made to the new EZ-1 was the wheel sizes. The old EZ-1 had a 349mm front wheel and a 451mm rear. The EZ-1SC rolls on a more common 305mm x 406mm set up with a Acera hubs and Alesa rims. The wheels are shod with some fairly durable looking Kenda tires.

Sun calls this bike the EZ-1 Super Cruiser. That name may imply that they plan on most of the units sold being used as comfortable leisure bikes. Undoubtedly, many of them will. However, many will also be purchased by people looking for a first recumbent. Many of these customers will probably

be looking for something a little more. I began the test by riding the bike on the local bike paths and back and forth to work, but I also took the bike out on a several longer rides and a couple of club rides to truly test the limits of its capabilities.

I had absolutely no problem adjusting to the EZ-1SC. Sun will surely sell a lot of these bikes based on their rideability alone. This bike has the lowest learning curve this side of a BikeE. It may even be easier for some folks. I had very limited experience with the old EZ-1, so I can't really compare the two. Many people I've spoken to who have ridden the old as well as the new bike say that the new one is easier to ride and more stable at low speeds. This probably has as much to do with the fat tires as anything else. Gardner Martin told us that the geometry of both bikes is identical.

This stability and predictability makes the EZ-1SC an excellent bike path/trail bike. The bike never got itself into too much trouble on the loose sand and gravel that plagues our local bike paths. I even found the bike to be manageable on a short section of nature trail that joins a local shopping center to the bike path. The EZ-1 isn't nearly as capable off-roading as the BikeE FX, but it would be right at home on an unpaved bike path or dirt road. The bike does have a small amount of tiller effect, but that doesn't take much away from the bike's handling.

The EZ-1 also makes a nearly ideal commuter. It's easy to mount accessories on (a BikeE bag fits great), is high enough to be very visible in traffic and is inexpensive enough that having one stolen probably won't be a wallet-breaking experience. The Super Cruiser's biggest weaknesses come into play when it's out on the open road. When I picked up the bike I immediately noticed its smallish 52-tooth chainring. This is plenty enough for a 26" or 700c rear wheel, but it leaves the 20" rear wheeled EZ-1 gasping for breath at around 22 - 23 mph. The most flat level speed I could muster out of the undergeared bike was 23.5 mph. This is will most likely be enough for most situations, but it does limit what could be a faster bike.

I also found that those fat, treaded tires that make the bike so predictable at lower speeds feel like dragging brakes at over 18 mph. If you are planning on using the EZ-1 for any real road riding, you may want to consider switching to something a little slicker and faster. However, even with the low gears and fat tires, I was able to achieve higher speeds than I ever did on a BikeE.

Once out on the hills of the cruel open road, the EZ-1's considerable curb weight also rears its ugly head. Sun claims a weight of 34 lbs. I weighed the bike on three different scales and my findings ranged between 37 and 39 pounds. You can really feel that extra tonnage on climbs, but again, this is a bike with an MSRP of \$500, not a P-38.

The components on the EZ-1SC also seemed perfectly fine when poking around town, but I did find a few flaws once I really worked the bike hard. For instance, the front derailleur rubs the chain quite a bit under hard

pedaling. Some of this is most likely because of bottom bracket flex, but it also has a lot to do with the tight tolerances of the Shimano SIS derailleur. The rear shifting also gets a little loud if you try to shift with much pressure at all on the pedals. But again, keep in mind that this is a \$500 bike.

I did find the EZ-1SC to be very comfortable, even on rides of 20-40 miles. The Super Cruiser's seat has a great shape and a very tall, supportive back. The foam cushion also has a very good density and the cover isn't very slippery.

I walked away from my test time on the EZ-1SC fairly satisfied. Is it the perfect entry-level bike? It's the closest we've seen so far. Is it worth every penny of its \$500 asking price? Absolutely. Is it worth much more than that? Probably not. This is not at all a slam on the bike. What we've needed is a decent bike for a reasonable price that could be produced in sufficient numbers and be readily available. We definitely have all of that in the EZ-1. Any first time recumbent buyer will find the bike useful for quite some time. It's an excellent commuter the way it is and with some very small modifications (bigger chainrings and better tires) it would be a competent tourer. Any one who already owns a higher performance recumbent may still find the bike useful as a commuter or trail bike.

I also had an encouraging conversation with a J&B sales rep about one month after the bikes started shipping. He was very curious about my opinions and took notes on everything I said. He said that J&B was very pleased with the bike's sales and that they were already planning the 2001 model. Perhaps most encouraging was the fact that he had an EZ-1SC with him on his trunk rack. Sales reps are usually only aloud to take one sample bike with them and the fact that he was carrying an EZ-1SC shows that J&B is committed to the bike.

I've already heard from many EZ-1SC buyers that had been considering a recumbent for months or even years before they finally bought a Super Cruiser because of its affordability. Most of them are very happy with their purchases. That's where the Super Cruiser will help the market. It is sure to get a lot of buyers off the fence and on a recumbent. The bike is affordable and good enough that it won't turn anyone off to 'bents. Sun and Easy Racers have definitely lowered recumbency's admission price substantially.

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