



EZ TANDEM

Evolution of A Dream

By John Axen

Just 40 miles into the Lighthouse Century, which is on the California Coast, I knew I was in trouble. I was in the best of shape, and as a tandem team Seth and I had been seriously training several months prior to the ride. We had just finished 2 months of building our "dream tandem" based on a very light aluminum frame adorned with the latest of high tech components. It weighed a mere 34 pounds

and was performing flawlessly but our average speed was decreasing with each glance at our bike computer. No super food supplement or secret ultramarathon motivational trick could rescue us now. At eight years of age, Seth was more than willing and able to make up the difference but even his exuberance was diminishing. I was succumbing to 8 months of dealing with severe nerve damage that was the

result of a seemingly minor car accident. I had blown out 3 discs in my neck and a couple in the lower back that resulted in uncontrollable spasms in my left arm and leg. Alternating pain and numbness would cause weakness and fatigue. I had always been a strong rider and had looked forward to this time in my life when I could do some serious tandem riding with my sons. I know it had to be discouraging

for Seth as well. **We did finish the century but it would not have happened if a few friends had not sacrificed and helped us back to the start. It took over a month to be free of most of the pain that resulted from that one ride. I had never been so depressed!**

Hanging in my garage were 3 high-end road tandems, 2 of which had been converted with child adapters. Often, a friend would pilot one of the tandems with one boy and I would ride with the other. The 3rd tandem was a full suspension steed that we rode on the trails of Crested Butte, Colorado. Now that I couldn't ride it I was going to add to the dusty collection the new aluminum road warrior! I had more money in tandem bikes than most people put into cars and I couldn't ride a single one of them! Seth and Jared watched me with interest as I tried to figure a way I could continue riding with them. The doctors basically told me there was nothing they could do short of fusing a few vertebrae together and that would certainly limit my mobility. I was determined to find another way! That is when I began to look at recumbent tandems.

After searching on the internet and visiting a major recumbent shop I began to suffer a depression that was nearly as deep as the original because I had not realized how expensive recumbent tandems are. It isn't that the builders are trying to soak the buyer. They ARE much more expensive to build and have a limited market. I found the range in price to start around \$2,650 and climb to nearly \$6,000. This was greater than my available funds. Limited also was the production of these technological wonders. I figured we would have to start selling off our tandems and try to buy recumbent tandem in several months. As we began the liquidation process I found a used recumbent tandem that met our needs, but was still out of reach financially. If it had not been for the sincere generosity of the person selling this recumbent, we would not be riding it today. His love for cycling, especially tandems, and trust in fellow cyclists, allowed us to purchase his recumbent tandem at a price significantly lower than the market value. We have never ceased to be amazed at his generosity. I almost had to give up on riding with my sons, and isn't that the reason we have

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kids anyway, to have playmates for life?

Fortunately, people looking for a recumbent tandem today can thank Gardner Martin of Easy Racers fame, and Sun Bicycles, for their efforts as they have created the Sun EZ Tandem. We have all witnessed the genius of Gardner Martin's Tour Easy and Gold Rush Replica recumbent singles as their riders have taken them to the farthest reaches of the world. As with most quality high-end recumbents the production has been limited and quite pricey.

In the last couple of years Gardner began working with Sun Bicycles, one of the largest bicycle producers in the world, to produce affordable recumbent bikes based on his designs but built overseas. This relationship has resulted in the Sun EZ series of recumbents, which have good riding characteristics and don't require a second mortgage of your property! Recumbent and Tandem Rider Magazine has favorably reviewed a couple of these bikes, and when rumors began to float around about an EZ Tandem being prototyped my palms began to sweat! Several months of development and a few prototypes later we got word that a production bike was on its way to the RTR test lab.

I got the call late one afternoon and met our publisher, Charles Coyne. Atop his car was a gold and black Sun EZ Tandem that almost defied description! I was getting worried though, as this tan-

dem was LONG and I began to think I might need a crane to get it down to ground level. Not really! I guess when you see a recumbent tandem at higher than eye level it looks bigger than what it actually is. In spite of my first reaction, we got it down to ground level with relative ease and gave it a thorough examination.

Let's start with the frame, which closely resembles the very popular EZ1 single, but with significantly larger tubing and more of it. The long, tig welded, Chromoly frame starts with a rather large square top tube and a large diameter down tube that are triangulated to form a strong foundation. A Chromoly fork is added to the frame, which has a wheel-base of 91 inches. The wheelset starts with front and rear American Classic sealed bearing Disc hubs, laced with black stainless spokes to Sun Single Track rims. Both the hubs and rims are black anodized, the front being 20" and the rear 26". I loved the Kenda Kwest Recumbent Tandem tires that are rated at 100 lbs of pressure as much as I have while testing them on single bikes.

A pair of contoured Lycra-covered seat bases combined with alloy framed, Cool Back seat backs provide the cockpit seating. The back-side of the front seat has two water bottle mounts. The "stoker" position has an adjustable alloy under the seat handlebar.

The captain's alloy handlebar is attached to the fork via a Quill-style alloy stem which clamps to the 1-1/8" steering

tube. The front bars also have 2 bottle cage mounts for the pilot. The drivetrain consists of sealed cartridge bearing bottom brackets and Alloy tandem cranks that have arms of 170mm and chainrings of 52-42-30 teeth.

The pedals, front and rear are Wellgo LU-982 with cages. The front derailleur is a Shimano FD-R443 Flat Bar and the rear is a Shimano RD-M510 Deore. The Shimano 11-34 tooth, 9-speed cassette combined with the triple crankset provides 27 speeds. The shift levers are SRAM Vario with rather large gear indicators.

Shimano Deore Mechanical Disc brakes are modulated by a pair of Tektro alloy levers. The front bars are topped off with a pair of Kraton rubber grips. Take a few steps backwards and you have a recumbent tandem, adorned in gold and black, 113" long, 59lbs, with seat heights of 58". Whew, that is some bike! I am sure you can figure it out that no compromise was made in the component department when designing the Sun EZ Tandem. To make things just a bit more interesting and keep you reading I am not going to give you the price until the end! I'll bet you can't wait!

Unlike previous recumbent tandem reviews, I didn't rely solely on the talents of my son, Seth. He was out of town for a significant period of the test time and only got to ride with me for approximately 30 miles. Instead, I recruited an interesting combination of stokers of varying

tandem experience. My first victim was a 14 year old by the name of Eric who is somewhat taller than 6 feet and "all legs" both in length and power. We worked together and dialed in the EZ Tandem to our specific sizes and proceeded down the street for the first time. The EZ Tandem seat clamps make for ease of adjustment both for and aft, as well as the angle of recline. Like other Sun recumbents, this tandem uses seat pins with spring clamps to hold the seat backs in position. Initially, the seat struts and pin combination seemed a bit flimsy, maybe even a bit flexible when the bike was stationary.

Once we were seated though, the seats seemed quite secure. I was a bit concerned about our first few strokes down the street as this is a very long tandem and requires a bit more real estate to negotiate tight turns. In fact, I wasn't really going to attempt a 180 degree turn until I came to a side street! Well, I really had nothing to worry about, as the slow speed characteristics of the EZ Tandem are quite stable. You just need a bit more room to turn around!

Those first strokes of the pedals were quite revealing as well due to Eric's "rookie" status as a stoker and not realizing his own strength. I am sure he was trying to convey his desire to carry his own share of the load and we took off a little faster than what I would have liked. What we lacked as a coordinated team effort was quite well handled by the EZ. I didn't feel any unnecessary frame flex. I was quite able to keep the EZ Tandem in a straight line, in spite of our awkward technique.

After a mile or so we began to work as a team and we began to ride like old pros. I wouldn't say that this tandem is a fast accelerator, but neither is it slow. The shifting was crisp and accurate and I even caught myself looking at those rather large gear indicators. What we really got a kick out of was the mechanical disc brakes. It only took a few traffic lights to "scuff" the rotors and they got stronger with each stop. I thought I would warn Eric every so often as I wanted to see how they would react in a "panic" situation. I was quite pleased with their operation, as they showed no sign of fading.

On that first ride, we had a blast sprinting from light to light, trying to keep a constant speed on the bikeway, and jamming down a couple of fast descents. Neither the bike nor the new "stoker" had

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Shimano mechanical disk brakes provided lots of stopping power for the EZ-Tandem after we gave them a tune-up. Plenty of adjustability makes getting comfy on the seats easy to do.



any major problems on that short 20-mile inaugural ride until an examination showed that both the front and rear disc brakes had been dragging, causing a significant amount of resistance! I was a bit mad at first but now laugh because Eric was such a trooper.

A quick and minor adjustment remedied the dragging brakes and we were ready to ride again.

As a "rookie" stoker, Eric performed better than most. He was very enthusiastic and very teachable. I like his comments because of his age and desire to please. He told me that once his seat was adjusted both in length and angle of recline that he could really put the power to the pedals. He couldn't believe how comfortable the EZ seat was and that he appreciated the ability to look around.

He also stated that he wouldn't mind riding an EZ1 single if they felt the same as this. I thought that was interesting, as I have gotten so many positive comments from the youth as I ride past them on the trails. Many want to take a recumbent bike for a ride. Eric also said he never felt nervous, even though he had no control over the gear choice, steering, or braking. That comment came even after we had a rather large dog bolt between two cars and hit our front wheel hard enough to take it out from underneath us! There was nothing to do but ride with the fall. I guess we got even as we fell on top of the dog and momentarily pinned him to the ground. Neither of us, or the EZ Tandem was hurt so we continued our adventure.

My second stoker had thousands of miles riding on the back of tandems but never on a recumbent. Her experience as a veteran stoker helped in climbing the longer grades. I believe we might have been only slightly slower riding the EZ

Tandem up some of the steeper grades than when riding my regular recumbent tandem.

Even at our slowest cadence the EZ Tandem rode straight and was pretty quick on the descent. The one thing I had to concentrate on was to learn to relax my upper body more as the long alloy bars do flex a bit if you pull on them. You're supposed to let your legs do the work and relax your upper body. Isn't that one of the reasons we ride recumbents in the first place? To relax!

It didn't take her long to enjoy the benefits of the comfortable seat and seat back. She was surprised how stable the EZ Tandem was at speed. The faster we rode, the smoother the road seemed to be.

Alas, there was one problem when descending with the EZ Tandem. We ran out of gears way too soon! You could change the front sprocket to one that is larger, but we had to live with what we had at the time. Then, my favorite stoker returned from camp and it was Seth's turn to evaluate the EZ Tandem.

I truly like riding with Seth as he has developed quite a sense of what works well and what doesn't, all at the ripe young age of 14 years. He probably has more tandem miles than the average adult stoker. Besides, he has intuition as to when the cadence needs to be stepped up or when we should drop into a bigger gear. So, for the last couple years I have grown to depend on his opinion about tandem bikes, especially recumbents. After cruising, jamming, and climbing our way around the canyons I asked his opinion of the EZ Tandem. He said that this tandem is quite similar to our own from the stokers' point of view. He sits only slightly higher and thinks the seat is very comfortable. For him the position of the hand-

grips was pretty good, but for shorter riders there might be a problem. The crank height was good enough for him to feel that he was contributing to the output of power. He felt confidence from the back and his enthusiasm showed with our average speeds being right in the middle of other recumbent tandems we have ridden. Seth said he only felt a slight difference from other recumbent tandems. Perhaps it was a tiny bit slower in the climbs or, that it took us a little bit more area to make those slower turns. He was also quick to remind me of my key statement: Just because a bike rides differently from another bike, doesn't mean it is inferior. It is just different. One of the things Seth liked about the EZ Tandem seats was the frames. They make good locations to hang bags and hydration bladder systems. He also found the bottle cage mounts to be plentiful and reachable.

My overall thoughts about the EZ Tandem are quite favorable. I like the frame's resiliency and that it climbs reasonably well. The seat is quite comfortable and I don't have to worry about where the controls are. The ergonomics work well. Speaking of working well, those mechanical disc brakes are a real asset. When I first saw that metallic gold paint job, I was immediately thinking of my old Schwinn Stingray, which shared the same color. I think the choice of components and tires is perfect for years of durability. This tandem is easy to handle and is probably suited for both the new recumbent tandem pilot as well as the veteran. I would consider it and did use it on club rides. I might even commute on the EZ Tandem if a regular stoker was available who worked near me. I would even go for weekend tours and perhaps get a bit adventurous and take off for a week or so. Is the EZ Tandem perfect? Close but not quite!

Did I mention that the EZ Tandem is quite long at 113 inches? How do you transport anything that long unless you ride it to where your group meets? Most truck beds cannot accommodate such a long bike either. So, what do you do then? The car-top Tandem Topper rack by ATOC (www.ATOC.com) handles the EZ Tandem and makes it very easy to load. I have also mentioned that slower turns may require more area to complete but it seems everyone got accustomed to that rather quickly. I loved the choice of

wheels but am a bit tired of the black look. I would have preferred stainless spokes that are stainless in appearance. There is something timeless about a finely crafted wheelset with shiny, stainless spokes that seem to get better with age. This is purely my preference and certainly doesn't affect performance. The EZ Tandem is a bit hefty at nearly 60lbs, which is nearly 15 lbs heavier than its nearest competitor, although the weight was not that noticeable. Does it perform like the rest of the veteran recumbent tandems? Like Seth said, the differences are there but at a retail price of less than \$2,000 which is nearly half the price of other recumbent tandems, you get a lot of value for your dollar.

Sun EZ-1 Tandem Specs

MSRP	\$1950.00
Frame	Tig-Welded Chromoly
Fork	Sun Chromoly
Headset	1-1/8" Sealed Bearing
Rims (f/r)	(f)Sun SL-1 Single Track 36h 20x1.5 (r)Sun SL-1 Single Track 48h 26x1.5
Hubs (f/r)	American Classic Disk
Tires	Kenda Kwest 100psi Tandem Series 20x 1.5/26-1.5"
Spokes	DT Champion
Derailluers (f/r)	Shimano R443/M510
Shifters	SRAM Vario
Chain	Shimano HG-93/PC59
Crank	Alloy Tandem 170mm
Crankset	52/42/30t
Eccentric	Shimano
Bottom Brackets	Shimano Ultegra
BB Height (f/r)	19"/13.25"
Cassette	Shimano 11-34, 9sp
Seat Height (f/r)	27"/27"
Seats f/r	Nylon Mesh
Pedals	Wellgo LU982
Handlebars f/r	Alloy
Brake Levers	Tektro
Brakes	Shimano Deore Mechanical Disks
Color	Gold
Wheelbase	91"
Size	Adjustable
Weight	59-lbs.

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