



Sun Bicycles EZ Sport The Shape of Bents to Come?

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You knew it had to happen. It was just a matter of time. Chrysler went back to the future with its popular PT Cruiser; VW brought back the venerable bug, and now we have a retro-styled recumbent, compliments of the joint efforts of Sun Bicycles and Easy Racers. The new EZ Sport, with its very curvaceous and classical looks immediately brings back the nostalgia of the 50's and awakens your long forgotten memories of beautifully sculpted bikes from the past. Yet, as attractive as this bike is, I kind of suspect that its beauty won't interfere with your ability to notice its fabulous \$899 sticker price and wonderful handling quality.



Several months ago, `BentRider Online had the opportunity to preview one of the EZ Sport prototypes. At the time, we offered a few suggestions for improvement and needless to say, we're thrilled that these suggestions were immediately adopted. The prototype's square main tube was replaced with a more harmonious round tube that greatly enhanced the bike's appearance. The prototype's seat was so high that I had to rely on the tip of my toes during a stop (at only 5' 6", I'm somewhat vertically challenged). So, it was great to see that the production bike would allow me to reach the ground in flat foot mode. Lastly, lighter parts such as alloy handlebars, alloy seatback and struts replaced their heavier counterparts. We were also pleasantly surprised to learn that additional enhancements and refinements were also implemented. For example the "no name" brakes were replaced with Shimano brakes, unnecessary cable guides were eliminated, attention to the "welds" greatly enhanced the bike's classic personality and a "skate-type" chain guide helps ensure a very quiet ride. Such quick action on the part of Sun Bicycles is, in my mind, a reflection of their commitment and their honest desire to put out a very good product.

Though the new EZ Sport is a new from-the-ground-up long wheelbase design, its roots go back a long time and are firmly grounded in the vast experience and genius of its designer, the one and only Gardner Martin of Gold Rush and Tour Easy fame. In Gardner's own words, "*The idea of the Easy Sport has been incubating for a number of years. A recumbent with real style combined with real user friendliness kept running through my mind and onto the drawing board. The EZ Sport is really in a class by itself. It's a do anything, go anywhere bike,*

and do it in style and comfort." The EZ Sport design departs from the "angular" shape of Gardner's previous creations in favor of a shapely, retro-styled recumbent. However, it does preserve the Easy Racers' "family trait" that made the Tour Easy and Gold Rush famous. The overall layout is more akin to a very large CLWB than it is to most contemporary LWB's. According to Gardner *"Easy Racers is responsible for the design of the EZ Sport and J&B manufactures and distributes the bike under the Sun Bicycle label."* All Sun Bicycle recumbents are brought to life in this same manner. This superlative working arrangement between these companies has resulted in the availability of quality recumbent bikes with a very affordable price tag.

Handling

As I normally do, I decided to test the EZ Sport under various conditions. Also, as I have often done in the past, I asked a number of experienced and neophyte riders to check out the bike and tell me how they liked it. I rode the bike around my house, on the streets, on the sidewalks, and around Shark Valley a 15-mile trail in the Everglades National Park. I went up and down bridges in a nearby park and attacked the busy streets of Broward County in South Florida. Finally, I wanted to check out the bikes' off road manners so I tried a few unpaved trails and attempted to go across a grass field. I checked the bike's low handling skills and zoomed down a few bridges as fast as I could to see how it felt at high speed. The EZ Sport passed all of these tests with flying colors.

When it comes to **handling**, I think this bike is **as close to a conventional upright as a recumbent can get**. Now don't get me wrong. There are a few upright bike tricks that just can't be done on any recumbent, unless of course you have the ability to defy gravity. However, I think that the EZ Sport will almost always require a near zero learning curve from most riders. As I pointed out, I asked a number of folks, both experienced and inexperienced riders to check out the bike and share their views with me. The experienced riders were simply "impressed" with the riding qualities of this bike. The "newbies" (and I found three young volunteers who had never been on a recumbent before) took off immediately and had absolutely no trouble handling the bike from the very start. If you think recumbents are unstable, you might change your mind after riding the EZ Sport.

The EZ Sport continued to handle extremely well at ANY speed. Zooming down a bridge at 30 miles per hour felt as if I were piloting a Harley Davidson motorcycle. The EZ Sport positions the rider in a very natural, comfortable and commanding upright position. The front/back wheel weight distribution is as optimal as it gets. Moreover, the relatively high seat and its adjustability, the low bottom bracket and the Kenda fat high-pressure tires "conspire" to give you an uncommonly pleasant sense of stability and control. Gardner's comments are right on the money. This bike ***"IS in a class by itself"***

Component Trivia

One thing that really caught my attention was the lack of drive train noise or any noise for that matter. Much of this can be attributed, again, to Gardner Martin. The EZ Sport uses the same quiet, single-idler system that other Easy Racer products do. Moreover, the Shimano drive train components, front and rear derailleurs, and Sram shifters work in harmony with each other resulting in a pleasantly silent ride.

The EZ Sport's components may not be "top of the line", but they work very, very well. The front derailleur reliably and smoothly guides the KMC chain to any of its three front Shimano Sora chainrings. The rear derailleur works smoothly and predictably as one shifts from the lowest to the highest gear. The most noise you'll hear throughout the shifting process is two consecutive "clicks" and you'll be immediately pedaling in the gear of your choice.

The front and rear brake also worked flawlessly and brought the bike to a complete stop without hesitation or so much as a little squeal. I can't ask for more!

Speed Performance

The bike's acceleration proved to be quite acceptable. You won't get the quick acceleration of something like a P-38 or a Wishbone, but you won't get unceremoniously dropped either. Once I got it up to speed, I was able to maintain 15-16 miles per hour for as long as I wanted **WITHOUT** breathing hard. I would not be surprised if a fitter rider got a significantly better speed performance out of this bike.

The bike's speed performance is admittedly inferior to its Tour Easy brother. However, it does perform well enough for most applications. The bike is not designed to help you win the Tour de France or set a speed record but you can still cruise at a very respectable speed, commute to work, or use this bike for all kinds of recreational rides or fitness.

Does it climb?

In a word, YES, of course it does. I can certify that it did climb **bridges** quite well. Unfortunately, we don't have any real hills in the South Florida area so I can't tell you how it would do under real hilly conditions. Does it climb the Florida bridges as well as a RANS Rocket or a P-38? Well, no, it does not, but I think it climbs as well as many other CLWB and LWB bikes that I'm familiar with. When it comes to climbing, I prefer, and I do better with bikes that have a high bottom bracket. But that is "my problem". As long as I chose a low enough gear and kept the RPMs in the 80 plus range, the EZ Sport passed the climbing test just fine.

Off Road Manners

The bike seemed to ignore surface imperfections and never tried to eject me from its seat. But don't get me wrong; this bike **IS NOT** a mountain bike. Nope, you won't be able to hop over a large rock or a root. Nevertheless, I can tell you that the bike felt very stable and sure-footed as I rode on gravel and hard-packed trails. The bike's very curvy chromoly frame absorbed the "trail shock" quite nicely while its seat cushion protected my bottom with tender loving care. The seat is quite similar to that of the EZ-1 or EZ-1 Lite models but comes with an alloy seat back and struts. I also found the seat back to be quite supportive and comfortable.

Road Manners

The predictable handling and user friendliness of this bike make it an ideal bike for commuting or touring through urban areas. The high upright position compromises aerodynamics but it can increase your chances of staying alive while riding in the city or the suburbs. The high seat puts you at eye level with most SUV vehicles and you will be highly visible. That is not to say that a car can't hit you. Motor vehicles are notorious for hitting very visible objects on the road, especially when drivers are preoccupied with their cell phones. I don't know how you feel about this, but as far as I'm concerned, riding at eye level with motorists and having a user-friendly bike has got to be a safer alternative.

Perfect Bent?

Well no, I don't think they make them - at least not yet. The EZ Sport is unquestionably a great value and while it may be perfect for you, when it comes to bents, some of us are really picky and enjoy being a pain in the rear end. So, I came up with three minor issues

As I mentioned previously, the production sample of the EZ Sport has a lower seat than its prototype. Again, there are definite advantages to a high seat like better stability and visibility. But the higher seat may still be an issue for shorter riders. Riders shorter than 5' 1" might have to rely on the tip of their toes to support the bike. I also found that transporting the EZ Sport can be a little bit of a challenge because it is a BIG bike and it is not exactly a lightweight. If you have a pickup truck, you'll be just fine. If you have a minivan, you'll have to be creative. The bike's seat might be too tall so the whole bike may not just "slide" into the back of your minivan. You might have to remove the bike's seat or slide the bike in at an angle to make it fit inside your minivan. A regular bike rack might do the trick but I did not have a chance to explore this alternative. To be fair, these "ease of transport issues" may also apply to other long wheel base bikes. Lastly, one of our female "testers" observed that the "main tube" (which is actually composed of three round tubes) might have been a bit too wide for her and her knees kept hitting it as she pedaled.

Overall impression

This bike represents an excellent value. Though it will likely be purchased by first time buyers, this bike might make an excellent 2nd bike for those who might want or need a "do almost everything every day bike".

Strong Points

- 1) Elegant, Classic Style
- 2) Handling - Very easy to ride!
- 3) Smooth ride
- 4) Price Tag

Weak Points

- 1) Size (BIG)
- 2) Seat Height
- 3) Weight