

Easy Racers Tour Easy LE



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Insert your overused descriptor here... Iconic, classic, archetypal, quintessential... They all apply to the [Easy Racers](#) Tour Easy. To many recumbent riders, especially those of us who have been around for awhile, the Tour Easy is the long wheelbase recumbent that defined the class and is the standard by which all the others are judged. That said, it's been a long time since the bike has seen a major update and it does have a few quirks that have needed to be addressed. It handles as well as anything else before or since but it still has hose clamps and electrical tape on the seat. For many riders it's the most comfortable bike they've ever ridden but it comes in a sometimes confusing five frame sizes. It's a jack-of-all-trades that can accomplish just about any riding goal but the paint and graphics show every bit of its thirty years. On top of all that, the price for this icon has drifted into some pretty heady territory. Easy Racers has changed hands over the last couple of years and the new owners have exploited their alliance with [Sun Bicycles](#) to produce a new, refined and less expensive version of their stalwart long wheelbase that they hope will put most of these complaints to rest.

The primary difference between the Tour Easy and the new LE model is the country of origin. The classic SS and EX models are still handmade in California while the new LE is built in Taiwan in the same factory as Sun's line-up. The LE also features a new seat mount that has allowed Easy Racers to eliminate three frame sizes and make the seat much more easily adjustable. This is a godsend for current and potential dealers.

Despite its less expensive price tag, the move to Taiwan has not caused the LE to look or feel any "cheaper" than its siblings. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Many observers thought that our pearl white test bike actually looked more like a real production recumbent than its more expensive California sibling. There are no hose clamps or electrical tape on the seat. The painted-to-match handlebars and seat back look very classy and high end and the LE's graphics are great and applied under the powdercoat rather than just stuck on.

This new, budget-oriented Tour Easy also features a different component group than the original. The parts are all a step down from those on the SS and EX but are all still very nice and more than functional. SRAM X7 shifters and rear derailleur handle the bulk of the shifting duties while a Microshift front derailleur controls the front. A set of very slick looking Easy Racers logo cranks with 52-42-30 chainrings come standard. The Tour Easy LE rolls on a very nice looking set of black Alex DA-22 wheels shod with Kenda Kwest tires. There is a disc brake compatible hub on the rear and braze-ons for a disc brake if you choose to upgrade later. The rear tire is a 700C as it is on every Easy Racers machine and the front is a 451 just like you get

on a Tour Easy or Gold Rush SS. If you opt for this size on a California Tour Easy, you get a road style front brake but the LE comes with Tektro V-Brakes front and rear. The 451 is a bit unique on bikes in this price range but with the addition of the Kenda Kwest for this wheel size, you shouldn't have a hard time finding tires to fit most of your riding needs. Just make sure to carry a spare tire and tube if you're touring as it may be difficult to source spares from your standard local bike shop.

All of these new "budget" parts functioned very well. The shifting was crisp and quiet and the braking was steady and predictable. When ridden back to back I couldn't really tell much difference between the parts on the Tour Easy LE and the Tour Easy EX but it's safe to assume that the higher end Shimano on the EX parts will outlast the midrange SRAM of the LE. And while it's not always true, hand built wheels like those on the EX usually stay true longer than machine built hoops like the Alex wheelset on the LE.

While the newer California Tour Easy's have gotten rid of the return side idler and replaced it with a small length of chain tube, the LE has a throwback derailleur cage style idler. Although I have to say, the one on the LE sounds a lot quieter than anything I've ever seen come out of the California factory in the old days. One of the best things about the Easy Racers design is its complete lack of any power side chain idlers and the LE retains that.

Rather than using two 11 mm bolts and nuts to adjust the seat, the Tour Easy LE has a pair of quick releases that pass up through the frame into the bottom of the seat. There are three mounting holes for these two QR's to allow a wider range of rider X-seams. Our test bike was a M/L size that accommodates riders with a 41"-48" X-Seam. The smaller S/M size is designed for riders with 36"-42" X-Seams. I have a 44.5" X-Seam and usually ride a Large sized Easy Racers. The M/L fit me very well and was a dream to adjust when compared to the older models.

A few eagle-eyed Easy Racers aficionados have noted that the LE's fork appears to have a different rake than the original bike. When placed side-by-side with a 2008 Tour Easy EX, the two did look a bit different but it made no difference in handling as far as I could tell. I've put probably close to 20,000 miles on a combination of Tour Easy's, Ti-Rush's and Fold-Rush's and I can attest that the Tour Easy LE handled every bit like an Easy Racers. It was still dead easy to pilot around town or while climbing at walking speeds and was hands off above twenty mph. New fork or not, the LE still handles like the proverbial dream.

The Tour Easy LE also has nearly all the comfort of the original. The ergonomics are identical of course. You may find the handlebars a bit farther away if you're on the extreme long side of a particular frame size but this is easily adjusted with the LE's replaceable Aheadset style stem. The seat base is not sourced from any of Sun's standard bikes. It is a full carbon fiber pan just like the ones used on the California bikes. The seat back is shaped just like the California bikes as well but it uses a different seat mesh with straps and buckles rather than parachute chord. This makes the seat back not quite as forgiving as the one on the SS and EX but once I ran the straps over the seat supports rather than under them I barely noticed. At any rate... This is a bit like complaining that the fabric on your Lazy Boy is a bit scratchy. It's still one of the most

comfortable long wheelbase recumbents out there and riding all day long for many days in a row should not be a problem.

When I first heard about the Tour Easy LE I was very concerned that it would turn into a bit of a tank. Let's be honest. Sun Bicycles makes many fine recumbents but none of them are exactly svelte. I'm happy to report that my worries were unfounded. Our M/L Tour Easy LE only weighed 1.5 pounds more than a Large Tour Easy EX. 36 pounds even to be exact. Right in line with other long wheelbases in this price range if not a bit lighter. Probably a good chunk of that is in the wheels and I imagine the rest is in the slightly more complicated seat mount.

Obviously 1.5 pounds is not going to make a huge difference in performance. The LE's frame feels just as stiff and solid as an SS or EX and there's no reason to think it won't be just as fast on the flats or on the climbs. And with a fairing mounted that can be very fast indeed.

If you do want to go the speed demon route and use a fairing and bodysock like so many Easy Racers owners do, you'll have no problem sourcing one. All of the tons and tons of aftermarket parts designed to fit the Tour Easy over the years will bolt right onto the LE. That means you have a plethora of choices when it comes to racks, fenders, bodysocks, fairings, aftermarket idlers, etc...

If I have one real disappointment with this bike, it's the price. With the world economy in the state it's in, anything made overseas is in a bit of flux. I know when this bike was first talked about a price of around \$1500 was the goal. Now that it's actually in production, the cost is \$1995. That's \$500 cheaper than the current Tour Easy. In my opinion, you get a ton of bike for that price tag and I'd honestly probably skip the California models and get an LE unless I just had to have the 406 mm front wheel and/or needed one of the custom frame sizes. However, even a \$1700-1800 price tag would have put it more in line with similar bikes like the RANS Stratus LE and made the difference more distinguishable between the Taiwan and California models.

Now that I've ridden the Tour Easy LE and have been so impressed with it, I can confess my sins. I was positive that moving production to Taiwan would somehow screw this bike up. I was certain that it would be cheapened, oversimplified for expedient production and that somehow a bit of the old "Gardner Martin Magic" would be lost. Old Gardner's been gone for far too long now but I guess I thought that a bit of his soul was still going into all those California built bikes and making them a bit better than they had any right to be after 30 years. Apparently his influence spreads far beyond the west coast of the United States because this new Tour Easy LE is every bit worthy of the Easy Racers name. No matter what continent it's made on.

EASY RACERS TOUR EASY LE

MSRP - \$1995

Highs - Every bit a Tour Easy, Looks very "polished"

Lows - Not as cheap as I was hoping for

More Info - <http://www.easyracers.com>, <http://www.sunbicycles.com>



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