CYCLING AND POLITICS : HOW RIGHT AND LEFT CAN SHARE THE ROAD, P. 84

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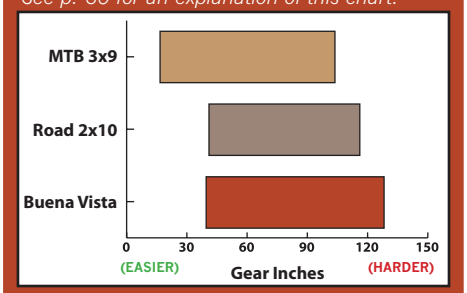
PHOTOS: JUSTIN STEINER

Soma Buena Vista

SOMA BUENA VISTA
Tester: Karl Rosengarth
Age: 54
Height: 5'10"
Weight: 150lbs.
Inseam: 32"

Country of Origin: Taiwan
Price: $490 (Frame/Fork)
Weight: 22.6lbs. as ridden (5.0lbs. frame)
Sizes Available: 42, 50, 54, 58 (tested)
Contact: www.somafab.com

See p. 60 for an explanation of this chart.



Soma Fabrications of San Francisco, California is on a mission to produce practical, durable, comfortable and affordable products for the everyday cyclist. The Buena Vista is Soma's mixte frameset.

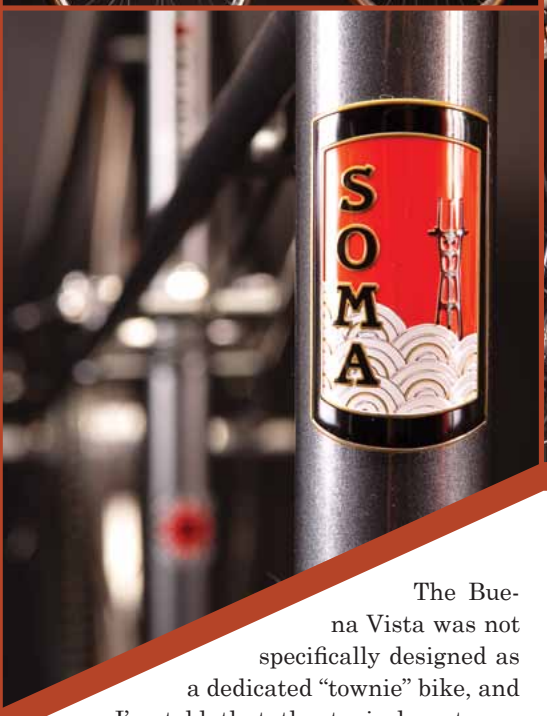
The mixte design replaces the traditional top tube with a pair of smaller tubes that run from the head tube all the way to the rear dropout, with a connection at the seat tube. By retaining the conventional seat- and chainstays, the mixte provides generous standover clearance, combined with better structural rigidity than step-throughs with a dropped top tube. The mixte is also skirt-friendly, for those so attired.

I asked Stan Pun, the marketing and product development guy at Soma, about the target market for the Buena Vista: "We would like to say it is for anyone looking for a classy, quality ride. But it isn't just a ladies' or gentleman's bike. We wanted to do a mixte that someone would not mind riding long distances with and feel at home riding fast on. We've had one enthusiast use it with an Xtracycle. The low standover allowed him to mount from the front, so he wouldn't kick his kid in the head."

To be sure, this is not your grandparents' mixte. It's made from Tange Infinity heat-treated chromoly for the down and seat tubes, and butted/tapered chromoly in the rear end. Chromoly is stronger than the plain steel used in many vintage mixtes (which have a reputation for being flexy), and can be formed into larger diameter, thin-walled tubes. Said tubes produce a stiffer frame with no weight penalty.

The Buena Vista comes with a lugged, sloping-crown, chromoly steel fork. The 132.5mm rear dropout spacing falls in between road (130mm) and mountain (135mm) hub spacing, and thanks to the steel frame's inherent flexibility, it will accommodate either road or mountain rear hubs. Semi-horizontal dropouts equal singlespeed compatibility. The frame is also ready for front and rear racks and fenders. Versatility indeed.







The Buena Vista was not specifically designed as a dedicated "townie" bike, and I'm told that the typical customer would opt for a "sport road/touring" build with drop bars. But when Pun offered to provide a townie build, I decide to accept, and put the frame's versatility to the test.

My build sported a Sturmey Archer 8-speed drivetrain with twist shifters (see sidebar for more information). The frame will work just fine with derailleurs, and it even comes with down tube shifter bosses. My build included several "house" brand goodies including Soma's New Xpress 28c tires in terra cotta (a personal favorite of mine) and Sparrow bar in 560mm width. From the photo, one can see the tall stack of headset spacers—visually awkward, perhaps, but they gave me ample stem height adjustability, very useful for tweaking my position.

From my first pedal strokes, I realized that this was one quick-handling townie. The narrow Sparrow bars combined with the 73º head angle produced a snappy feeling at the handlebars. The Buena Vista diced through congested city streets like a Ginsu knife. With the upright, head-on-a-swivel riding position, I felt confident and in control when dodging potholes and/or avoiding collisions with aggressive bus drivers.

After receiving the Buena Vista, I've test-ridden a few other townie bikes, and they felt similarly snappy at the handlebars. We're talking fast-paced city life here, not laid-back beach cruising.

Sturmey Archer recommends a 30-tooth chainring, but Soma built my bike with a 34-tooth chainring, which made my "easiest" gear (34x23) higher than normal. The narrow bars combined with the higher gearing gave me some grief on steep, long hills. After a few rides, I switched to wider mountain bike bars and twist-shift compatible Ergon grips with integrated bar-ends to give me more leverage on the handlebars. Now that's what I'm talking about! I was able to produce more oomph up the hills, and the handling was still plenty quick.

The Buena Vista was just the ticket for my weekly 25-mile-plus "explore the city" ride. On it, I rhythmically weaved through crowed streets in search of adventure around the next corner. At the other end of the spectrum, the Buena Vista felt comfortable and at home cruising the open, and sometimes unpaved, rural roads on my favorite multi-hour recreational loop.

Continued on p. 64

STURMEY ARCHER DRIVETRAIN



While internally geared rear hubs have been around for a while and are growing in popularity, they are not yet household names. We offer this sidebar to shed some light on the Sturmey Archer 8-speed X-RF8(W) rear hub and twist shifter tested on the Soma Buena Vista.

The drivetrain's overall gear range is 325% (the highest gear compared to the lowest gear). The bolt-on hub offers direct drive in first gear, with gears 2 through 8 providing progressively higher gear ratios. There is no internal brake in the hub. The hub comes packed with grease that is designed to last for its lifetime, with no routine lubrication of the hub internals required.

As is common with most internally geared hubs, you can't shift under load. It took me a while to get used to coasting briefly while I shifted gears. That being said, once I got the knack, the hub changed gears quickly and reliably. On the positive note, it was possible to shift while stopped at a red light and select the proper gear for my holeshot. Well-defined "indexed clicks" resulted in minimal instances of missed shifts.

There are riders who will consider the clean, streamlined design of this internal hub drivetrain a decided aesthetic and functional advantage. Incorporate a chainguard, and you'd have a tight, clean package that's the cat's meow for commuting and utility cycling.

One complaint is that I got an unacceptable number of unintentional shifts with the stock grips. The outer stationary portion of the grip was too short for my hands, forcing me to wrap two fingers and a thumb around the inner shifter portion of the grips, leading to inadvertent twisting and shifting once in a while, usually in situations that required applying extra leverage to the handlebars. The problem went away when I swapped the stock outer grips with some longer Ergon grips.

Based on my test experience, I would not hesitate to run the Sturmey Archer X-RF8(W) on one of my personal steeds. Price is $190.

www.sturmey-archer.com. –Karl Rosengarth





PHOTOS: JUSTIN STEINER

Continued from p. 63

There's that versatility theme again.

The Buena Vista exhibited the classical "lively" feeling of a quality chromoly steel frame—a sweet blend of snappy acceleration and a comfortable resilience over the road. I felt that the mixte design offered some additional bump-absorbing vertical compliance, compared to double-diamond frames.

Going into the review, I wasn't sure what to expect from a mixte. Fortunately, what I didn't get was any notable frame flex or feeling of lost efficiency. I felt comfortable pushing the Buena Vista hard into corners, hopping curbs, rumbling over unpaved roads, and generally riding without any inkling of "holding back." Hey, it rode like a bike, imagine that!

At less than five bills for a chromoly frame/fork, the Buena Vista impressed me as a great value. It's equally the ticket for the tinkerer looking for a versatile frame, or somebody with a set plan and a set budget. This steel is real—affordable.

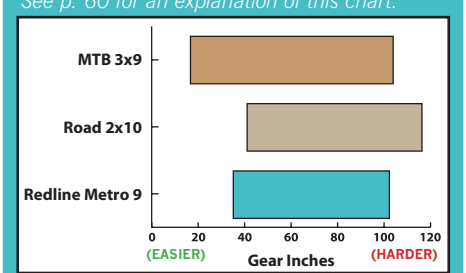
-Karl Rosengarth

REDLINE METRO

Tester: Shannon Mominee
Age: 38
Height: 6"
Weight: 183lbs.
Inseam: 33"

Country of Origin: China
Price: $640
Weight: 26.2lbs.
Sizes Available: 44, 48, 50, 52, 54, 56cm (tested)
Contact: www.redlinecicycles.com

See p. 60 for an explanation of this chart.



It's silly, but whenever I think of Redline, I imagine being 12 years old and watching a neighborhood kid named Earl ride his BMX in circles around a tree, yelling "Redline! Redline!" The bike name sounded cool, and as much as I desired one, I never got it.

Redline began producing BMX frames and forks in 1974. These days, the company has extended its line to encompass nearly all forms of cycling and has sponsored many racers and Olympic riders. The Metro 9 is a far cry from neighborhood dirt jumps and Olympic glory, but what it has in common is two wheels that get people outside riding bikes.

The Metro 9 is designed as an urban-friendly bicycle with an upright stance and a riser bar that put me in a position to see the road ahead. Since I was sitting more upright, I was also more visible to drivers. The drivetrain is kept simple with a single front chainring and SRAM 9-speed rear cassette. This 1x9 drivetrain uses SRAM's X5 rear derailleur and trigger shifter, which functioned flawlessly. I was pleasantly surprised by how well the Tektro caliper brakes performed even when wet, and especially in an emergency situation when I really