

# How to Choose a Recumbent Bicycle

An article by Warren Beauchamp

As of this writing, there are over 200 models of recumbent bikes and trikes available. These vehicles come in a huge variety of styles, weights, comfort levels and prices. There is something for everybody. The question is, which one is right for you? With recumbent bikes, as with many things in life, there are many compromises. It is hope that this information will help you decide which compromises are best for you. In choosing a recumbent bike, there are several things you need to consider:

- Your price range
- Your height/weight
- Your riding style
- Your level of fitness

## Price

The first thing you will want to consider is the price. Recumbent bikes start out higher than upright bikes because they are not yet mass produced at the level of the "WalMart" variety of bikes. Also they have the equivalent of a high end office chair grafted onto the top of them, which adds to the price. The lowest priced ones are about \$500. The bikes you will find in this price range are quite serviceable and easy to ride, but are often very heavy. You can get a great recumbent for around \$1000, and this is the price range you should be looking in if you will be riding once a week or more. If you are a casual rider, or on a limited budget, you will want to start out with one of the lower priced recumbents. High end recumbent bikes and trikes can be priced up to about \$7000. Paying higher prices for a recumbent will buy you things like light weight, space age components, exotic materials, suspension, and more speed.

## Rider Height and Weight

Most recumbent bikes are designed for a specific range of rider heights. If you are shorter you will find that due to the lower seat height, the bikes with a smaller front wheel will be easier to ride. If you are taller you can ride most any style of recumbent. If you are overweight or have circulatory issues in your legs, you will probably want a long wheelbase (LWB) recumbent with a lower bottom bracket. These are generally long wheelbase bikes. If you don't have these issues, or want a sportier feeling bike, you may want a short wheelbase (SWB) recumbent. People with circulatory issues in their arms will find under seat steering (USS) more to their liking. I recommend above seat steering (ASS or OSS) for those who don't have those issues, as it is more aerodynamic.

## Riding style

As with upright bikes, some recumbent bikes are designed with comfort in mind, and some are designed with performance in mind. The higher performance models are not normally less comfortable, but they are usually more expensive. Recumbent bikes priced around \$1000 generally have a good tradeoff between price and performance. If you want to go fast, and can ride in areas where excessive traffic is not an issue, a lowracer or quasi-low racer is a good choice. These bikes have the best aerodynamics. If you want to go fast, but will be riding in higher traffic areas, or riding up large hills, the highracer design would be a better choice due to its more visible position and higher efficiency drivetrain. In general, the higher a bike's bottom bracket (BB), and the more reclined the seat, the more aerodynamic the bike will be (this means you can go faster). The tradeoff is that the bikes with high BBs and laid back seats will require a higher skill level to ride. Recumbent bikes with upright seats and a lower BB, such as compact long wheelbase (CLWB), or long wheelbase (LWB) bikes are quite easy to ride, most novice riders can jump on and ride without issues.

## Fitness

Your fitness level is a major consideration. If you are a casual rider, and are just into tooling around once in a while, I'd suggest a bike under \$1000. Most of the bikes around the \$1000 mark and below are designed for comfort, and as such, your will be trading off potential speed. If you ride once a week or more, or want a higher performance bike, I'd suggest a bike around the \$2000 mark. If you are a casual rider and buy an expensive bike expecting it to make you go fast, you may be comfortable, but disappointed in your speed. If you currently ride a road bike, and purchase a performance oriented recumbent, you should eventually be as fast or faster than on your road bike. Note that it will take a few months to develop your "bent muscles".

## Trikes

If you don't want to deal with that balancing thing, like to ride on the ice, or just think trikes are cool, there are recumbent trikes available for every task. Generally the tadpole trikes (two wheels in front) are better at cornering, while the delta trikes (two in back) are more stable at high speeds. Trikes come in a huge range of weights and prices. Recumbent trikes are generally slower than recumbent bikes.

To help you in your 'bent quest, [click here](#) for a web page that will show you bikes with the characteristics that you want. If you need a lower priced recumbent, take a look at the [Used Recumbents](#) page.

Whichever recumbent you choose, be sure to do the research and take as many test rides as you can. Most recumbent riders will let you take a ride on their bike, don't feel bashful about asking. Many bike dealers will let you take one home to try it out before buying. Post on the [HPV bulletin boards](#) and ask questions about the models you are considering. Recumbent riders love to give their opinions.

### Other Resources:

- ▶ [Recumbent Cyclist News](#) - The only recumbent newsletter in print, with great reviews on bikes.
- ▶ [BentRiderOnline](#) - Online recumbent reviews
- ▶ [VeloVision](#) - A UK based magazine for "specialized bikes".