Dynamik Trail Bike by RANS

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"Sure, I can test a forward crank design bike, what kind of moron couldn't?? Gee, I wonder what a forward crank design bike is." Those were the thoughts that entered my head as I read an e-mail from Officer Joe Gagliardi at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia. In the missive Joe had asked the simple question, "Would IPMBA accept the use of forward crank design bikes for patrol?" Joe already owns a RANS crank forward bike for riding off-duty with some of his co-workers. His e-mail started the wheels turning, so to speak, so to satisfy my curiosity, I logged onto www.RANS.com.

RANS is a growing company, based in Hays, Kansas, which manufactures airplanes and bicycles. I liken them to the Wright Brothers because of their pioneering efforts in design. The following is an excerpt from their website: "Established in 1974 on the plains of western Kansas to build Sailtrikes, RANS has evolved into a world leader in the ever-growing recumbent bike and kit plane industries. Setting the standard of innovation in these exciting fields, RANS uses cutting edge technology to produce safe, high-quality aircraft and bicycles." My curiosity was further piqued, and upon request the folks at RANS sent me a Dynamik Trail to test ride this past summer.

The bike caught my eye right out of the box because of its seat tube angle, its crank position, and its non-traditional seat. As I assembled the bike, I took notice of its components. RANS had selected the Rock Shox J2 fork, Truvativ crank and bottom bracket, SRAM derailleurs, and the Tektro Aquilla disc brakes, front and rear. There are also several custom parts made by RANS, such the seat post, stem, and seat. The bike went together like most bikes I've assembled with the exception of the headset/stem area. A call to RANS resolved the issue.

I stood back to take a look at this strange contraption. The first item to draw my attention was the seat. It looked more like a tractor seat than a bike seat. Despite my doubts, this design did add comfort to my test-ride experience. Once I looked past the seat, I checked out the crank position. The frame geometry puts a much smaller angle on the seat tube, about fifty degrees or so. This pushes the crank forward by about a foot from a traditional mountain bike. This geometry also spreads the wheels apart to a wheelbase of just over four feet at 49.5 inches. This added distance will come into play later inside the ten foot box.

The next step was taking the Dynamik Trail to school. I co-taught a class in May that had 21 students. As I rolled the bike into the class, all 21 heads turned. I must admit that I only rode the bike for a short time in that class. The true test ride came in August during another class with another officer and me. I spent all of the ride time during the class on the RANS Dynamik Trail. I should have ridden it earlier, because it was a nice ride. The seat was comfortable on my backside although I did notice a new rub area on the back of my legs just below the cheeks.

However, it didn't seem to affect, hurt or numb anything of importance. There was also no need to stand up to pedal. In the rowing-type position I was in, I would just pull with my arms while I pushed with my feet to accelerate. The new position only takes a short time to get used to. By the end of the class I was able to do wheelies, trackstand, and cut cones.

The Dynamik Trail handled reasonably well during the cone courses used during the IPMBA class. I had no problems with the offset serpentine, lock-to-lock, quick turn or maximum braking. As a matter of fact, the maximum braking is quite easy as the rider is already in position to brake fully. However, the ten-foot box took several attempts to complete. As I completed each revolution, the bike needed more room for the next one. By the third rotation I was touching cones on each side of the box. It is my opinion that many of the students I've had the privilege of instructing would have major difficulties passing this obstacle on a bike with a wheelbase of 49.5 inches.

As our class moved into the dismount and scenario phases, I was expecting the Dynamik Trail to have some issues due to the rider's body position. I was pleasantly surprised to find that rolling dismounts were not a problem. I was able to complete a half-dismount serpentine with nominal effort. Granted, the bike seat didn't rest on my hip, but the bike was easily controlled and I was able to maneuver it well.

During the last day of the class, we relocated to the Ohio State University campus for some urban obstacle work. The Dynamik Trail performed well in the concrete jungle that is the college campus. The greatest thing about the bike is descending stairs or hills. In all but the most extreme cases, I didn't have to get out of the seat. During descents of stairs of all kinds, I was able to stay seated and confident as the bike handled the obstacles.

If RANS ever designs some type of full suspension, the rub I spoke of earlier would most likely disappear. During some of the more difficult climbing, I found it harder to ride than my traditional mountain bike. The technique of pulling with my arms while pedaling didn't work on the steepest of inclines. Overall, though, the bike performed well and I didn't see any problems with it doing all of the obstacles presented, and it held up well during the test ride. After the test ride, I contacted RANS about accessories. I was told that a kickstand and racks are available, which is important, as they are a must for bike patrol applications.

In conclusion, I think the RANS Dynamik could be used as a patrol bike, especially if the individual was familiar with it and/or had experience, as an IPMBA rider. However, I don't feel a new student should be sent to any IPMBA class with it because all but the best, or experienced, riders would not be able complete the 10- foot box while riding it. If you ever get the opportunity to try out a forward crank design bike, don't judge it until you experience – and enjoy – the ride.

Ron has been with the Hilliard P.D. for 16 years, including 11 years on bike patrol. He enjoys off-road and road riding and has been an IPMBA instructor since 2001. He is currently serving as Industry Liaison on the IPMBA Board of Directors and is proud to have been a model for the new Complete Guide. *He can be reached at ron_burkitt@hboe.org.*