

Actually think before buying a tandem

Before the question is asked, I know what's coming by the "look" a male gives when approaching our Santana Team AL tandem. The question never changes. "Say, I'm thinking of getting a tandem for my wife and me. What do you think?"

After almost seven years on our tandem, with 30,000 miles of pedaling (the earth has a circumference of 24,901.55 miles), I've honed my answers. "1. If your wife is not a cyclist, a tandem could be a bad idea. 2. If you're hoping to pedal for both of you, this is definitely a bad idea. 3. If the two of you have control issues, a tandem can definitely expedite a divorce."

If those responses don't faze the fella, I am willing to discuss what we like about riding a tandem even though I failed at Canoe Couple 101 in the 1970s. I gave up the canoe and kept the marriage! I point out that a key difference between a canoe and tandem is on a tandem, only the front person (captain) steers, brakes, shifts (with a few exceptions). If the rear person (stoker) is good with that, you have a winner.

Half of a successful experience, however, is the captain's willingness to prove worthy of the stoker's trust by operating the more than seven-foot bicycle in a manner that reassures the stoker. My wife and I negotiated a maximum desired speed that I've tried to adhere to. I also try and freeze the pedals and say "bump!" so she can rise off her seat when I spy imperfect road surfaces.



We have other bicycles but one of the main benefits of a tandem is the hours of conversation, even on roads with medium traffic. We're only two feet apart – single file – but on the same bike. On single bikes, the conversation would be continually interrupted. The learning curve was shorter for us than a lot of people because we had been married for more than 30 years when we made the Santana purchase. We'd also been avid cyclists for years.

We made several wise custom investments. First, we purchased one of the more expensive suspension seatposts for the stoker seat. Otherwise, the stoker would feel all the "comfort" of riding in the back of a school bus going over speed bumps. Second, we opted for a 10-inch rear rotor/disc brake for the rear. We tour in mountainous areas. Rim brakes would not provide a sufficient margin of safety. We also paid for a bike fit to insure the bike conformed to our body geometry.

If I haven't discouraged you yet, let me recommend one more thing before you plunk down the cash. Take the tandem quiz at:

<http://santanatandem.com/Started/TandemTest07.html>

