

Time to get out the rain bike

This is the day I dread each year, the day I have to go downstairs to rescue my rain bike and make it feel loved again. As if anything would feel loved by subjecting it to the elements, something you wouldn't do (or shouldn't do) for your "nice" bike. Think about the history of most of our "rain" bikes. At one time, they were the favored bike in the stable. The bike that felt special... fast & confident & fun to ride. For me, that bike's reign typically lasts 3-4 years as top dog. And then, assuming it's suitable for slightly-wider tires & some sort of fender, it moves to the category of utility/rain bike, maybe utility/rain/travel bike if it's really worthy.

Not every bike becomes a rain bike though. My Madone 5.9SSL, which preceded my Madone 6-series super-bike, won't likely ever achieve rain-bike status, or even utility bike, because there are no eyelets (for fenders) and it didn't really like wider tires. Plus there's some reason to question whether the later versions of superlight frames are really durable enough for the kind of abuse that a rain/utility bike would get. My 5900 could represent the last generation of top-of-the-line frames that could handle whatever you threw at them... sometimes literally! So my 5.9SSL sits on a hook at the shop, often surrounded, sadly, by old frames hanging on hooks that have been crashed & thrashed and are awaiting disposal. I wonder if it sees the steady parade of product that's at the end of its life and ponders when it will be its turn? That won't happen, at least not for some time, as the 5.9SSL only had 30,000 miles or so before "retirement" so it's nowhere near worn out and has never had a hard crash. In a perfect world, it would get recycled for my son, but at 5'9, maybe heading to 5'10, he's not going to fit a 60cm bike.

So in all likelihood my 5900, a bike that goes back to, what, 2003 or so?, is going to remain my rain/utility/travel bike for some time to come. It just keeps on going, no matter how much rain, snow & road grim is thrown at it. You just pour on more oil, wipe it down once in a while, and replace brake pads frequently (brake pads get eaten alive on descents in the rain). Tonight, looking quickly over it, the main thing it needs are... brake pads. Hopefully I've got some here at home. The rest of it looks sorta OK, certainly good enough for a ride in "real" rain, where the least of your concerns are perfectly-running shifters. Spinning the front wheel, the bearings feel pretty much shot, but as long as they don't seize up, it doesn't really matter that I might be losing .1 mph (likely a lot less) to them. I do need to figure out how to attach the video camera, assuming an opportunity to get "epic" rain footage.

I'm realistic about tomorrow's ride; it's likely that it will just be "wet" out there and not seriously dumping, and you don't get much credit for "wet." No bragging rights for light drizzle, no matter how much crud is on the roads. I don't have any firm plans for the ride, just some ideas, maybe out to LaHonda and back via West Alpine. It won't be cold, so this should be a good practice run for the more-serious weather coming in the months ahead.