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Dirt Cheap Recumbent

By Alan W. Jarrettq

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A dirt cheap Recumbent Bike! Am I crazy? Does that sound crazy to you? Just because you've looked in some stores, and some online sites, do you think dirt-cheap is too cheap? How about impossible, is there a vote for that? Sure! All you doubters stand and be counted. Let me tell you how you can have a recumbent bike for \$299...or less!

You saw them on sale for \$1200, \$1700, \$2500 and more. Where are they on sale for \$299 or less? You can't find one on sale for that price...at least in one piece. Who is going to give away a recumbent dirt-cheap?

OK! OK! I know it sounds hard to believe, and for some it will be hard to achieve. Here's the deal. As soon as some of you read the next few lines you'll be gone. Why? Because you're going to have to sweat and work for this.

Notice it does not say, "free" anywhere. Some will be more than up to the test, so for those ready for the challenge of having one of these incredible machines for your own riding pleasure...read on.

Just for the asking! It sounds a little overconfident doesn't it? Well, I can tell you it worked for me so it can work for just about anyone who's not afraid of the "asking" part. Is someone going to give you a recumbent for \$299 just by asking? Nope! So what's the catch?

Would you believe you can make a recumbent bike from a Road Bike frame, and about the only things you will need to buy are a front wheel, tire and tube, about 8' of galvanized electrical conduit, gear and brake cables for a tandem bike (available at almost any LBS), and maybe a seat.

Now assuming that you have some simple tools, like a hacksaw, tape measure, files, and a way to sand the frame and galvanized conduit, you're just about ready to go. The only thing missing so far is a Road Bike frame.

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Some plans call for two Road Bike frames. I have successfully made two homemade LWB recumbents using just one Road Bike frame each time. Check out the latest <http://www.recumbent-bikes-truth-for-you.com/homebuilt-uss-recumbent.html> USS Homebuilt Recumbent.

About the only benefit of using two Road Bike frames may be not having to splice in a piece of top tube from another source. That was the only piece I used from a trash bike, just that piece of top tube and nothing else. There wasn't much else usable. A plain old piece of any steel tube of the right size would work just as well.

As long as the frame has not been wrecked, one will do. The key is finding a good frame with components that are in reasonably good condition. So where do you find this frame? Well, here comes the asking part.

I just happen to spot two old Raleigh Road frames someone had put out for trash. When I asked the owners if I could have them, they said, "sure!" Normally you wouldn't pay any attention to something like that. It's amazing how they suddenly "pop up" when you start looking.

But let's say you can't find any like I did. Many bike shops will take old bikes on a trade for a new one. They don't give much of a discount, and they usually don't fix them up to resell. They wait for someone like you who's looking for an old bike for parts.

Parts! Keyword there. If they think you want to repair it then they're much more interested in selling you something new. I picked up a perfectly good frame from a LBS for \$25, and I was able to use most of the major components to make a recumbent.

Garage sales are great for bargains. I had a neighbor who had this really nice, perfect condition girl's road bike that I picked up for \$10! The daughter had a car now and the bike was just taking up space. That scenario gets repeated every weekend in someone's garage.

You have to know just a little bit about frames to make sure you're getting a good one, and not just a cheap department store variety. The easiest way to know a good frame is to look at the cranks! Click [here](#) to go to Nashbar.com to see a variety of cranks. Cranks are what the pedals are attached to. If you were going to buy them new, the Shimano Sora Triple gives you a great range of gears.

If they are connected to the chain ring with bolts, it generally indicates a frame with decent components. If the crank is one solid piece you don't want the frame, at any price. You also want a road bike frame, and not a www.performancebike.com mountain bike frame.

A www.performancebike.com road bike frame will have a top tube that goes straight back from the head tube to the seat tube (the Mountain Bike tube has more of a downward slant). It is the only tube that is horizontal with the ground, or the topside of a triangle. Just because the bike may be in very good shape, doesn't mean you can't get it for a steal!

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People put these out when they are tired of looking at them in their garage. They will all but give it away just to get rid of it. Now and then you may find a real bike rider who knows the value of what they have, and you may as well just go on. As for the others, when you convince them you don't need it for anything but parts and no one else is buying, you'll get the deal.

Road Bikes have a decreasing appeal. After riding one for five miles or so, the seat starts to hurt real good. After that, every time the bike comes into view the memory of the pain comes flooding back. As a result, in time the pain becomes greater than the value of the bike, and then it's time for the bike to go. So you can wheel and deal at the garage sales.

Now you have the bike frame with decent components. What next? Well, you probably want to ask for some plans on how to cut up the frame in the right places. Are you wondering where to get plans like that? Well, it just so happens you can get them right off the Internet... ! Bookmark sections 1 through 4. You can print them out later if you want.

All you need is Adobe Acrobat to download it, and you can even get that free if you don't have it. Just go to www.Adobe.com to download the free version.

OK. I'm going to believe that you have the frame(or two frames if you go exactly by the plans) and the

plans. You're going to need the galvanized electrical conduit, or if you want to spend the extra money, you can buy Cromalloy tubing. You can get a 20" wheel for around \$58 new. Some have found used BMX wheels to save money.

Tire and tube will cost another \$14. If you paid as much as \$25 for the frame you're at \$97 so far. Cables will cost no more than \$7 for brakes and \$26 for grip shifters for the gears. Three lengths of chain will run around \$30.

All that's really left is the galvanized conduit and the seat. The whole 10' stick of conduit runs about \$8. The seat, which is the heart of the recumbent, will run around \$140. Of course, you can always look for used equipment or make your own if you're handy with tools and save that money.

The handlebar is another item of interest. You will need what's called a Quill to fit in the head tube. On to this "Quill," you will fit a curved tube, which will attach to your handlebars. You can buy a steerer tube for \$60 made by Rans Recumbent, but you will still need an extender to make it long enough for a LWB.

You can make your own by buying a piece of Cromalloy and bending it. You'll need to buy or borrow a tube bender to do that. I found a 7/8" tube of Aluminum from Loews, that I was able to bend for mine. Creativity and ingenuity are King when building your own.

You'll find that once the frame is together and you start adding the brake and gear cables, a good supply of plastic Zipties will be a huge help. As most plans do not include the "braze on" cable stops and cable guides, the Zipties will be necessary to hold cables in place.

Now, once you have made you frame, if you can't weld it, then get a professional to do it for you. Set

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the frame up on what's called a "jig." A "jig" is explained in the plans. That way the welder will know how it's supposed to look.

Don't just take a bunch of tubes that need to be welded together, and tell him to "go get it!" He won't get it, but you will! He might charge \$60 or so. Be sure to ask first so there won't be any surprises.

Now, it's possible these components can be found for less money. I tried mixing old chain from several different bikes and found that doesn't work too well. Usually the components from the "donor" bike can be used in making the new one. I used all the components from my 5 month old, \$425 Giant Hybrid, 24-speed bike.

Here's a list of what you might buy and the approximate cost.

Frame \$25.00
Front Wheel \$58.00
Tandem Brake Cables \$ 7.50
Grip Shift Gears \$26.00
3 chain sets \$30.00
8' conduit \$ 8.00
Zipties \$15.00 M
Tire \$10.00
Tube \$ 3.50
Seat \$140.00 (optional) Welding \$ 60.00

Total \$383.00

Making your own seat keeps the price well under the \$299, even if you have someone weld the frame for you. If you buy the seat but do your own welding, or find a friend like I did to do it for free, you're still under \$299.00. You may find some of these other items for less. New prices were used to give you an idea of the actual cost.

Finding your frame for free saves you money. Being able to weld the frame will reduce the cost even more. I'm glad I didn't try this on the first one. Watching the process taught me a great deal, and after practicing on a second frame, I discovered how NOT to do it!

A very comfortable seat can be made from plywood and foam, or a used one may be for sale. One was given to me that had basically been trashed as my riding buddy upgraded his homebuilt and had the extra seat.

The point is, whether all new components are purchased or you put something together like many others using whatever is at hand, just build it! The first try may be a tremendous success. After 13,000 miles I feel confident in saying mine is.

If changes are needed (if you ask any bent rider changes are ALWAYS needed) to improve the ride, no big deal. This is still a ride you put together, and it didn't cost the "big bucks" of a new one, or even a

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used one.

More important, you know how this thing is made, so you'll also know the effect of any minor or major changes and the immediate result. You may also decide to buy a factory made bent in the future, and this is the huge advantage you have. Now you know what you want, and if it's worth the money.

I found the first frame I made completely to be easy enough, that I was encouraged to make another of my own design. Not everyone is going to do this. I still haven't finished my experimental frame, so it's difficult to tell how it will work out.

To do this I had to invest \$225 in a portable Oxy–Acetylene welding kit, because it was too much of a demand on my friend's time to ask him to do it. It also cost too much to use the little kits available at Home Depot.

In welding my first frame, I discovered the little Oxygen tanks only last about 8 minutes. That's not nearly long enough to do serious welding, and you can't control the flame. Before I had finished, I used 12 tanks at a cost of \$8 each. It would have cost me less to take it to a welding shop...I think!

The one point that shines through in building your own recumbent is this. You did it! If you can get on it and enjoy a relaxing, comfortable ride, does anything else matter? It may not shine as much, the welds may not be as pretty, and it may not be as fancy as those from the factory. But you can enjoy every single mile, every hour on your bent knowing it was fashioned by your hands.

Accept with humble thanks when others are amazed that you made it! Let your chest swell with pride when you hear the kids shout, "Cool bike!" Feel the rush of riding along with those "expensive factory built bents" that don't go any faster than yours. Soak in the admiration of fellow bent riders who had to buy one because they can't turn a wrench.

Mention that you only have \$299 invested in your bike, and watch the faces of those who paid six, seven, and in some instances 10 times as much for theirs. Are you starting to get the picture?

When you pay \$2000 for a bent, you are reluctant to do any customizing, especially if you aren't mechanically inclined. When you made it to begin with, no such resistance exists, because you have the confidence of your building experience.

Making changes, finding a way to improve it, modifying part of the design are almost guaranteed, because you know you can. So it might be a good question as to who gets more pleasure out of a bent.

You CAN have a "Dirt–Cheap" bent all your own. Maybe you can even improve on what others have done, and do it for less. That would be worth writing about, and you might be surprised how many would be interested. Comfort you never dreamed of, at a price you never imagined! Just do it!

After building his first recumbent bike in 1998, Alan was smitten by the "homebuilder" bug. Having ridden over 13,000 miles since then and adding another homebuilt frame to his experience, he eagerly

shares his experience with those who think they can't, when they really can! Recumbent-bikes-truth-for-you.com is a website developed with the idea in mind to provide as much information as possible about these incredible machines.

Lowrider Bikes History

By Alastair Hamilton

Lowriding began as a cultural element of Chicano Americans, part of the street culture of the American barrio where Mexican immigrants maintained a lively urban culture. Lowrider bikes, one of the most splendid and unique products of this culture, are a cross between the Harley and the cruiser bike, decorated with paint and chrome and streamers, found in any all-American hometown parade.

As you might surmise, lowriding bikes hug the ground. The highest points on a lowrider bike are almost always its two hand grips, just like you might find on its motorized cousin, the Harley motorcycle. The seat of a lowrider bike is down at wheel level and its pedals are sometimes higher than the seat! These bikes are typically a highly individualized creation. Most of them are ridden with enormous pride by their creators, although you can buy some standard models and a few elaborate models in a good bike store, especially in cities of the American West.

Despite the fact that these bikes originated within the poverty of the barrio, lowrider bikes are anything but cheap. Makers of these one-of-a-kind creations regard their bicycles as much as an artwork and a mechanical marvel as a means of transportation, though part of the joy of creation has always been parading them down the street when completed—these are not pieces of art meant for life in dusty museums, for the most part. Each part is usually carefully selected for its utility as well as its beauty, with the resulting bike a breathtaking example of technical and artistic ingenuity.

Lowrider bikes are becoming a presence in more and more cities, perhaps made more "respectable" among the affluent bicyclists who drive the market by the increasing popularity of their cousin, the recumbent bicycle. As the baby boomer generation ages and feels increasing twinges of back pain riding on the dropped handlebars of road bikes, expect to see more and more lowrider and recumbent bikes alike.

And once you get your first basic lowrider bike, don't be too surprised if you find yourself flipping through the real or online pages of a lowrider parts catalog musing, "Hmm. I wonder how that golden sprocket would look on my bike?" Lowrider bikes have a tradition of creative embellishment and technical improvisation that calls out the artist and the inventor in many of us.

What, really, could be better to evoke, especially if you're already a bike rider?

Find further information on lowrider bikes at

, your online resource

on road and mountain biking reviews, the hub of cycling information.



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