

# CURVE

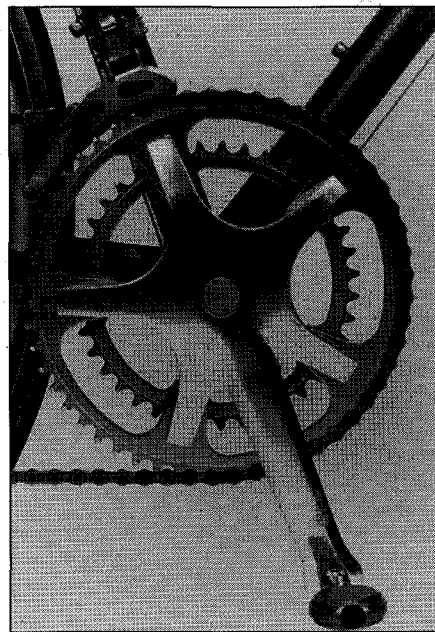
gear. Now, Curve is using it to build the Curve Road Bike. The alloy breaks down like this: carbon .23%, chromium 3.1%, nickel 11.1%, molybdenum 1.2%, cobalt 13.4%, and iron fills in the rest.

**Facts:** They claim a strength-to-weight more than 3/2.5 titanium but less than 6/4 titanium. Amazingly, the tensile strength is more than the 6/4 titanium. The material needs artificial aging (heat treating at 250 to 300 degrees for one to 16 hours) to reach its potential. Now hold on to your helmets. AerMet 100's strength-to-weight ratio surpasses 3/2.5's, but it shares equal stiffness with good old chromoly and can be brazed or TIG-welded. In a nutshell, this versatile new alloy smokes titanium. On paper.

**Disclaimer:** There was a Taiwanese company at last year's bike show hawking a bicycle made from paper tubing (rice paper, we think). It also had an impressive list of tensile strength, yield strength and weight savings. On paper any tubing looks good—even paper tubing.

## BACK TO THE BIKE

What really matters is the bicycle. This is how Curve used this new wonder material. The tubing is slightly oversized with 1.125-inch and 1.25-inch top and down tubes. The stays are 5/8-inch. There is no trick tube contouring to be found anywhere. Curve did

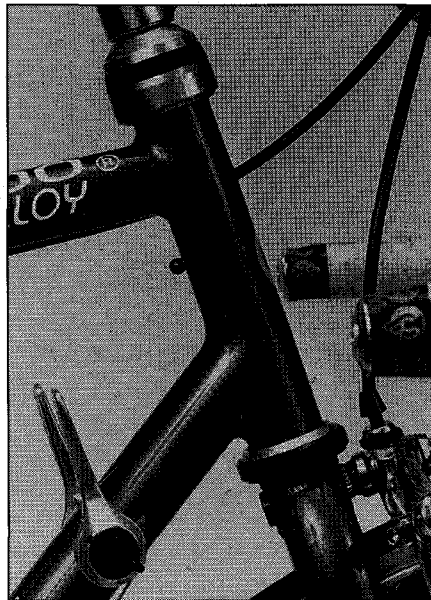


**Ankle biter:** Our Curve bike came set up with a Mavic gruppo. The French cranks are sleek-looking, but need to be slimmed down. Every RBA test rider complained of annoying ankle rub on the center of the units, even with the forgiving Speedplay pedals installed.

◀ **Country comfort:** The bike is light, stiff and a pleasure to ride on long training rides. Don't expect all AerMet-built bikes to enjoy this type of performance. Curve's titanium seatpost has a great deal to contribute to the overall comfort.

opt for a chainstay bridge and a forward-mounted seatpost binder. A radically sloped top tube (*a la* mountain bikes) keeps the seat stays short and stiff.

The fork is a unicrown chromoly Tange Silhouette. That's not a bad fork, but it doesn't share the same fanfare of what is being touted as the next generation bicycle frame material. We wonder if the frame



**Goose bump:** The pimple of a tire pump mount looks like an ugly blemish until you need to use it. Small features and concern for detail are much appreciated. Speaking of blemishes, there are none on this beautifully brazed Nobilette-constructed frame.

feels insulted.

The effective frame size of our test bike was 56cm. The numbers crunched like this:

- Seat angle—73.5°
- Head angle—73.5°
- Top tube—56cm (22")
- Wheelbase—99.7 cm (39.25")
- Chainstays—41 cm (16.25")
- Weight—19.2 lb.
- Bottom bracket—25.4 cm (10")

## THE PARTS PARADE

The Curve used a standard Mavic road group. The wheels used 20mm Michelin Hi-Lite SuperComp H.D. clinchers on Mavic, 32-hole, Open S.U.P. SBP aero rims laced with straight 14-gauge spokes.

Curve used its own quick-release skewers. We were skeptical because they have a very mountain-bike-oriented appearance, but since Curve uses vertical drop-outs, we knew wheel slippage wouldn't be an issue. Closer inspection of the skewers revealed large knurled bushings that would work fine with a regular road drop-out. These guys know how to make road-worthy quick-releases.

The rest of the running gear consisted of Mavic shallow-drop bars, a 120mm-

reach, ten-degree Dean aluminum TIG-welded stem, a Flite titanium-rail seat and what must be a world record: Curve's 14.125-inch-long titanium seatpost.

## GOING THROUGH THE PACES

Once set up, the seat-to-stem relationship feels fine, but the seatpost sticks out there in never-never land. The sloping top tube exaggerates the optical effect, but before we rode it, we gave a quick, cautionary call to the guys at Curve. They assured us that the 14-inch protruding seatpost was part of the design. This also explains the forward-mounted seatpost binder. This design greatly strengthens the critical post-and-tube junction by moving the slit to the front of the seat tube.

Once under way, things just fall into place. The comfort level of the bike falls somewhere between "fair" and "poor." Even with the massive, forgiving, titanium seatpost, most riders described the rear end as ultra-stiff and jarring. The unicrown fork is not known as a resilient performer, and mounted on the Curve, it won't change your opinion. The overall comfort rating could be improved by spec'ing a Kestrel EMS fork up front.

It's stiff and rigid in the comfort department, but how does it work?

**Sprinting:** Oh, yeah! Curve's miniscule frame gets up and boogies. The sloping top tube makes throwing the bike from side to side so attractive that test riders got into whipping up a froth in the final meters of every training ride. We realize that may not be the most effective way to sprint, but it sure is the most fun. The frame is stiff and the light steering stays with you no matter how fast or hard you are kicking the little beast. Off the drawing board and sprinting towards the finish line, the AerMet 100 will beat most of its titanium counterparts.

**Climbing:** The Curve is light, tipping the scales slightly above 19 pounds, but it feels even lighter on the climbs. It is a fun bike to attack a hill with. You can get out of the saddle and stay out of the saddle (if that fits your riding style). The riders raved about the light steering at both crawling and supersonic uphill speeds. (Lance Armstrong: If you are reading this, have Eddy Merckx build you up a bike out of this stuff. You might win a mountain stage in this year's Tour de France!)

**On the flats:** Nothing wrong here. Even with the long 175 cranks, this thing was a jet on the flats. The faster you push yourself, the better the tubes harmonize and the smoother the ride becomes. Keep the Curve revved up and it will set your TT clock ablaze. If you don't have any excuses to get out of the saddle, you will be reminded about the punishing nature of the rear triangle. This would be a great ten-mile time trialer. It would only be a good 25-mile time trialer.