



REVIEW

REDLINE 9.2.5 & SURLY STEAMROLLER COMPLETE

BY WENDELL CHALLENGER

ALMOST EVERY MAJOR manufacturer now has a single speed or fixed-gear city bike in their catalogue. In keeping with the times, we compare two models that have been making waves among aficionados: the Redline 9.2.5 and the Surly Steamroller Complete.

From the name to the build, it is clear that the Redline 9.2.5 is intended to scratch the commuter itch. The bike comes equipped with fenders (rare from a North American manufacturer) commuter-oriented road tires, and flat pedals. It even has frame mounts for a rear pannier rack, and stylish coffee-shop-friendly bullhorn bars.

Other nods to the commuter include a front quick-release to change flats, some touch-up paint for when it gets chipped from all those bike racks, a lower gear ratio, and a flip-flop rear hub that allows you to run the bike as either a single speed or fixed-gear. The factory default is a 16 tooth

freewheel (providing 42:16 gear ratio or 69 gear inches), while the other side comes installed with a 15 tooth fixed-gear cog (42 :15 or 73.6 gear inches). Want to try fixed-gear? Just flip the rear wheel.

Surly's Steamroller, on the other hand, is all about simplicity, speed, and performance – there are no frills here. To quote their marketing description, “the Steamroller is designed as a fixed-gear street bike that’s track legal.”

With that in mind, the bike comes with a higher gear ratio (48:17 – 74.2 gear inches), a single front brake (you use your legs to brake the rear), road drop bars, and neither pedals nor frame mounts for fenders or a rack. The wheels and tires are also more performance oriented, using larger flanged hubs to increase wheel stiffness and slick tires for rolling efficiency. As in the 9.2.5, Surly has equipped the Steamroller with a flip-flop hub, except you only get the

fixed-gear option. If you want a freewheel you have to mount one yourself, even though the bike might scowl at you if you did.

Arguments about front brakes aside, there is nothing on the Steamroller that you absolutely do not need. “Creature comforts? What are those?” Even the graphics are simple. It exudes purpose – fast riding on city streets.

The Surly Steamroller is appropriately named as it literally rolls over anything in its way. The bike is amazingly stable and compliant, allowing you to bomb down rough streets, gravel paths, and even across grass fields, with aplomb. Compared to its much twitchier cousin the track bike, the Steamroller is extremely well suited to city streets.

There is still enough twitch in the bike to allow for rapid changes in direction, requiring you to always be “on” to some degree while riding the bike. The balance in handling also makes for a bike

HOW TO MAKE A SEAT COVER

BY DENISE WRATHALL

I used to tie a plastic grocery bag onto my seat when I loaded my bike on the bus. This made many bus drivers nervous – they envisioned the plastic bag coming loose, flying onto their windshield and causing an accident. After being told to remove my plastic bag and riding home with a sippy seat a few too many times, I sewed this easy seat cover.

SUPPLIES NEEDED:

- Waterproof fabric, about half a metre.
- Thread
- Elastic or cord, about half a metre.
- 1 toggle, if you are using cord.

1. Remove your bike seat and place it upside down on the wrong side of your fabric. It doesn't matter how you line up the grain of the fabric.
2. For the top of the cover, trace the bike seat, using chalk, a thin piece of soap, pen, or pencil.
3. Draw a second line outside the first, 1/2" away. Your first line will be your stitching line, and the outside line will be your cutting line.
4. Cut out the top of the cover.
5. Measure the length of the stitching line on the top piece as precisely as possible.
6. From the remaining fabric, cut a long strip, on the grain, 3.5 – 4.5" wide, depending on the depth of your seat. The length of this strip should be the length of your stitching line, plus 1".
7. Fold this strip of fabric in half, right sides together, and stitch the short end together, using a 1/2" seam allowance. You should now have a loop of fabric.
8. Fold up one edge of the loop 1/2" and stitch. Leave a 1/2" section unstitched, so you can later insert the cord or elastic.
9. Stitch the loop of fabric along the outer edge of the top of the seat cover, along the stitching line, using a 1/2" seam allowance. Pin it well before stitching. For the most waterproof seat cover possible, make sure that all the pinholes are in the seam allowance.
10. Grade the seam. Notch outside curves and clip inside curves. Edge stitch if desired.
11. Using a safety pin, thread the elastic or cord through the casing. If using elastic, adjust the length and sew the ends together. If using cord, attach the toggle and knot the ends of the cord.
12. For a super waterproof seat cover, you can seal the seams. Use a liquid seam sealer, because seam seal tape is difficult to apply on curved seams.

that is a joy to skid brakeless; one of the many tricks often performed by fixed-gear riders.

Strangely enough, it also comes with a certain attitude. I found myself cranking classic punk bands such as NoMeansNo, rolling up my jeans, dressing in black, and grabbing my courier bag as I headed out on the streets. Once there, it demanded that I ride completely "on the rivet*" at all times. From hills to flats, I could feel the bike egging me on to gain every bit of speed I could muster; to pass every car in my way. "Master says faster... Yes, master!"

All in all, this is a great bike as long as you use it for its intended purpose, to fly around on city streets. Sedate commuter, or all-in-one wonder bike, it is not.

The Redline 9•2•5, in contrast, achieves a balance of adult practicalities, with a nod to doing it your own way. The ride is slightly more relaxed than the Surly, but still on the sporty side for a commuter. It felt at home zipping around town, taking corners at high speed, and the steering forgave unintended twitches caused by bike-gazing on the city streets.

Not unlike the Surly, it also seemed to bestow some of its personality onto the rider. Its outwardly appearance of civility had me wearing my "adult" clothes and riding this bike to meetings. That said, the bike also produces an undercurrent that is hard to quantify, but when I showed up for a meeting and was directed to use the back cargo door (the courier entrance), I just smiled and continued on my way.

The Redline 9•2•5 will set you back \$500 USD, while the Surly Steamroller Complete comes in at \$650 USD.

**On the Rivet - a term used to describe bike racers who are right on the very edge, pushing with all they have, but dangerously close to blowing up into little pieces.*

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