

BRIDGESTONE SYNERGY RB-2

NOT HAVING RIDDEN A \$500 BIKE MORE THAN 50 MILES IN MY adult life, I was both curious and apprehensive about testing the Bridgestone Synergy RB-2. But I needed to, for a couple of reasons: 1) This bike, named one of the year's 12 hottest in our March issue, was worth a closer look; and 2) My winter bike had busted a seat tube, so I was looking for a replacement that fit, worked, and handled as well.

Can This Price Be Right?

By Ed Pavelka

I doubted that the relatively inexpensive RB-2 would fill the bill, because my broken beater happened to be a custom Italian racer that was old (circa '74) and roomy enough to accept mudguards and beefy 700x32C clinchers. Even so adorned, it retained the spirit of a performance bike. It also permitted a riding position identical to my summer cycle, another pricey Italian model. Talk about having the best of both worlds. But after that seat tube snapped, I wondered if I'd ever find a "second" bike to match it.

Now here I sit, eyeing the Bridgestone resting against a bookshelf across the room. It's wearing a pair of Zefal mudguards and the new Mavic 646-LMS clipless pedals, but otherwise it's stock—and dirty. It's traveled more than a thousand miles through rain, slush and the sandy, salty grit that coats Pennsylvania's winter and spring roads. And come to think of it, I even rode it on a couple of nice days.

I'd like to ride it a lot more, too. Yes, it's a budget bike. And,





Generous clearances let the RB-2 accept tires much wider than this stock 700x28C, and down-tube cable barrels permit derailleur adjustments while riding.

it has no stock equipment that approaches the cost and prestige of the stuff I'm used to. But there's a quality of design that lifts the RB-2 to a level I never expected of a bike so moderately priced. Or, looking at it from the opposite side, it's a machine that gives you the max for your money if you're moving up to the \$500 range.

I began realizing it while setting my position. In short, every critical measurement on my 63-cm Italian racer could be accommodated by the 62-cm RB-2. Saddle height, saddle over bottom bracket, saddle to handlebar—all were easily duplicated, which was surprising—and slightly irritating. After all, it had taken years to refine my position through variations in saddle location, stem extension, and top tube length. So give Bridgestone product manager Grant Peterson an A in geometry, a grade that applies to the other 5 RB-2 frame sizes because each is also proportioned for its rider. In fact, the RB-2 copies most of the \$750 RB-1's dimensions, capitalizing on the winning formula established by Bridgestone's best-selling road bike.

On the roll, the surprises continued. Thanks to the position match and 175-mm crankarms (the right length for leggy guys), I was as comfortable on the RB-2 as on my own bike. And amazingly, its handling was as precise and predictable. It tracked true during no-hands riding and never suffered front-wheel shimmy. The bottom bracket was concrete stiff, thanks in part to a triple-

butted 1 1/4-inch-diameter Tange MTB down tube, but the ride wasn't objectionably harsh.

Of course, there's usually a downside when you pay only \$500 for a bike. The RB-2's TIG-welded frame is heavy at 6.2 pounds (add another 1.8 for the unicrown fork). This puts total weight at 27.2 pounds, and it increases to a mountain bike-like 30 when outfitted with a tool kit, pump, 2 (unfilled) bottles and cages, and plastic mudguards. That's a load, and you feel it on hills.

However, the RB-2's gear range helps compensate for the weight and gives it impressive versatility. My all-weather bike could just as easily be your commuter or loaded tourer. Equipped with a 21-speed drivetrain, shifting is accomplished via SunTour's index Bar-Con handlebar-end levers cabled to Edge derailleurs. Front changes were flawless (save for typical balkiness when going to the granny ring under load), but the AccuShiftPlus long-cage rear required several rides to dial in, a process assisted by the handy barrel adjuster on the down tube cable stop. Gear changes then became reliable if not uniformly prompt, considering the wide-range, 13-28-tooth freewheel.

The 28/40/50T round-ring crankset provides a tractor-like 27-inch low gear, adding yet another possibility for the RB-2. Shod with 700x35C tires, it can assume the role of a hybrid bike, letting you enjoy dirt roads and even nontechnical trails. Installing bigger rubber is no problem, thanks to generous frame clearances. The off-road potential is enhanced by the SR Low-Fat mountain bike pedals, an alloy-cage racing model with toe clips and straps.

Another plus was the Dia-Compe BRS 300 brakeset, which features easy-pull aero levers and ample stopping power, even in the wet. The Sansin sealed hubs, all-weather performers as well, are laced with Wheelsmith 14-gauge stainless-steel spokes to Wolber GTX hard-anodized, 36-hole rims. Although there's quality here, the rear wheel was the bike's most significant problem in that spokes loosened on every ride until I backed them down to the top thread and retensioned the wheel. Otherwise, the bottom bracket assembly, which developed play during each of the first 4 rides, was the only sign of mechanical imprecision.

Available in black and silver as well as our test bike's wine red, the RB-2 has a full complement of braze-ons to help it fulfill Bridgestone's intention of being its "most versatile" bike. I call it a budget beater (take it either way you want) that barely hints at its moderate price. ■

BRIDGESTONE SYNERGY RB-2

Distributed by: Bridgestone Cycle (USA), Inc.
15003 Wicks Blvd.
San Leandro, CA 94577

Country of Origin: Taiwan

Suggested Retail Price: \$480-\$525

Sizes Available: 47, 50, 53, 56, 59, 62 cm (tested), center to top of extended seat lug

Weight: Frame, 6.2 lbs.; fork, 1.8 lbs.; complete bike, 27.2 lbs.

Frame: Tange chrome-moly tubing, MTB triple-butted down tube

Wheelbase	40.2 in.; 102 cm
Seat tube	23.6 in.; 60 cm
Top tube	23.8 in.; 60.5 cm
Head angle	75 degrees
Seat angle	73 degrees
Chainstays	16.8 in.; 42.5 cm
Bottom bracket height	10.5 in.; 26.7 cm
Fork rake	1.63 in.; 4.1 cm

Trail 1.90 in.; 4.8 cm

Wheels:

Hubs Sansin SE, low flange, quick-release, 130-mm axle spacing

Spokes 36, Wheelsmith 14-gauge stainless steel, 3-cross

Rims Wolber GTX, hard anodized, gray

Tires Bridgestone (IRC), 700x28C

Drivetrain:

Derailleurs SunTour Edge, AccuShiftPlus; index Bar-Con bar-end levers

Chain SunTour (HKK) Z

Crankset Sakae SX, 28/40/50T; 175-mm crankarms

Bottom bracket Tange, bolt-type axle

Freewheel SunTour Alpha

Components:

Brakes Dia-Compe BRS 300 standard reach, aero levers

Pedals Sakae Low-Fat with alloy cage, toe clips and straps

Headset Hatta Vesta

Seatpost Delta one-bolt alloy

Saddle Avocet Racing

Bar/stem SR Sakae Custom anatomic 43-cm bar; SR 12.5-cm stem

Gear Inches

	28	40	50
13	x	83	104
14	54	77	96
16	47	68	84
18	42	60	75
21	36	51	64
24	31	45	56
28	27	38	x