

BICYCLING!

ROAD TEST

Two from Sekai

by Gary Fisher

Photos by Gail Heilman

Velocipede of Seattle, Washington went right to the horse's mouth in developing this month's road test bike, the Sekai 5000 Superlite. The primary force behind its design was Washington's #1 racer, Mark Pringle. Mark is a national class rider who went to the Olympics as an alternate last year. Actually, Velocipede almost gave up on marketing this frame because of its delicate nature; but Mark stood behind it, and some suggestions on improvement were enough to keep the 5000 in the running.

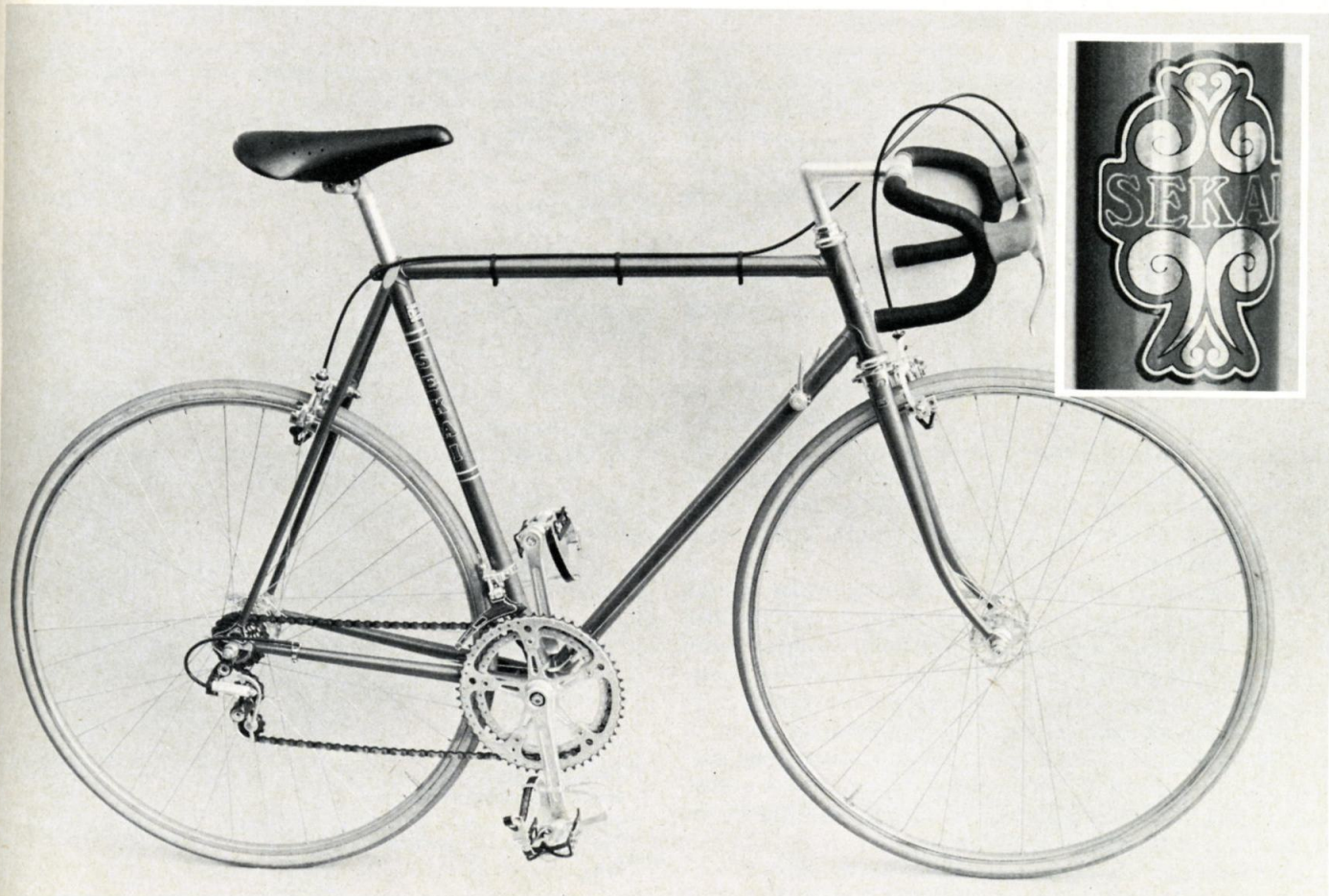
This Sekai model is sold as a frameset only. We tested it equipped with top Japanese components with the exception of European tires, rims, spokes, seat post and saddle. The built-up test bike totaled out at just 19.75 pounds, and I've

actually seen it used as the basis for under-17-pound time-trial machines.

The first thing the rider notices on the 5000 is the ultra-tight rear triangle and minimal fork rake, things that normally distinguish modern criterium bicycles. On the Sekai these clearances are very closely calculated; the rear wheel can just be removed with the tire fully inflated; the front wheel just clears the toe clips.

While the weight of this frame might lead one to think that it would only be suitable for time trialing, I found this wasn't so. While many time-trial frames are hard to accelerate and don't corner well, the 5000 doesn't follow this pattern.

The Superlite 5000 from Sekai.

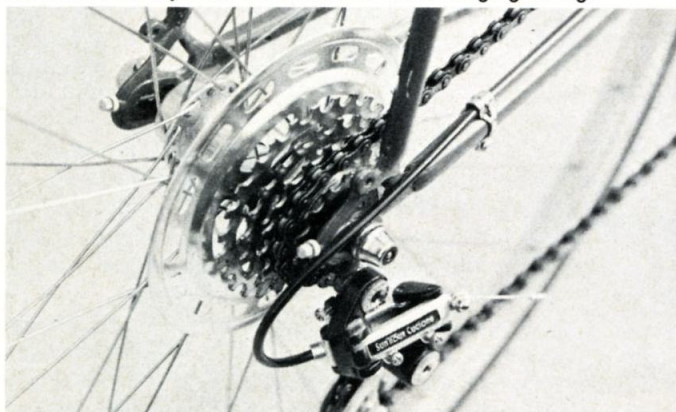


Pringle has used this model for virtually every style of racing. He's pretty light, however, about 130 pounds.

Tubing diameters account for the weight. Top and seat tubes are built from paper-thin 0.6x0.3mm Tange double-butted tubing. (Six pages out of *Bicycling!* Magazine equal about 0.3mm thickness!) This is so thin that the manufacturer points out in the owner's manual not to overtighten the front derailleur or you're liable to ding the seat tube. Caution should also be taken when the bike is mounted in a clamping repair stand. We could literally squeeze one of these tubes with our fingers and watch it flex in and out. However, the butted ends are of ample thickness for strength after brazing.

A heavier down tube (0.8x0.5mm) gives better steering control, holding the front and rear wheels in line despite

Right: The Superlite featured ultra-close clearances. Below: Detail on the Sekai 2500. The nice selection of components included small-flange Shimano 600 hubs for a more relaxed ride and Sun Tour Cyclone derailleur for wide-range gearing.



twisting forces from the crankset. Tongues of steel stiffen the inside of the forks, affording better feel from handlebar to wheel.

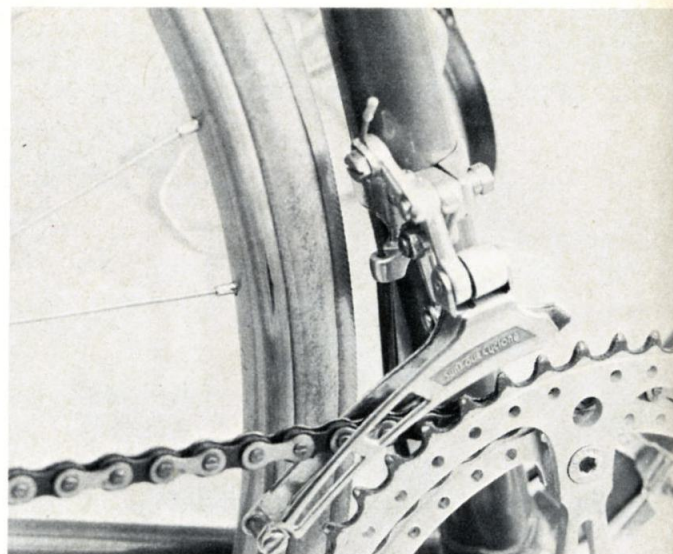
Can a 4½-pound frame be ridden with confidence by a strong 150-pound rider, climbing, descending and cornering? After the tube-pressing demonstration I was afraid to let it all hang out. But I found good design has eliminated most of the problems inherent in this light a frame. The tight rear triangle and heavier down tube have minimized bottom bracket flex, and the bike gives good response when the rider is thrashing away in large gears. The shallow head angle eliminates that uneasy feeling at high speeds. Speaking of angles, who'd ever think you'd find 72/73 angles on a racing machine?

We had a chance to compare the 5000 rear triangle stiffness to some other brands in a simple test and found it to have more flex than any other similarly tested machine except the Teledyne Titan. This is primarily due to the 0.6mm chain and seat stay members. Even so, I found the 5000 to be superior to many of the frames listed in the accompanying chart. So much for in-the-shop testing. It can sometimes be misleading.

While I wouldn't recommend this frame to anyone but the most super-careful, weight-conscious cyclist, I certainly liked it. The 5000 comes with an excellent chip-resistant finish (you'll dent the frame before chipping the paint) and a lifetime guarantee against failure due to poor workmanship.

The Velocipede people offer a more pedestrian model in the 2500 Grand Tour. This bike, with its long wheelbase, laid-back angles and soft saddle, lends itself well to the person looking for a model that's easy to handle and comfortable: the casual rider or the tourist with full gear.

It's nice to see that the Japanese have finally come up with a lower-priced tubing that compares well with European



tubing. This Tange high-tensile double-butted tubing gives a frame that's in the ballpark weight-wise, too. You've probably noticed that the literature for many Japanese bikes in this price range talk a lot about the lightweight components without mentioning overall weight. At just over 27 pounds, the 2500 could be a forerunner of better things to come. This tubing gives a very lively feeling ride as well.

The Grand Tour comes with Sun Tour Cyclone derailleurs and Shimano 600 hubs, an unusual combination. Most bicycles are equipped from either the Sun Tour/Sakae combine or the Shimano/Sugino group. You'll seldom see crossovers of this sort.

Of all the components, I especially liked Sekai's own tire,

SEKAI 2500 GRAND TOUR SPECIFICATIONS

Frame: Tange double-butted high-tensile tubing with Sun Tour GS dropouts.
Frame sizes: 19½, 21, 23, 25. Frame size tested: 23 inches.

top tube: 23"	bottom bracket height: 10¾"
seat tube: 23"	wheelbase: 42¼"
chain stay: 17½"	head tube angle: 72 degrees
fork rake: 2¼"	seat tube angle: 72 degrees
weight: 27 pounds	

Crankset: Sugino Maxi-Tour VIII. New models will be black anodized with 165mm arms and 40/52 chainwheel teeth.

Freewheel: Sun Tour gold 14/16/19/22/26

Derailleurs: Sun Tour Cyclone GT with fingertip shifters

Brakes: Dia Compe 500, black

Wheels: hubs: Shimano 600, 36-hole
rims: Araya high-pressure alloy
tires: Sekai Deluxe high-pressure

Pedals: KKT Top Run, black

Saddle: Kashimax padded nylon with suede top

Bar and Stem: S.R. custom bars; Apex alloy stem. 50mm extension on 19½, 21; 70mm on 23; 90mm on 25.

Extras: Toe clips and straps, kickstand

Price: \$229.95

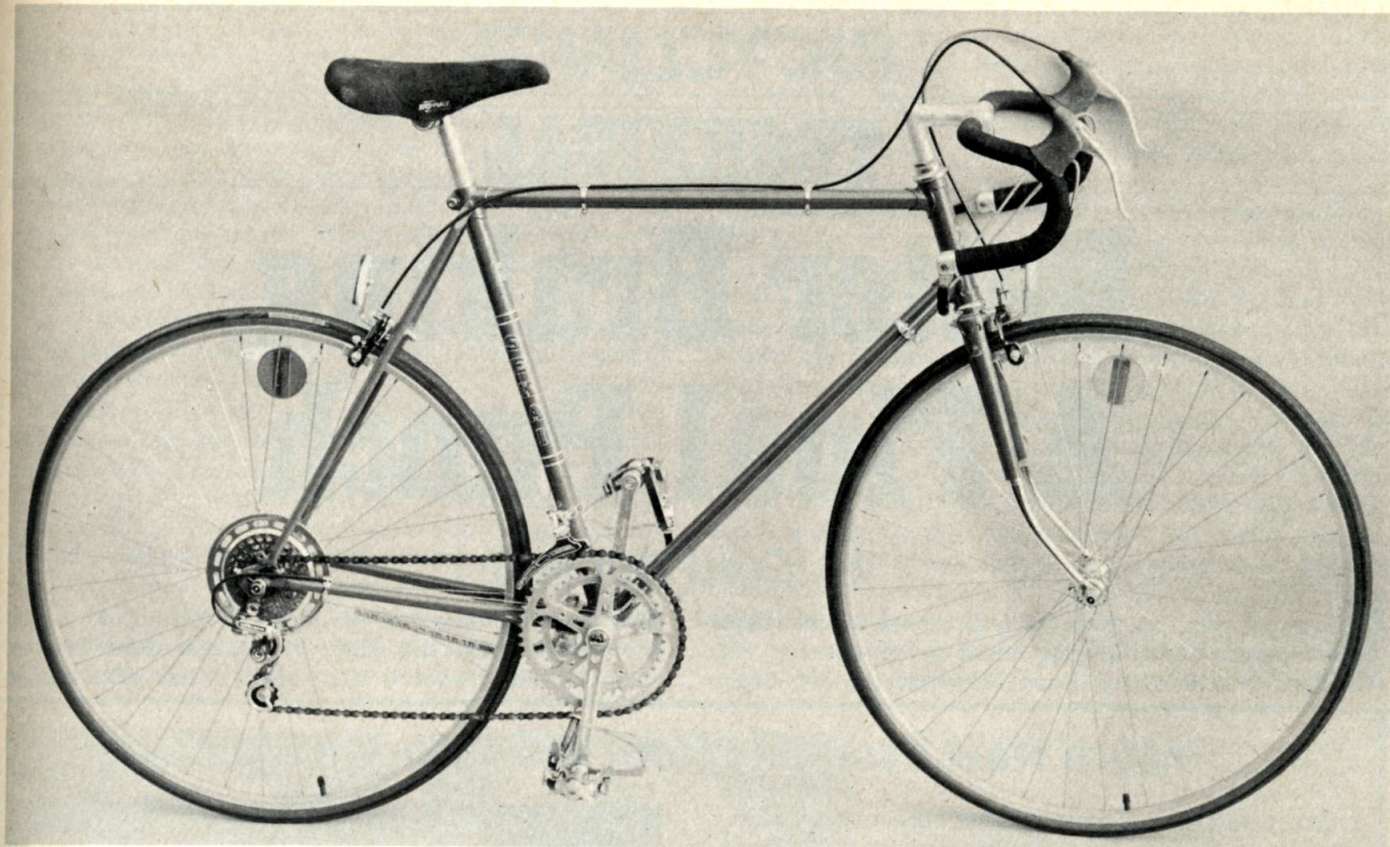
SEKAI 5000 SUPERLITE FRAMESET SPECIFICATIONS

Frame: Tange Professional double-butted chrome-moly steel tubing; 0.6x0.3mm top and seat tubes, 0.8x0.5mm down tube. Tange short-point lugs with cutouts. Shimano SF dropouts. Midnight blue or red with chrome fork crown and dropouts.

top tube: 22"	bottom bracket height: 10¾"
seat tube: 22¾"	wheelbase: 38¾"
chain stay: 16"	head tube angle: 72 degrees
fork rake: 1-3/8"	seat tube angle: 73 degrees
weight: 4½ pounds with headset	

Frame comes equipped with Tange Levin headset, Tange allen-key seat-pin bolt. Headset and bottom bracket are English threaded. Seat post size: 27.2mm.

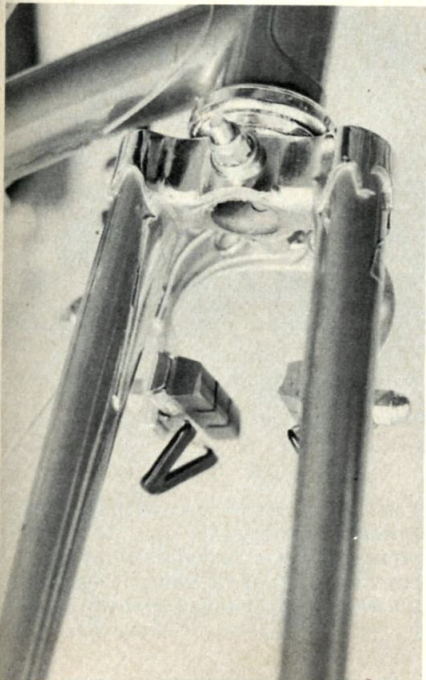
Price: \$229.95



the Deluxe. It's one of the best-feeling wired-ons I have tested. They make a sound like a silk tubular. Conversely, the weakest component on the 2500 is the saddle clamp. With so many good, inexpensive steel micro-adjustable seat posts on the market, the traditional seat clamp generally is found on only the lowest-priced bikes—hardly the category here.

Unlike our test bicycle, brand-new Sekai Grand Tours available this year come equipped with black-anodized cranks, new style Araya rims and black KKT Top Run pedals.

Above: The Sekai 2500 is a nice machine for the casual rider. Below: Steel blades lining the upper forks add strength to a superlite machine, the Sekai 5000.



This bike is also covered by a lifetime guarantee as well as a free 60-day checkup, a two-year free minor adjustment warranty, one-year wheel truing and one-year guarantee on defective components.

More information on Sekai bicycles is available from the distributor, Velocipede, Inc., 611½ E. Pine Street, Seattle, Washington 98122. By the way, they sponsor the Velocipede Sekai racing team.

