

THE HUMVEE OF BIKES

It can cross desert and tundra without breaking a sweat. Meet the new breed of adventure bike.

By **STEPHEN REGENOLD**



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SPORTS

A bigger, badder bike

Call it the Humvee of mountain bikes. **STEPHEN REGENOLD** takes the Pugsley adventure bike for a spin.



Surly's Pugsley adventure bike. (AP Photo/HO/Surly Bikes)

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By **STEPHEN REGENOLD**

BLOOMINGTON, Minn.

On the sidewalk outside company headquarters of Surly Bikes, on a chilly November afternoon, Dave Gray grips the handlebars of a shiny new purple bike.

"This one is fresh off the line," he says, subtly kicking the ballooned front tire.

The Pugsley, as this bike model is named, has 4-inch-wide, 26-inch-diameter tires, which are about twice as fat as the tires found on a regular mountain bike. Made for snow, sand, ice, muck and deep mud, the Pugsley can roll through terrain heretofore considered impassable on two wheels, according to Gray, who is general manager at the company.

Gray says the Pugsley can be thought of as the Humvee of mountain bikes.

Called adventure bikes, models like the Pugsley are defined by their massive tire size and unique frame geometry, which is more relaxed than a mountain bike, allowing riders to pedal for hours on end.

A case in point would be Jakub Postrzygacz, a native of Poland, who in September rode a Pugsley for 2,105 kilometers through the desert in western Australia. Following an old livestock track called the Canning Stock



Dave Gray, general manager at Surly Bikes, encounters a steep, rocky section on Surly Bikes' private test trail. (AP Photo/Stephen Regenold)

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Route, Postrzygacz rode 50 kilometers or more per day through deep sand on fading, dilapidated desert roads.

Postrzygacz spent 33 days biking alone, hauling supplies with a bike trailer and finding his own water en route. He completed the journey on October 3 in Wiluna, Australia.

In the snow, adventure bikes have been used for events like the 100-mile Iditasport in Alaska and the Arrowhead 135 Ultramarathon, a 135-mile winter race in northern Minnesota. Both of these events have been won by competitors on adventure bikes in recent years.

While custom bike builders like John Evingson, Ray Molina, Mark Gronewald and Mike DeSalvo have sold fat-tire adventure bikes since the late '90s, Surly is unique in that the company is making the genre's first mass-produced model, says Lou Mazzante, deputy editor at Bike Magazine in San Juan Capistrano, Calif.

"Surly is trying to capitalize on the trend of wilderness biking, which is a very small trend right now," Mazzante says. "But for the people who need this kind of bike, the Pugsley will be a godsend."



John Evingson, owner of Evingson Cycle, stands ready to ride along a trail near his bike shop in Lindstrom, Minn. (AP Photo/Stephen Regenold)

The primary advantage an adventure bike has in snow and sand is its extra float, says John Evingson, owner of Evingson Cycle, a custom bike builder in Lindstrom, Minn., who has sold adventure bikes since 1999. Thin bike tires slice through the snowy crust or dig into sand, he says, while an adventure bike's 4-inch-wide tires distribute weight more evenly to keep you on the surface.

"The fat tires let you bike through deep snow, mud and sand where on a mountain bike you would have to get off and push," says Evingson, who built the bike his wife, Kathie Evingson, rode to win the Iditasport's women's division in 1999.

Increased traction is another plus, as well as built-in shock absorption. Unlike mountain bikes, most adventure bikes do not have fork or rear-frame suspension, which are seen as heavy and superfluous. The fat tires absorb shock on their own, says Surly's Gray. With the right tire pressure, Gray says the tires on a Surly Pugsley will mold around rocks or roots and absorb up to 2.5 inches, making for a smoother ride.

Surly, which is a division of bike-component distributor company Quality Bicycle Parts, Inc., has several hundred Pugsley bike frames in stock. The frame, which comes in four sizes, sells for \$520; the accompanying oversize tires and rims cost about \$500. As of late November, the company had sold about 130 Pugsley frames, according to Gray.

Adventure bikes from Evingson Cycle, which are differentiated from Surly's offering by their custom, rider-specific frame dimensions, specialized gear racks, and lighter frame materials, range in price from \$1,800 to \$3,000.

Evingson sells less than a dozen bikes a year. He says the current market for adventure bikes is relatively small, with most sales coming from athletes and explorers who need to ride in snow or sand.

But Evingson believes there are untapped consumer markets that would be perfect for adventure bikes. He plans to promote the concept to beachside resorts with rental bike fleets for sand biking and downhill ski areas for customers who want to try biking in the snow.

Says Evingson: "Once you ride an adventure bike your whole perspective changes."

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