

GOING ELECTRIC

Reed Nester

Karen and I started tandeming in 2002, and purchased three tandems over the years to accommodate our riding needs. In 20 years, we have ridden over 50,000 tandem miles. We both retired in 2016, and by 2022 had 20 years of tandem experience. But ... we were getting older, and the hills were getting steeper. Seeing many WAB members with e-Bikes, we thought “maybe some day.”

Well, that day came in September 2021, when we were on a tandem ride in the Barboursville/Orange/Gordonsville area in the Virginia Piedmont. We ended up walking three steep hills, and decided that now might be that “some day.” And that created the challenge of finding a suitable e-Tandem. Tandems are probably one of the smallest of cycling’s niche markets, and tandem dealers, and especially e-Tandems, are not plentiful.

After much searching, we connected with Ric and Marcia Becker at House of Tandems in Spring Texas (suburb of Houston). After much discussion, careful measurements and a long video call, we decided on a custom carbon fiber Hawthorne Tandem (their house brand). Ric designed the frame based on our measurements, sent us the CAD drawing for our approval, and helped us pick out suitable components for our riding style. One of the most important choices was the color, and Karen and Marcia worked this one out. It was a delightful experience working with Ric and Marcia, and first class customer service.

We turned our trip to Texas to pick up the bike into a two-week vacation. On our way home, we took our first e-Tandem ride – a 30-mile loop from Port Gibson, MS, partially on the Natchez Trace. It was a hilly ride, and a good test of our e-assist motor. Bottom line – we made the right decision to go electric. It was an enjoyable first ride, we worked as hard as we ever did, but went a lot faster. Normally, we would have averaged 13-14 mph; with the e-Tandem we were over 16 mph, and we didn’t die on the hills.

We picked up the Hawthorne e-Tandem on September 26, and have ridden over 800 miles since, including climbing the mountain on the Virginia Creeper Trail from Damascus to White Top. We use the lowest (Eco) setting for 95% of our riding, and the medium (Trail) setting for steeper hills. Our longest ride has been a metric century, which is the limit of our battery range. Switching to an e-Tandem was the right decision for us. It has made riding more enjoyable as well as faster - we feel 15 years younger on the bike. Having e-assist will let us continue riding for years to come, and in hilly and challenging terrain.

