

## About MARS

The Metro Area Recumbent Society (MARS) is one of the country's premier recumbent bicycle clubs, with members in at least four states.

We're a very relaxed group, far more so than most bike clubs. We have no formal ride schedule or strict rules, no meetings, no elected officers... it's friendly anarchy. Despite this utter lack of organization, we are very active, ride a lot, and are a pretty entertaining crowd to hang around with.

The club is basically a creature of the Internet. With our membership so widely scattered, we use the club website and an email list to stay in touch and organize activities. You don't necessarily have to be on the Net to be in MARS, but if you're not you'll miss most of what's going on. Check out our website at <http://www.recumbents.com/mars>.

All are welcome to join the club. We have membership dues of \$10 per year, which go primarily for insurance coverage and a rainy-day fund for future use and to keep the website and mailing list going.

The best way to get to know us is to subscribe to our e-mail list. It's very active, and is the true heart of the club. Visit the website and see the Mailing List page for more details.

### About the members

There's no "boss." MARSians are just folks who love to ride these odd contraptions. Some of us are fast, some are slow, but all are welcome and we try to make accommodations for all abilities.

There's more to MARS than just riding. We have a tradition of tinkering, invention and innovation, supported by a core group of active members. A number of our members have built or are building their own bicycles. We have some very exotic machinery in the club, including back-to-back tandems, FWD lowracers, carbon fiber streamliners, and more.

It is this pioneering spirit of individuality and ingenuity, the urge to build a better mousetrap, that many of us find appealing about MARS. In an era where amazing high-tech equipment is just a credit card swipe away, it is refreshing to find people who prefer to do it themselves.

## For more information

We encourage you to visit the club website at <http://www.recumbents.com/mars>

You'll find out a lot about the club there, as well as links to other recumbent websites.

### Other useful websites:

<http://www.bentrideronline.com>

<http://www.recumbents.com>

### Publications and organizations:

Recumbent Cyclist News

<http://www.recumbentcyclistnews.com>

International Human Powered Vehicle Association

<http://www.ihpva.org>

### Where to buy/rent/see recumbents

There aren't many recumbent-specific bike dealers, unfortunately. Though some regular bike shops do carry recumbents, the proprietors and staff are not usually well-versed in recumbent knowledge, and have been known to dispense misleading or inaccurate information.

The best source of information is, of course, the Internet. To find a dealer, check the manufacturer's websites or visit the links above.

To see a bunch of bikes up close, come to a MARS ride. We love to talk!

The MARS webmaster Andy Douglas is happy to answer questions. Email him at [adouglas@optonline.net](mailto:adouglas@optonline.net)



# Metro Area Recumbent Society

NY/NJ/CT/PA

<http://www.recumbents.com/mars>

# All about these bicycles

## The recumbent FAQ

### - What do you call that thing?

It's a recumbent bicycle. There are many different varieties, with steering above the seat, below the seat, big wheels, small wheels, short wheelbases, long wheelbases, trikes... but all share the feature of a comfortable, chairlike seat. Some are very laid back, others place the rider in more of an upright position. No matter what you're looking for, from sedate to exotic, there's probably a recumbent that will fit your needs.

### - Is it hard to ride?

No, but it is different from an upright bicycle. It takes about five or ten minutes to get used to it initially, and about 10 or 20 miles to get fully acclimated. Some recumbents take more getting used to than others. In general, the more laid-back the riding position and the higher the pedals, the steeper the learning curve.

Of all recumbents, the entry level Easy Racers EZ (www.easyracers.com) is one of the easiest to ride and also is one of the least expensive recumbents but it's not known as a performance bicycle. It's worth a try in any case. It makes a great introduction to recumbents, and is sure to put a smile on your face!

### - How do you steer it?

You're probably referring to the bikes that do not seem to have any handlebars. In fact, they do... they're under the seat.

### - How much does it cost?

Not much more than a comparable upright bicycle. However, there are no "department store" style recumbents. The least expensive start at about \$500, and go up to as much as you want to spend. The most expensive recumbent you can buy costs over \$5000... but then, so does the most expensive road bike. An average price for a good recumbent is in the \$1000 - \$1500 range. Trikes (which make fantastic touring machines) are typically

### - What are the benefits?

To start with, COMFORT!! You can, literally, ride all day long and when you get off, your butt doesn't hurt, your wrists don't hurt, your back doesn't hurt and your neck doesn't hurt.

Think about that for a minute. Is your upright bike really, truly comfortable? Would you rather sit in a reclined easy chair or on a bicycle saddle?

At the end of a long ride, you'll notice that recumbent riders aren't limping around in pain. They're still sitting on their bikes, because they're so comfortable. Bike shorts have padding for a reason!

You're not giving up any of your workout, either. You can pedal just as hard on a recumbent as you can on an upright bike, though you use different muscles. Also, since the bike is so comfortable, you're likely to ride much more than you would on an upright bike.

Some recumbents are optimized for speed and are much more aerodynamic than upright bicycles, even the slickest of aero-tweaked time-trial bikes. Fairings are available that can further boost aerodynamic efficiency to a remarkable degree. In the fall of 2001 a fully streamlined recumbent went 80 mph... without drafting.

### - What are the drawbacks?

Many recumbent enthusiasts would argue that there aren't any. But realistically, there are some things that recumbents just don't do as well as upright bikes. As with all things, there are tradeoffs.

Most recumbent designs don't mix well with pace-lines, because they don't leave much of a draft.

You can't unweight the seat easily, so recumbents aren't good for off-road riding. You can't hop curbs.

Recumbents are heavier. This makes sense, because that comfy seat has to weigh *something*. However, sub-20 lb. recumbents do exist.

Recumbents are not quite as maneuverable at low speeds as upright bikes are, though with practice this difference is minimized. It's rarely a problem.

Hill climbing is different. Since you cannot stand on the pedals, climbing hills requires that you learn how to spin (i.e., gear down and pedal faster with a

lighter load). Most recumbents have a very wide gear range to accommodate this. The low gear on a recumbent is about the same as the low gear on a mountain bike, while the high gear is usually about the same as the high gear on a road bike.

With practice, you should be able to climb hills as easily and nearly as fast as you can on a conventional bike, though some riders never do match the performance they get from conventional bicycles.

We think the tradeoffs are well worth it.

### - You're so low to the ground... aren't you worried about not being seen by drivers?

We're a lot taller than road markings, traffic cones and curbs.... The fact is that recumbents are just as easy to see as any regular bicycle. Even the tiniest of bents with a rider on it is an object two feet wide, three feet high and six feet long, or about the size of a refrigerator lying on its side! Any driver who can't see that needs to have his or her eyes examined.

In our experience drivers tend to give recumbents more room on the road than they give upright bikes, probably because of the novelty factor.

### - Recumbents are slow, aren't they?

Well, a lot of recumbent *riders* are slow, but the bikes can be very, very fast indeed. Some time trials are opening up to recumbents, and the bikes are winning (in a time trial in Illinois in April 2002, a bent won and all six of the recumbents that entered finished in the top 10 percent of the 150-rider pack; the average age of the recumbent riders was in the 40s).

The performance profile of a recumbent is different than that of an upright bike. Uprights have the advantage going up hills (because you can stand), but recumbents have an aero advantage going down and on the flats. Again, this depends on the bike... some bents are much faster than others, just as high-end road bikes are faster than sidewalk cruisers.

In our opinion recumbents have a reputation for being slow because the average recumbent rider tends to be older and more focused on comfort than the average road bike rider. So when you see a recumbent you're less likely to be looking at someone whose goal is to go fast. That doesn't mean the bikes are slow. Anyone who's been blown away by one of our faster riders can attest to that.