

# ***Adventure Cyclist reviews Co-Motion's Americano***

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Photos are not from the original review

## **Road Test: Co-Motion Americano**

***A blend of classic and modern for the connoisseur***  
**By John Schubert**

It's the welds that catch your eyes first. Underneath the gleaming blue paint, the Co-Motion Americano's welds are like none other I've ever seen. Forsaking the "row of BBs" look of most expert welds, Co-Motion's are as smooth as silk. It's a flawlessly executed detail, and the welds look that good without any finish work. That's how they look as soon as welder Rob Postma lifts his torch away from the metal. But what makes people flock to Eugene, Oregon, and generate Co-Motion's backlog of orders, isn't just the weld-ing, or some special steel in the frames, let alone the component selection. It's the combination of design nuances and customer service that this tiny company provides. Co-Motion is best

known for its high-end tandems, but the company also has a lively single bike business. There's the usual fine road racing bike; a bevy of travel bikes equipped with S&S frame tubing couplers and usually sold with the optional suitcases; and, for the past couple years, the Americano, a no-compromises \$2,745 touring bike, which is a direct descendant from the tandems. "The whole idea behind the Americano is that we're making all these bikes that can easily handle 400 or 500 pounds," said Co-Motion's Dwan Shepard. "Why doesn't anybody make a touring bike that can handle that load? "You see a lot of collapsed wheels, a lot of shimmy at high speeds, a lot of touring bikes that feel so soft. By the time you get the chainstay length you need on those bikes, the stays are long and skinny and the thing doesn't climb worth a darn. "Everything on the Americano is scaled up to be tandem-like, so it can handle the load that you can carry on a touring bike without getting too noodly. " Indeed, it is.

The main triangle is 1 1/4-inch tubing throughout (with 0.8/0.5/0.8 mm butted tube wall thickness-es). The fork is beefy as all get out. The wheels are in your choice of 36, 40 or 48 spokes. They're the same wheels offered on Co-Motion tandems, with brick-solid tandem hubs, complete with hub brake threads. The rear wheel is built dishless for extra strength, and its overlocknut distance is a tandem-standard 145 mm, compared with most single bikes at 130 and 135 mm. The list goes on. But after a day of riding the Co-Motion, you might notice some invisible attributes — like the attention Shepard pays to making sure the bike fits you well. I experienced this attention firsthand by filling out Co-Motion's Frame Fitting Guide and seeing Shepard's response.

Shepard read through my measurements and told me my beloved 1983 Specialized Sequoia had its handlebars too low and too close. "For touring, most people want to be a little more upright. After all you want to absorb the scenery, right? Trouble is, if you do that just by raising the stem, the balance of the bike is thrown off," Shepard wrote to me. "More weight is borne by the saddle, and the front tire is too light on the ground, which makes it tough to control on steep climbs, especially if you tend to grab the top of the bar and scoot back on the saddle. The way to fix this problem is to increase extension while raising bar height (decreasing saddle-to-bar drop)." And then he announced the solution: "I have reduced your saddle-bar drop by four cm, and increased reach by 4.5 cm. This should give you an idea what we're shooting for position-wise. It should also be very comfortable, probably more comfortable than your Sequoia. The Sequoia's shorter reach and longer drop is likely to cause a little neck and shoulder stress."

It worked, too. I was impressed. Shepard has never seen me straddle a bicycle, but, 3,000 miles away, working from a handful of measurements, he set up the Americano so that I was indeed more upright and comfortable, yet the bike felt natural and well-balanced on steep climbs and steep gravel-road descents. When riding the Americano, it's easy to forget how rugged it is. It has the spry feel of a great light bike. According to Shepard, the frame weighs a mere four pounds even — the same weight as a classic steel racing frame, and only ounces more than many aluminum touring frames. Okay, why steel? At these prices, Shepard could build the frame from any material he wanted to, and his company does offer aluminum tandems.

*(continued below spec chart)*

<b>Spec Sheet</b>
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**Price as shown:** \$2745; Frameset price, \$1390. Prices may vary. S&S Couplers, \$405 extra.

**Sizes available:** 50, 52, 54 through 60, 62 cm, measured center to top.

**Size tested:** 52 cm

**Frame dimensions:**

Seat tube: 52 cm, or 20 1/4 inches (measured center to top)

Top tube: 21 1/4 x 1 1/4

Head angle: 72.5

Seat angle: 74

Chainstays: 17 3/4

BB height: 10 3/4

Front center: 23 1/2

Fork rake: 1 3/4

Trail: 2 1/2

Wheelbase: 40 3/4

Standover height: 30"

**Frame & fork:** Handbuilt by Co-Motion Cycles, Eugene Oregon.

Oversize Reynolds 725 heat-treated chrome-moly double-buttet tubing; lugless welded construction; 1 1/4-inch top tube & seat tube diameter; 1.4-inch down tube diameter. Threaded bosses for three water bottles. Bosses for cantilever brakes front and rear. Single set of dropout eyelets front and rear for racks and fenders; threaded rear rack bosses on seatstays; threaded holes for fender mounts in chainstay bridge, seatstay bridge and fork crown. Slotted top tube boss-es for rear brake and slotted chainstay boss for rear derailleur cable. Vertical rear dropouts. Race Face Thermo SP threadless 1 1/8 inch head-set with sealed bearings. Co-Motion Unicrown-style taper gauge chrome-molly fork. Oval fork blades measure 1.22 x 1.03 at top. Co-Motion CNC tandem steerer.

**Rims:** Velocity Dyad 40-hole 700c, made in Australia; 24.2 mm rim cross-section.

**Spokes:** 14-gauge cross-four front and rear.

**Hubs:** Phil Wood cartridge-bearing sealed large barrel front and rear. Rear hub has hub brake threads. Salsa quick-release skewers.

**Tires:** Avocet Fasgrip Duro Plus/K20 700x35C; 90 psi; 425 grams. Smooth (tread-less). Measured width, 30.4mm

**Crank:** Race Face Turbine LP forged 170 mm with 24/36/46 chainrings and sealed spindle.

**Front Derailleur:** Shimano Ultegra triple

**Rear Derailleur:** Shimano Deore XT

**Shift levers:** Shimano Bar-end index/friction style

**Cog cassette:** Shimano LX nine-speed

**Chain:** Shimano CN-HG92

■ Gearing in inches:			
	24	34	46
11	59	83	113
12	54	77	104
14	46	66	89
16	41	57	78
18	36	51	69
21	31	44	59
24	27	38	52
28	23	33	44
32	20	29	39

**Gearing in inches:****Saddle:** Co-Motion touring (Salsa saddle used in photography session).**Seatpost:** Zoom; two-bolt micro-adjust saddle clamp; 355 mm long, 29.8 mm diameter**Brakes:** Avid Single Digit 7 "V" style with Dia Compe 287V hand levers**Pedals:** as specified by customer.**Handlebars:** Profile black anodized 42 cm wide MAES bend with Salsa Moto Ace 105 mm stem.**Sold by:** Co-Motion Cycles, 4765 Pacific Ave., Eugene, Oregon 97402. Phone 541/342-4583; fax 541/342- 2210; <http://www.co-motion.com/>; [info@co-motion.com](mailto:info@co-motion.com)

The Co-Motion Americano benefits from the company's extensive tandem-building experience. "I got an E-mail from a customer in India. His bike got thrown off the top of a bus, and a dropout eyelet broke. He was able to get it repaired locally." Try that on your carbon fiber wonder. "We think steel makes the most sense for a touring bike," Shepard continued. "It can be repaired anywhere in the world. It is less prone to damage than any other material. If you scratch or dent steel, it's most likely not going to phase the bike. With titanium or aluminum, a scratch or dent could lead to a serious problem rapidly. " A lot of people who are looking for a touring bike of this caliber are traveling around the world, and they need something reliable and repairable in those situations." In addition, Shepard added, choosing steel gives him the best design flexibility. "Steel's been around so long. With titanium, it's so expensive for the mills to produce the tubes that you have very few to choose from," he said. "There are no tubes produced to be a touring bicycle. With steel, the palette of available tubes is larger, and much easier to specialize. We have several tubes we designed ourselves for tandems, and we use them on the Americano." The Americano's ultra-beefy fork has dividends both in strength and in bike handling.

"I've done a lot of frame repairs, and I've seen a lot of bent forks and bent steerer tubes," Shepard said. "On a touring bike, your life depends on that steerer tube, so it makes sense to have something very strong there, so we use a tandem steerer tube." The stiffer steerer tube and fork blades make the bike steer and corner more securely under emergency conditions, and the fork blades flex less under braking. This improves your ability to control the bike in touring conditions. "If a bike surges when you put the front brake on, you might say to yourself, 'I'd better not go down steep hills.'" Shepard said. "But everything about the Americano is designed to make you think, 'There's nothing it can't handle.'" Shepard built the frame to clear 700x38C tires (it comes with 35C tires), and he has sold

custom bikes to some people who wanted to use 45C tires. I asked him why he didn't build all the bikes with the extreme clearances. " You can't make a bike that does every-thing," he replied. "If it has clearance for 45C tires and fenders, it's better that it's designed for that. With that larger profile, you increase bottom bracket height, standover clearance, and toe clip overlap. If you want something that special, it's better off if the bike is designed for that."

Co-Motion was founded in 1988 by Shepard and Butch Boucher. In the years since, Dan Vrijmoet replaced Boucher as Shepard's partner. Before founding Co-Motion, Shepard spent some years working for the legendary inventive Eugene frame-builder Gary Hale, and before that Shepard worked in many a bicycle shop. The bike pictured is a 2000 model, with a non-spec saddle. The Phil Wood hubs in the photograph are now optional for a \$90 upcharge, with DT Hugi hubs standard. Co-Motion sweats the details to make the Americano right. This is one of very few bikes to cross my path that doesn't get points deducted because of its gearing. Where fashion coincides with the needs of the hard-core touring cyclist, fashion is followed, but where it doesn't, it isn't. That, I submit, is a welcome change.

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**Note: For current pricing and specifications, please refer to the [Americano](#) page.**

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