

# IMPRESSED? 22- inch AEROLITE'S TECH 2200

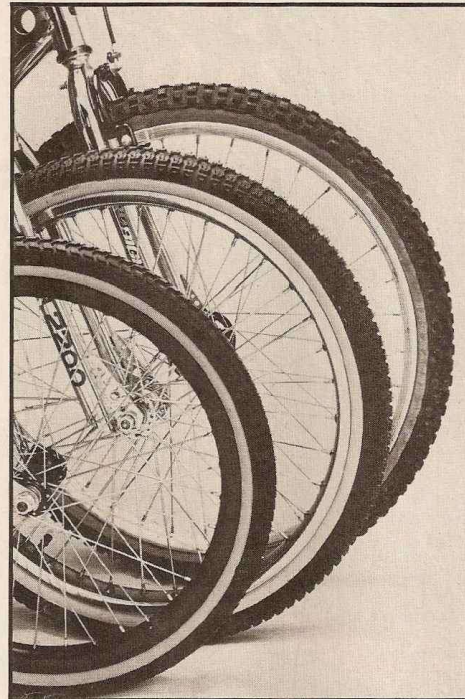
Bigger than small, smaller than big

By Dean Bradley

Why a 22 inch? Good question. But why not? Certain top pros have made it known that it could very well make the ultimate-size BMX bike. And it might, but honestly, it's too early to tell—there are too many variables, too many skeptics, and not enough hours in a day. All we've done here is get our hands on one of the first production 22-inch BMX bikes we could find—the Aerolite Tech 2200. Originally the Aerolite Tech was designed by Tom Lotito of North America Tradimpex Cycles "to be the ideal size for the older segment of the BMX market," as he explained it. With its scaled-up 20-inch styling and the the rideability of a scaled-down 24- or 26-inch cruiser, there's no doubting it could have wide market appeal. However, with the current model (MX2222) Tradimpex is offering, it will definitely *not* be the race market. At least not quite yet. You see, the Tech 2200, manufactured for Tradimpex by Saint Tropez, is an admittedly budget-minded Taiwanese machine incorporating 1020 mild steel fork and frame (complete with welded-on chainguard mounts, kickstand, etc.); low-line cranks, stem, bars, and pedals; heavy\*105-gauge spokes; steel rims; and a coaster brake. But that's not the point. The Tech 2200's greatest assets and, at the current time, sole redeeming qualities are its 22-inch CMC rims and Kenda, 22 x 2, snakebelly-type



Two inches more or less makes the difference in the Aerolite Tech 2200. Is this the size and shape of things to come? Or is BMX just becoming a game of inches?



Bigger than small, smaller than big, the Aerolite's 22-inch CMC rims and Kenda snakebelly-type-tread gumwalls bridge the gap between traditional 20- and newcomer 24-inch wheel sizes.

gumwall tires. Although the rims are uncompetitive steel, Mr. Lotito has assured us that alloy counterparts may soon be available as well as an updated, upgraded, complete, alloy/chrome-moly bike. Tradimpex is obviously waiting to see how BMXers receive this new wheel size before becoming more heavily involved.

Well, we're waiting too. And wondering out loud just how far and how fast these 22-inch-wheeled bikes might go.

So, on our way to taking a brief look at where BMX came from and to theorize on where we might be headed, we went out and got some qualified opinions from some small and big wheeled in BMX.

Today's modern 20-inch-wheeled BMX bikes evolved from early dirty use of Schwinn's very popular "juvenile," as they call it, "high-rise," as they also called it, Sting-Ray line of bikes for "the youthful, sports-minded kid of the sixties." Actually, it wasn't until years later, during the late '70's, that certain enthusiasts who felt they were growing out of the sport they loved (BMX) even questioned the fact that you could ride anything other than a 20-inch wheel in the dirt. Sure,

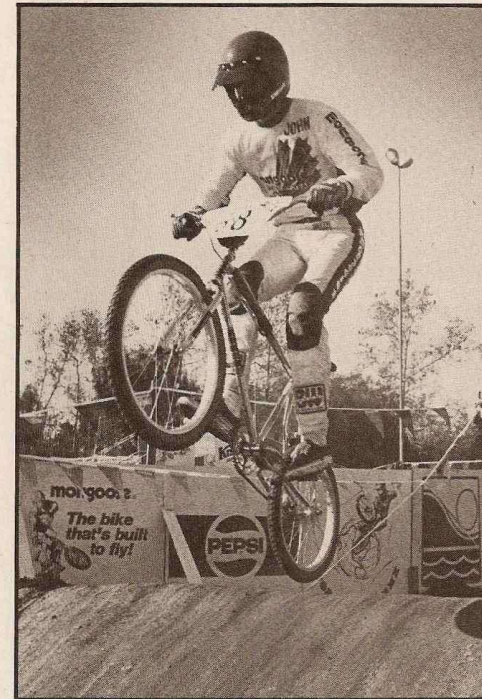
20-inchers were small and light and nimble, but 20-inch chassis could only comfortably accommodate riders up to a certain size (except for Stu, who's a different story). Again, in stepped Schwinn, who had always offered a scaled-up Sting Ray-like model classified "a heavyweight" (and for good reason), with 26-inch balloon (2.125" width) tires, which was just waiting to be discovered all right, and, to the utter disgust of 20-inch purists, the 26-inch "cruiser" class was born and major manufacturers began to produce specialized 26-inch chassis, rims and tires. The twenty-sixes will be long remembered for paving the way for bigger riders, older brothers, dads, and moms to all get involved in BMX. That's something nobody can take away from them. However, trophies have become another story! With 26-inchers, who can ever forget Jeff Kosmala, 1980 NBA, and ABA National and World Champion—the very first and very possibly the very last of the 26-inch-wheel cruiser class champs. Says The Kos, "Twenty-six inchers were so fun I was sorry to see 'em go—but that's racing." On the question of a 22-inch, Kos flatly

states "I don't see a real need or any real advantage besides maybe a little comfort, and if they keep adding different wheel sizes and classes I think it'll defeat the purpose and feeling of the two current distinct racing styles and classes—20" and cruiser. Anyway, what class are you gonna ride the thing in?"

What class indeed.

We checked with Don Wright at the NBL—he set us straight. "Currently in our competition format there is no place for a 22-inch-wheel bike, cruiser or otherwise." NBL's rulebook clearly states: "The bicycle wheels on a 'cruiser' must be of the 24" or 26" type. Also a cruiser may not be ridden in any other class." However Wright added, "If it (the 22) were to amount to anything big, I'm sure the board of trustees would consider modifying the ruling, as we did in the case of the 24-inchers."

On the other hand, officials at the ABA said, "Anything between 20" and 24" is currently illegal, period." In the ABA rulebooks: "A 'cruiser' must have at least 24-inch wheels." But, it didn't always read that way. It all changed in Oklahoma City



In search of the perfect wheel size: Veteran John George on Mongoose's experimental 24/20 combo 'crossover'. The result? Faster acceleration and one very ugly bike.

# AEROLITE'S 22-inch TECH 2200

back in 1980, at the ABA Grand National, when tempers flared and the rulebook became considerably more specific. It seemed top cruiser-class contender Joe Claveau rolled up to the Grands' starting gate on his RRS-prepped and heavily modified Schwinn Varsity with 24-inch alloy rims off two cannibalized Univega



This was the day the 26-inch-wheel BMX cruiser became obsolete for racing—the 1980 ABA Fall National at the Anaheim Convention Center. Number 86, Tony blew 'em away on his controversial 24-inch-wheel, RRS-prepped Schwinn Varsity!

unicycles. ABA prez Merl Mennenga remembers the occasion well: "Everybody was sitting there on the gate refusing to start, yelling and pointing at Claveau's wheels, and RRS's owner, Craig Kundig, was just standing there smiling and pointing to the rulebook, which at the time specified anything over 20-inch wheels was considered a cruiser." Claveau rode that day and eventually went on to win ABA's National Number One Cruiser Plate in 1981, on his prototype 24-inch, and the ABA modified their rulebooks to the current state. That day and later that year, Kundig received national attention and went down in history as designer and builder of the first 24-inch-wheel racing cruisers—which have since become the standard of competitive cruisers.

Craig on the 22": "Somewhere out there between 20- and 26-inch there's the ultimate bike. Maybe we've already found it in the 24—maybe it's the 22. I think there are a lot of larger guys out there riding around on 20-inchers holding back their overall abilities and potential as racers. Plus, if your bike is more than just a race bike—if it's transportation—then larger-wheeled and framed bikes are more comfortable and more practical."

Kundig adds, "The 22 interests me because it's untried and unproven—just like the 24 was. And most of all, I'd like to see that look



Today's 20-inchers evolved from Schwinn's popular Sting Ray models. This is the first BMX national ever, the NBA national in Phoenix, Arizona, 1975. No gate, no hill. The 14 and Over Experts are on the line: (L to R) Scot "Old Man" Breithaupt; #3, Jack Shannon; #2, unidentified Sting Ray rider; #112, Brian "Ramo" Ramocinski; #60, Ernie Ernsdorf; #29, John "Snaggletooth" Paltryman; and NBA #1, David Clinton, on a vintage Kawasaki with full suspension!

on Merl's face again when we pull up on the line with something weird."

Next we talked to Hutch's Toby Henderson who has probably had more success campaigning both a 20- and a 22-inch this year than just about any other pro.

"Stuart and I talked a long time ago about a 22 and we both thought it had possibilities. That's hot somebody came out with one! It might just be the ideal size, but, just like everything else, it's gonna take some dialing-in—you know, components, geometry. Don't get me wrong, I love my 24" and still feel comfortable and fast on my 20", but you never know until you try—a 22 might just be the hot tip."

And last but certainly not least, we asked current NBL National Number One 20-inch Pro and "Mr. 20-inch," Stu Thomsen, who at 6' 1" and some 200 pounds, still looks comfortable on a 20"-inch and has managed to win just about every major race, title, honor, etc. at least once just for drill.



At 6'1", The Kos was a primo candidate when the 26-inch-wheel bikes became popular in 1979-80. Bigger wheels and chassis gave the sport added growing room.

Said Stu, "Remember the old Graco bikes with suspension and everything? Well, they had a 22" front wheel and 20" rear. That's what started us thinking. The 22-inch has the potential to take over the Pro class if it's designed right. It could be the perfect compromise. It also depends on the tracks. If the tracks remain as tight as they are, it's going to be tough to beat the acceleration of a 20-inch. But what I'd like to see is an open-wheel class—a run-whatcha-brung deal where anything goes. Now that would be interesting!"

So after all is said and little is done, what we've got here is a new bike, new wheel size, skepticism, enthusiasm, and no place to race it. However, even if the sanctioning bodies did find a class for it, the Aerolite Tech 2200 would not be competitive, with its experimental geometry, lack of race-bred componentry, and most of all, steel rims holding it back from the winner's circle.

However, a tip of the helmet is due to designer Tom Lotito and importer North American Tradimex Cycles for introducing BMX's first 22-inch machine. Whether or not it can or will become a viable BMX future force is up to you guys.

In BMX, don't ask *why*—ask *why not*?

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