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Azub Origami

Posted on June 11, 2013 by Bryan Ball



By BRYAN J. BALL Managing Editor

Ah, the folding recumbent... The unfound "Holy Grail" of the recumbent world. Obviously, there are a lot of good folding 'bents out there but most of those are designed to fit in the back of a car or into a case for air travel and many of them work great for that. I'm referring to a true folder that can be used just like any folding upright. The recumbent industry has never produced something that you can easily fold up

in less than 30 seconds and take into work or into a coffee shop with you. That may have just changed. Azub is the latest company to take a shot at completing this impossible quest and their new bike, the Origami, is the closest I've seen yet.

The Origami's general lay-out and steering geometry are all based on Azub's dual 20" Eco model. That's a very good start. The Eco has been widely praised for its excellent handling. To create this new bike, Azub cracked open the CAD file for the Eco and added a folding mechanism that can only be described as amazing.

In less than 30 seconds (probably more like 20 once you get used to it) the Origami folds into very small, easy to handle and self-contained package. The best part is that the entire process happens while the bike is sitting on a secure two-legged center stand. There's no lifting or grunting involved. The whole thing locks together with a couple of large straps when folded and the seat even stays on.

The final package is shockingly devoid of sharp pointy bits and fairly easy to maneuver around. It's obviously not as small as a Brompton or a Dahon but I've seen folding uprights with 26" wheels that folded into a similar size. My test bike was a bit heavy to routinely carry in and out of the house after every ride but that's partly my fault for ordering so many options. A stripped down 9-speed version wouldn't be much of a chore at all. If you want to travel with the bike or store it long term, there's a very nice bag available but you'll have to remove the seat to use it.

One feature that Azub doesn't really mention is that you'll often find storing the bike doesn't require any folding at all. With its very narrow handlebars and the center stand that allows it to sit completely upright, just pushing it against a wall is sometimes the better option. It's so flat that it really doesn't take up much room at all. When storing it in my dining room, I actually found that leaving it unfolded and flat against the wall took up much less room.

One of my favorite things about Azub is that you can order their bikes and trikes in almost any color you can think of. I ordered the Origami in beige for two reasons. First of all, Azubs come with a sort of matte finish. The military taught me that dirty flat beige looks just the same as clean flat beige. Secondly, where else can you order a beige bike? The finish and welds all looked great with the exception of one spot on the folding joint where some after-paint grinding obviously took place. The bike's many quick releases were all red-anodized, CNC-machined pieces of art. Azub's quick-releases are hands down the best I've seen as an OEM recumbent item.

Azub takes a lot of pride in how many different options there are for their bikes. They wanted to show that off a bit. Therefore, they told me I could order the Origami with any parts that I wanted. I complied. My basic goal was to outfit the Origami as the ultimate commuter recumbent, since that's one of its main design goals.

With the urban commuter theme in mind, my test bike received a Shimano Alfine 11 internally-gearred rear hub and a Schmidt SON Delux dynamo hub matched up with a Schmidt Edolux headlight and Busch Muller Toplight Flat Plus rear light. The Origami came with a Shimano Alfine cranksset and Tektro disc brakes. I asked for Schwalbe Big Apples because I expected the bike to be a bit of a rough ride, but they were out of stock at the time so I went with standard Schwalbe Marathon Racers. I went with the standard Tektro v-brakes and fenders. An Origami can weigh as little as 34 pounds, but with all the options, my tester was a touch over 42 pounds.

All of the parts performed very well. I'll be covering the Alfine 11 and the SON hub in other reviews, but I'll say that I think both of these parts fit the Origami's personality exceedingly well. This is especially true for the Alfine 11. I didn't specify cog sizes when I ordered the Azub and it came with a combo that yielded a range of 29-120 gear inches. It works perfectly fine for the relatively flat city that I live in but you can specify ranges as low as 17-90 inches if you want. It takes awhile for most internally geared hubs to break in and the Alfine 11 is no exception. Once I had a couple hundred miles on it, the Alfine really came to life. The shifting is, I feel, more smooth than the Rohloff and it costs less than half as much. It's also very nice to not worry about tweaking a derailleur while folding or packing the bike.

As I expected from riding the Eco, the Origami was a fun ride. The handling is shockingly stable for a short wheelbase and the performance was quite good once the Alfine hub got broken in. A dual 20" recumbent that weighs 42 pounds is never going to be a speed demon, but it wasn't bad. It was faster than any of the trikes I have around at the moment and just a bit slower than the Bacchetta Giro 20 I recently reviewed. The very stiff frame and fiberglass seat obviously help a lot when sprinting and climbing and I think that performance will improve even a bit more once the Alfine hub is completely broken in.

However, one area where the stiff frame and hardshell seat don't help is in improving the ride quality. The Origami can be a very bumpy ride with the Marathon Racers and thin Ventisit cushion. I put on a pair of Big Apples and a three-inch-thick seat pad I had lying around and it was much better. Still stiff but quite tolerable in most conditions.

The Origami's seat and handlebars are highly adjustable in almost every axis. However, the seat and bars pictured are the only options. You cannot get a mesh seat or wider handlebars because both would interfere with the folding action. I'm fairly used to European bikes and the narrow bars didn't bother me at all, but if you're a fan of wider "tweener" style bars or can't stand hardshell seats, you're out of luck.

As I mentioned above, the Origami (and all Azubs) are available with a dizzying array of options. Some of my favorites are their bags. I ordered the underseat "Eco bag" and the self-explanatorily-titled "Boom Bag." Azub's bag quality has come a long way over the last two or three years. This current generation is very well made. The Eco Bag has an easily accessible water bottle pocket and map holder that you can comfortably remove and replace while in motion. It also attaches to the seat with a few clips and one velcro strap. You have to remove it to fold the bike but it only takes a couple seconds.

The Eco Bag is not your only option for hauling gear. The Origami also has a very nice and very useful integrated rack that's perfect for two smallish panniers.

So the final question is this... Did Azub find the Holy Grail? Is this the "true folder" we've been looking for? The recumbent equivalent of a Brompton? Yes and no. It does fold and unfold quickly and easily enough to do it multiple times a day, but it's nowhere near as fast as most small upright folders. The final package isn't as small as a mainstream folding bike either, but achieving that with a recumbent is just about impossible. The weight is a bit of an obstacle when carrying the bike in and out of buildings but I'd hardly call it a deal breaker.

The best praise I can give the Origami is this... I've owned two Brompton folders. These are largely considered the gold standard of the folding bike world. I've found that the Origami is capable of about 90% of the tasks I performed on the Brompton. It's heavier and more cumbersome and takes a bit longer to fold, but the additional comfort I experience while actually riding the thing, more than make up for the additional hassle. I've never been able to say that about a folding recumbent before

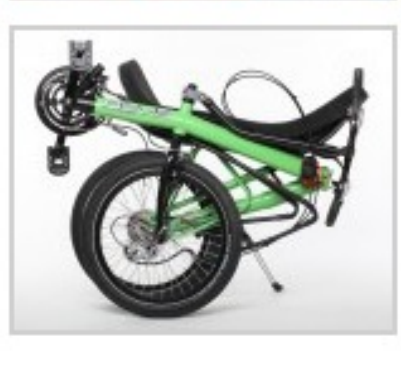
AZUB ORIGAMI

Highs - Amazing fold, Great handling, Good quality

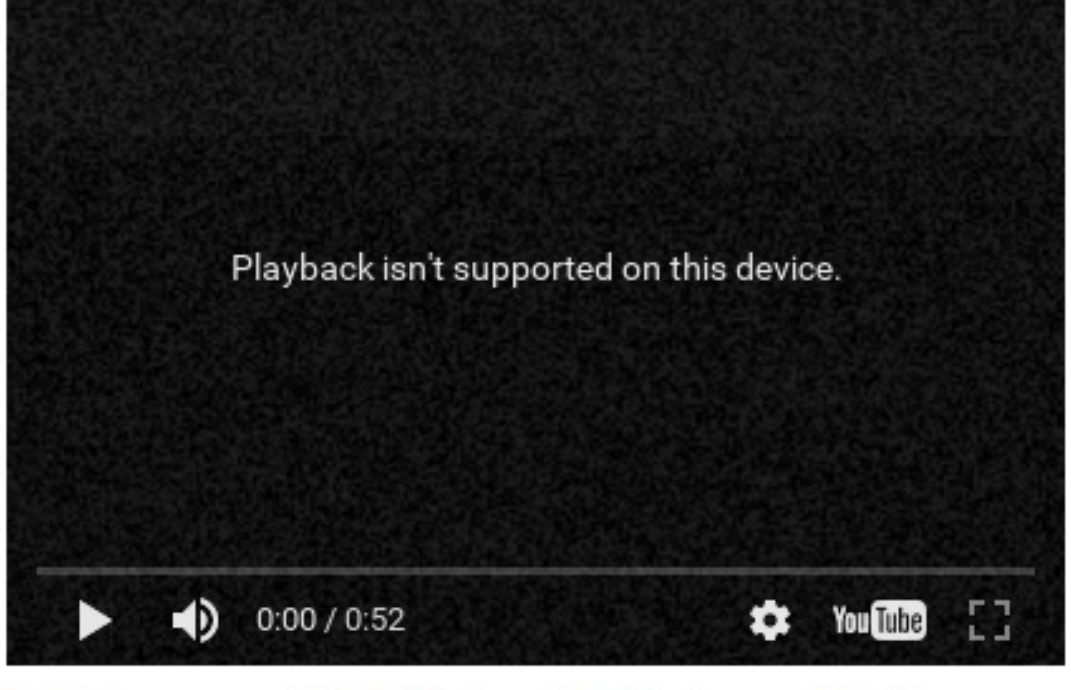
Lows - Rough ride

MSRP - Starting at \$2150, Approximately \$3100 as tested

More Info - http://www.azub.eu



Folding recumbent bike AZUB ORIGAMI



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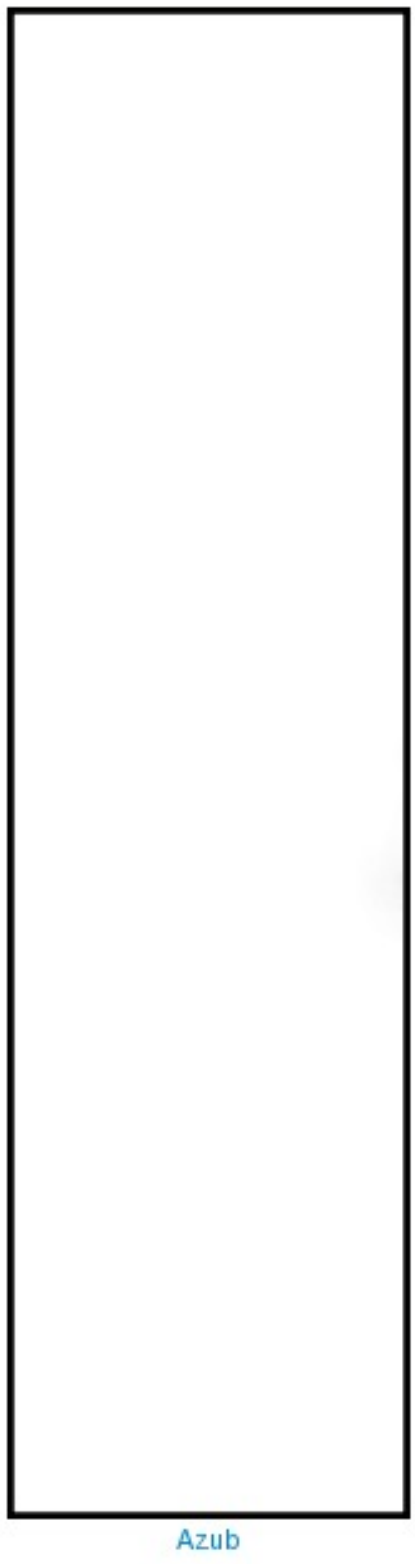
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