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HEALTH

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GEAR

Two for the road doubles the fun

It's easy to simply call a tandem bike the great equalizer, but it's more than that. Because it allows two people of different ages, abilities and fitness to work out together, a tandem becomes the great bender, letting them converse and share the adventure in an immediate, personal and fun way that is nearly impossible in any other fitness activity. Because it maintains the same aerodynamic face of a single bike while adding a second "engine," a tandem can also be the great speedster, routinely outpacing soloists. New designs, such as those reviewed below, bring the fast fitness and pure joy of tandeming to kids, disabled people and the budget- and space-challenged.

— ROY M. WALLACK



Specialty specs

Buddy Bike: Unique design in which the "stoker" (traditional rear rider) sits up front, ahead of the "captain."

Likes: Easy conversation and intimacy between the riders. The extra-long handlebar allows the captain to envelope the stoker. "There is no alternative when you have a kid who needs significantly more supervision," says company owner Barry Nelson, who has an autistic child. My 10-year-old son enjoyed the intimacy.

Dislikes: Not a performance bike. Low-speed, seven-gear transmission. The design has flaws: The rear seat post is more vertical than a normal bike and the front pedals are too far back, so the seats are crowded too close together, causing the captain to ride with knees splayed out to avoid hitting the stoker's back. My son was irritated by my knees poking his ribs. Nelson says you get used to riding knees-out.

Price: \$1,295 (\$998 with disability discount). (305) 932-2000; www.buddybike.com.