

LimeBike – great concept, bike not so wonderful

By Kathryn Reed

Gears. Oh, my, I will never take them for granted on my bikes ever again.

Sunday's tiny excursion through South Lake Tahoe on a LimeBike proved a few things: a) I might be in worse shape than I want to admit, b) the town is not as flat as I think it is, and c) a heavy bike cruiser is not meant for a mountain environment.

I love the concept of LimeBike; love the whole shared economy. I don't mind the color. It's fun. I'm totally good with not having docking stations. It adds to the flexibility of the whole rental.

Does the system need some tweaking? Of course. Every business needs to make adjustments, especially when first starting out.

Two us started from different locations with the goal of meeting up and riding to lunch on Aug. 27. Sue had looked the night before to see where a LimeBike was located (it's all done through an app) and there was one on 13th Street. By the next morning it was gone. She walked about 15 minutes to Burger Lounge for the next one. It wasn't locked. She rode for free the whole day.

"I began to have guilty feelings, thinking someone would come out of the restaurant without their transportation. This is my ethical dilemma with the LimeBike program. It's like stealing someone's horse in the Old West," she said.

In reality, there is a big difference. She would have been shot dead for stealing a horse. LimeBike's, well, they are meant to be shared. No stealing possible. No reserving either.



LikeBikes are cheap transport, but it's a bit of a workout. Photo/LTN

People are known to not lock them when they stop. In part this is to thwart someone from taking it. For those on a free ride it means having the bike that much longer without paying.

I thought I was going to have it easy getting my bike. There has been a LikeBike on my street for at least week. When I went to unlock it it said it was out of service for maintenance. A neighbor came out. He said he called LimeBike to come move it. He said they had no record of it being on this street near the Y.

There is a GPS system in the bikes, which is how the owners know where they are and how people can find them via the app.

This meant I had to start walking. The closest was at Grocery Outlet. But that one didn't unlock either. I tried moving it and a recording said something about the police would be called if it's moved without unlocking it. I moved on without the bike.

Next one was on Bertha. It was at a residence. The guy poked his head over the fence. He was fine that I wanted to take the LimeBike away.

He's hoping the next incarnation of the bikes have gears and a better steering mechanism. Sue echoed those sentiments.

"For one thing, I wished I had my Allen wrench to fix the crooked handlebars," she said.

I was whining about the little things. I had actually looked forward to having the front basket for my phone, camera and notebook. Didn't work. All could slide out.

We both thought the seats were uncomfortable after a couple miles. Riding on our crappy roads on a LimeBike was worse than being on my 20-year-old mountain bike. There's no give on these LimeBike's. The cracks on the roads are jarring; not sure if I should send my massage bill to the city or LimeBike. (Just kidding of course.)

Sue had issues with the handlebars to the extent she felt awkward, saying her elbows were bent the whole time. I didn't have the same issue. I liked that the grips were flat. Way more comfortable than my bikes.

At the end of the ride LimeBike shows you a map of your route, how many miles you went, the carbon you saved, and calories burned. I'm too embarrassed to share the mileage. Suffice it to say we sweated more than we would have on our own bikes.

"Having no gears could be problematic as I felt the hard pedaling associated with having one gear was the equivalent to an hour's workout at the gym," Sue said.

Mostly we were on city streets or bike paths.

"I also appreciated having tires that could ride over dirt since I took the Washington-Dunlap street cutoff," Sue said.

The tires are tubeless, so no need to worry about getting a flat. But it does make the bike heavier.

LimeBikes are here through September on a trial basis. I'm not sure they are ideal for tourists unaccustomed to this elevation. Gears are a beautiful thing and these bikes don't have any. There is no way I would recommend them to guests. I'd send them to a local bike shop with a better bike – the cost would be worth it. Locals who have a bike probably aren't going to get on one unless they are writing about the experience. What I can see is locals who don't have a bike and need to get from point A to point B faster than walking would use them. It would be great for errands, going to class, that sort of thing.

The concept is great, it's the bike itself that leaves a lot to be desired.