



## Rockin' and Rohlin'. A Year with the Rohloff Speedhub 500/14.

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REVIEWS

I have loved gravel riding ever since I was a kid. Growing up on several hundred acres of family land and having a family that operated sawmills and logging companies gave me access to a lot of unpaved goodness. Back then, it didn't matter if I was on a BMX fixed gear bike or a Sears 10 speed, I had a gravel-grinder. Fast forward more than a few years, and I was still riding gravel on what I had available which was my fully sprung mountain bike or cross bikes borrowed from friends. That all changed when I committed to riding the 2014 Trans Iowa. After registering, I knew I needed a more appropriate and dedicated gravel rig.

With Trans Iowa in mind, I wanted my bike to be robust. Comfort was stressed over low weight, and reliability trumped speed. No matter your conditioning, a mechanical at 320 miles into T.I. is still a DNF. After first reading about the Rohloff Speedhub 500/14, that soon became the most difficult decision of the build. I spent well over a month researching everything I could find on these hubs and agonizing over what could potentially be a quite costly mistake.



Cost was not the only concern. I was also reluctant to commit to something that is heavier than a standard drivetrain. In addition, I was apprehensive the gear range would not be enough for my local gravel routes which heavily feature short but steep ascents, and I worried about trusting a piece of equipment that pretty much guarantees it's game over should it fail on course.

The weight penalty (claimed by various sources to be between 1 and 2 lbs) was something I was comfortable with. In addition, the proven reliability of the Rohloff and the fact that it is pretty much impervious to mud and the elements convinced me to build the bike with a Gates Carbon belt and Rohloff Speedhub.

I have now put about a year, and several thousands of miles, on the hub. It has proven to be a great investment. It has been bulletproof and incredibly low maintenance. Combined with a Gates belt, it is the perfect bike for taking out when the weather and roads are really nasty. What would be a 45 minute clean-up on a standard drivetrain requires only about 5 minutes with a water hose for this set-up. Concerns over destroyed derailleurs are a thing of the past.



My gravel rig is steel and I run fairly fat 2.1" 29er rubber. I also have a Dynamo front hub to power my lights. Weight is only a secondary concern, and the extra added by the Rohloff has not been noticeable for the most part. There are certain situations, such as lifting or hopping the bike, when I notice the extra weight on the rear. It also sometimes makes for a lighter front end when riding with a heavily-loaded seat pack. In addition, the cables and shifter for the hub can sometimes prevent usage of a handlebar bag or roll especially if the shifter is mounted on the top of the bars as is more common. This can make getting a nice weight distribution when bikepacking difficult.

The gear range covered by the 14 speed hub is really quite amazing. I have lows that can get me up long Rocky Mountain ascents with a heavy bikepacking load, and highs that let me fly on flats and descents when the bike is light. Running a 55/19 ring/sprocket combination gives me the equivalent of a 46/11 big gear and a super-low 26/32. The even spacing of the gearing makes picking the right gear easy, and the lack of crossover gears means the Rohloff has as many distinct gears as a 27 speed standard mountain group. The fact that you can shift into any gear you want instantly means your gear selection is only limited by how far you can twist your wrist. Another quickly appreciated aspect of the Rohloff's shifting is the instant engagement when stopped. Any gear can be chosen while stopped and the Rohloff is engaged and ready when you start moving. The Rohloff does need a short stall in the pedal force while shifting. This is something you get used to very quickly, but can sometimes cause a loss in momentum on sprinter hills, especially if you choose the wrong gear on your first shift.



A perhaps underemphasized plus to this set-up is its quietness, especially in the higher range gears. There's nothing like the tranquility of cruising down a carless country road with the only sounds being your breathing and the gravel beneath your tires. Even in muddy conditions that would have other drivetrains squealing for mercy, the belt-driven Rohloff quietly propels you into happiness. I have sometimes gotten a very slight belt hiss after extended usage in dry, dusty conditions, but this is easily remedied with a light shot of silicon spray.

Based on my experience with the Rohloff so far, I am extremely happy with my decision. The hub has been extraordinary. The use of the Gates belt has elevated it even higher. The hub/belt combination scoffs at weather that would wreak havoc on chain/derailleur set-ups, it is extremely low-maintenance, offers a very impressive gear range, and the lack of chain means no greasy mess next time you need to change a tire. The Rohloff/Gates just might be the ultimate adventure bike drivetrain.