

Should I get an A. Homer Hilsen or a Sam Hillborne?

They're functionally identical. Good for the same things, great for the same things, workable for the same things. They take the same tires and fenders, and are designed to be functional clones; so if you're torn---as many people seem to be---that's understandable. The following is intended to help, but no guarantees.

Brake differences: The A. Homer Hilsen uses sidepulls or centerpulls; the Sam Hillborne uses cantilevers or V-brakes. If you feel strongly about what style brake your bike has, that should select the bike for you.

Each brake style listed is perfectly good for any of the riding either of the bikes is suited to. Generally, sidepulls are the winners-by-a-nose in the "ease of adjusting" category. V-brakes are the most powerful. But really, the diffs are minimal, and sane people like each style.

Artsy detail differences: The A. Homer wins this one, but the A. Homer would also beat the everloving pants off 98 percent of the bikes that cost three times as much; and as far as that goes, the Sam would cream lots of those bikes, too. But putting them in the ring together, the decision goes to the A. Homer Hilsen, based on front dropout treatment, slenderness of fork blades down low, fork bend, the double-tapered seat stays, paint fanciness and quality, and lug look, especially with the cream head tube. It costs twice as much, so some of this is to be expected.

Frame weight: Oh man....can we not talk about this? It's so freaking unimportant till the cows come home and help me Mr. Wizard. But people ask, so: The tube walls on the top and down tubes are roughly 0.1mm---a tenth of a millimeter!---less on the A. Homer Hilsen than on the Sam Hillborne.

Tubing country of origin: A. Homer: Japan or America; Sam Hillborne, Taiwan. All the tubes are excellent. The A. Homer's are heat-treated, Sam's are not. Heat-treating adds strength, but the Sam is already stronger – and safer – than most frames on the market.

Degree of precision in the finished frame: The Japanese- and American- built A. Homer Hilsen is built to tighter tolerances than is the Taiwan-built Sam. But they ride equally well hands-on or hands-off, and the differences are small.

Conclusion:

We are so enamored with the A. Homer Hilsen that we wanted to bring all of its excellence down to a price where more people could afford it. With all due respect to both frames and people in all tax categories, an A. Homer Hilsen for riders on a budget, riders who just no way are they going to pop for A. Homer, and for riders who (shame on them!) think the A. Homer is too fancy for daily commuting and general beater/roughhouse riding. The \$2,000 for a complete Sam is—well, it's still \$2,000—but when you look at how little \$2,000 gets you these days most places, it comes across as a super bargain. Half the buyers are people who can easily afford A. Homer, but can't pass up a bargain. The other half are honest budgeteers who are thrilled to get 100 percent of the A. Homer's function and comfort while saving \$1,000 to \$1,200.

If you can afford the A. Homer and know you won't get both, and don't want to look back in ten years wishing you'd bought the “better and fancier” frame, just do it. At \$2,000 for the frame and fork, there's nothing like it.

If half the price and all that function sounds good, and you know you'll never look back and say, “Dang, man...I shoulda saved up a little more...” then get the Sam.

