

→ THE 2017 BUYER'S GUIDE *Bicycling*

WHAT
BIKE
SHOULD
I BUY?

87
DEFINITIVE
ANSWERS
TO CYCLING'S
GREATEST
QUESTION

SEVEN
REDSKY
P.52

I WANT ONE BIKE THAT DOES IT ALL / CAN I GET A
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THAT STANDS OUT IN A CROWD / SHOULD I GET A
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MY COFFEE WHILE I RIDE / I NEED A MACHINE THAT
WILL MAKE ME A BETTER RAGER / I WANT A CLASSIC
STEEL BIKE / I NEED A BIKE THAT CAN GO EVERYWHERE

“I WANT TO RIDE TO WORK EVERY DAY.”

DO IT
ON THE
ELBY

All kinds of people all around me for several months rode the Elby. Every one of them loved the Elby. I love the Elby. I love it so much I like saying the words *the Elby*. Just saying the *Elby* makes me a happier person. I have extensive time on the Specialized Turbo, the Stromer, the Faraday Porteur, and other pedal-assist e-bikes, and the Elby is by far my favorite noncargo. [For my cargo pick, see page 32.]

Here's what is wonderful about the Elby:

① **The name.** The Elby.

② **The styling.** The Elby is the first e-bike that fully is what it is—it's not trying to look moto souped-up and hard-ass, doesn't masquerade as just an elegant bicycle by hiding the motor and battery in a traditional-looking frame, but also

doesn't awkwardly and visibly graft its battery and drive system onto a stock frame like some kind of goiter or parasitic abomination. By embodying its purpose—to help you ride around town comfortably, safely, and quickly—it achieves an admirable kind of coolness. ►

BI0417_STU_elby001
keep SM please



ELBY 9-SPEED
PRICE \$3,700
WEIGHT 57 LB [ONE SIZE]

3 **The handling.** Most likely as a result of its pure-purpose design, the Elby is snappy but secure in corners, stable at all speeds (neither floppy at low nor wobbly at high), good with heavy loads, and brakes smartly and predictably.

4 **The power system.** Its 500-watt BionX D-Series rear hub, handlebar control unit and display, and frame-integrated battery rival the Bosch Performance Line for torque, smooth power delivery, and range. (I routinely exceeded 50 miles on a charge when I carefully modulated between power levels.) Top speed is 20mph. An iOS and Android app monitors and controls setup, display, charging, navigation, and more.

5 **The details.** Superbright integrated LED lights front and back. A USB charging port. Hydraulic brakes (paired with a 9-speed SRAM drivetrain). The ability to legitimately fit riders, with seatpost and stem adjustments, from 5-foot-nothing to 6-foot-5. Foolproof kickstand. Integrated rear rack (and pannier mounts), and fenders.

6 **The throttle.** I initially was dismayed by the inclusion of a throttle, which lets you accelerate without pedaling. But I only really used it in one common scenario that made riding feel safer: to get back up to speed after stopping at intersections. And every noncyclist who tried the Elby said the throttle option gave them much more confidence for this reason, and made the idea of riding more appealing. The Elby can also ship with this feature disabled to states that don't allow e-bikes with throttles.

7 **The name.** The Elby. The Elby. Try it out yourself.—*Bill Strickland*

Random sampling of exultations, observations, and grudging admittances evoked by The Elby

“DUDE!”

—Spectators, watching BICYCLING designer Jimmy Cavaleri get air on the Elby after throttling it over a grass hill

“It looks like the coolest grandmother in the world!”

—Our good-old-boy local bike shop owner, somehow reaching a level of unprecedented eloquence and insight in summing up the Elby's style

“Bring it back home!”

—My wife, Beth, who grew dependent on the Elby to ride to work daily and more quickly grew resentful of the time it spent in the BICYCLING office for additional testing and photo shoots for this issue

“YEEEEEEHAW WOOOOOWWWW YEAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!!!!!!!”

—Two dirtbag mountain-biker friends, sessioning the Elby (at the same time, one standing on the “down-tube” platform) during a party

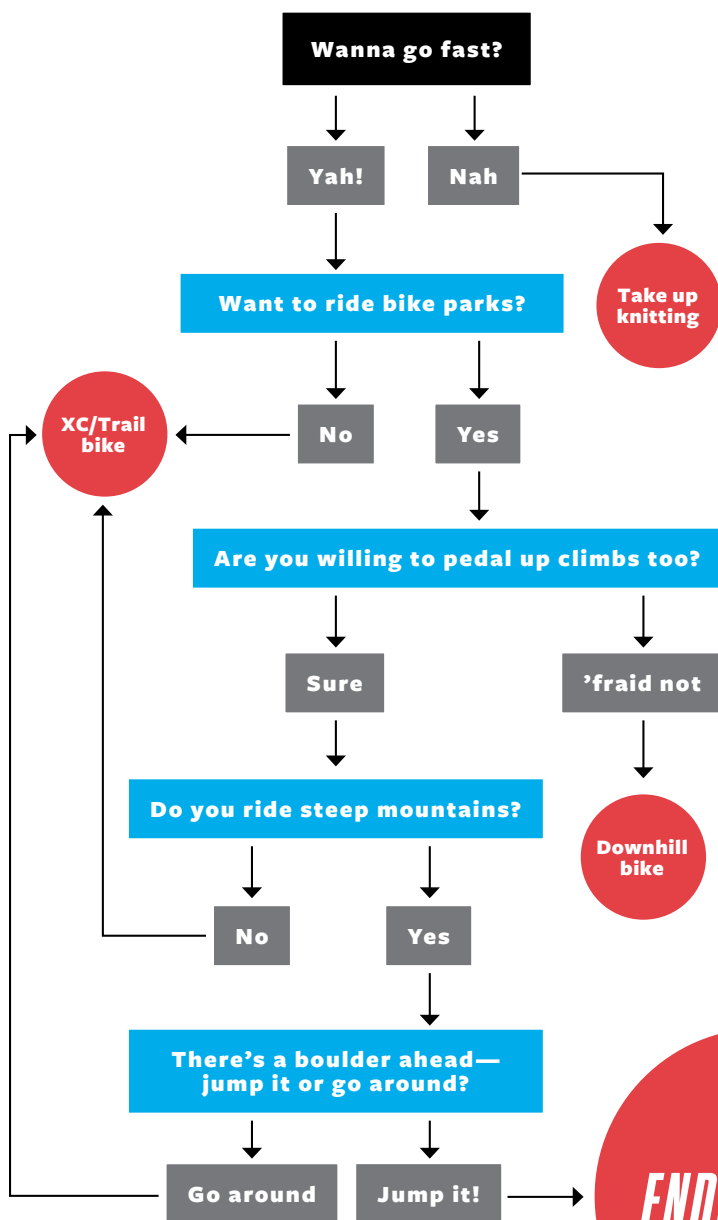
BI0417_STU_elby002

“YEAH, I DID. HUH? YEAH, I GUESS. WHAT- EVER. CAN YOU LEAVE ME ALONE NOW?”

—My 18-year-old daughter, who decided at about age 13 on a cunning and effectively hurtful rebellion and stopped riding bicycles, and who has resisted all my efforts to trick or cajole her into riding with me, and who goaded me into a screaming argument in our driveway when I tried to get her to use the Elby so she could get to her summer job in town, and who later, on her own, when she not me decided she wanted to, tried the Elby and despite this verbal confession that must have felt like a length of chain getting dragged out of her throat, loved the Elby and rode it all summer

“SHOULD I GET AN ENDURO BIKE?”

Time for some serious self-reflection.



Did you find
enduro in your soul?
Check out the
**Pivot Firebird
Pro XT/XTR 1x.**





A NOTE ON HANDLING

A bike this long and slack takes a slightly different handling style than a trail bike. Instead of turning through a corner with the front end, you initiate a turn with a flick of the bar, then countersteer as the bike drifts through—you're pretty much steering with the rear end at times. The Firebird's geometry works particularly well in supersteep turns with a ledge in the middle, where you're falling into them as much as riding through.

BI0417_STU_Pivot001

ONE OF THE MOST abused enduro bike clichés is, “It climbs like a cross-country bike and descends like a downhill bike.” From the standpoints of geometry, weight, and rolling resistance, that probably won’t ever happen—but Pivot’s completely redesigned carbon Firebird gets us closer to that grail than any bike I’ve ever ridden.

Good enduro bikes control chaos: A rough section of trail with rocks and drops, taken at a speed that’s just barely rideable for me on a trail bike, is right where the

Firebird really starts performing. Credit goes to its extra travel, amazingly controlled Fox X2 shock, relaxed 65-degree head angle, and a front-center (distance from bottom bracket to front hub) that’s longer than that of some enduro models a whole size larger.

While it’s no XC bike, at 29.6 pounds the Firebird is very light for a 170mm-travel bike, and that’s with Pivot’s mixed XT/XTR 1x build—higher-end builds would be lighter. (I did go for the Reynolds carbon wheel upgrade.) The bike’s

DW-link suspension, and its built-in anti-squat properties, keeps pedaling crisp enough to embarrass a lot of trail bikes, with or without the Fox Float X2 shock’s climb switch engaged. I even cleaned a loose, steep, and technical climb that I’d previously been able to scale only on a bike with 2.8-inch-wide plus tires. A steep, 74-degree seat angle keeps the rider centered over the bike on climbs, making even near-vertical inclines way easier than you’d imagine for such a big bike.

If your idea of the perfect ride involves charging down trails that would be a challenge to even walk, and pedaling to the top of a mountain to access them, you’d have a tough time finding a better tool for the job.—*Ron Koch*

PRICE \$7,399
(AS TESTED, WITH
\$1,300 CARBON
WHEEL UPGRADE)
WEIGHT 29.6 LB [L]

DO YOU OFTEN RIDE SMOOTHER TRAILS? Perhaps consider a different bike, or also buying a different everyday trail bike. Although the Firebird feels more crisp and playful than most enduro bikes in this terrain, it’s still not as fun as a shorter-travel trail bike. It takes extra effort to corner, removes most of the challenge from moderately rocky sections (it just mows right over them), and resists catching air off little kickers—it wants to stick to the ground.

“SHOULD I GET CARBON OR ALUMINUM?”

IT DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU SEE IN THE INKBLOT.

ORIGINALLY—STARTING IN the 1990s—this was a question of ride quality. Though a frame made of any material can be engineered and outfitted with wheels and components to dial in ride feel, in general aluminum bikes were light but bony, steel was resilient but heavy, titanium was a great compromise between the two, and, eventually, carbon was the lightest but tended to feel dead and give less feedback.

Next—starting in the 2000s—it became primarily a question of cost. We used to advise people to go for aluminum below X dollars if they wanted what we call an “enthusiast” road bike—one that is lively and durable enough to see you through years of weekend jaunts, multiday charity rides, fondo-type challenges, or novice-level competition. The higher cost of producing a good carbon frame meant that on similarly priced bikes below that sweet spot, either the metal version would have far superior parts, or the carbon frame had to be produced so cheaply that it would be a dud. (Or both.) But X kept dropping, so that even in the lower range of the enthusiast sweet spot—\$2,000 to \$3,000—I now equally recommend bikes like the carbon Giant Defy Advanced 1 and aluminum Trek Émonda ALR 6 Pro.

ALTERNATIVES



GIANT DEFY ADVANCED 1 \$2,375
The Defy has won BICYCLING’s Editors’ Choice award multiple times. This model has a carbon frame, mix of Shimano Ultegra/105, and a ride as dialed as bikes twice its price.



TREK ÉMONDA ALR 6 PRO \$2,500
One of the lightest and most tuned aluminum frames available, and a full Shimano Ultegra drivetrain complemented with Bontrager components and tires? Bring it on, world!

BUT BELOW \$1,000? IT'S DEFINITELY ALUMINUM

Check out our review of the \$810 Giant Contend 1 (p. 50) to find out why.



BI0417_STU_low001

LOW MKI ROAD CAT1
PRICE \$6,100, AS TESTED
WEIGHT 16.6 LB (54CM)

Today, the decision to ride aluminum outside of the lowest enthusiast levels has become a Rorschach revelation about attitude, thanks to a resurgence of handmade-in-America aluminum frames, primarily driven by people who raced on it earlier in their lives and want to revive something raw, visceral, and vicious about the way those bikes rode. That's not to say these bikes are designed to beat you to death. They're designed to let you do the beating—and be awash in every punch and counterpunch, every sensation of force and every drop of sweat and blood that flows from the action. These are for outlier badasses (and those who just want to feel that way in their riding life) who respect cycling but think more of Muhammad Ali than Chris Froome.

The Low mki road is a prime example of this breed. Handmade in San Francisco by a two-person team led by founder Andrew Low, the custom-shaped and tuned 7005 frame rides just how it looks—bold and blistering-fast in handling and acceleration, brash without being reckless (it tempts you into speeds and lines and quick-cut moves at the edge of your abilities), yet somehow, through it all, classy. If you made a buddy movie with this bike, it would be the wisecracking and coolly expert-at-everything lead, to your role as the one with more heart who learns more by the end. I'm a big fan of these bikes in general, and the Low in particular. They're not just preserving but reviving and even amplifying a particular kind of road bike riding that's too wildly and savagely delicious to lose.—*Bill Strickland*



4 MODERN ALUMINUM BIKES THAT MAKE THE CUT

MERKUR SAFETY RAZOR

STOEMPER DARRELL

Compliant and controlled enough that I rode it the full length of Paris-Roubaix and kept my teeth for the picture at the end.

VYNL ROAD

Of these four, maybe the most equidistant between the states of busting chops and busting your ass.

LOW MKI ROAD

Slightly edgier than the VYNL—which also means not quite as compliant.

GAULZETTI CORSA

That friend who never starts a bar fight but always seems to get in one, but who always has your back in anything in life and also makes scars look hot at a black-tie cocktail party? This bike.

THIERS-ISSARD STRAIGHT RAZOR

“WHERE DO I WANT TO RIDE? DUH, EVERYWHERE.”

Good attitude. The Focus Paralane Ultegra feels the same.

W

WHEN I IMAGINE the bikes that answer this question—and the riders who ask it—I think of one of my favorite road rides here in Boulder, Colorado. It is one that not just any road bike can handle. On some, the gearing isn’t suited for the steeps that push total elevation gain to almost 5,000 feet. On others, lightweight tires will not make it through the sections of sandy wash studded with rocks and ruts. On still others, the overly stiff frame will leave your back and neck aching with every jolt of a pothole or washboarded corner. On the far right, see how the Focus Paralane crushes this benchmark ride, exemplifying why it’s the type of bike best suited for riding everywhere.—*Joe Lindsey*

ALTERNATIVES

WANT SOMETHING LIKE THIS, BUT...



BI0417_STU_Focuso002

Moots Roult RSL \$5,519, frameset
The new Roult RSL is technically a gravel bike that fits up to 38mm tires, but it is still light and spirited on pavement thanks to a near road-like geometry and stout titanium tubes.



BI0417_STU_Focuso003

Specialized Roubaix Comp \$3,400
Like the Paralane, the Roubaix has a similarly low bottom bracket and clearance for up to 32mm tires. But it also sports the Future Shock front suspension system, with 20mm of travel. See how the two bikes compare on page 86.



BI0417_STU_Focuso001

CYA
YEP, THOSE
FENDERS COME
WITH THE BIKE.
YOU CAN FIT
32MM TIRES
WITH FENDERS,
35MM WITHOUT.

PRICE
\$3,500
WEIGHT
18.1 LB
[54CM]



PAVED CLIMBS The route starts with a 2,000-foot climb up Flagstaff Mountain. With more than half the climbing coming after Flag, I spin instead of charging around every switchback. It’s easy to meter my effort with the 34x32 low gear on the Shimano Ultegra drivetrain.



DIRT ROADS The pavement ends, and the graded dirt gradually narrows to a primitive fire-access cut. I climb past ravines choked with grass and willow, stony outcrops and glades of pine and fir. Hands on the hoods, I float as best as possible across exposed, bony rock sections, with brief taps of the Shimano R685 hydraulic disc brakes to set up line choice. The slightly longer fork flexes just a bit to take the edge off. I power through sandy washes with my best high-cadence cyclocross technique.



BAD ROADS I emerge on Magnolia Drive, a rolling, pocked dirt road. The agile Paralane dodges the worst potholes with tiny nudges on the handlebar. Washboard corners are a muted rumble rather than a jackhammer roar. As compliant as the Paralane is, I’ll admit, I’m happy for the smoothness of pavement again on the downhill.



TECHY DESCENTS Magnolia is one of the steepest paved roads in the area, with sharp, cambered switchbacks. The Paralane’s lower bottom bracket makes the bike a descending fiend. I arc through corners, with a quick touch of the brakes to scrub just enough speed. The wide tires hiss in the apex, then there’s almost a pop-like rebound as I accelerate into the straightaways. I’m slicing the road now, diving back and forth from fog line to almost the center line.



LONG FLATS When I emerge in the canyon, 2,000 feet lower, there’s a hint of brake smoke in the air—from the car I almost caught. I hop onto a crushed-gravel path back to town. So late on this ride, you don’t have energy to squander pushing an inefficient bike. The carbon frame is stiff under power, and the 28mm tires accelerate with no discernible efficiency gap to narrower rubber.

“I WANT TO TAKE MY RACING TO THE NEXT LEVEL.”

ON THE MOUNTAIN

GET THE NORCO REVOLVER 9.1 FS. Here's how it checks the boxes for all the characteristics you want in your next XC race bike.

■ **Light.** With its full carbon frame and lightweight components, a size small weighs just 23.8 pounds.

■ **Efficient.** The frame is optimized for efficiency. The down and seat tubes flare as they approach the bottom bracket for stiffness, and Norco employs size-scaled tubing to match frame stiffness to rider size. A Horst link suspension design provides a firm pedaling platform, even when you're out of the saddle hammering up a rise. The low-profile 2.2-inch Maxxis Ikon tires spin up quickly.

■ **Quick but balanced handling.** The Revolver is designed to be pushed hard through the twists and turns of an XC race-course. Its 70.3-degree head angle (size small) is in line with peers, balancing speedy response to stability, and the chainstays on the size small are a shortish 437mm. But the Revolver has a relatively long reach for an XC bike, paired to a shorter stem and wider bar for its category, so body

positioning and steering feel more stable and akin to a trail bike than a typical XC model. In corners and when picking through rock gardens, the bike feels small and agile, making it easy, for example, to smoothly negotiate a downhill rooted switchback that challenges even some 27.5-inch trail bikes; and to switch directions going flat-out in a corner.

■ **Full-suspension.** The Revolver features 100mm of front and rear wheel travel.

■ **Control.** The bike manages rougher descents better than expected for an XC bike, perhaps helped in part by the trail-bike cockpit. An actual trail bike would be more fun on this terrain, but I still enjoyed riding the Revolver on rocky, technical trails. The suspension characteristics and the big wheels give it a surprisingly goat-like personality on steppy uphills.

■ **Great parts.** The 1x12 SRAM X01 Eagle drivetrain lets you power through flats and spin up grunty inclines. The RockShox SID RLC XC race fork is light and stiff, and SRAM's Level TLM brakes stop cleanly and quietly.—*Gloria Liu*



Norco Revolver 9.1 FS
PRICE \$5,000
WEIGHT 23.8 LB [S]

Felt FR2W
PRICE \$4,999
WEIGHT 15.9 LB [47CM]

BI0417_STU_FletNorco001

ON THE ROAD

THE FELT FR2W has the kit you'll need to cat up.

■ **Light carbon frame.** The women's FR2W features the same geometry and layout as Felt's unisex FR2, but goes up to only a size 54cm frame. If you need a larger size, the similarly equipped FR2 comes in at the same price, albeit without touchpoints (saddle and handlebar) adjusted to better fit female riders.

■ **Electronic shifting.** The Ultegra Di2 drivetrain will help you eliminate misshifting from your list of things that can go wrong during a race.

■ **Power meter.** This build comes stock with a single-leg Pioneer power meter,

which would set you back \$560 if you purchased it separately. Pioneer will upgrade the bike to a dual-sided system for \$580.

■ **Race-ready gearing.** A midcompact (52/36) crankset and 11-28 cassette allow you to spin up a hill, but also give you enough muscle to crank out the watts and win a sprint.

■ **Training wheels.** The alloy Fulcrum Racing 5 wheelset is great for training, but as with most bikes at this price you'll want to buy a lighter set for racing. Swapping in my Zipp 303s made the bike ride with more snap, and I set a PR on a local climb that I'd been going after for more than a year.—*Elsbeth Huyett*

EASY THERE!

It may take a couple of seasons to get to the level you want, so buy a race bike that you love to ride—don't sacrifice too much comfort for performance.

ALTERNATIVE



Want nicer wheels?

The alloy DT Swiss X1700 Spline Twos on the Revolver 9.1 FS have a skinnier 22.5mm internal width. If you want to upgrade with modern wider rims, and don't mind sacrificing a bit of range in your gearing, the Revolver also offers a light, full carbon frame. But instead of the 1x12 X01 Eagle drivetrain on the Revolver, the Top Fuel mixes SRAM X1/X01 parts for a 1x11 group and rolls on Bontrager's USA-made Kovee XC wheels with carbon rims, which feature a 29mm internal width.—*G.L.*

BI0417_STU_FletNorco002

“I WANT TO TAKE MORE RISKS.”

YOU’RE GOING TO SEND IT ON THIS 161MM-TRAVEL 29ER—WHETHER YOU’RE READY OR NOT.

I’M NOT A “go-for-it” guy. I prefer the predictable to the reckless. In a recent leadership-training evaluation, I was shown to have a cool, blue profile—cautious and calculating. I ride that way, too.

I stop and analyze lines, sometimes measuring the size of a jump by walking the distance heel to toe, then doing it again to get it right. For instance, there’s a tricky rock drop in the woods near my home that I’ve stood atop numerous times and then backed away after figuring that the rewards were not equal to the risk.

For some time, I’ve wanted a bike that would tip that balance in my favor—through extra travel, more stable geometry, smartly tuned suspension, or some other factor that would make going for it feel less risky. But I also wanted it to pedal efficiently enough to enjoy on flatter trails. Mostly, I tried ►



▼
EVIL THE WRECKONING
PRICE \$6,899 [WITH X01 EAGLE]
WEIGHT 30.2 LB [M]

► five- and six-inch-travel bikes with 27.5 wheels, because that is where most manufacturers have focused their designs.

So what was I to think of Evil's The Wreckoning, this 161mm-travel (6.3-inch) 29er with frame shapes and angles seemingly ripped off a downhill bike? When Gloria Liu, the BICYCLING editor captaining this issue, assigned me this bike to review, and in particular asked me to assess its ability to "get big air," I was skeptical. A 29er would make getting air harder, not easier, I said, citing a longer wheelbase and more wheel weight that'd be harder to get off the ground. Or so I believed. Just ride the damned bike, she told me.

Evil owner Kevin Walsh had a similar reaction when his design partner, Dave Weagle, suggested he make this bike's predecessor, The Following, a short-travel trail 29er. At the time, Walsh was not a 29er guy, either; he believed the wheel size better suited riders who emphasized fitness over fun. But Walsh is also a "go-for-it" guy who is less risk-averse than I am.

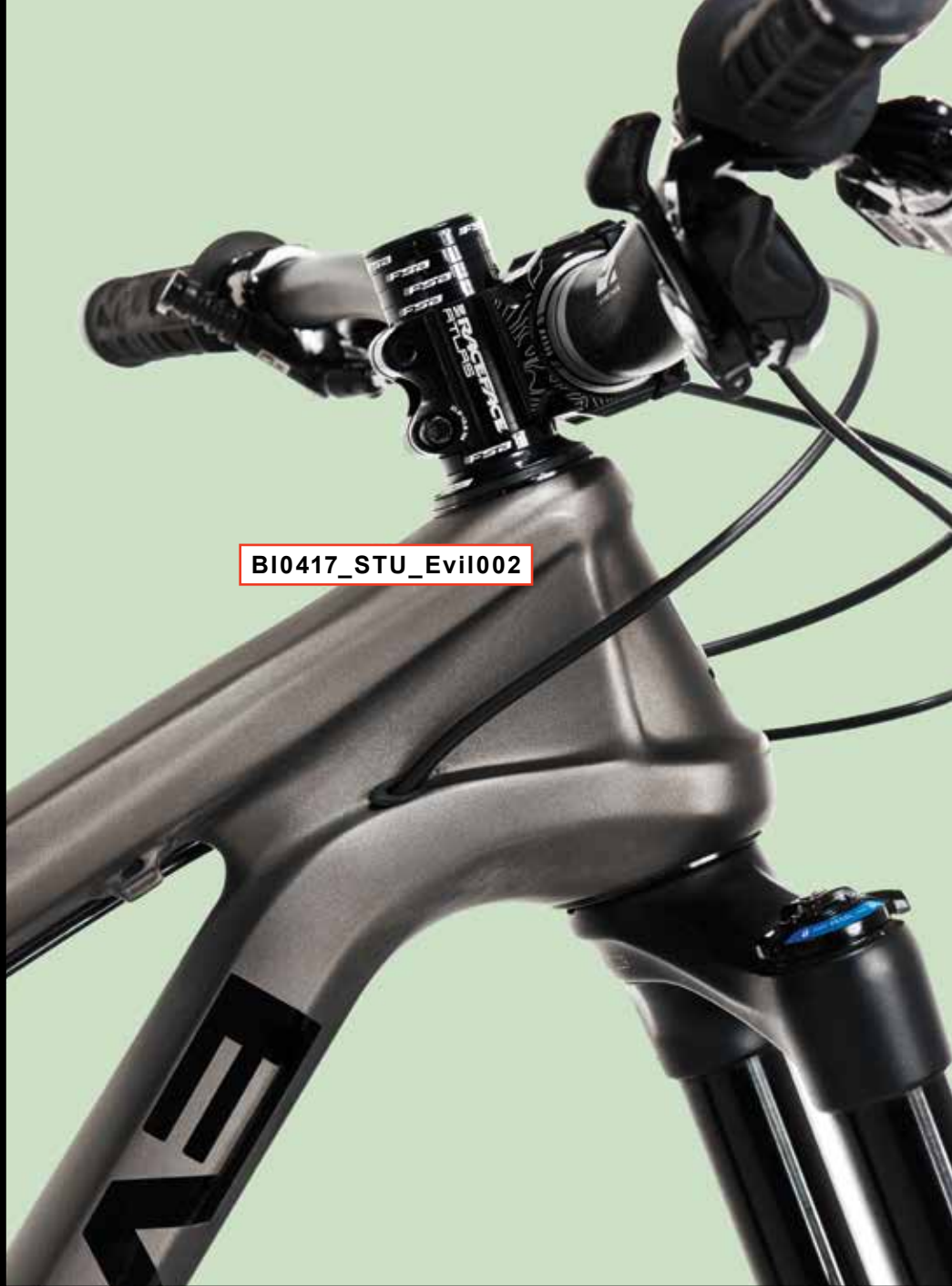
That's important, because he was just then beginning the difficult job of moving Evil's production to a new factory and rebuilding his small brand after years of manufacturing defects nearly sank it. The safe move would have been to develop a 27.5-inch bike with 150mm of travel because that's what potential customers were buying. Instead, Walsh green-lighted a radical 29er. The Following had only 120mm of travel but the slack angles of an enduro bike that made it feel more exciting and capable on rowdier trails.

"It only took one run to become a convert," Walsh said. "I told Weagle, 'Man, if we make a long-travel version of this, it will be insane.'"

About a year later, Evil brought forth The Wreckoning, which has the same suspension and design philosophy as The Following but with additional travel, which makes it good for enduro racing, park riding, and any ride that involves a bit of climbing to reach big descents. The bike's Delta suspension design allows users to choose two geometry settings (playfully: low and extra low) and in the low setting the chainstays (from

rear axle to bottom bracket center) measure just 16.93 inches. That's shorter than you'd find on many 27.5-inch bikes that have less travel. The head-tube angle is more relaxed than most bikes of this type—either 66.1 or 65.5 degrees. The 432mm reach on a size medium frame is long, but not so great that my hands felt like they were on another trail. There's a built-in chain guard, so the bike fits only 1x drivetrains.

The first rides illuminated a carbon frame that felt sturdy, with linkages that resisted bending thanks in part to extra-wide pivots. The 148mm wide hubs limited wheel flex, and I never felt any part of the bike wiggle. The extra traction provided by the 29ers and their larger-than-normal contact patch allowed the bike to easily roll over rocks and logs, reminding me of all of the reasons I initially fell for 29ers years ago. The low bottom ►



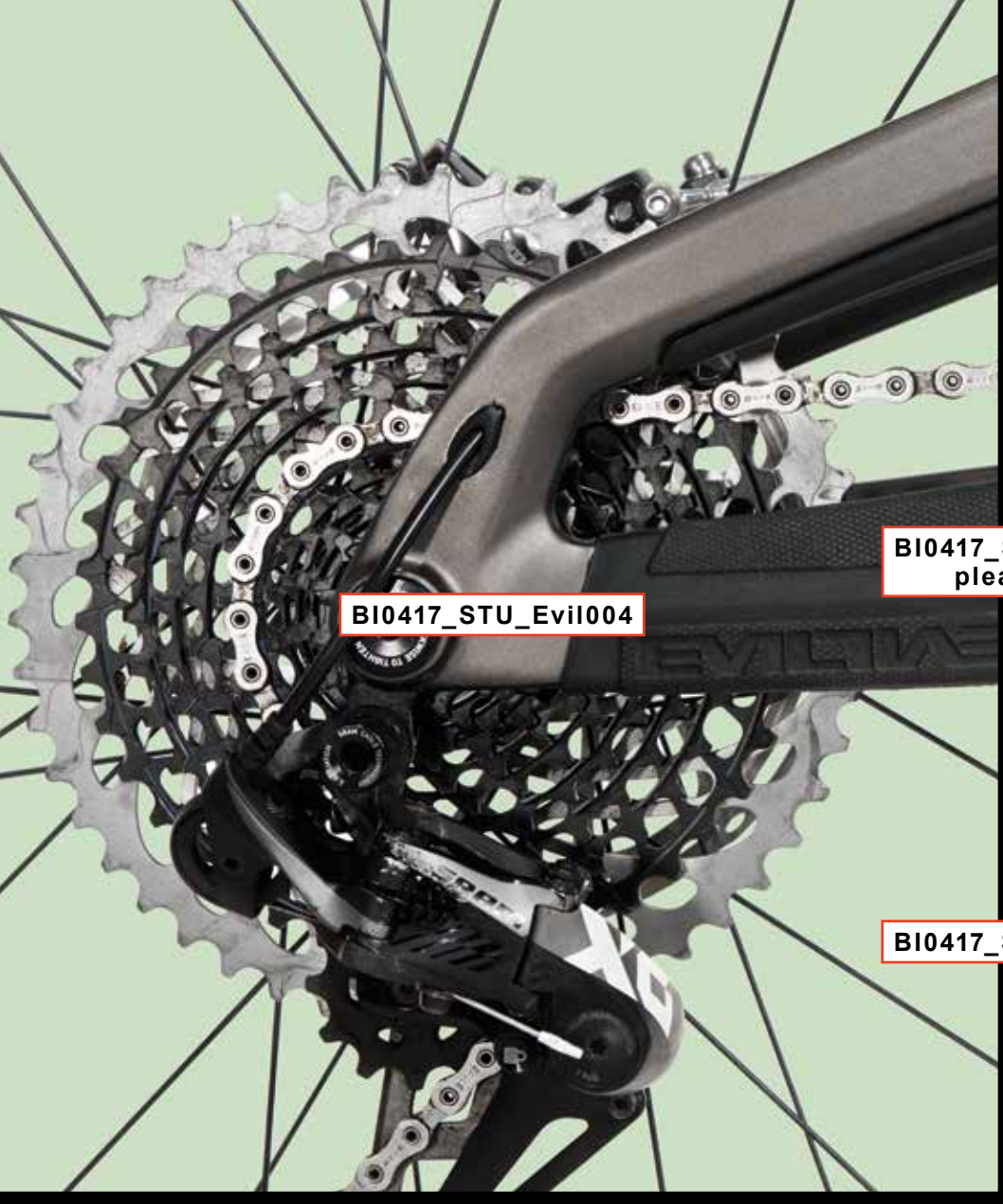
► bracket and longer top tube added assuring stability.

At one point, I dropped into a serpentine downhill that I know well. The Wreckoning floated across the chutes of rock that often slow me and generally felt smoother and faster than any other bike I've tried. In just my second ride, the bike had already shifted the speed at which I was riding, but not yet how I rode. The rock drop that always scared me was near the bottom of this trail and I sailed past it without stopping. It still felt too risky.

Still, I was enjoying the bike more with each run, particularly its Delta suspension, designed by Dave Weagle. The single-pivot design uses two links that dial in performance based on the forces applied. After a supple initial stroke, the system has more resistance through the middle of the shock's travel. With ample mid-stroke control, the Wreckoning was surprisingly easy to pop off lips and logs and toss around corners. This also made it more fun than I had expected it to be on smoother flow trails. On the hardest hits—like flat or rocky landings, or when I cased a jump—the suspension ramped up predictably to soften the blow without a jarring jolt. My early skepticism of the Wreckoning's "big-air" potential was coming undone; the bike was encouraging me to seek out jumps more than I usually do.

Despite the slack head angle and 30-pound weight, The Wreckoning also made it up hills pretty well, though not with the crispness of some others. The initial softness of the suspension made it feel slower on technical climbs or when trying to get back up to speed after braking or cornering. But on steeper ascents, the 50-tooth rear cog on the SRAM Eagle ►





BI0417_STU_Evil004

BI0417_STU_Evil005
please sillo

BI0417_STU_Evil006

BI0417_STU_Evil007

ALTERNATIVES

"WHOA. I DIDN'T MEAN I WANTED TO GO THAT HUGE." YEAH, THAT REALLY ESCALATED. HOW ABOUT ONE THESE?



The Little Brother
Evil The Following
\$6,599 (with X01 build kit)

Basically, the same bike as The Wreckoning but with slightly steeper angles and 120mm of travel. Buy it if you want to ride XC trails like you're on a DH bike.



For the Trail Rider
Specialized S-Works Enduro 29
\$8,500

The Big Red S deserves credit for pushing the idea of long-travel 29er earlier than most companies, and for sticking with it. Introduced in 2013, the Enduro 29 has slightly less travel and more nimble handling than the Wreckoning, making it better for trail riding.



The "Never 29er" Option
Transition Patrol Carbon 3
\$5,299

Like Evil, Transition is a rider owned company in the PNW. The Patrol is another bike that makes going big easier. But its smaller, 27.5-inch wheels don't have the monster truck feel of 29ers, and they can feel more maneuverable.

REVIEW ON P. 44

►drivetrain was helpful.

After a while, I avoided steep, sustained climbs and used paved or dirt roads to link together descents, where The Wreckoning rules. Just like on a downhill bike, I felt like I could plow over almost anything. I went faster, chose straighter lines, and none of it felt any riskier. That modest feeling of invincibility appealed to me. On my fourth or fifth ride, at a trail system where a popular enduro race is held, I hit a good-sized double with something like abandon.

After about a month of testing, I returned to that

serpentine trail with the rock drop. I was with a friend who is a more daring rider than I am. We agreed to stop and look at it carefully; by then, I was feeling confident on The Wreckoning and thought that if I watched him go first, I might hit it myself. As we made a sharp left corner and approached the drop, I saw that Rob wasn't going to stop. In a fraction of a second I had to decide: stop and recalculate or go for it. He flew off the drop, and so did I.

Because of the timing of my test, I didn't race The Wreckoning in an enduro or take it to a bike park. But this is the

bike I would choose for both. And on almost every ride, I thought of the big mountains to the West, in Colorado and Washington and British Columbia, where

lead to swoopy and jumpy descents. This is the bike I'd want there too. Kevin Walsh took a huge chance developing the Wreckoning, and by doing so created a category-defying bike that made going big seem less risky for this cautious rider. Just imagine what this lively, easy-handling, and—as it turns out—highly sendable 29er can do for everyone else.—Louis Mazzante

“I WANT A BIKE THAT WILL LAST ME 15 YEARS.”

That’s not easy to find. But the **Seven RedSky** has a good shot.

THERE WAS A TIME when bicycle technology was less complicated. Things like headsets and bottom brackets were simple pieces that could be moved from bike to bike. Today’s technology is impressive, but it’s evolving at a pace that can feel difficult to keep up with.

So what if you want a bike that will last? One that you will very likely be able to repair and maintain with little fuss, for its long life. Something that nonetheless comes in a modern configuration that won’t make you look like you are riding in from the turn of the century. And that (with a swap of wheels or tires) will do anything from club rides, to dirt and singletrack, or road races.

I know what kind of bike I’d choose. It would look similar to the Seven RedSky.

The RedSky is custom only and available in a steel model, a titanium/carbon version (ti lugs and carbon tubes), with three tubing options: straight gauge (S), double butted (SL), and what Seven calls ultra-buttet tubes (SLX) that differ in weight



BI0417_STU_seven001

PRICE
\$8,645 as tested
[\$6,450 complete,
plus \$2,195 for
custom paint]
WEIGHT
18.1 LB [S4CM]

ALTERNATIVE



LIKE THE IDEA OF A TI BIKE, BUT WANT SOMETHING OFF THE RACK?

Litespeed T5 Gravel \$5,200
It’s made in the USA, designed around big tires, uses flat-mount disc brakes (what looks to be the ongoing standard for road disc), and has a 44mm head tube with pressed-in cups. This build comes with smooth-shifting Ultegra mechanical.

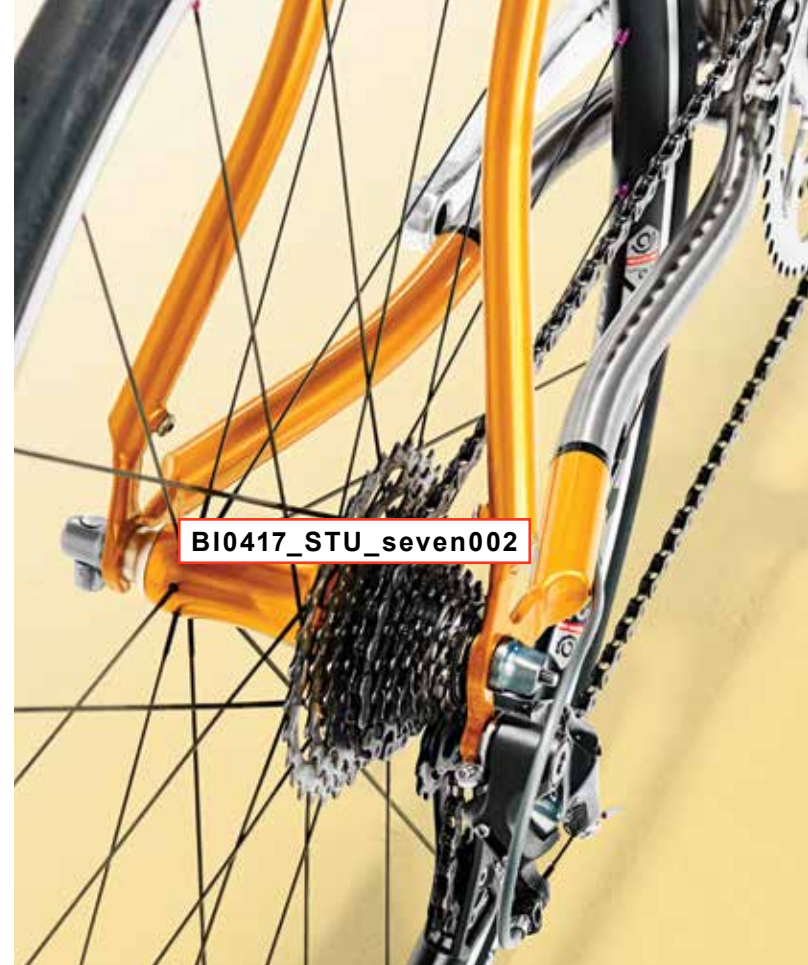
and ride feel. We tested a ti version with the double-buttet SL tubes. Titanium is a material that can last virtually forever. It’s resistant to corrosion, keeps its ride quality for decades, and tube replacement and repairs can be carried out easily.

For fittings on the RedSky, Seven sticks with what works and will likely remain unchanged and available for a long time: The bottom bracket is English threaded and the headset is external and pressed in. The frame is built around midreach caliper rim brakes (our test model had stoppers from Velo Orange) for clearance for up to 33mm tires.

The RedSky is fun because it is versatile. In the ’90s, everybody wanted to be a Tour de France racer. Now we all want to ride dirt roads. When fashion swings again, this bike will be ready.

It can accept a wide range of tires, and it has covert fender and rack mounts. The geometry is adaptable to a variety of terrain, comprising a bike that is steady when you’re plowing through miles of wet clay and still feels at home whipping in and out of a paceline. Toss on a set of fat 28- or 32mm smooth road tires, and it can serve as an all-day randonneuring bike. Swap to 32mm Clement X’plor MSO knobbies and hit the gravel—there’s ample clearance for mud if things get wet. Want to get some speed work in? With a pair of 25mm Vittoria Corsas on the bike, it’s suitable for fast group rides.

Fashion and technology crazes will continue to march on, but thanks to a bit of forethought and a nod to trends that still serve us well, the RedSky will stand the test of time.—Mike Yozell



BI0417_STU_seven002

“I QUIT MY JOB, AND I WANT TO RIDE ACROSS THE COUNTRY.”

DO IT ON THE KONA SUTRA!
[AND TAG US ON YOUR
INSTAGRAM UPDATES.]

Kona Sutra
PRICE \$1,399
WEIGHT 29.4 LB
(48.5CM, WITH RACK
AND FENDERS)



BACK WHEN I WAS leading bike tours across the US, I spent years putting together my perfect touring bike, from the steel cyclocross frame and apocalypse-proof wheelset to top-shelf rack and fenders. Had the Kona Sutra been around then, I could have saved some time. The Sutra is a dangerous bike—not because of any structural issues, but because it’ll make you want to ride out of your office on a Tuesday and keep pedaling until you’ve reached the opposite coast. (My boss hates when I do that.) Here’s how it’s packed with all of my favorite touring features.—*Caitlin Giddings*

1 Steel frame

The chromoly butted frame is stable and ready to climb twisty back roads with what feels like the weight of two toddlers on board. The geometry put me in a more upright, comfortable position.

2 Triple crankset

Have you ever toured the Appalachians? I’d be pedaling on replacement knees if I had huffed up those jagged peaks on a loaded bike with anything less than a triple. The Shimano Alivio 11-34T 9-speed cassette and 28/36/48t chainrings helped me

crank up even steeper gravel climbs.

3 Flared bar

The slightly flared drop bar offered great leverage under load.

4 Full fenders with mud flaps

Fenders not only keep my feet and back dry, but also say, “Sure, you can ride behind me—I value your face enough not to exfoliate it with road debris.”

5 Bar-end shifters

They’re easy to access when you’re rocking a handlebar bag.

6 Big tires

Sturdy 700x40c tires helped the bike roll smoothly on- and off-road.

7 Rack-ready

I tour with front and rear racks holding four lightly packed Ortlieb panniers—food and stove up front, clothes and everything else in the back. The Sutra comes equipped with a rear rack and has copious mounts on the fork for a front setup.

8 Disc brakes

They provide reliable stopping power in miserable weather.

GOT THE BIKE?

Now you just need the rest of Cait’s touring must-haves:



Rain jacket

“I like to bury it deep inside one of the rear panniers where it can’t be unearthed without 20 minutes of pawing through everything I own in a downpour.”



Waterproof panniers

“Because no matter when and where you tour, torrential rain will find you.”



Handlebar bag

“I prefer a square-shaped bag that’s attached by a mount, not straps, so it doesn’t chafe against my hands.”



A rope to hang food

“Because no matter when and where you tour, raccoons will find you.”



Ground scores

“For years, I toured with a clean coyote skull affixed to my handlebar bag. Before that, I had a little army guy I found and carried across six states. The best souvenirs are free, so stay alert and keep scanning the side of the road!”

TRY
BEFORE
YOU
BUY

Sizing is a bit different on the Sutra—at 5-foot-8, I typically ride a 52 to 54cm frame but felt comfortable floating along on the 48.5cm Sutra.

BI0417_STU_kona002

“I WANT TO TRY CYCLOCROSS.”

AND THIS BIKE WANTS TO DO IT WITH YOU (OR NOT)

FUJI CROSS 1.5 DISC
PRICE \$1,419
WEIGHT 20.5 LB [58CM]

If you're looking to dip your feet into the muddy world of 'cross, you want a bike that is good enough to put on a start line, can grow with you as you progress for a couple of seasons, but also—if you decide 'cross isn't for you—is versatile enough to ride some gravel and light singletrack or be equipped as a commuter, so you don't end up throwing your cash away with your 'cross-racing dreams. You want a bike like the **FUJI CROSS 1.5 DISC**. Here's what makes it right.—James Hart

Sturdy aluminum frame
These tubes can take a beating. I'm new to 'cross myself, so I had much to learn about skills during testing. The frame emerged unscathed through my occasional flubs. The roomy front triangle made shoulder carries easy too.

Fender and rack mounts
These attachment points mean the Cross 1.5 can also serve as a commuter, especially after swapping out the knobby tires for something smoother (which I'd do for any pavement ride longer than a couple of miles).

“Race-brain” friendly shifting
The 1x drivetrain with SRAM's single-lever DoubleTap system makes shifting simple, and without a front derailleur, you'll have one less component to gunk up, meaning less chance of chain drop.

Carbon fork
A full carbon fork (including the steerer) helps lighten the bike to a respectable weight for its price.

Mechanical disc brakes
Hydraulic disc brakes will beat them in terms of strength and control, but these still work well in wet conditions. Deep in the woods, I came across several descents laden with boulders that I really had no business trying. However, I was always able to stop quickly and use these obstacles to practice my dismounts and remounts.

Versatile tires
The 700x32c Challenge Grifo sports a great all-rounder tread that is popular among 'cross racers for good performance in most conditions, except for very deep mud.

ALTERNATIVES

WANT A MORE TRADITIONAL DRIVETRAIN?



Ridley X-Ride 20 Disc
\$1,999
In addition to a 2x Shimano 105 groupset, it also comes equipped with hydraulic disc brakes.

ARE YOU A SHORTER RIDER?



Raleigh RXW
\$1,600
Like the Fuji 1.5, the RXW has a SRAM Rival 1x groupset and mechanical disc brakes, but it's available in frame sizes 46 to 56cm. Technically, it's a women's frame, but any rider can rock it if it fits.

HAVE A BIT MORE TO SPEND?



Fuji Altamira CX 1.3
\$2,799
You'll get a lighter full-carbon frame and SRAM Rival 1x11 groupset, and harder-stopping hydraulic disc brakes.

“I WANT TO GO FAST.”

Like, really fast?
“Yeah.”

Go ride the Trek Madone 9.5.



Women's
version tested:
PRICE \$8,000
WEIGHT 16.6 LB
[52CM]

TREK SAYS THAT AT 40KPH, the Madone 9-Series saves you 19 watts over a non-aero bike. But that number changes depending on how fast you're going and whether you're drafting. Your absolute savings can also depend on other factors, including your position on the bike and even what you're wearing. So what might be more meaningful to know is how riding this aero race bike feels, compared with an ultralight but non-aero road race bike: like getting a rocket start in Mario Kart, only all the time. Everything is a little easier and yet you're moving a little faster. In a group, going at a social pace, you may have to feather the brakes to avoid half-wheeling the rider next to you. If you end up lollygagging and dropping behind on a long descent (say, to take a photo), you can relax knowing that in about 15 seconds you'll coast up behind the pedaling pack. You may even feel a subtle “turbo boost” when you're speeding into a hill after a small dip, traveling a few extra meters before running out of momentum.

And even when you take the Madone's aerodynamic features—like airfoil tube shaping and integrated brakes—out of consideration, so much else about this bike is designed to make you go faster. The carbon frame of the women's version we tested is identical to the standard Madone 9-Series in the H2 fit—shorter and more upright than the H1 frame most of the pros ride, but just as effective at allowing you to make watts (says Trek). When you're hammering, the bike shoots up the road with mercenary efficiency. In a sprint, the bike feels unified from the one-piece bar and stem—which on our test bike is narrower and has a shorter stem to accommodate a smaller rider—through to the back end.

And my, does this bike take a corner. It laser-cuts turns so precisely and feels so stuck to the road (the wider rims on the Vision Metron 40 wheels help the 25mm tires to ride bigger for more control and traction) that when you're heading fast into a flat, 90-degree right hander, you may decide that instead of lopping off the apex, you'll surgically follow the curve of the road. Compared to other race bikes, the Madone strikes a wonderful balance between quickness and stability—a sure shooter that steers easily from the hips, making it fun to aim into hard turns.

The IsoSpeed decoupler technology allows an internal seatpost to flex inside the airfoil-shaped seat tube, contributing to a ride that's not just smooth for an aero bike, but on par with non-aero

race bikes like the Specialized Tarmac on all but very chopped-up surfaces. When the road delivers staccato blows, the Madone 9.5 with its Vision wheels is a bit harsher than the top-end Madone 9.9 with Bontrager Aeolus 5 wheels. But everywhere else, the Madone 9.5 rides smooth enough to be pleasant for long rides. And it won't scare the crap out of you in crosswinds. The reliable Ultegra Di2 group ensures that you'll lose no time with a misshift.

Many riders who buy this bike don't race, according to Trek. I hear that: Who doesn't want that edge just for fun rides with friends too? Depending on your reasons, you may find it less important to go faster than to feel faster. But either way, on the Madone 9.5, you'll do both.—*Gloria Liu*



ALTERNATIVES

REVIEW ON P. 34



Going down
the mountain?
**Juliana
Roubion C S**
\$4,699

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With more than six inches of travel a long-men's all-mountain rig (identical to the Santa Cruz Bronson) floats down rough descents so quickly and capably that it's the Juliana-SRAM pro team's weapon of choice for the Enduro World Series. This version is more affordable, with a mid-tier carbon frame and SRAM's GX 1x group.



On climbs?
**Wilier Triestina
Zero.6 Unlimited**
\$5,499 (frameset)

Aerodynamics gener-

BI0417_BG_Trek003

where with lots of those, you might be more interested in something like the Zero.6, which weighs in at a scant 12.8 pounds for a size medium on our scale.

SORRY, DID YOU MEAN FAST?