



Trail Hounds

Let's go ahead and call 2010 the year of the 29er. Though bikes built around 29-inch wheels, instead of the 26-inch standard, have been around for more than a decade, they've been largely a fringe category. No longer. Walk into any bike shop and you'll see that 29ers—valued for their smooth feel and ability to roll over obstacles—are plentiful. On the component front, suspension designs continue to evolve. Travel is longer, smoother, and more predictable yet also more resistant to pedal feedback and forward-momentum-robbing bob. People are now showing up for races on bikes with five inches of travel, something previously reserved solely for heavy all-mountain riding. Regardless of where you're riding—be it a mellow cross-country trail or a gnarly descent—there's never been more comfort or performance at your disposal.

BY JOHN BRADLEY

AND THE WINNER IS...
Santa Cruz Blur LT Carbon SPX \$4,699
"It climbs like Tommy Caldwell," said one tester. That's not normal for 26-inch, all-mountain bikes. With their long suspension travel—five and a half inches, in this case—and relaxed angles, they're designed to soak up big hits. But this carbon copy of the company's popular aluminum Blur LT weighs just 26 pounds, even with a mid-tier SPX build (mostly Shimano XT). That plus Santa Cruz's proprietary rear-suspension design—plush with no perceptible pedal bob—means full-time traction without a constant battle against gravity. Of course, the rubber matters, too, and the wide DT Swiss XR400 rims provide a nice big contact patch for added control. The extra-wide bars, which provide leverage for steep climbs, might slow the steering down just a bit, but that is a minor quibble—and an easily correctable one—for a bike that will be, for a lot of riders, perfect. 25.8 lbs (large); santacruz bicycles.com
Climbing: 4.4 (out of 5)
Descending: 4.4

