



PHOTOS: JUSTIN STEINER

**TESTER:**  
Maurice Tierney  
**AGE:**  
51  
**HEIGHT:**  
6'4"  
**WEIGHT:**  
NOYBlbs.  
**INSEAM:**  
34"

**VITAL STATS****COUNTRY OF ORIGIN:**

China

**PRICE:**  
\$2350 (Frame),  
\$4875 (as tested)

**WEIGHT:**  
27lbs.  
(w/pedals)

**SIZES AVAILABLE:**  
M, L, XL, (tested),  
XXL

**CONTACT:**  
www.santacruz  
mtb.com

Back in the day, some bike companies were on the forefront of the 29er thing, some came along as the niche grew, and some hung back, resisting the Kool-Aid. I can see why they might resist; with all the zealotry surrounding the category it's no wonder. Note to self: in some towns they've never heard of a big-wheeled bike. The mental obstacles to 29" wheels in the Santa Cruz braintrust were the usual overall wheel weight and gearing issues, but once these things were understood and accepted, the inherent advantages of 29" wheels were there to be reaped. They've also been delving into the world of carbon, with the results being lighter and stiffer bikes. I'm told this bike would be two pounds heavier if composed of aluminum material.

Santa Cruz uses a monocoque technique to build the two frame components. Many individual pieces of carbon fiber are strategically laid into the sides of a waffle-iron-like mold, which is then folded together

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and baked while an inflatable bladder expands inside to press the fibers against the outside of the mold. Santa Cruz prides itself with the inside finish of their bikes as well as the outside—keeping the inside clean keeps the weight low. The carbon process is manually laborious and expensive due to the fact that you need a separate, very expensive mold for each bike size. Santa Cruz makes four sizes of Tallboy, all the way up to an XXL with a 25.9" top tube.

These thoughtful carbon fiber construction techniques deliver just the right amount of material in the right places. So the result is a bike light enough to race that still has stiffness in spades. Check out the tapered head tube: the taper doesn't just make the front end

stiffer, the larger diameter of the lower part of the head tube provides more room to connect the whole front triangle together. The rest of the frame is a pleasure to look at as well—nice lines, subtle graphics, form and function meeting far beyond what can be done with metal.

As for the suspension, it's the second generation of the VPP design that Santa Cruz has been pimping with great success for some time now. VPP affords the engineers a flexible platform to draw upon. For the Tallboy, the spring curve gives a falling rate at the beginning of the stroke for small bump compliance, then it ramps up toward the end of the stroke for bottom-out resistance.

Further details enhance the experience. Like the pivot bearings: since the Blur LT, all Santa Cruz pivots have had the advantage of big strong axles, with angular contact bearings, locking collet heads, and grease injection ports. Creaks and groans from the pivots are a

thing of the past.

A basic Tallboy can be had as a complete bike for \$3600, or you can buy a frame for \$2350 and go from there with one of the kits available. My demo bike had the Fox RP23 shock, Fox F29 RLC100 fork with 15mm thru axle, and the "XPX 29" build kit for a total price of \$4874. The XPX 29 kit includes a Shimano XT drivetrain with Avid Elixir 160mm disc brakes. Rotational duties are handled by Mavic TN 719 rims laced to a DT Swiss 340 rear hub and Chub 15mm front hub with DT 14/15 spokes. WTB saddle, Thomson seatpost, Easton handlebar—all good stuff I would choose myself.

Me, I've been waiting for a bike like this. I love the big wheels for general everyday riding, but every



29er I have ridden has weighed over 30lbs., not optimum for me. I'm also looking for something faster. More XC speed and less burly. The Tallboy's 27lbs. of weight and more aggressive, lower handlebar position speaks to this need.

The Tallboy was picked up at Dirt Demo last fall and ridden first in Flagstaff, Arizona and then in the early winter mud of the east. In Flag, the rocks are sick and chunky and waiting to spoil your day. If you're heading uphill, you have a long technical way to go. I was one of those guys that used to say, "Why not just lose ten pounds off yer beer belly," but this ride addressed my weakness. At 200 something pounds, getting up a long technical climb is not exactly my forte, especially given the rigors of the previous week's trade show. But this was just what I was looking for, and I was almost able to keep up with our local buds on the way up. The Lower Moto trail was next. Here I pitied anyone on a small-wheel bike; very tight, derailleur-clipping rocks, the big wheels holding firm, smoothing out the giant gaps, and helping me clean sections like I never did before. I was able to make it through many narrow gaps between the rocks unscathed, since Shimano XT rear derailleur is of the Shadow variety, which helps keep the mech out of the way. This bike does not handle like a boat at all. I am going to attribute this partly to the massive head tube and thru-axle fork for sure. The overall package is stiffer than many metal bikes I have ridden.

Back home it was time for PUNK Bike Enduro. The mud zone. While the Kenda Small Block 8 tires surprised me with their capabilities in a wide range of conditions, they would have to be replaced with Continental Mountain Kings for the really muddy leaves and wet roots of the Enduro course. Fortunately there's plenty of tire clearance in the Tallboy.

So how to sum up the ride? I want to say it "rides like a bicycle," but that wouldn't be saying much. Let's just call it natural and neutral. A 71° head angle provides stability rather than twitchiness. A 73° seat angle is like "whatever, man." At 17.5" the chainstays are on the short side for climbing prowess. At 44.7" the wheelbase is not going to get in the way.

As for the suspension, it didn't feel plush like a longer-travel 26er, it almost felt like a softail on the more buff terrain, yet was ready to absorb the big stuff without harsh bottoming. All the while being very efficient when pedaling. This efficiency did require the use of the ProPedal switch on the RP23. It might have been nice to have a shock with more air volume, as having the air pressure dynamited up above 250psi doesn't make for easy tuning adjustment.

With Santa Cruz's showing their new command of carbon design and their old command of suspension design, this new offering only extends their reach as a bike company to be reckoned with.



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Dirt Rag Go To

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what's this?