

FIRST LOOK

Santa Cruz 2010

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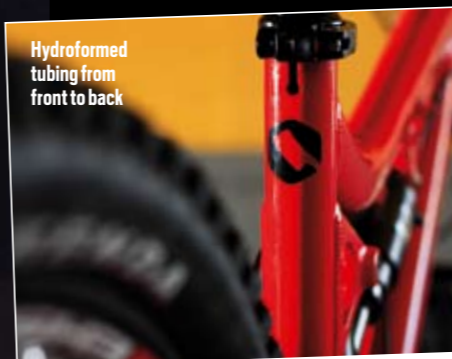


Santa's come early: the new Butcher is here

APP

APP is a "bogus acronym". It stands for Actual Pivot Point and is both accurately descriptive and subversively dismissive of all-too-serious marketing spiel. APP inserts a pair of links between the swingarm and the shock to tune the suspension qualities, in this case to (as closely as possible) replicate the shock rate characteristics of the VPP (Virtual Pivot Point) bikes. Santa Cruz's aim is to produce a single pivot bike that feels like a VPP bike. The APP system is regressive during the initial part of the suspension stroke, to help the bike feel supple. As the travel moves into the mid-stroke it becomes linear, then gradually ramps up towards the end of the stroke to help avoid harsh bottom-out. This compares to a simple single-pivot design, such as the Heckler, where the suspension is usually regressive throughout the stroke. The APP patent specifically protects a linkage that moves from progressive to regressive or vice versa.

Hydroformed tubing from front to back



— and patented — APP design (see boxout) combined with a similar high/forward main pivot location to the Heckler. There's a tapered 1.5in-1 1/8in head tube and a hydroformed aluminium tubeset with such contemporary niceties as cable stops for a remote adjust seatpost, an ISCG

05 mount and a bottle opener integrated into the driveside dropout.

"Sounds great," I hear you cry, "but isn't it just a Heckler with linkage driven shock?" Well, that's one way of looking at it, but for anyone currently in the market for a Heckler, the advantages of the Butcher should outweigh what will be a marginal premium. The Butcher gains stiffness, particularly at the front end, over its elder cousin: a benefit of the tapered head tube. The geometry also takes a step forward with a 1.5 degree slacker head angle and 3/4in longer wheelbase. Although sizing, like the rest of the Santa Cruz range, is slightly skewed and you are probably better off getting one size larger than you would normally ride

NAME GAME

So why Butcher? Well, high in the Sierra Mountains, near Downieville, California, is the Butcher Ranch trail. It's part of the infamous Downieville enduro course and one of Santa Cruz's favourite test beds.

The Nickel is a five-cent piece. The Santa Cruz Nickel is a five-inch bike. Santa Cruz also claims that the Nickel is one of those bikes that can climb as well as it can descend — a bike for one of those days when you have to flip a coin to decide where to ride.

(so, if you are 5ft 10in-5ft 11in we'd recommend a large).

On the trail, the Butcher proved hugely capable. While we felt it wasn't the supplest performer, the APP's progression shone through on deep braking bumps and harsh landings. The handling did a good job of walking the thin line between being stable enough on fast, rutted descents without drunkenly wandering off line when climbing back up. In effect, the Butcher is an evolution of the Heckler; a bridge between the sophistication of the VPP suspension bikes and the blue-collar ruggedness of the single pivot range.

Pricing for a frameset with Float R shock will be £1,299 when the Butcher lands in the UK in June.

THE NICKEL

While the Butcher stole most of the limelight on the long, fast, descents behind Santa Cruz's headquarters, at home in the UK it could well be the 125mm travel Nickel that is the trail-centre weapon of choice. Although outwardly similar to its longer travel sibling, the Nickel uses a different S-shape down tube and welded on pivot mount. Gone are the ISCG 05 tabs,

but the tapered head tube, hydroformed tubing and remote adjust seatpost stops remain, and the swoopy down tube makes room for a bottle mount within the main triangle.

As you'd expect, there are a few tweaks to the numbers, although the 68 degree head angle, 13.6in bottom bracket and 44.4in wheelbase (on the

large) all point to the Nickel being far from short-changed in the geometry department.

A Nickel frame with Fox Float R shock will also retail for £1,299.



New nickel: turns on a dime

"The Butcher takes a heavy cleaver to roots and a sharp carving knife to singletrack"

Santa Cruz Bicycles has managed to find a few miniscule cracks within its already burgeoning range in which to shoehorn three new models: the Butcher, Nickel and Nomad Carbon. We flew out to California to ride them.

If you're already familiar with the Santa Cruz range, you'll know that it's divided across two suspension platforms. At the big bucks end of the scale are the Virtual Pivot Point bikes, such as the Blur, Nomad and V10. These are complemented by the simpler, and cheaper, single pivot bikes (think Superlight, Heckler and Bullit). The all-new Butcher and Nickel create a third, intermediary, tier to the collection, while premium

composite technology, found on the Blur XC, LT and Tall Boy, finally arrives at the popular all-mountain Nomad platform.

The Butcher

Built to occupy the burly end of the all-mountain spectrum, the Butcher takes a heavy cleaver to roots, a scalpel sharp carving knife to singletrack and puts rock gardens through the mincer. Rear wheel travel is pinned at 150mm using the all-new



New APP design gives great progression



Welded pivot mount differs from its big Butcher brother



Carbon stiffness means no more wandering for the Nomad



NOMAD CARBON

No one was surprised to see Santa Cruz extend the carbon technology found on the Blur XC, Blur LT and Tall Boy to the 160mm travel Nomad, but we reckon everyone was bowled over by just how gorgeous this bike looks rendered in composite. With a muscular, purposeful head tube junction gradually tapering rearward to a carbon VPP link and wishbone swingarm uprights, all accentuated by the graphical key-lines, this is one sickeningly good looking frame.

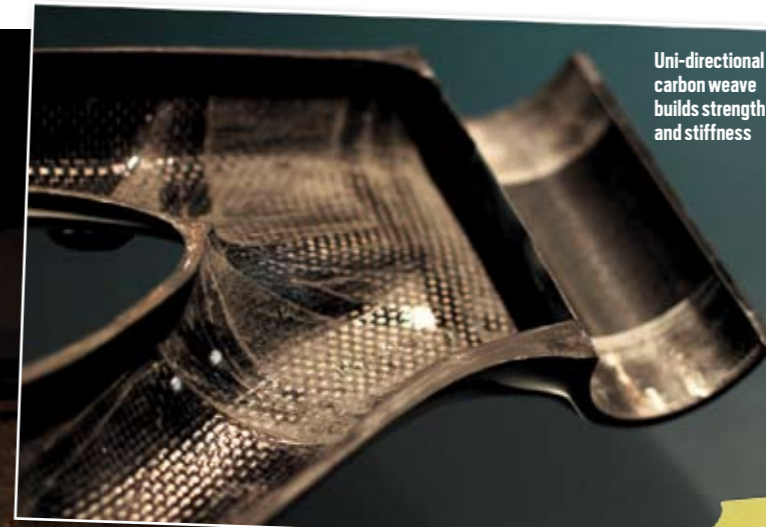
Carbon may have done wonders for the aesthetics, but its real benefit lies in both chassis strength and stiffness.

Although the carbon frame is an impressive 500g (1.1lb) lighter than the aluminium version (frame weight is a claimed 6.1lb with shock), it is considerably stiffer and exceptionally strong. We watched a Nomad Carbon being destruction tested in the Santa Cruz 'lab' by simulating a heavy rider landing on the saddle while the shock

was completely bottomed out (while, for good measure, lead engineer Joe Graney repeatedly smacked the down tube with a heavy steel bar).

It took a good half dozen drops from increased heights before the upper link finally exploded, leaving the main triangle and swingarm completely undamaged.

"Carbon may have done wonders for the aesthetics but its real benefit lies in both chassis strength and stiffness"



Uni-directional carbon weave builds strength and stiffness



Swingarm survived destruction testing



APP plates give a VPP 'feel' to the rear suspension

The frame gets its strength and stiffness from a combination of the one-piece lay up and curing process, the multitude of unidirectional, aramid and 3k weave layers (the underside of the down tube has eight) and the complete wrapping of frame tube junctions. Having seen just how tough these frames really are, the chance of rock damage is almost non-existent, but for the terminally paranoid, Santa Cruz has also thoughtfully included some additional 'placebo' plates on the chain and seatstays as well as a 'Pleather' (plastic-leather) down tube protector similar to Trek's Carbon Armour.

Geometry and suspension kinematics remain completely unchanged from the regular Nomad. Price, however, rockets skyward, with the frame and Monarch 3.3 shock costing £2,499, but for VPP fans wanting the ultimate Nomad, the wait is over.



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