



EASY RIDERS

Electronic shifting, fat tires, and stronger wheels make the latest mountain bikes funner than ever
BY AARON GULLEY



It's tempting to chalk it up to becoming a stronger rider, but the engineers deserve some of the credit. The six-inch all-mountain bikes of today are almost as light as the cross-country racers of a few years ago. Manufacturers continue to refine suspension designs and trim frame weight. Wheels are stronger and lighter, allowing you to send bigger features but still climb like a spandex-wearing racer. Electronics are speeding up shifting and automatically adjusting suspension to match the terrain. Fat tires and rims—the latest craze—add traction and improve ride quality, so it's possible to take more challenging lines. Some may argue that all the tech makes riding too easy. But we like to think it just means longer, more comfortable days in the saddle.

GEAR OF THE YEAR
Salsa Cycles Bucksaw
Carbon \$6,499

This full-suspension fatty with four-inch Schwalbe Jumbo Jim tires latched onto loose rubble like Velcro, letting testers motor through scree that left skinnier rubber spinning. "You almost can't lose traction," said one tester as he skipped up and down steepes he'd never ridden before. The geometry and efficient four-inch suspension, the latter borrowed from Salsa's cross-country racer, make handling sharp. The bike is light enough to be playful: our medium snuck in under 30 pounds, thanks partly to the SRAM 1x11 drivetrain and Whisky carbon rims. Once people grasp their versatility, we expect wider tires to become the norm for dirt, not just snow. 29.9 lbs; salsacycles.com
CLIMBING: 4.5 / DESCENDING: 5 [OUT OF 5]

MOUNTAIN BIKES

KILLER VALUE



Bulls Wild Edge 29 \$3,799

BEST FOR: XC racers on a budget.
THE TEST: Making its U.S. debut with this lightweight 29er, the popular German brand surprised us with near telepathic handling and greyhound speed. "Stand on pedals, rocket forward," said one tester. Just as you'd expect from a four-inch cross-country racer, it bumped around on rough trails. But the stiff RS-1 fork—controlled, along with the rear shock, from a single bar-mounted lever—did an impressive job of smoothing out minor chatter. With a full Shimano XT group set and carbon bits from FSA, the Wild Edge is a real bargain, especially since the fork alone sells for almost half the bike's retail price.
THE VERDICT: The best deal we've seen for a carbon racer. 25 lbs; bullsbikesusa.com
 CLIMBING: 4.5 / DESCENDING: 3

Ghost Riot 9 LC \$7,999

BEST FOR: Climbing fast.
THE TEST: While the 5.1-inch carbon Riot 9 had no problem handling rough lines, we appreciated it most on climbs. The 27.5-inch wheels and tight geometry made easy work of slow switchbacks, and thanks to the bike's light weight, we were outpacing the spandex crowd on steep. Brawny Easton Haven wheels and a RockShox Stealth dropper post make the bike capable on descents, although some testers found the steering a bit unstable in the techiest sections. But everyone raved about Shimano's 2x11 XTR components, which offer wide gear range and featherlight carbon levers.
THE VERDICT: As light and snappy as a racer, but with added comfort. 25.8 lbs; ghost-bikes.com
 CLIMBING: 4.5 / DESCENDING: 4.5

Lapierre Zesty Trail 529 \$4,900

BEST FOR: Technophiles.
THE TEST: Our Zesty Trail came equipped with electronic suspension that automatically made the rear shock softer or stiffer, depending on the terrain. The changes happened so fast (in under a tenth of a second, according to Lapierre) that we didn't even notice them. In fact, there was no need to think about suspension at all, as the bike seamlessly adjusted itself between climbs and descents. Beyond the tech, the Zesty Trail is a five-inch 29er that's confident on just about any trail. Our only issue: at this price, we'd like to see coordinated components (our model had a haphazard mix of Shimano and SRAM) and better wheels, which several testers said were ponderous.
THE VERDICT: The future of suspension design is here, and we love it. 29.5 lbs; lapierrebicycles.com
 CLIMBING: 3.5 / DESCENDING: 4



The Zesty Trail's electronic suspension uses accelerometers to adjust the rear shock on the fly.



GET A GRIP

Ibis's 741 and 941 wheels—for 27.5s and 29ers, respectively—presage a trend toward even fatter rims. The 35-millimeter hoops take standard tires (like the 2.3-inch Maxxis Minions we tested) and spread them laterally for a bigger contact patch and added traction. They also allow for lower tire pressures, adding even more grip, though you have to be careful in rocky terrain. From \$1,450; ibiscycles.com —A.G.

Yeti Cycles SB5C \$9,349

BEST FOR: Your one-bike quiver.
THE TEST: Yeti's Switch Infinity suspension gets the award for most interesting design, with a link that changes direction partway through the travel, providing excellent small-bump handling and plush, solid support on big hits. "Mechanics aside, it's the smoothest suspension I've ever felt," said one tester. The front end of the five-inch SB5C is slack and the bottom bracket low, making this 27.5er more capable on descents than the slightly longer-travel Ghost. And Enve's M60 Forty wheels are so stiff and confident, you'll want to bomb downhill on them.
THE VERDICT: A trail bike for riders with big-hit dreams. 26.2 lbs; yeticycles.com
 CLIMBING: 4.5 / DESCENDING: 4

Ellsworth Epiphany 275 Enduro SST.2e \$5,600

BEST FOR: XC riders looking to expand their horizons.
THE TEST: We've always liked the aluminum Epiphany 275. This year, Ellsworth made the bike even better by boosting travel (5.5 inches in back) and decreasing the headtube angle. Result: arguably the most capable ride the company has ever built. Though the bike was designed for downhill-oriented enduros, the ICT suspension makes it as efficient a pedaler as most four-inch racers. And while faster climbers turned into nervous wrecks on descents, the Epiphany, with its bomber Stan's wheels and dropper post, surfed through chunder and shrugged off big hits.
THE VERDICT: A racer that can handle the ups and downs. 27 lbs; ellsworthbikes.com
 CLIMBING: 4.5 / DESCENDING: 4.5

Giant Reign 27.5 2 \$3,400

BEST FOR: All-mountain riding.
THE TEST: You can thank Giant for building a capable, 6.3-inch all-mountain machine, complete with dropper post, for a third of the price of most other bikes in our test. Many riders thought it was the best-looking ride of the bunch, too, and we even appreciated the aluminum frame, which, though heavier, won't chip or break like carbon. You don't get the premium suspension bits, but the RockShox Pike fork and Debonair RT shock work just fine. The Reign's low bottom bracket made for lots of pedal strikes on technical climbs, but it also locked in descents like an alpine slide. Even the meaty Schwalbe Hans Damps tires impressed, yawning at Arizona's sidewall treachery and rock abuse.
THE VERDICT: Everything you need for shredding without the second-mortgage guilt. 29.6 lbs; giant-bicycles.com
 CLIMBING: 3.5 / DESCENDING: 4.5



Yeti's new Switch Infinity suspension has a translating pivot that slides on two Kashima-coated tubes for added stability.



UPGRADE

MOUNTAIN BIKING

Our favorite kit for trail riding and racing

BY AARON GULLEY

1. Leatt 3DF Air Flex elbow and knee pads \$79 and \$99

Finally, guards made for all-day wear. The sleeves are so breathable, they feel like warmers, and the six-millimeter-thick gel pads are soft until impact, at which point they turn rigid. leatt.com



1

TRAIL RIDING

2



4



3



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6



7



9

RACING

6. Bontrager TLR Flash Charger pump \$120

You used to need an air compressor to set up a tubeless wheel. Not anymore. Though it works like a standard pump, the Flash Charger has a chamber on the shaft that can be filled to 160 psi and then released in a blast of air to seat and fill the rubber. bontrager.com

7. 7mesh S2S shirt \$130

This midweight nylon-poly jersey relies on smart tailoring instead of spandex for its trim fit, so it breathes and wicks moisture better. We like the zip side pockets, which keep gear out from under a backpack. 7meshinc.com

8. Assos T.rallyShorts_s7 bibs \$419

These Swiss bibs have criss-crossed elastic shoulder straps that don't chafe under a pack; abrasion-resistant fabrics and removable hip pads protect against tumbles. assos.com

9. MET Parabellum HES helmet \$230

This lid offers the protection of a trail helmet, but at about half a pound it's light enough for the Lycra set. Its 28 vents breathe better than Todd Wells at nationals, and the visor blocks sun. met-helmets.com

10. Vittoria Rock MTB shoes \$399

With a stiff carbon sole and combo ratchet-strap and spin-dial closure, this flashy, lightweight Italian shoe is built for on-the-bike speed, though sticky rubber on the bottom added enough grip when we had to run. vittoria-shoes.com



10

BIKE

ROAD
BIKES

FAST FORWARD

Halo-bike technology comes to the masses at last
BY AARON GULLEY

After years of incremental advances, we're seeing dramatic technological change in all bikes, thanks to trickle-down from top-tier models. Electronic shifting is set to expand as SRAM prepares to release its wireless system, and disc brakes have flooded the scene, with over half the bikes we reviewed sporting the new stoppers. There's even a whole new category, the adventure roadie, with a longer wheelbase for more stability, a taller headtube for added comfort, and clearance for bigger tires. Superior rides with added versatility: just try and tell us it's not an exciting time in road bikes.



GEAR OF THE YEAR
GT Grade Carbon

\$3,580
Given GT's BMX heritage, we weren't surprised that the company's crossover roadie outpaced its competitors. "It's like the griffin of the cycling world," said one tester, "with the snappiness of a road bike but the handling and trail manners of a hardtail." Flex points built into the carbon frame paired with a pencil-thin, reverse-camber fork took the edge off the chip-sealed asphalt and rough fire roads in Tucson, Arizona. The wide 28-millimeter tires helped, too, and we love that the bike has room for up to 35 millimeters of rubber. The Grade flew along in fast group rides, posing the question: Is there anything this bike can't do? 18.9 lbs; gtbicycles.com
HANDLING: 4.5
COMFORT: 5
[OUT OF 5]



ROAD BIKES

Trek Émonda SLR 10 \$15,750

BEST FOR: Climbing like Contador.

THE TEST: "This bike is basically mechanical doping," exclaimed one tester. Trek's new superbike weighs an astonishing 10.3 pounds, thanks to its gossamer parts. Some, like the SRAM Red 22 drivetrain and the Bontrager Speed Stop direct-mount brakes, are outstanding. Others, including the tubular wheels with 22-millimeter tires and the integrated bar and stem combo, feel so light they might snap. But the frame is as low-slung and fast as a fighter jet, and it proved surprisingly capable on descents.

THE VERDICT: Amazing. But you can save almost \$8,000 and get the Émonda SLR 8, which pairs the same frame with sturdier parts and still weighs in at just 13.6 pounds. 10.3 lbs; trekbikes.com

HANDLING: 4 / **COMFORT:** 3.5

Fuji Transonic 1.3 \$4,699

BEST FOR: Free speed.

THE TEST: The full-carbon, super-aero Transonic—complete with top-notch Shimano Dura-Ace—is one of the best deals in race bikes. Developed after plenty of wind-tunnel time, the Transonic is said to be about a minute faster than Fuji's comparable road and climbing models in a 40-kilometer time trial. "The claimed numbers always sound like marketing hokey," said one tester, "but the Transonic actually feels fast." Unlike many aero bikes, this one offers a ride that's smooth, not harsh. And the Oval Concepts components, including the deep-section wheels, shallow-drop bars, and saddle, are as excellent as they are inexpensive.

THE VERDICT: The best aero racer for the price. 16.2 lbs; fujibikes.com

HANDLING: 4 / **COMFORT:** 4

BMC Teammachine SLR03 \$2,299

BEST FOR: Saving big while going fast.

THE TEST: We gave our 2014 Gear of the Year award to the BMC Teammachine SLR01. The 2015 SLR03 is almost identical to that USA Pro Challenge-winning bike, but it costs less than a quarter as much. The frame is built from lower-grade carbon, but you get the same quick handling and roller-coaster-smooth descending, just in a slightly heavier package and without the internal cable routing. The Shimano 105 group, with 11 speeds and excellent light-action braking, performs almost exactly like the more expensive components. "I bet few people could tell the difference in a blind test," said one rider. The same could almost be said when comparing the SLR03 with its pricier relatives.

THE VERDICT: Swiss detail without the high cost. 18.5 lbs; bmc-switzerland.com

HANDLING: 4 / **COMFORT:** 3.5

Wilier Triestina Zero.9 \$3,499

BEST FOR: Leading the pack.

THE TEST: Eric Marcotte won the 2014 U.S. National Road Race Championships aboard the Zero.9. The crazy part: this isn't even the company's highest-end bike. The Zero.9 borrows geometry from Wilier's top racer, the Zero.7, with a short headtube and long top tube for aggressive positioning. Yet the frame has a smooth road feel, and it was confident on sinuous descents. The smart attention to detail—coordinating FSA cockpit parts, a comfy color-matched San Marco saddle, and a complete Ultegra parts kit—made us like it even more.

THE VERDICT: Drips with the confidence of a much pricier bike. 17.3 lbs; wilier.com

HANDLING: 4.5 / **COMFORT:** 4

LeMond Washoe \$4,549

BEST FOR: Riding all day.

THE TEST: Greg LeMond's new steel bike, his first since 2010, reminds us of the man himself: purposefully counterculture, hard to ignore, and fast as hell. LeMond keeps the bike lively with Reynolds 853 steel, which has a bright, snappy feel. The classic geometry, with long headtube, top tube, and seatstays, was smooth and stable, and the Enve carbon fork adds to the silky road sensation. But with electronic Ultegra Di2, this is no throwback.

THE VERDICT: Go race a gran fondo—and win. 18.1 lbs; greglemond.com

HANDLING: 4.5 / **COMFORT:** 4.5

Scott Solace 15 Disc \$3,500

BEST FOR: Forgoing back pain, not performance.

THE TEST: The endurance road category often implies slow steering and flag-in-the-wind positioning. That's not the case with the Solace, which gains forgiveness from smart tube shaping and layups but retains a geometry closer to the company's true racers for impressively nimble handling. This year's model is equipped with Ultegra-level hydraulic disc brakes, which give you more power and control.

THE VERDICT: An endurance bike that thinks it's a racer. 18 lbs; scott-sports.com

HANDLING: 4.5 / **COMFORT:** 4.5

TECHNO CHARGE

Nearly a third of the 2015 bikes we tested were equipped with Shimano's electronic shifting systems. The company's hard-goods branch, Pro, is starting to build handlebars and stems that integrate wiring and electronic push buttons. And though SRAM is coy about timing, its wireless electric component group, already in use at the pro level, should be ready later this year. —A.G.

The Émonda's seat mast uses a sleeve over the frame-integrated post to absorb bumps for a comfier ride.



The Solace's tires are wider than most race rubber, but they absorb bumps with only a slight weight increase.

UPGRADE

ROAD BIKING

The best stuff for racing and city riding

BY AARON GULLEY

1. Smith PivLock Arena Max sunglasses \$239

We love Smith's classic frameless PivLock design for its feathery feel and quick lens changes. The new Arena Max has additional Velcro-like grip at the nose and temples, and it's compatible with more helmets, thanks to shorter, thinner arms. smithoptics.com

2. Castelli Free Aero Race bibs \$199

With a yoke-style harness that lies flat and comfortable, lightweight mesh leg grippers, and an extremely plush, seamless chamois, this is definitely the highest-quality bib for your dollars. castelli-cycling.com

7. Giro Bib 2.0 Undershirt \$130

With three rear pockets for carrying tubes, a pump, and other essentials, these under-bibs can support long days in the saddle. But they're also lightweight, with a thin but comfy pad, so you can wear them under street clothes. giro.com

RACING

3. Louis Garneau Course Air Lite shoes \$380

Not only are these double-Boa-closure shoes some of the lightest we've tried (our size 42's weigh less than a water bottle), but the mesh in the upper and vents in the sole kept our feet cool even when the mercury hit the mid-nineties. louisgarneau.com

4. POC AVIP Short Sleeve jersey \$170

Only the Swedes can make traffic-cone orange sexy. Combining bright panels with clean lines and smart details—like the reflective back patch and internal zip pocket—the AVIP keeps you safe in style. pocsports.com

5. Lazer Genesis Lifebeam helmet \$230

Kiss your old chest strap goodbye. With an optical sensor embedded in the brow pad and a small rechargeable battery out back, the Genesis Lifebeam measures and wirelessly transmits your heart rate to your smartphone—all while protecting against crashes. lazersport.com

6. Rapha Brevet jersey and gilet \$265

The stylish merino-poly jersey is built for long days, with five pockets and reflective stripes; the vest bumps up visibility even more. rapha.cc

CITY RIDING

8. Oakley Sliver sunglasses \$130

Forgo the fitness-goon look and slip on these stylish, high-performing shades, with impact-resistant synthetic frames and shatterproof lenses good enough for the brightest days. oakley.com

9. Kitsbow Haskell shorts \$165

The knee-length Haskell's are constructed from a rugged DWR-coated stretch nylon that won't catch, bind, or stain. The tailoring is exceptional: when we wore them to the bar, no one realized they were made for cycling. kitsbow.com

10. Rapha Climber's shoes \$400

We love the retro look of the synthetic upper and the three Velcro closures, but this is no throwback: it has a thin carbon sole for efficient pedaling and an adjustable-arch cork footbed. rapha.cc



COMMUTING

Arrive at the office safely and in style

BY AARON GULLEY

1. Kitsbow Drifter jeans \$230

Though it looks like a classic pair of five-pocket jeans, the Drifter has loads of clever, bike-specific details. We love the hidden articulation in the knee for flex, the Lycra and nylon for durability and stretch, and the reflective print on the inside left leg. kitsbow.com



2. De Marchi Tradition shirt \$159

The Tradition's cotton weave is soft and the styling dapper, but what we really love about this woven jersey are the subdued rear pockets, which honor its cycling heritage. demarchi.com



3. Chrome Industries Mirko shoes \$85

Built with a rubber sole that's heat-forged onto the canvas upper, this tough urban sneaker will tolerate years of rolling to work. The reflective heel is a nice touch. chromeindustries.com



4. Smith Lowdown sunglasses \$209

These understated shades pair sophisticated urban frames with Smith's Chroma-Pop lenses, which heighten color and clarity. The result is a safer ride—and a more inspiring view. smithoptics.com



5. Specialized Flux Elite light \$175

This rechargeable headlamp seems much brighter than its 400 lumens suggest, thanks to a reflector design that widens its range. The sturdy quick-release bar mount keeps the beam pointed where you want it and makes the light easy to pop off when you lock up the bike. specialized.com



6. Sahn Classic helmet \$129

Sahn's lids are designed in Vancouver and have a ratcheting fit system just like you'd find on performance helmets. The clean lines, muted color options, and simple styling trade the aggressive, teched-out racer aesthetic for equestrian chic. sahn.cc

7. Nau Riding Jacket \$235

Updated for 2015 with a trim cut, hidden pocket, and soft DWR-treated polyester fabric, Nau's blazer is dressy enough for a board meeting and smooth enough for the bar, yet still impervious to rain. nau.com



8. Brompton Game Bag \$400

Designed by British luggage maker John Chapman, this rubber-lined canvas-and-leather briefcase reimagines the vintage game bag by incorporating a padded laptop sleeve and two zippered bellows pockets. brompton.com



FIELD TESTED
UTILITY BIKES



These are the workhorses of the bike world—and with plenty of panache at last **BY AARON GULLEY**

BEST FOR: Budget-Minded Patriots

1. Shinola Detroit

Arrow \$1,000

We love Shinola's classic Made in America story, but its early bikes ran \$2,000 and up—not exactly priced for everyone. Enter the single-speed Detroit Arrow, which has a Wisconsin-built frame, is assembled in the company's reclaimed Detroit factory, and costs half as much as its other models. The bike is no beater, either, with a TIG-welded steel frame and stylized branded dropouts. The components are top-notch, too, including full-metal fenders, a leather saddle, and contrasting cork grips. 25 lbs; shinola.com

BEST FOR: Commuting

2. Marin Fairfax SC6

DLX \$2,399

This aluminum flat-bar bike is as sexy as the Stromer (right), minus the electronics, and costs loads less. Testers loved the Gates carbon belt drive, which eliminates the noise and grime of a chain but still offers enough gear range, thanks to the Shimano 11-speed internal hub. Positioning is relatively aggressive, and we felt fast and agile in traffic. The components are all high quality, including hydraulic disc brakes, Ergon grips and saddle, and cushy Continental tires. And we love the full fenders, cargo rack, and hub-powered light. 28.2 lbs; marinbikes.com

BEST FOR: Big Loads

3. Kona Minute \$1,399

Most long-tail haulers are cumbersome because of the additional length. The Minute gets around the issue with a relatively short wheelbase that makes handling quick and maneuverability easy. Despite its dimensions, the bike, which is capable of carrying 300 pounds with its wood deck and twin panniers, doesn't relinquish any hauling ability. Fully loaded, the Minute feels solid, with strapping-wide tires providing plenty of grip and Tektro disc brakes keeping it all under control. Our only niggles: we'd prefer larger 180-millimeter rotors. 40 lbs; konaworld.com

BEST FOR: Giving Up Your Car

4. Stromer ST2 \$6,990

Meet the future of pedal-assisted electric bikes. The muscular aluminum frame, with a 90-mile-range lithium-ion battery inside the down tube, looks like Apple's design lab teamed up with George Lucas. When we stepped on the pedals, the hub-based motor kicked the ST2 forward like a motorcycle, delivering up to 500 watts of supplemental power with a maximum assisted speed of 28 miles per hour. But what sets the ST2 apart is the touchscreen LCD in the top tube, which controls the GPS, front and rear LEDs, and power settings. 62 lbs; stromerbike.com

GETTING STARTED BIKEPACKING

Why walk when you can roll?
BY AARON GULLEY

1. Jones Plus bike \$6,020

With three-inch tires for traction and stability, the steel-frame Plus is the finest bikepacking rig available. The upright stance and carbon H-bars make for comfy riding, while the 11-speed Shimano XTR cassette has ample

gear range. And the bike comes with enough tailor-made packs to easily carry a week's worth of gear. jonesbikes.com

2. Osprey Rev 18 pack \$120

At just over a pound, this wispy hydration pack uses mesh in the straps, back panel, and pockets

to cut weight while adding breathability. ospreypacks.com

3. Spot Gen3 messenger \$150

Think of a satellite messenger as an insurance policy. The GPS tracks progress, while the SOS button sends for help if things ever go south. findmespot.com

4. Big Agnes Fly Creek 2 Platinum tent \$550

An engineering miracle, this tent packs down to the size of a Nalgene bottle, yet it sleeps two adults, with space in the vestibule for gear. And we stayed happily dry when the weather got nasty. bigagnes.com

5. MontBell Down Huger 900 #5 sleeping bag \$419

Packed with 900-fill down, the Huger kept us warm even below its advertised 40-degree threshold. Diagonal seams and baffles provided enough give to wiggle, and best of all, it compresses down as small as a grapefruit. montbell.us

6. Therm-a-Rest NeoAir XLite pad \$160

Though it's about half the size of other ultralight pads, this 2.5-inch-thick air mattress is as cushy as a full-size blow-up bed. Updated material reduces the crinkle that plagued the first version. cascade-designs.com

7. Pearl Izumi X-Project 1.0 shoes \$320

The X-Project bridges the gap between cycling shoe and hiking boot. A carbon-fiber plate keeps the midsole firm for pedaling, but built-in flex makes walking comfortable. pearlizumi.com

8. Fenix BTR20 light \$140

The BTR20 packs 800 lumens into a rechargeable-battery-powered package. With one unit on the bars and another on the rack, we got many hours of light over a two-week back-country expedition. fenixlighting.com

9. Snow Peak LiteMax Titanium stove \$60

For less than the weight of a Clif Bar, you get warm food at night and hot coffee in the morning. If you're careful, the small fuel tank will last a full week. snowpeak.com

