

If you're not familiar with Santa Cruz bikes, you will be soon. With only a few months under his belt on the SoCal bike brand Nathan Rennie is already standing on podiums. That says something for his riding ability, for sure. But if you've ever seen Nathan ride it says a lot about Santa Cruz too. In fact Nathan's 4X bike is a Blur, beefed up for his burly style, sure, but a Blur all the same. As with the other test bikes the Blur is American-made. And because we all need to fund Bush's War on Terror, we'll be paying top dollar for the pleasure.

THE BUILD

The Blur is a finely crafted machine made from 6069 aluminium that Santa Cruz claims is now pushing the boundaries of what's capable on a XC rig. That may be true, but we found there were a few loosening pivot issues. Do yourself a favour and spend a solid afternoon with a tube of Loctite before you take the Blur on her virgin run. The pivots should all be checked regularly and tightened. Santa Cruz's patented Virtual Pivot Point (VPP) design delivers 4.5" travel through its sealed cartridge bearing pivots, making it the biggest bike in the suspension stakes of the three. The system's swinging links (sometimes referred to as the "dog bone") are designed to balance different forces, eliminating unwanted compression without limiting bump absorption. And it works.

THE RIDE

It is a super-sweet climber that like the Intense accelerates like a rocket. A low bottom bracket (BB) and a long cockpit make it an ideal XC racer. Let's also just say we were spoiled in the front suspension department. The bike was probably not designed with the Maverick fork in mind, but the slightly higher front-end and odd riding position was quickly forgotten as the ridiculously light six inches of travel tracked like a bloodhound through the bush. The forks are great but as they were fairly progressive the bike felt unbalanced with a noticeable difference between the front and rear suspension action. A distinctive breakaway threshold in the initial part of the shock's stroke was noticeable. This is created by the Control Valve Technology (CVT – same as SPV) valving of the 5th Element Air shock, which, once passed, allows the bike to move freely through the remainder of its travel. This meant it wasn't butter smooth through the little stuff, but stepped up when the terrain demanded. No dramas here, as this is all fully adjustable. In fact when discussing shock set-up options with Greg from Progressive he encouraged any 5th Element customer to call him up for set-up advice; the frame design theory is sound.

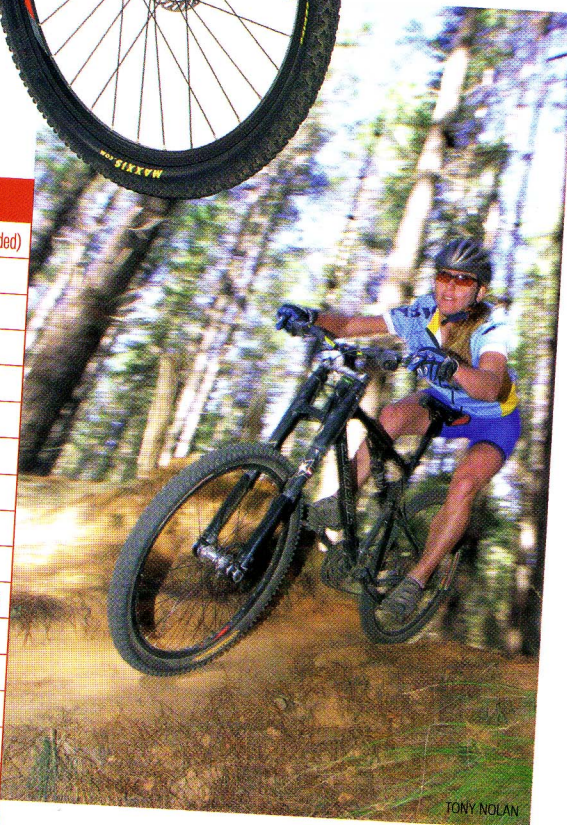


SPEC SHEET

RRP: \$3250 (5th Element Air shock included)
WEIGHT: 11.6kg or 25.5lb (built up)
FRAME: 6069 aluminium with VPP
FORK: Maverick
R SHOCK: 5th Element Air
DERAILLEUR F: Shimano XTR
DERAILLEUR R: Shimano XTR
CRANKSET: Shimano XTR
SHIFTERS: Shimano XTR Dual Control
CASSETTE: Shimano XTR
BRAKE LEVERS: Shimano XTR Dual Control
BRAKES: Shimano XTR
HUBS: Maverick/XTR
RIMS: DT Swiss XR4.1d
TYRES: Maxxis Tomahawk 2.1"
SPOKES: DT Swiss
HEADSET: Chris King
BAR: Maxm MX-5
STEM: Maverick
POST: Thomson Elite
SEAT: Maxm
PEDALS: Crank Brothers Candy
CONTACT: Neezy Pty Ltd, 0414 768 109

VERDICT

The best climber of the bunch, with an innovative frame design making this possible. Overall the bike comes in at number two. As with any pivoting design, wear becomes a factor, so tighten the living daylights out of your bolts (but make sure you consult the owners manual for the correct torque setting). Then, point your Blur out the door and let it take you for a ride. It will give you the confidence to truly better your riding skill. It'll even have you out in the bush for longer. A solid investment.



OTHER OPTIONS

Rocky Mountain Element TSc >> \$3895
(frame only)
www.bikes.com