

Santa Cruz Blur—XC & LT



Santa Cruz released the original Blur two years ago and over that time it has received many rave reviews. In response to customer demand to supply a long travel version they have replaced the original Blur with three new models—the Blur XC, LT and 4X, all aimed at very different riding styles. As the name suggests, the XC is aimed at the cross country market, the LT (long travel) is more of an ‘all mountain’ style and the 4X is designed for mountain cross/slam-action. In this review we look at the Blur LT and the Blur XC.

Santa Cruz takes great pride in the design and manufacture of their bikes. This is reflected in the quality of their product, and of course the price tag. The two Blurs tested here will wear a big hole in any budget with the LT retailing at \$7,550 and the XC \$6,800. As a frame only you can expect to pay \$2,940 for the XC and \$3,180 for the LT. One nice touch that emphasizes the thought that has gone into the Blur is the replaceable rear dropout design. It is beefy and looks very tough to damage, but if the worst happens the whole tip and derailleur hanger can be replaced in one.

The Company makes a lot of noise about their Virtual Point Pivot (VPP) rear suspension system. It utilizes a one piece rear triangle connected to the main frame via a two linkages—one under the bottom bracket and the other up near the shock. All pivots contain sealed bearings which look quite robust. Basically, the linkage on the VPP suspension system makes the rear wheel travel backwards slightly before rising in a near vertical line, as opposed to most other systems which travel in an arc.

Typically, when you hammer on the pedals your weight moving up and down will make the suspension bob. With the VPP, the chain force generated by hard pedalling is supposed to counteract the suspension’s tendency to bob. The design aims to create an efficient pedalling platform, while still delivering smooth suspension in the rough stuff.

All VPP frames are manufactured in the US and are competitively light. The XC frame weighs in at around 2,320g with a 5th Element shock. The LT is stronger being made from bigger diameter tubing with more gusseting in critical places. This adds approximately 500g to the frame weight. The test bikes came in at 12.8kg for the LT and 12.3kg for the XC. Both bikes were impressively light—especially the LT. It is quite remarkable for a 135mm travel bike with a 150mm dual crown suspension fork.

Mix ‘n’ Match

One of the nice things about these bikes is that you can mix and match components when buying. There is a large range of component options and you even get to choose from an extensive colour range and three finish options—painted, anodized or polished. Each variation on the standard powder coated/5th Element shock format will cost you more.

Both the test bikes came with Shimano XT running gear, Maxm carbon handlebars, seat posts and a saddle decked out with titanium rails. The wheels were built up with DT Swiss rims and Kenda tyres. The LT had Avid Juicy 7 brakes which we loved—the XC had Shimano Dual control brakes and shifters. All decent quality stuff.

Both bikes were fitted with Maverick forks which use a special hub and 24mm axle to provide a very stiff front end. The LT had the DUC32, a dual crown design offering 150mm travel, the XC used the SC32, a single crown 125mm travel version. These forks

SPECIFICATIONS - BLUR XC		SPECIFICATIONS - BLUR LT	
Frame	Aluminium 6069 VPP 115mm travel	Frame	Aluminium 6069 VPP 135mm travel
Shock	5th Element	Shock	Fox RP3
Fork	Maverick SC32 125mm travel	Fork	Maverick DUC32 150mm travel
Components	Shimano XT	Components	Shimano XT
Brakes	Shimano XT Disc	Brakes	Avid Juicy 7
Rims	DT Swiss XR 4.1d	Rims	DT Swiss XR 4.1d
Tyres	Kenda Nevegal 2.1	Tyres	Kenda Nevegal 2.1
Bike Weight	12.3kg (27lbs) inc. pedals	Bike Weight	12.8kg (28.2lbs) inc. pedals
Frame Weight	2,320g (5.1lbs)	Frame Weight	2,800g (6.2lbs)
Cost	\$6,800 as tested (\$2,940 Powder coated frame-only)	Cost	\$7,550 as tested (\$3,180 Powder coated frame-only)

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Platform Performance

The LT was fitted with a Fox RP3 rear shock to deliver 135mm of travel. This shock provided a ride that was very plush—more so than the 5th Element. It soaked up big hits and ironed out small bumps—at times we were left wondering whether someone had taken all the bumps out of our normal trail ride! Pedal induced bob was mostly removed by the inbuilt platform which had three adjustable settings. While we could tell the difference between the three settings the variation between them was subtle. In the end we concluded that it would be better to go for a cheaper Float Pro Pedal model rather than investing cash in the RP3.

The XC came kitted with a Progressive Suspension 5th Element shock and offered 115mm of travel. The smooth action of the shock complemented the VPP frame design and delivered an impressive controlled ride. The shock could be tuned to provide a firm and very noticeable platform to stop the bike bobbing when pedalling out of the saddle. When combined with the shorter travel format, this shock made the bike pedal with hardtail like ease.

Contrasting Blur's

From a geometry and handling perspective, the difference between the two bikes is what you would expect. The LT has a longer wheelbase and a slacker steering angle—both work together to give a more stable ride on serious downhills, but will work against you when tight manoeuvring is required. Conversely the XC performs extremely well on tight singletrack. In the cockpit, the LT is taller and offers an upright seating position, the XC is more stretched out, but not uncomfortably so.

Both bikes are impressive to ride and each one excelled in its specific area. The LT can best be described as a 'cruise-ship'. It handles any terrain with ease and while it is not necessarily the most efficient bike—who cares. Just ride and enjoy. Drop offs and rocky descents, it eats them for breakfast. All of this is achieved in a package that is surprisingly light—it is a great bike to ride all day, every day, uphill and down.

In contrast the race inspired XC provides a solid rear platform for racing and the 5th Element shock suits the bike perfectly. The frame is light, the geometry nimble and the suspension works well to create a smooth riding race ready machine.

We think Santa Cruz has done a great job in refining the Blur to offer these two impressive and distinctly different variations on the one theme—if only we could afford to buy one! **TUBE**

Article by Gwyn Tavener-Smith & Ken Wilyman

Photography by John Hardwick

offered impressive plush rides.

The longer travel DUC32 model gave a serious sense of security—it made you feel that picking a line down a hill was something from the past. The down side with both forks was that they bobbed significantly whenever the pedalling got serious. To counteract this both forks offer a lock down position, which is activated by turning a switch mounted on the top of the right stanchion. Once locked the travel is reduced from 150mm to 100mm for the DUC32 and from 125mm to 80mm for the SC32. This feature worked but once locked down the forks became too rigid for any decent off road riding. In reality we only found the lock-down to be useful on steep climbs and on the road. Overall the DUC32 Maverick forks suited the LT but we thought that better options were available for the Blur XC.



Blur XC - Thumbs Up

- Responsive and efficient rear suspension
- Low weight

Blur LT - Thumbs Up

- Plush overall ride
- Just plain fun to ride
- Front fork performance

Blur XC - Thumbs Down

- Value for money
- Fork bobs too much for an XC racer

Blur LT - Thumbs Down

- Value for money