

Santa Cruz Heckler

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Bike: 2004 Santa Cruz Heckler

Distributor: Neezy Pty Ltd.

Ph: 0418 771 583

Email: scaust@gil.com.au

RRP - frame only with 5th Element or 5th Element Air rear shock: \$2600

RRP – As Tested - \$7500



This Farkin.net gig is hard work, particularly when someone drops a test bike on your doorstep that's just so damn sweet you realise it's going to spoil you for other bikes. But that's exactly what we got when courtesy of Neezy (Santa Cruz Australia) and Michael from [ForTheRiders.com](#) a Santa Cruz Heckler literally dripping in trick parts landed on our doorstep for us to test.

The Frame

The frame these trick bits were hung on was a medium 2004 Santa Cruz Heckler with a 5th Element Air rear shock. Coated a deep lustrous shade of cherry red the frame reeked of quality, with excellent welds, sensible gusseting and a single rear pivot that was more or less in line with a 38-tooth chain ring.



As far as frames in the Santa Cruz range go, the Heckler is something of a misfit. With a burly gusseted head tube, dropped top tube and 125mm of rear wheel travel from Santa Cruz's time tested mono-pivot suspension design, the frame is easily burly enough to be a 4X or dirt jumping machine but could just as easily be built up into a 12-13kg all day trail bike if that's "your thing".

Our test sled was built up somewhere in between these two, with a selection of tough but sensible componentry and 5th Element Air rear shock. It was taken shuttling, dirt jumping and street / skate park riding during the 3-week test and during this time, while the rear shock performed admirably, the plastic bushings attaching it to the frame did not.



Towards the end of the test the lower shock mount bushings on the 5th begin to split and eventually split in half when jumping the creek gap on Flaggon in Toowoomba. 5th Element Australia informed us that this is common on Hecklers that are ridden hard and that they replaced the plastic bushings with burlier stainless steel bushings if and when they died. Two thumbs up for customer service.

The Bits

As I mentioned before, the frame we were given was dripping in trick parts and if I ever build up my dream bike it's spec sheet will look a whole lot like the one the Heckler boasted.

Starting from the front an LP Carbon riser bar mounted to a Thomson stem and turned Fox's top-of-the-line Vanilla 125RLC forks through a Chris King No Threadset. On the bars Hope Mini levers pumped fluid to Hope Mini brakes while Shimano XT shifters controlled the XT front and XTR rear derailleurs. Unfortunately the Thomson stem proved too long for my short ass, so it was swapped out for an equally functional but slightly less trick 70mm Bullit stem, reducing the pimp-factor of the bike by a few points.

The Hope 6" rotors mounted to DT Cerit Hubs laced to Dice Duke wheels with double-buffed DT spokes. The wheels were wrapped alternately in a Maxxis Minion front-rear combo in the superlative Slow Reezay compound for downhill and an Intense front, Hutchinson Python rear for dirt jumping and cross country duties.

A Thompson seat post held up an SDG saddle for you to park your rear while Oury grips gave you somewhere to put your hands. I threw my Oddysey Jim Cielincki pedals onto the Shimano XT cranks and bottom bracket and the bike was ready to rock.

Sound like a dream spec to you? You better believe it was...

The Ride

Getting the 5th Element Air shock dialled in for my weight proved to be a problem at first, with the Santa Cruz website suggesting an air pressure that felt way too soft. Luckily I managed to find Tim Flook's Racing who provided me with some set-up tips that were much more to my liking.

All these sweet bits mean nothing if the bike isn't good to ride, luckily for the Heckler the frame lived up to it's looks and ripped absolutely everything I threw it at. Shod in downhill tyres the bike devoured local downhill runs, cornering like it was on rails with the combination of Slow Reezay Maxxis rubber and a low (13.2") bottom bracket letting you lean the bike waaaaay over in the corners with total confidence.

It tracked predictably at high speed and was nimble enough to pick through rough and rocky sections quickly, though the bike seemed to blow through the last third of it's travel too easily for my liking on repeated hits like braking bumps.

The bike rewarded you for staying off the brakes, with the single pivot rear end working much more effectively with the brakes off.

As a dirt-jumping rig the Heckler was simply phenomenal. I pumped the 5th Air right up, wound the Fox Forx up to give me as much pop as possible and took it for a few sessions at various trails around Brisbane.



The light-weight frame and wheels, stiff suspension and roomy top-tube combined to make the bike a stable, confidence inspiring and eminently flickable dirt jumping machine. The dropped top-tube meant getting the bike flat was effortless and the 22.5" top-tube length was x-up and presumably bar-spin friendly.



It was the couple of XC rides I managed to get on the Heckler though, that made me realise just what a versatile bike this was. Though the bike was sensibly tough, it was still light-weight enough to be an all-day trail bike or XC racing machine. With the suspension set-up for cross-country riding (with the settings again taken from Tim Flook's racing) the 5th Element Air shock showed just why stable platform valving is indeed a 'good thing'.

The bike took off like a scalded cat when you put the pedal down with the 5th Air and the Heckler's pivot location working together to all but eliminate pedal induced bobbing. The straight seat-tube allowed the seat post to be run for full leg extension and more importantly, allowed ample room to show off the fact that I was running a Thomson seat-post.

The bike steered quickly and devoured swooping single-track turns and switchbacks, when the terrain turned up hill the bike would dig in for traction while seated and climbing, with the superlative rear suspension compensating more than adequately for those of who like to honk on the pedals rather than pedalling anything even resembling a circle.

The Verdict

It's hard to look back over a review and realise you've written what amounts to ad-copy, but when a bike is this damn sweet there's just not a lot of bad things you can say.

Built up like this was a fantastic do-everything bike, perfect for epic cross country rides, a bit of dirt-jumping, some 4-cross, some cross country racing, in fact just about any discipline of MTB riding you could care to mention.

If you wanted a more jumping / 4-cross / DH oriented rig you could easily opt for a tougher build, with burlier wheels a chainguide, some Manitou Shermans and a 5th Element coil rear shock to give yourself a seriously pimp little accompaniment to your DH rig.

To put it simply, if I could afford to own a Heckler I would in an instant, I have ridden my dream do-it- all bike and I want it back. If you get the chance to ride one I seriously suggest you take it and I dare you to tell me you didn't like it. The Heckler is something of an anomaly within the Santa Cruz line-up, not neatly fitting into the mould of a cross country, 'freeride' or downhill bike, but equally suitable for any of the three the Heckler could easily become the only mountain bike you need to own with a few intelligent spec decisions.

The only problem with the bike we experienced was the shock-mount bushing and we were sorted out with information on how to receive a warranty replacement the same day we called 5th Element Australia.

Thanks again to Neezy and ForTheRiders.com for hooking us up! We appreciate it guys.

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