TOAD

OFF ROAD TEAM TOAD

Lean green dirt machine

There are two basic classes of bicycle companies that manufacture fat-tire bicycles: the ones that take themselves seriously and the tongue-in-cheek folks. While both are out to make a living, it's an easy guess which group is going to enjoy the journey. Off Road Toad is definitely one of the latter group. Off Road Toad (yep, that's the bike's legit name!) is another of the Vancouver, British Columbia, frame-building set that has been quietly cranking out a few hundred custom units each year for anyone who subscribes to its brand of fat-tire philosophy. Exactly what does that mean? We called 'em up and popped the question to satisfy our curiosity.

A quiet, unassuming voice on the other end of the line explained that the Off Road Toad was designed to be fun to ride in any terrain. It was light and snappy enough to do well at the races, and yet had all the moving bits tucked far enough away from the nasty elements to make it a durable trail bike. The voice continued, modestly explaining that it was the company that developed Canada's signature high-seat-stay/low-top-tube style that by now is now *de rigueur* for all custom bike builders above the 49th parallel. Another tidbit we didn't know was that the first frames to utilize roller pulleys to route the front derailleur cable were Toads at the '86 bicycle show. Impressive stuff in a soft voice.

OUR TOAD ARRIVES

After receiving a few-hundred-odd bicycles in reinforced cardboard boxes, the *MBA* staff has developed an accurate feel for how much an average one weighs. If one feels exceptionally light, it's usually because the rest of the bicycle was shipped in another box. Our Toad remained in its box because it felt too light for a complete bike and we were waiting for the remaining components to show up. To our shock, when we finally pulled the bike out, it was complete, it was steel and it weighed a tad over 22 pounds. Whoa!

It wasn't just a regular Toad—it was a Team Toad painted in their team colors. What was that color? Team Toad green. As fat-tire bicycles go, this baby was as plain and straightforward as they get. The frame uses Ritchey Logic Prestige Super tubing with standard-diameter, 1.125-inch seat and top tubes with an oversize 1.375-inch downtube. There were no major tricks on the Team Toad—just less of everything, which was the basis of this design, right down to the demure Ritchey dropouts. Less may be more, but the Off Road Toad manages to throw in a few curves. Even the rear triangle came equipped with fender mounts. Below the standard-diameter head tube was a cool brazed-on reinforcement. Our resident frame gurus couldn't help but note that the head tube/down tube gusset (in the context of such a light steel frame) seemed like a vain attempt to forestall inevitable fatigue failure. As far as coolness goes, the only compromise the Off Road Toad's designers made towards making a statement was to move the seatpost clamp to a position below the seat stay junction. We thought we had seen everything until we were forced to adjust our seat by reaching midway between the bottom bracket and top tube. The Toad designers claimed a minute reduction in weight, although the modification requires a minimum of five inches of seatpost to remain in the frame. So whatever weight is lost, is gained!

SO WHAT IS THE FRAME GEOMETRY?

Surprise! The Toad breaks with tradition. At least Canadian tradition. Rather than the ubiquitous steep 74-degree seat angle and classic 71-degree head angle that is rubber-stamped all across the Great White North, our Toad came with a moderate 72.5-degree seat angle and a cruisin' 70-degree head angle. The top tube length and bottom bracket height did, however, stick with tradition. Our 19.5-inch frame had a 12-inch-high bottom bracket and a 23-inch top tube measurement. The wheelbase was a short 41.65 inches, due in part to its laid-back seat angle. To keep things clean and out of the way, all the cables run atop the top tube and, as further insulation against the nasty bits, the last run of cable housing spans the entire length of the seat stays on its way to the rear derailleur.

What kind of components would you expect on a steel bicycle under 22 pounds? The lightest ones in the world? Surprise! The list reads more conservatively than you would expect, but it's still a mixed bag. The drivetrain, rear hub and cogs were pure Shimano XTR. Syncros provided the titanium bottom bracket and its TIG-welded chromoly crankset. The wheels are Mavic 231s with 32 spokes. The front rim is laced to a Syncros suspension hub. Pretty cool stuff, but not the lightweight wonder garbage that graces most made-to-be-light bikes. The Toad

◄ *Take a deep breath: High-speed tight corners? The faint-hearted need not apply. Any of our testers who had questions about how ultra-thin steel frames would handle at speed, stepped off the Toad with a clear answer.*

Sleek peek: The Off-Road Toad epitomizes what the classic hard tail should look like: Conservative, no frills, well constructed, and VERY light. We calculated our Team Toad's frame weight at 3 lb. Can a steel frame be that light and still hang? ►