

OFF ROAD

does have a few obvious weight reduction tricks in evidence. Shimano thumb-shifters replace the heavier Rapidfire Plus combos; Control Tech Ti-Rods eliminate the quick-release mechanisms, and instead of Shimano SPD pedals the Toad has tiny, titanium, Speedplay pedals perched like Louis the XIV furniture adornments at the end of each crank arm. A few other weightless parts worth mentioning were the Bontrager Titec bar ends and Syncros Ti handlebar. The important job of suspending the bike (and including this bicycle in a hardtail test) was delegated to Manitou IIs.

LET'S GET THIS TOAD ON THE ROAD

It didn't take the MBA test riders very long to figure out which bike they wanted to ride first. The requisite pre-ride Heft-a-thon shocked our resident titanium cult riders, who had to outelbow everyone for the first shot at a steel bike that was lighter than Ti. The Team Toad was impressive with its minimal weight and depressive with its torsional flexibility.

The light weight paid big dividends, especially at moderate speeds. The Toad was fun to sprint and provided a serious mental advantage when climbing. On singletracks the Team Toad's feathery

feel was an advantage anytime the bicycle had to physically move to avoid an obstacle. When push came to shove, it became obvious that the Team Toad was designed with the finesse rider in mind.

A bike with this much flex had better be under a rider with a fine eye. When you get the bike up to 30 mph on tacky fire roads, it begins to feel good. You get overconfident and start carving the turns hard. When the Toad is forced into a turn the frame winds up a tiny bit. The flex is loaded into the tube's computer bank much like guitar feedback. The moment the front or rear wheel breaks loose, the frame unwinds and the bicycle slips off line. On a long, hard sweeper this phenomenon can take place three or four times. While the bicycle certainly can be pushed in this manner without creating a serious incident at every curve, an hour or so of this unsteady activity is enough for even the bravest riders to back off and cruise for the rest of the day.

Even the titanium cult riders began to feel that there was a limit to how light a steel mountain bike frame can be. The Team Toad might be an indicator pointing to the edge of the weight precipice. Most riders jumped on the Toad with enthusiasm and returned with mixed reviews. Part of this had nothing to do with the frame but was related to nag-



Helium-filled: Lofting the thin steel zep-pelin was a matter of picking a small hump or a even a rock to spring from. Once airborne, perfectly smooth landings were in your best interest.

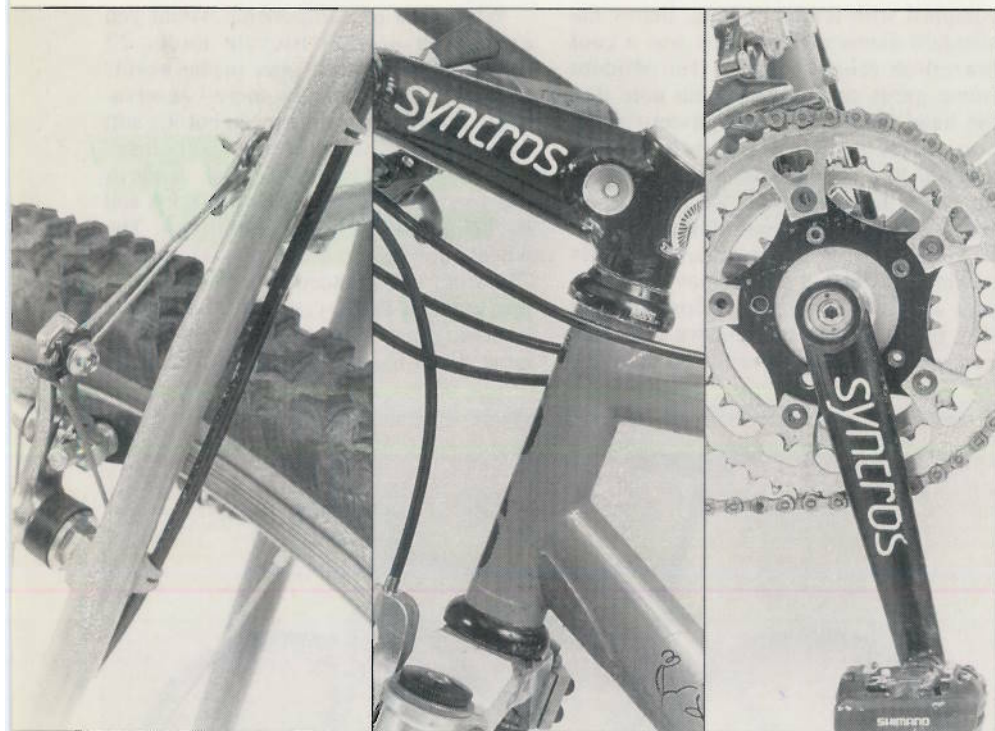
ging failures in the component department. A terminally loose Aheadset prevented any solid feeling from being transmitted through the steering head. A thin Ritchey Z-Max rear tire kept searching for traction that only the larger front tire could find. Even the normally reliable Syncros crank was bent on abandoning its chainrings (one bolt at a time). It wouldn't be fair to point the bony finger of blame at the frame, considering all the component-related distractions the test riders were forced to look through in their evaluations.

ENVELOPE, PLEASE

If we were to recommend a Team Toad to anyone, it would be to a tall, thin, six-footer weighing in at around 145 pounds. This person would live at altitude, climb with a smooth rhythmic pedal stroke and ride lightly in the technical stuff. All Toads are sold as frames, so none of our nitpicking would be a problem, since we would switch the rear tire, pick a lower stem to compensate for Off Road Toad's tallish head tubes and mix our components with care.

If light is what you are searching for, the Toad's price is right—\$795 is reasonable for a custom anything these days. If you are a pedal-to-the-metal, fire road and singletrackin' fool, the Team Toad might be a bit of a disappointment.

For more information on the Off Road Toad, call them at (604) 876-2683, or write them at #100, 68 E. 2nd Ave., Vancouver, BC Canada V5T 1B1. □



Watertight trend: The MBA crew was pleased to find cable housing running the full length of the rear stays. We have found that unbroken housing runs last longer and run smoother in this location. It's no surprise to find this routing on an amphibian.

We would be happy, too: Why is Mr. Toad smiling? Because Off-Road Toad added a brazed-on gusset to the underside of the downtube to keep things in place under high loads. The Toad's 1"-size AheadSet gave us continuous grief.

Shedding weight: The Syncros TIG-welded chromoly crank was stiff and fairly light. However, the chainring bolts popped off one by one until we were riding double instead of triple chainrings. Where DID that granny go?