

BIKE TEST



DIAMONDBACK * SANTA CRUZ * TREK

10/12

Diamondback Sortie 2: Diamondback's five-inch standard-bearer comes in a no-frills, budget version that is easily upgradeable.

Santa Cruz Butcher: Santa Cruz's new all-mountain rig packs a lot of punch in a surprisingly simple and affordable package.

Trek Fuel EX 8: The Fuel EX 8 is loaded with bling, but the innovative frame and rear suspension is what truly sets this trail bike apart.



SANTA CRUZ BUTCHER

\$2,354 / SANTACRUZBICYCLES.COM
(**\$1,350 frame only**)



SANTA CRUZ BICYCLES HAS WRUNG SOME OF ITS MUCH-BALLYHOODED VPP SUSPENSION PERFORMANCE out of a simpler, single-pivot design called APP—or Actual Pivot Point. By carefully adding linkage to a single pivot design, Santa Cruz's engineers have captured the shock rate of their Virtual Pivot Point design without using VPP's more complex (and expensive) counter-rotating links.

In theory, the changing (initially falling and then rising) shock rate helps Santa Cruz's VPP and APP bikes ease into their travel, so that they're buttery on small hits, and then ramp up deeper into the shock stroke, so that they don't blow through their travel on big hits.

Out on the trail, theory and reality mesh nicely. The Butcher feels magic-carpet smooth on small to medium hits, without bottoming out on fiercer terrain. In fact, having ridden a Blur LTc for most of the 2010 season, I was struck by how much more supple the Butcher felt. Of course, this isn't an apples-to-apples comparison—the Butcher sports an extra 10 millimeters of rear travel—but I was impressed all the same.

The Butcher's geometry (67.5-degree headtube, 72-degree seat tube and 44.5-inch wheelbase, for a size Large) lends the bike confident and neutral manners when things get dicey. The bike's rear triangle isn't as triangulated as the back halves on either the Blur LT or Nomad, and thus proved a tad less stiff than either model under hard cornering, but the Butcher is a fearless descender all the same—and is just flat-out fun to ride.

The APP design doesn't add gobs of chain-driven, anti-squat to the single-pivot equation. Consequently, while the Butcher climbs well for an all-mountain bike, the pedaling isn't as crisp as what you'd experience with a VPP model. If you live for the climbs, upgrade to the RP23 rear shock (an extra \$115) and flip that blue ProPedal lever.

You can buy the Butcher as a frame only or clad in one of 13 different build kits. —VERNON FELTON

Hydroformed frame



The Butcher features a rugged, hydroformed frame that's built to take abuse. Want to build this thing up for big-hit riding? Go ahead. This is a bike that truly lives up to its "all-mountain" billing.

APP (Actual Pivot Point) linkage



The clever addition of the APP linkage has enabled Santa Cruz to capture some of their Virtual Pivot Point bikes' bump-eating performance in a simpler, single-pivot package.

BOTTOM LINE: ALL-MOUNTAIN ON A BUDGET? THE BUTCHER IS PROOF THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO SELL THE FARM TO BUY A SUPERIOR BIKE.