



SANTA CRUZ BLUR XC CARBON

\$5,705

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THE BLUR XC CARBON WAS SANTA CRUZ'S FIRST FORAY INTO THE WORLD OF CARBON FIBER. USING carbon shaved a pound off of the Blur's frame and made it one of the stiffest bikes the company has ever produced.

This Blur spent a healthy amount of time with a number plate zip-tied to it. The 23.5-pound (size large with pedals) weight makes it competitive with any full-squish bike available. But what surprised me most was the frame's stiffness. Instead of bonding several tubes together, Santa Cruz uses a proprietary molding process to create a monocoque front end that is truly one piece. This makes for a stiff frame that is as light as possible.

Descending on the Blur evoked a feeling of confidence that is rarely felt on a 4-inch race bike. The headtube angle is slightly slack for its class, at 69.5 degrees. The suspension behaved in a balanced manner front-to-back, with a ramp-up at the end of its travel to prevent harsh bottom-outs. The only thing that bungled up the Blur's otherwise superb suspension performance were big square-edge hits, where the ramp-up characteristics caused the bike to hang up a bit. The bike constantly wanted to be pushed harder and deeper. Slapping some meatier tires and a through-axle fork on this Blur would create a blazing-fast trail bike.

The stiff and light carbon frame meshed perfectly with the efficient VPP linkage. The Blur climbed like a monkey, absorbing small trail features and easily keeping the rear tire tacked to the ground. Though the headtube angle is slightly slack for an XC race machine, the front end refused to wander—even on the steepest climbs.

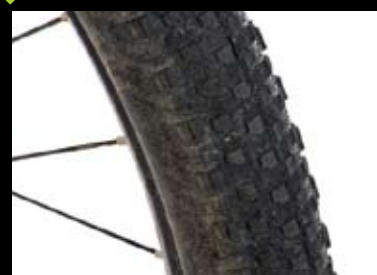
Santa Cruz offers seven different build kits for the Blur, with fork and shock options to cater to just about anyone's brand and price preferences. The build kits range from a reasonable-for-carbon \$3,500 to an investment-grade \$7,500. I opted for Santa Cruz's X.0 XC kit with RockShox Sid Team fork and Fox RP23 shock. With this kit, the bike retailed for \$5,700. —RYAN LABAR

RockShox Sid Team



The Sid Team matched the feel of the Blur's rear suspension—smooth at first, with a nice ramp-up at the end. The RockShox Sid platform's stiffness improved greatly a few years ago with the addition of 32-millimeter stanchions and larger bushings. The non-remote lockout is clean and simple. Even after some big hits and heavy race-day floggings through mud and dust, it refused to leak any oil.

Renegade S-Works 2Bliss Ready



These tires were originally going to be used for only one race, but ended up staying on the bike for most of the test period. They provided more traction than I would have imagined, and the rolling speed-to-traction ratio was impressive.

BOTTOM LINE: A BLAZING-FAST RACE MACHINE THAT CAN DOUBLE AS A TRAIL BIKE WITH A FEW PART SUBSTITUTIONS.