

DEFINING THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN CYCLIST

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UNRAVELING THE HANDMADE WHEEL
530 MILES, 60,000 FEET: THIS IS A RACE?
MYSTERIES OF THE KAIBAB CRESCENT
A TWO-WHEELED SCAVENGER HUNT



Before things got really ugly, Scott Penzarella (in foreground) follows his teammate Grant Smith through a swooping drop during Stage 1 from Shawanigan Lake to Cowichan.

Left: Emerging from the woods of pain, two riders enjoy another stage of the BC Bike Race.

Stage 1: Shawanigan Lake to Cowichan

What a day... hot, hot and really hot, 90-plus degrees and competition is tough. We rode 89 km today with some really tough riding. The racecourse quickly entered the challenging singletrack with hard climbs. We had no idea how hard it was really going to be. Boy, do we feel unprepared.

Despite the challenge, we took 32nd today out of 300+ two-man teams. Grant rode well but suffered cramps. We got stuck in no man's land and made a few wrong turns here and there. The biggest factor was the heat and lack of water.

For once, I pulled for the last 25 km up a light, false flat to the finish. The last start took its toll but no doubt Grant, the locomotive Kiwi, will be back tomorrow.

Stage 2: Lake Cowichan to Port Alberni

Dusty long day. More than 128 km. There were several really

Stage 3: Port Alberni to Duncan

This was another long day with a pizza from yesterday. Today's stage was 125 km. After yesterday's tough 125 km, we finished in 28th place. Happy with our performance today with no great efforts.

The field tore apart after hills. I reminded me to go easy and save energy. Grant kept getting stronger and stronger and we did the countless pulls to the top.

We tackled the hills with more energy. The first of a long series of log bridges. The singletrack resumed and we descended. Crossing a river. Waist deep in ice cold water on our way to the first aid station.

Once onto the trail after aid station, the group and quickly accelerated to a very good time, making our way through the forest. We encountered some of the best singletrack I've ever ridden.

Tomorrow we would have to take our first ferry ride from Cumberland.

Day 4: Earls Cover

The singletrack continued to be tough. Cold, Grant rallied more than once. The night blowing his horn and coughing was one to highlight.

Starting at sea level, today's stage was over and over for 60 km.

The singletrack throughout the stage was classic wood bridge crossings and river crossings. I learned a number of river crossings. I learned to ensure we got no more than 100 km. Sure is a wise fella.

Day 5: Sechart to Squamish

Today was only 64 km but it was a long day (and on our asses), we are getting tired and 50 minutes. Not our best performance. Early mornings and late nights.



[ellsworth]
EVOLVE

Size tested: XL
Price (frameonly): \$2,395
Weight (frameonly): 6.05 lbs.
www.ellsworthbikes.com



The Right 29er Formula

I'm 6-foot-1 and getting old and rickety, so I'm in favor of a bike that fits better, climbs easier and goes faster without actually working harder. Better living through engineering, I suppose. If it weren't for past experiences with 29ers that feel tippy and handle like an old Winnebago with an overloaded roof rack, then I would have grabbed a gun and joined the 29er revolution long ago. That's the difficulty though: 29-inch wheels are the circular equivalent of stilts for your bicycle. So, could the new Ellsworth Evolve deliver the efficiency benefits of a 29er without compromising its technical savvy? I had high hopes.

The Evolve is Ellsworth's reply to the call for a nimble 29er that can conquer technical singletrack with grace and agility. It is designed with a recommended four inches of front and rear wheel travel and is intended for cross-country riding.

Ellsworth's featured frame design is a patented variation of the traditional four-bar link dubbed ICT, or Instant Center Tracking. The Evolve uses a special 29er version of Ellsworth's ICT design to counter suspension compression with forces generated by chain torque. A pivot on the chainstay eliminates the arcing rear axle path found on similar rocker-link designs. The Evolve's aluminum frame is heavily gusseted and uses square tubing on the seatstays and chainstays for increased torsional stiffness.

Out of the box, the Evolve's shapely gussets and neat, even welds looked professional and accounted for a very good-looking bike. There is no set gruppo for production, so component choice on the Evolve is purely up to individual decision. This test bike came equipped with high-end components from Shimano, FSA, Thomson and Ringle as well as a RockShox Reba 100 mm fork and a Fox Float R shock. This bike has a smoke anodized finish, and there are four other finishes available. I'm a function-over-form type of guy, so the scratch-resistant durability of the anodized finish was an extra bonus, and it will look good for years to come.

On the trail, I was immediately impressed with how stiff and responsive the Evolve rides. It truly feels like there are four inches of rear suspension travel buffering the blow of big impacts, yet the bike doesn't flex or feel wobbly. Tube shape manipulation, wise gusset placement and burly-looking CNC'd aluminum rocker arms contribute to confidence in rough terrain. I was as comfortable railing straight ahead through a mess of jagged rocks on the Evolve as I am on 26-inch mountain bikes with similar travel. My test bike's 45.5 inch wheelbase is comparable to that of my downhill bike, and it feels very stable

at high speeds in general.

Low speeds and especially low-speed cornering are where the going gets tough. Cornering on any 29er is a bit awkward, especially tight cornering. Just by nature of the larger wheel, 29ers distribute weight higher above the ground, and the wheelbase spreads out to allow tire/pedal clearance up front and tire/frame clearance in the back. A high center of gravity and long wheelbase make for clumsy cornering, but there are ways to help offset the ride characteristics.

The Evolve uses a comparably steep 72-degree head tube



The Ellsworth Evolve has classic lines and rides like it has classic geometry.

angle which effectively tightens up handling and tucks the front wheel underneath the rider. The 13.6 inch bottom bracket height is not remarkably low, but it's low enough to help distribute weight closer to the ground and add to stability. I was worried about clearance issues but never had any crankarm digs that couldn't have been avoided with a better-polished technique.

The Evolve is more nimble and capable in the technical sections than I had even hoped for. It's not on par with the agility of a 26-inch wheeled bike, but that's not a fair expectation. I had a few 29er moments where I felt like I was top-heavy, but the Evolve never felt spindly or flimsy in the rough stuff. Many times, especially in prolonged sections of small rocks and roots, the Evolve felt significantly more sure-footed than my traditional mountain bike. There are several familiar rock gardens and technical sections on my local trails in Crested Butte, Colo., where I am faster on the Evolve, no doubt about it.

The Evolve is not at all suited for big jumps, but it's a standout in the climbing arena. The suspension feels snappy and power and acceleration is immediate with the Evolve, but just as



Ellsworth's patented Instant Center Tracking Suspension design makes the Evolve different from any other twenty-niner you'll find.

it is on any 29er, it takes a little more effort to start turning the bigger wheel and gain momentum. The Evolve is no exception to physics, but it is exceptionally good at maintaining the power transfer from leg to wheel.

Ellsworth seems to have found the formula for pivot placement and rocker arm length and the efficiency of the ICT design is apparent with each pedal stroke. With the shock adjusted correctly, compression and torque balance out and every pedal stroke delivers forward momentum. Thrust the pedals abruptly and the front tire pops up. Spin nice even circles without throwing weight around and the bike will go down the road bob-free all day long. The Evolve rides and reacts much like a hardtail does—and then four inches of suspension smooth out the bumps.

Disappointments are few and brief. Without dwelling on component spec too long, the strong points were Shimano's new low-profile XT rear derailleur, Kenda's fast and grippy Small Block Eight tires and Magura's Marta SL brakes. The Ringle Abbah hubs were fine, but the wheelset could have stood to be stiffer overall. I've often thought that a bolted Saint hub and axle assembly would lend a lot of stability to these 29er bikes with long spokes, long chainstays and long seatstays.

Weight and price vary with component specifications and from dealer to dealer, but it's fair to say that it can easily be

lighter than 30 pounds for less than \$3,500 with a safe and reliable gruppo.

And now to answer the question I started with: does the Evolve maintain all the efficiency benefits of a 29-inch wheel without compromising technical ability? No, it doesn't. It just can't. It is more capable than any other 29er I have tested or ridden, but it's just not going to thread a line or slice a corner the way a traditional mountain bike will. Personally, I'm over it.

For all the trade-offs and advantages the Evolve offered, I don't care if it's a bit slower or more awkward in the tight technicals. I would stack this 29er up against my riding equal on a traditional mountain bike and bet odds that the Ellsworth Evolve will be faster on nine trails out of 10. More importantly, I know I can come off a 25-mile ride with this bike without a sore neck and back, and I might even have enough extra energy to go wash off my liver with a few beers. —Jim Fitzgerald

Suspension Travel: 4 inches
 Wheelbase: 45.5 inches
 Seat tube: 73.5 degrees
 Head tube: 72 degrees
 Bottom Bracket Height: 13.6 inches

Custom anodizing provides a subtle and unique finish on the Evolve frame.



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