

# FAT CITY CYCLES' FAT CHANCE

*The lazy man's bike*



Hold the line: Fat City knows a thing or two about frame geometry. The Wicked Fat Chance feels stable at speeds, with a responsive and light-feeling front end. The rigid frame reminds cyclists how rough the terrain is—it feeds impacts to the rider.

It's not uncommon to see other riders when cycling in the hills, but this guy is different. You're having a hard time keeping up with him. Ignoring your best judgment, you push aside the leg-burning pain and grind the chain onto the middle ring, get out of the saddle and stomp away at the pedals. All this increased effort is doing little to keep the coolly seated cyclist from disappearing over the horizon. Completely disenchanted, you ease off the pace. One mile later, as you clear the summit of the lengthy climb, you're startled by the unknown mountain biker's silhouette on *Top of the World* (so nicknamed for its incredible view). Cycling slowly toward Mr. Mystery, your eyes focus on his bike's paint scheme. Blue stays fading into white and back again to blue on the forks. Wait, there's more. Jagged yellow triangles and black dots are strategically placed on the main tubes

to provide one of the most attention-grabbing bikes you've ever seen.

"How's it going?" you blurt out as you coast to stop next to him.

"Oh, not too bad, just taking in some scenery," he replies in a soft tone.

"Nice bike. Did you paint it yourself?"

"No, Fat Chance," the stranger replies. Not only is this guy fast and the rider of a trick bike, he's also very cocky.

"Can you at least tell me what kind of bike it is?" you ask somewhat hastily.

"Fat Chance." With that, the cyclist lifts his feet, simultaneously slips them into the clips and drops off the edge. In the process, you catch the name of the frame—Fat Chance.

**MODEL:** Fat City Cycles' Wicked Fat Chance.

**PRICE:** \$1250 (including custom paint).

**PURPOSE:** Off-road cycling/racing.

## FRAMESET: LIGHT, CRAFTY AND HIP

**MATERIAL:** Chris Chance, the man behind Fat City Cycles contacted True Temper to custom-make chromoly tubing for the Wicked Fat Chance. The triple-butted main tube frameset displays a true mix of tubing diameters (1.125-inch top and seat tube, 1.375-inch thin-wall down tube, .625-inch seat stays, and .750-inch chain stays) to fight flex in the required areas while cutting weight in the less-critical stress areas. The 1.375 head tube is machined down to 1.25 inches at the center, giving sturdy headcup-end reinforcers. The chain stays are butted at the brake boss mounts to improve rigidity. Our test Fat Chance featured the minimal braze-ons: two sets of water-bottle bosses, dual rear-dropout eyelets and single fork-dropout eyelets (Shimano or SunTour dropouts). Fat City Cycles will design a bike

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to suit your specific needs, so the lack of pannier and rack mounts shouldn't alarm anyone.

MBA test riders approach most one-inch-diameter fork blades with extreme caution (we bend them), but the Fat Chance's tapered Tange chromoly tubes passed the testing process with flying colors. The forks spin freely in a black-anodized Shimano EX600 headset. Weight is cut by pressing light steel races into the aluminum housing. O-rings make super-efficient seals that increase the life of the crucial headset bearings.

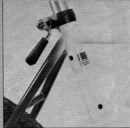
What a paint job! A special Fat City Cycles mix of blue Du Pont Imron stays fade into a white front triangle. Matching blue forks and stem accent the color scheme. But why stop here? Fat City Cycles throws on some artful black dots, yellow triangles and bold graphics to add a Mondrian finish to the Wicked Fat Chance. A clear coat of Imron keeps the bike looking new under most conditions. Imron is one of the most durable finishes available. Fat Chance City Cycles has unlimited frame color designs available or will custom-paint to customer requirements. The Wicked Fat Chance will go a long way toward making you look sharp.

**GEOMETRY:** The tight single-track trails of the New England countryside provide an excellent testing ground for the Fat Chance's handling. Going with the flow of new mountain bike design, Fat City Cycles steepened the head angle to 71 degrees and shortened the chain stays to a spunky 17 inches (there's adequate tire clearance with the short stays). MBA testers agreed that the 22-3/4-inch top tube, 72-degree seat-tube angle, two inches of fork offset, 11.9-inch bottom-bracket height and 42-inch wheelbase complemented the steeper front and shorter rear like a glove. It looks as though the laidback 69-degree seat and slack head geometries (called Excelsior geometry) are dying a quick death. Time continues to improve the breed.

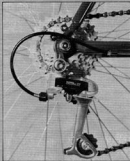
## WHEELS: STRONG, LIGHT AND SILVER

**ASSEMBLIES:** Double-butted DT 14/15-gauge stainless spokes prove that Fat City Cycles is paying attention to details. Weighing only 485 grams, the Araya RM-20 rims are the builders' number-one choice as wheel hoops. Is it still necessary to explain the advantages of the Shimano Deore XT hubs? Well, here goes—minimal weight, rubber-tipped quick-release and skewer caps, outboard drive-side bearing, cassette sprocket interchangeability, and easy-to-service seal retainer grease injection portholes (rotate the retainer to open, and inject grease with a hypodermic needle). With wheels like this, who needs powerful quads?

**TIRES:** Specialized Ground Controls. What else would you expect from a \$1250 bike? If you're not familiar with the Ground



Proud Mary: Made in the USA! American-made Tru-Temper chromoly tubing is placed together with outstanding welds. The paint scheme is flawless. A Shimano Deore XT quick-release binds a Sunfour seatpost collar.



No introduction needed: This is by far the slickest shifting of them all! Shimano's Deore XT SIS rear derailleur actually enhances mountain biking pleasure. All it takes is one smooth click-shift, and you're hooked.

Controls' traction and durability, let us remind you. Although not exceptionally light, these tires use a moderately flexible sidewall (66 tpi) and offset knob layout to roll over and around everything that stands in its way. Run 35 psi in Ground Controls. They rarely suffer flats.

## DRIVE TRAIN: SAME OLD SONG AND DANCE

**CRANKSET:** It's hard to fault the new Shimano Deore XT crankset. Just one look at the 175mm arms will convince even the most stubborn doubters. Not only do they look strong, they are. A heat-treated chromoly bottom-bracket spindle is accurately centered in the cartridge bearings by set-screw aluminum retainers. The 26/36/46T Biopace II chain rings use three different types of sprocket teeth and critical shifting area reliefs to fool the chain into believing the sprockets are round in order to aid shifting. Shimano's new Deore XT pedals use a healthy platform to transfer full power to the cranks. Slanted cage sides automatically pivot the pedals flat as you step on them. These units are great for toe clips, although



Work of art: The Wicked Fat Chance had very well selected 14-16-18-22-26-30T cogs slipped onto the Shimano Deore XT cassette hub. This hub is easy to service with its external-access seal holders. No more excuses for bearing failures!



Looking at you: Shimano's centerpull-inspired Deore XT U-brake offers simplicity and powerful braking modulation. Adjusting the brake is fairly straightforward. The new Shimano brake pads are made from improved material and incorporate an innovative anti-wear shape.

some cyclists have been filing down the aggressive gear teeth to allow toe-clip users to slip their feet in and out of the clips a bit easier.

**DERAILLEURS:** Be forewarned—don't try index shifting unless you're planning to get it. One solid click-shift with Shimano's Deore XT SIS rear derailleur is all it takes to get hooked. It's great! A special shifter cable housing (made from piano wire) puts a stop to any cable compression that could throw the critical SIS center adjustment out of whack. Adjust high and low derailleur stops, then adjust the cable ferrules to center the clicks over the cogs. It's as simple as pie. The 14/16/19/22/26/30T gearing is one of the better spreads we've powered through in some time. There's a gear for every situation. A narrow Uniglide chain is standard-issue Shimano drive line.

Front derailleurs are still weeding their way through mountain bike development. The Shimano Deore XT is designed to perform smoothly and quickly based on its simplicity and stiff construction. The critical granny-gear shift still requires some plan-

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ning, but this derailleur is a major step in the right direction. The outboard-placed Shimano Deore XT thumb shifters could barely be improved on. The shifters' indent clicks are solid and the index-to-friction mode option can be switched by a simple flick of the finger. An impressive design feat.

## COMPONENTS: BLUE, BLACK AND COMFORTABLE

**BAR:** Fat City Cycles bends True Temper T2 aluminum bars into a perfect sweepback 23.5-inch width. The T2 bars held up exceptionally well to off-road pounding and aided in impact absorption. You wouldn't expect anything less than Grab-On grips on a mountain bike like the Fat Chance. They're comfortable and durable. Take a close look



at the Fat Chance stem. A double expander spindle slips inside the fork center stem, while the 1.25-inch 4130 chromoly neck fits over the protruding wedge. Tightening the stem bolt cinches both wedges at the same time (one in the fork center stem and one

**We don't care how they do it in California:** Fat City Cycles' Wicked Fat Chance inherited basic East Coast geometry. Short wheelbase, tall bottom-bracket height, and upright seating position are pluses in tight, woody single-track trails.

## SPECIFICATIONS



**Model:** Wicked Fat Chance.  
**Manufacturer:** Fat City Cycles, P.O. Box 216, Somerville, MA 02143, 617/625-4822.  
**Sizes available:** 16.5", 18", 19.5", 21".  
**Size tested:** 19.5".  
**Finishes available:** A wide variety of Iron paint schemes.

**Actual weight:** 26.2 lbs.  
**Brake-one:** Dual water-bottle brake-ons, dual rear dropout eyelets, single front dropout eyelets.

**DIMENSIONS**  
**Wheelbase:** 42"  
**Bottom bracket height:** 11.9"

**Fork offset:** 2"  
**Trail:** 2.5"

**Head tube angle:** 73°  
**Seat tube angle:** 72°  
**Top tube length:** 22.75"  
**Seat tube length:** 19.5"  
**Chain stay length:** 17"  
**Bar width:** 23.5"  
**Stem reach:** 4"  
**Stem rise:** 4.75"

### GEAR INCHES

| Cluster | Chain rings |    |
|---------|-------------|----|
|         | 26          | 36 |
|         | 45          | 57 |
|         | 42          | 58 |
|         | 36          | 49 |
|         | 31          | 43 |
|         | 26          | 36 |
|         | 23          | 31 |

NOTE: THE MOUNTAIN BIKE ACTION test uses real-world ride data under controlled circumstances, on private property and with respect for the environment. No wilderness or environmentally sensitive areas are used.

## MOUNTAIN BIKE ACTION PERFORMANCE CHART: WICKED FAT CHANCE

| COMPONENTRY EVALUATION  | 60         | 70         | 80         | 90         |
|-------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| QUALITY OF CONSTRUCTION | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| COMPONENT SELECTION     | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| SHIFTING                | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| BRAKING                 | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| RELIABILITY             | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| RIDING EVALUATION       | 60         | 70         | 80         | 90         |
| CLIMBING                | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| DESCENDING              | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| CORNERING               | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| ABSORPTION              | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| LAYOUT                  | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ |
| OVERALL HANDLING        | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ | ██████████ |
|                         | Poor       | Fair       | Good       | Excellent  |

against the stem). The 4.75 inches of rise makes for a comfortable seating position. Very efficient.

**SEAT:** A Lambda S saddle has great padding and features the excellent leather construction that Specialized saddles are famous for. Most cyclists will be satisfied with its comfort. The 300mm long Strong seatpost isn't one of our favorite components. We've bent them under average mountain biking conditions. The Shimano Deore XT seatpost quick-release binder bolt has an incredible amount of thought built into it. In an unusual feature, the QR cinches on a SunTour cast seat-tube binder.

**BRAKES:** Progressive, powerful and easy to adjust. That sums up the new Shimano Deore XT front cantilever and rear U-brake. The front cantilever brake is compact and easier to adjust. Although the U-brake isn't the cure-all for under-the-stay mounting, it delivers reasonable tire clearance and trouble-free performance. Fat City Cycles will build you a Fat Chance with a seat-stay-mounted cantilever rear brake, if you prefer. One nice touch on the Shimano hard-rubber brake pads is their built-in anti-wear design that keeps them in full contact against the tracking edge of the rim, thus avoiding a pad slipping under a rim. *MBA* isn't really pumped by the standard-issue Magura levers. Once the favored brake-lever blades, these short-lever require too much hand reach and too much finger pressure to provide adequate modulation to the brakes. They're still very popular on the East Coast.

## RIDING IMPRESSION: THE LAZY MAN'S BIKE

**OVERALL HANDLING:** The first thing you notice about the Fat Chance is its comfortable riding position. Aggressive riders might prefer a flatter reach stem (Fat Chance will make the stem any way you want) to deliver a more powerful hunched-over cycling position. But even these cyclists admitted that the standard 4.75-inch rise grows on you after initial familiarization. The Fat Chances respond instantly to body shifts



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and directional inputs. Even in the saddle a slight shift fore to aft of upper body weight provided instant chassis reaction. Climbing is excellent with the short 17-inch stays and rigid rear triangle assembly. While climbing, front-end straying is minimal. It didn't have any undesirable heavy feel, but still displayed some front-end hunt under slow-speed cranking situations. The 22.75-inch top tube pushes out the front triangle clearance for healthy out-of-the-saddle hammering. The stiff frameset monitored a lot of terrain feedback to the cyclist. Nothing uncomfortable, but fast, rutted barzol runs produced a few shudders that allowed the bike to skip around. Cornering is even better than what you would expect from a 71-degree head angle—it holds the fine line with no nasty habits. It's obvious that we enjoyed riding the Fat Chance.

**NECESSARY CHANGES:** *Mountain Bike Action* would prefer Shimano's new Deore XT brake levers—they're a perfect match to the rest of the brake lineup. A flatter stem would suit our tastes but isn't necessary.

**RATING:** Excellent. Is it really that good? Easily. Fat City Cycles knows how to build mountain bikes. And they'll do it any way you want. That means that if you don't want Magura levers or the Strong seatpost, they'll install the suitable component. As it sits, the Fat Chance is a perfect in-the-saddle stormer. Plus, it's built with tons of quality and features a truly impressive paint job. Do you think you can beat that? Fat chance! ☐

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