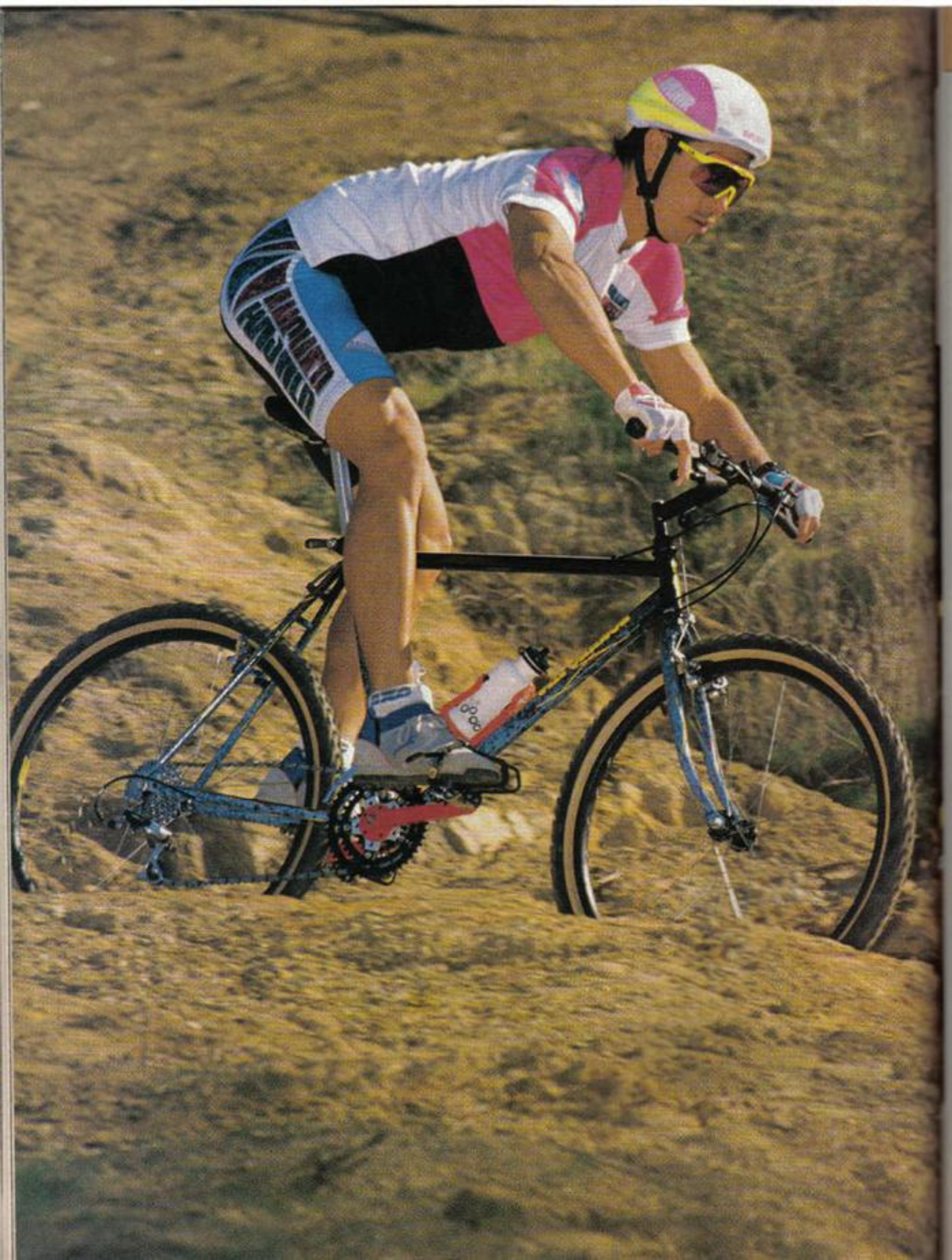

FAT CHANCE TEAM COMP

Holding up their end of the coast

One of the inherent problems with the name "mountain bike" is that people who don't live anywhere near the Rockies have had a difficult time relating. There was a move afoot a few years ago to call mountain bikes by the acronym ATB (for All-Terrain Bike). Most off-road riders hated the ATB label and kept calling the bikes mountain bikes, and they called them that even if they lived in mountainless Florida. Hard-core off-road riders know that you don't have to live above 7000 feet to ride a mountain bike and the world is beginning to accept the versatility of the "mountain bike." The dichotomy of altitude has disappeared in the off-road world.

But the mountain bike world is still divided by an East-vs.-West rivalry. The West Coast builders (Fisher, Cunningham, Breeze, etc.) got a head start on the sport, captured the imagination of the Sun Belt racers and etched their designs in iron from the late '70s on. The East Coast designers weren't far behind, but they did their work in obscurity. The press, public acclaim and racing world centered itself far from the Atlantic Ocean. It might have remained a West Coast-dominated business but for one company—Fat City Cycle—better known as Fat Chance.

BUILDING AN EAST COAST BASE

Chris Chance has been so successful in building an East Coast base of operations that many West Coast riders now straddle Fat Chance mountain bikes. After years of seeing western bikes invading the forest trails near his Somerville, Massachusetts, factory it gives him no end of pride to suddenly find a welcome national market for his machines.

Other East Coast custom builders haven't been as prosperous at cracking the rest of the country because of the unique attributes that make an East Coast woods bike an effective weapon in the trees. Riders careening down the fast fire roads of Southern California, climbing above the treeline of the Sierras or pedalling across the rolling terrain of Kansas could never come to terms with the high bottom bracket height (for ground clearance), narrow bars (to weave through trees), short top tubes (for more upright pedalling) and agile steering (for low-speed quickness). Chris Chance built more than his share of woods bikes, but he also kept abreast of the changes in the rest of the off-road world. His bikes have kept pace.

The new Fat Chance Team Comp is an effort to build the ultimate all-around Fat Chance. It is the top-of-the-line bike from Fat City, and with a $1998 price tag it is $400 more than the amazingly popular Wicked Fat Chance.

WHAT CHANCES DID CHANCE TAKE?

With Fat Chance's nationwide dealership network and rapidly expanding reputation the Team Comp is a natural step for Chris Chance to make. By building an all-out race bike, Fat Chance will appeal to the NORBA crowd, be more attractive to the Pacific Basin downhillers and have a lightweight, high-quality, high-dollar bike to play off of the Wicked's popularity.

One goal that Fat Chance had in mind was to use as many American-made parts as possible. To that end the price of the Fat Chance Team Comp was raised considerably because American-made components such as Bullseye hubs and cranks are designed as aftermarket add-ons (and can't compete on an OEM price basis with Japanese production houses). We believe that the goal of building an American bike with made-in-the-USA components is a worthy one, and that Chris Chance should be applauded for trying.

The Fat Chance Team Comp is a hand-built, limited-edition mountain bike. Chris has no plans of flooding the marketplace with Team Comps. He wants each one to go to the kind of rider who will enjoy it—and he plans to build each one carefully to ensure enjoyment.

The American way: The concept behind the Team Comp is to produce a bike with as many made-in-America components as possible. True Temper provided the frame and handlebar tubing, while an IRD seatpost and Bullseye hubs round out the package. Top quality throughout.

Quick shift: Shimano's selection of rear clusters for seven-speed Hyper-Glide is limited to 12-28 or 13-30. Fat Chance's selection of a short-cage rear derailleur guarantees ultra-quick shifts and necessitates the use of a rear cog no larger than 28 teeth.

On target: American-made Bullseye cranks are unique in that they aren't cast out of aluminum, but are a lightweight tubular chromoly design. Chainrings are Shimano units in a 48/38/28 configuration.

True tubes: Fat Chance uses True Temper's new ATX tubing. It is marginally heavier than Tange Prestige, but is specially made for Fat Chance. True Temper also makes the bars. Shimano supplies the headset.

Franco-American: In a very unusual twist of component one-upmanship, Fat Chance uses American-made Bullseye hubs laced to French-made Mavic M6 rims. The quick releases are very sano Mavic road units.

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THE MOST COMMON QUESTIONS

WHOs & WHYs OF THE FAT CHANCE

• Each off-road bike has a story to tell. Sometimes the geometry, specs and numbers tell most of the tale, but there are always unanswered questions that nag the bicycle enthusiast. What are the ins and outs of building a specific model? What does the sum of the parts add up to? Did the designer do everything he could have done? How good is the end result? The *MBA* wrecking crew dissected the Fat Chance Team Comp to find out the hidden secrets. Here are the most common questions and the answers.

QUESTION ONE: WHAT'S THE FRAME ALL ABOUT?

Our Fat Chance Team Comp frame was a slightly odd size. It measured center to top at 19.75 inches, but because it had a slightly sloping top tube it was really a 20-inch frame along a level plane. The Somerville factory receives special shipments of American-made True Temper ATX tubing to use in the Team Comp. You may not be familiar with ATX, but it is a good, solid tubing that is strong and relatively light. It weighs more than Tange Prestige tubing, but Chris believes that it will have a longer lifespan (which makes it a more durable, reliable and cost-effective buy).

True Temper is an aggressive company producing a rapidly expanding lineup of seamed chromoly tubing. To make Fat Chance's plans to produce an American-made bicycle a reality, True Temper was the only choice because it is the only high-quality American-made chromoly bicycle tubing.

QUESTION TWO: WHAT ELSE IS AMERICAN-MADE?

Even with the best of motives Chris Chance could not have built a 100 percent American bicycle. Some parts aren't available and some that are aren't up to the standards of the foreign parts. Fat Chance used a fair measure of American parts—it could have used even more.

The frame tubing and bars come from True Temper. George Wilson dropouts grace the ends of the tubes. The stem is a Salsa, while the grips are Grab-On. Hubs, bottom bracket and cranks are California-made Bullseye parts. The seatpost is from IRD in Oregon, and tires, clips and bottle cages from Specialized. That's it for the good old USA!

Foreign components consist of Mavic M6 Oxygen rims and quick-releases, Selle Italia Super Turbo saddle from Italy, Shimano derailleurs, brakes, headset, levers, shifters and freewheel from Japan, and SunTour pedals from Japan.

Could Fat Chance have used more American-made products? Sure! Sun Mistral rims, IRD brakes, Revco pedals and Bullseye bolt-on axle releases. But all told, Fat Chance made intelligent choices and did a good job of keeping Americans employed.

QUESTION THREE: HOW IS IT BUILT?

Workmanship is first-rate. The welds are very neat with no pits, voids or flaws. The Team Comp comes with a one-color paint job, but Fat Chance will custom-paint any bike (our test bike has a three-color splatter) for extra dollars. The paint on our test bike was so thick as to cover the welds and smooth out the finish.

None of the tubes are ovalized, pierced, extended, crossed-over or grooved. Fat Chance built the Team Comp without any fashion statement tubing tricks. Just good solid welding and clean prep. The head tube has very tidy reinforcing collars at the top and bottom. The seatpost is held in place by an aluminum BMX-style seat clamp that has a centering tab on it. In between the seat stays (where they join the seat tube) there is a small gusset reinforcing the rear triangle. The dropouts are very stylish George Wilson units that were cult items a few years ago. Wilson dropouts are investment-cast stainless steel designs that are uniquely different-looking. We were a little suspect of the strength of the rear derailleur hanger. It is quite thin and slender.

QUESTION FOUR: WHAT DIDN'T WE LIKE?

No matter how well-built a frame is there can always be some criticism leveled on the design and layout of the bike. Fat Chance did an excellent job of avoiding almost all nitpicking except for one major area—tire clearance.

We were shocked by the minimal front tire clearance that the Team Comp's front forks offered the off-road maven. Since Fat Chance builds its own forks and its bikes are all-around, all-weather machines, it is hard to figure why it has less fork clearance than a set of off-the-shelf one-inch Tanges.

Rear clearance was adequate, but not outstanding. Tire clearance means a lot to a rider who goes out for a quick spin on a day after a rain (or for a rider caught out in the rain). If the mud builds up on the tire it will get scraped off on the forks and stays. Mud buildup on the frame tubes can quickly bring a bike to a halt, and that means a long walk home. Tire clearance is *beaucoup* important.

QUESTION FIVE: WHAT ARE THE NUMBERS?

We like the frame geometry of the Fat Chance Team Comp. The 70.5-degree head angle is a nicely selected number that offers quickness and stability. Equally cool is the 71.5-degree seat angle. Lots of avant-garde hotshots have tried to push mountain bike seatpost angles upward into the criterium and sprint bike mode. Those 74-degree seat angles are great when you sprint, but just the opposite on a long grind up a terminal incline or on a fast, bumpy and skatey downhill. As mountain bikers we appreciate the versatility that a slack seat angle has over a steep one (we can always slide forward or get out of the saddle to sprint).

The 1.75 inches of fork offset combine with the 70.5-degree head angle to provide a balanced steering response. Reasonable

SPECIFICATIONS

Model: Fat Chance Team Comp.
Manufacturer: Fat City Cycles, PO. Box 218, Somerville, MA 02143; (617) 625-4922.
Sizes available: 14, 16.5, 18, 19.5, 21.
Finishes available: One-color paint scheme stock (custom colors available).
Suggested retail price: $1098.

COMPONENTS
Front derailleur: Shimano Deore XT.
Rear derailleur: Shimano Deore XT-7s.
Front brake: Shimano Deore XT cantilever.
Rear brake: Shimano Deore XT cantilever (seat stay-mounted).
Cranks: Bullseye 176mm, 48/38/28.
Freewheel: Shimano Deore XT, Hyper-Glide, 12, 15, 17, 19, 21, 25, 28.

FRAME
Tubing: True Temper ATX.
Head angle: 70.5°.
Seat angle: 71.5°.
Top tube length: 22.75".
Chainstay length: 17.1".
Braze-ons: Double water bottle bosses, slotted cable guides, single rack eyelets.

NOTE: The MOUNTAIN BIKE ACTION test crew rides its test bikes under controlled circumstances, on private property and with respect for the environment. No wilderness or environmentally sensitive areas are used.

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trail for stability at speed and controllable pendulum effect for slow-speed agility.

QUESTION SIX: AREN'T THE CHAINSTAYS TOO LONG?

Fat Chance may be one of the few manufacturers to have chainstays longer than 17 inches (17.1"), but don't be confused into believing that the extra quarter-inch in length over contemporary chainstays was a mistake. Fat Chance's 17.1-inch chainstays are perfectly set up for a bike with a slack seat angle. Remember, when the seat angle is tilted rearward the rider's weight is positioned farther back than on an upright seat angle. That slack seat angle gets more weight and more traction to the rear wheel. Good specs, excellent climbing and clean design philosophy.

The bottom bracket is 11.65 inches off the ground and the wheelbase is a spot-on 41.5 inches. Top tube length is 22.75 inches (when measured across a level plane). Stand-over height on our 19.75-inch frame was 30.5 inches tall.

QUESTION SEVEN: WHAT IS THE GOOD STUFF?

To tell the truth, there isn't a bad component on the Fat Chance Team Comp. The Shimano Deore XT seven-speed drive train (with short cage derailleur) is functionally the best derailleur system ever made. It overshadows last year's six-speed clicker by 20 percent.

Let it roll: Chris Chance spec'd the Team Comp out with a nicely balanced middle-of-the-road geometry that is more daring than mundane. If the Salsa stem wasn't too long, the Team Comp would have been a terrific all-around bike. One inch less and it's almost perfect.

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Bullseye cranks are way cool. The hollow tubular steel units are light, strong and rigid. The innovative thread-in bottom bracket assembly slips over the large integral spindle and is so easy to use that it makes the old ball-and-cone system seem archaic. We didn't like the new cap system that was used to cover the hole in the hollow spindle. It was unnecessary and overcomplicated. We'd rather have the tunnel than two machined caps, two Allen bolts and an aluminum slug in between them. Excess foof.

IRD seatposts are top-notch. The double-bolt design adjusts the seatpost rocker into a solid and secure micro-adjust. The IRD post has a usable length of 320mm. Very long and very strong.

QUESTION EIGHT: ARE THE HOOPS FROM FRANCE?

Rims are the new round-profile Mavic M6 Oxygen. Mavic and the rest of the European component contingent are just starting to make a dent in the off-road market and the Euro parts are going to open up all-new options for off-road cyclists. The dark anodized rims will get scratched. We prefer natural aluminum coloring so that the bike looks as good on the trail as it does in the showroom. Chris Chance selected Mavic quick releases to go with the Bullseye hubs and Mavic M6 rims. The Mavic QRs are terrific-feeling, ultra-light and very status-oriented.

Steering wheel: Grab-On Pyramid grips grace the ends of the bars and give the rider a comfy place to grab the new Shimano Deore XT-II shorty brake levers. The seven-speed shifters work like a charm.

QUESTION NINE: HOW DOES IT HANDLE?

On our first test ride we didn't like the Fat Chance Team Comp. It had a serious oversteer problem that aggravated the bike's steering response to off-cambers, fast downhills and tricky drop-offs. Why? None of the numbers pointed us in the direction of a bike that would hold a line only up to a point before the front end would dart out from under us. But the problem was staring us in the face. The long Salsa stem is just too much for the 70.5-degree head angle. The rider's body weight overrides the Ground Controls' contact patch and the front gives way. An easy fix—a one-inch-shorter stem.

With the shorter stem in place, the Team Comp began to respond to rider input with accuracy. At low speeds it was agile, quick and very adept at holding a line. There was no front-end wag when climbing and the bike felt comfortable picking its way through rocks and trees.

At high speed the stem swap made the

most difference. The 22.75-inch top tube isn't ultra-long (which is probably why Fat Chance went with the long stem to begin with), but it does give the rider more than enough room to control the bike's balance points. One advantage that a bike with a 71.5-degree seat angle has is the ability to let the rider hang way over the back on descents and fast fire roads, and a wider range of fore and aft motion than a sprint bike. This is what makes the Fat Chance a good fireroader and adequate downhiller.

QUESTION TEN:
WHAT DO WE REALLY THINK?

Where the Fat Chance Team Comp really shines is on the trails. It is light and aggressive to ride through single-track trails. It can be accelerated, slowed and burst back to full tilt in one fell swoop. The bike's comfortable layout, strong chassis and sturdy components make it one that can bash, crash, thrash and blast its way through the most rugged terrain around—and it can do it for years without whimpering. It's a solid-performing off-road bike that isn't hampered by lead weight feel or faddish upright geometry.

We think that the new Team Comp model breaks Fat Chance out of its woods bike mold and into the realm of a good all-around bike design. This bike can do it all, and do it well. • □