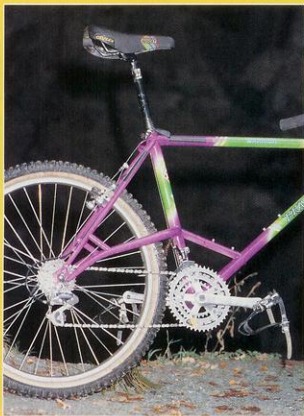




# Brave Warrior

*The Brave Warrior's a top line  
elevated chainstay frame that  
will arrive in Britain equipped with  
Ritchey goodies. Dave Smith  
took out the first one to reach these  
shores. Here's his report.*

*Pics: Eric Whitehead Photography*



**B**rave Warrior is quite a macho, aggressive name for a bike. Whether or not riding it makes you feel brave is another matter. Still, if you're going to be brave on a bike, you should really have one that handles as well as the warrior. Oh, I should mention it looks the part too.

The Brave is an American-made beast, out of Monrovia, California, imported into Britain by Split Sports of Manchester, a skateboard emporium of some repute, which has recently moved into the mountain biking retail business. They set it up for me at short notice using various available components, including Pace Research forks, which will not be specced as standard.

What the spec sheet does list are the following goodies for £750: Brave frame and forks, Ritchey stem, bars, seatpost, true grips, headset, bottom bracket, bottle and cage. So you'd need to set aside a few hundred quid extra for wheels, transmission and the rest to get the bike ready to roll.

What can I say about the first impression you get when you look at the bike? After the green and purple paint job has ceased to dazzle you, it strikes you that some of the bits are in the wrong place. For this is an elevated chainstay bike, nowhere for the chain to catch and enough tyre clearance to make a grown man cry. Then you'll notice that the welds are immaculate, then you'll notice the neat pipe work to carry the cables, then if you're lucky, you'll get on the

thing and thrash it till your legs are dead, but you'll still be smiling. However your bank manager will not be smiling - no way - he'll be well miffed.

The frame is made from a standard diameter custom drawn Tange/Brave double butted 4130 chromoly steel. The whole caboodle is then TIG welded and brazed into a wonderful basket of goodness. The rear triangle is meaty, the chainstays looking suspiciously liked re-worked front forks, really solid. A cross strut from the seat tube to down tube helps reduce frame flex, and coincidentally makes a useful handle for carrying the Warrior.

Cables are all routed on the 23 inch top tube, disappearing into neat little pipes at the seat tube. However, the clearances between the cables and expensive paintwork are just too small, practically non-existent, therefore the cables will soon be eating into your investment - not a nice thought. More about the little pipes later. Also, the front cable stops are on the head tube which means that when the bars are turned there is a quite stiff bend in the outer cable, probably enough to crack the casing in time.

Staying with cables, the front mech cable routing uses a pulley wheel on the seat tube, having descended from the top tube via an intricately worked pipe. However, the friction on the cable was such that front shifts were nightmarish, not helped by a Shimano 500LX mech, so stiff in fact that the STI lever couldn't cope, necessitating ▽



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▷ a shift to thumbshifters.

The elevated chainstays tuck the rear wheel nicely under the 74 degree seat tube, the head angle being 71 degrees. The actual dropout to bottom bracket chainstay length is 16 inches, which made for some nifty climbing, despite the test bike's weight of 28.5lbs. Of course, use of full Ritchey gear and more carefully selected components would cut that weight down. As I mentioned before, Split Sports were pushed for time and did OK.

One previously overlooked feature of the elevated chainstay design is that although there is nowhere for the chain to jam when riding, likewise there is nowhere for the chain to jam when it snaps. Result - you spend a bit of time poking around in the undergrowth trying to find your snapped chain. I know, I've been there! If you're lucky you find it. If you're unlucky, it happens when you are at the front in a race!

What goes up must come down and the Brave comes down really well with good reassuring high speed handling. It goes where it's pointed, but doesn't try and point itself off the beaten track. I rode the Warrior in the Dual Downhill race at the Cheshire Classic and found that the bike was a better descender



than I was. Dismal times were not its fault.

Overall verdict? A great bike, handles beautifully, but...the little touches which look so good, such as cable pipes and cable routing aren't so suitable for British conditions. If you're going to spend this much money on a frame, you don't want rusty, stiff cables or cables eating into paintwork.

In the two weeks I had the bike I had to change the rear brake cable twice, and that was only in sunny October. American design, and Californian design especially, is for America and

mud free California. In most cases, it carries over the Atlantic, but in the case of the Warrior, it wasn't destined for cruddy British conditions.

Admittedly, these are very minor criticisms, but important ones. Using more mud resistant routing would elevate the super handling of the Brave Warrior to higher levels of practicality for British use, the elevated chainstays starting the ball rolling. If you happen to be emigrating somewhere hot though, 'warrior' waiting for, go see your bank manager.