

DURANGO

SPECIALIZED

SPECIALIZED

NED OVEREND'S SPECIALIZED EPIC

Fit for a king

The idea seemed absurd at first: Ned Overend handing over his trick titanium-lugged carbon fiber Specialized race bike to the wrecking crew. Ned scoffed, too. "You know, I remember when Mike Kloser's race bike showed up at Mammoth three years ago looking like a chopper after *MBA* tested it. This bike is sweet, man; giving it to you guys is a dangerous proposition." We enticed the champ with tickets to a major motorcycle race when he came to town for the Anaheim bike show. Mention of a full-color page in the as-yet-unseen December issue helped persuade him. Of course, the folks at Specialized were more than happy for us to get our hands on the bike. The Specialized Epic that Ned rode to convincing victories at Mammoth and Durango is the pride of the company. Utilizing all the computer- and personnel-aided designs that could be had, the conservative (in appearance) bike is actually as trick as any fat-tired bike can get.

WHAT CHANNEL IS THAT ON?

Once we got the bike, our next challenge was to corner Ned long enough to hear what he had to say about it. As the winningest mountain bike racer in the world, Ned found himself too busy to talk during the days when the Anaheim show was in full swing. We decided to do a phone interview at his home in Durango. Unfortunately, we were pre-empted by a horror movie on TV that Ned was watching late at night. "Oh, man, you should see this—there's this huge snake creature crawling out of this woman's mouth . . ." We waited. "I've never seen anything this gross before . . ." We waited. "Okay, it looks like this guy is going to blow her and the creature up with a bomb . . . so what do you want to know about the bike?"

Ned rides an 18.5-inch Epic that weighs 24 pounds. The frame itself weighs three pounds and will be the same chassis used for the '91 Epic Ultimate (unlike the production bike, Ned's doesn't have rear dropout eyelets). Carbon fiber sheets are applied in a uni-directional manner at certain angles to absorb frame stress. As far as carbon fiber technology is concerned, the wrecking crew wasn't too impressed with earlier versions of the Epic. We thought the Epic was actually a steel frame with short carbon fiber connector tubes running between the steel lugs. The big bottom bracket lug robbed wheel



With minor exception: Specialized actually sent us the bike Ned used to win the National Championships. The only difference between that bike and the one he won the Worlds with was that at Durango he used Rock Shox forks with special magnesium pieces for greater weight savings. Even with suspension, Ned's bike weighed just over 26 lb.

clearance because the steel portion made up more than half of the chainstay. Regardless, Ned still liked the bike's stiffness, though he didn't appreciate the extra weight. His race-winning Epic sports much shorter lugs and more carbon fiber. Rear wheel clearance is increased because the lug now ends just two inches from the bottom bracket (vs. the earlier six inches). The chainstays are now molded carbon fiber—more clearance and less weight. This is a major leap forward for the Epic.

THE CHAMP'S CHASSIS

"I like the bike's weight and the absorbent ride of the carbon fiber. The smaller lugs give the bike more flex, which is good, and it really dampens road shock well." Ned's Epic has a 22.5-inch top tube and a 71-degree head and 73-degree seat tube angle. "Specialized would've built me a bike with custom angles, but I really feel most comfortable with these." Ned's Epic has an 11.5-inch bottom bracket, with 17-inch chainstays.

When Ned won the NORBA National title at Mammoth he used Specialized's chromoly Direct Drive forks. "For that type of course, I didn't think suspension would be that much of a benefit. The course was pretty smooth and I knew we'd be racing at a fast pace, so I wanted to keep the weight down." For the Worlds at Durango, Ned chose to run with Rock Shox up front. "Even though that course had a lot of climbing, the downhill was where I would be forced to keep up with guys like Tomac, who can descend faster than I can. Rock Shox were an advantage when we hit those water bars at speed. I knew the extra weight was there, but I could not really feel it."

AT THE CONTROLS

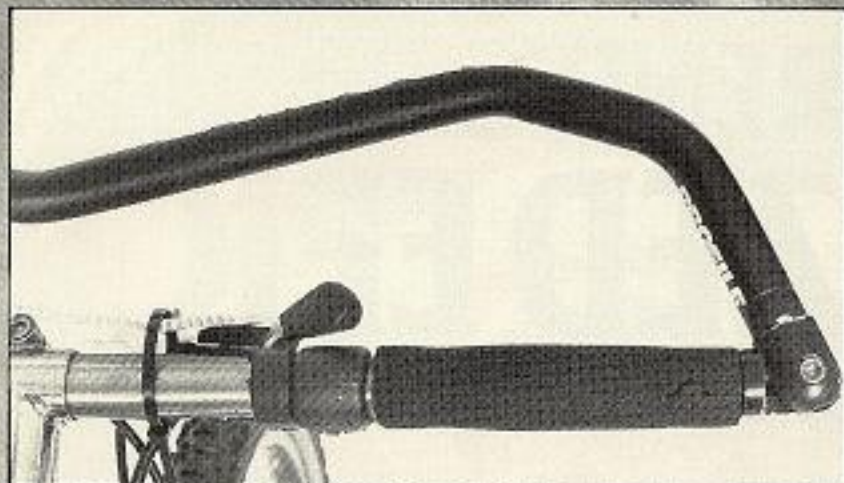
Ned's steering system is the most accessorized of the whole bike. Litespeed made a custom titanium stem and handlebar set. "I am not into steel bars. The titanium setup is definitely lighter and transmits less shock to my forearms. The faster you ride over rough terrain, the more you can feel the movement—I wouldn't say they're flexing, though. When you put the front wheel between your legs and twist the bars, the movement is surprising, but you never torque them like that when you're riding."

After testing different variations throughout the season, Ned showed up at Mammoth with a custom pair of alloy Profile handlebar extensions that he designed himself. "I designed them to be more compact for tighter maneuvering in the trees. They change my riding position when I'm climbing—I stand up, straighten my back and pull back on them, which gives me better traction. I use three different positions with my hands and they help keep my hands from going numb." For grips the Champ uses Grab-Ons.

Much to the dismay of Shimano, which has spent the season promoting their Rapid Fire shifters, Ned won the two big titles using the old-style top-mount shifters. Never a big advocate of the under-the-bar system, Ned had other reasons for using the thumb shifters: "I've got a gimp thumb on my left hand and could not get the shifts with the under-the-bar system. It's too confusing to run two different types, so I stuck with the top mounts. Anyway, if something's working well for me I don't like to change."

THE REST OF THE EPIC

"I used 24-36-48 Shimano Superglide chainrings this year. Last year I used a 34



Personal touch: Profile signed on as team sponsor but it wasn't until Ned designed his own pair of handlebar extensions that the bars found any use in racing. Ned's (also used by Lisa Muehich) is a much more compact design than earlier production models and he used them to his advantage when climbing. Profile will be marketing a Ned Overend bend in 1991.

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middle ring, but Shimano didn't make an SG version this year and they really work sweet so I switched to the 36. In the rear I used a 13-30 Hyperglide combination. At Durango it was threatening to rain, and I figured I'd need the extra gears if it got wet.

"For wheel assemblies I use Specialized

X23s with 32 spokes front and rear. I like the durability of the slightly wider rims. The team uses Wheelsmith spokes with alloy nipples and we haven't suffered any wheel failures this year. On a few courses I use Specialized Ground Control Extremes, but I mostly run Kevlar bead Ground Controls

front and rear."

Besides the under-the-bar shifters, Ned also stayed away from Shimano's other big promotion of the year—SPD pedals. "Like I said, I'm slow to change and I needed more time to work with the product. I didn't want to have to change my riding style once the

OVEREND'S SPECIALIZED



season got started. I was also real comfortable with the Specialized Hot Dog shoe."

YOU CAN BE JUST LIKE NED

Riding Ned's bike gives you a wonderful feeling, not only because it's light, nimble and precise, but because it is the winningest bike in the world. Like flipping pancakes

with Julia Child's spatula, shooting baskets in Magic Johnson's shoes or wrestling in Hulk Hogan's leotard, Ned's bike fills the mind with images of greatness. Its light weight is its best attribute, allowing the rider to brake deeper in turns and throw the bike through the singletrack over the rough stuff.

The front end rides so lightly it makes suspension almost a complete afterthought. No doubt the carbon tubes, titanium stem and bars help dampen trail shock. It's a sweet ride, worthy of all the gold in the world.

This was Ned's third year riding a carbon fiber bike (he alternated with his steel Team

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As little as possible: Every part on the Specialized frame is either titanium or carbon fiber. Compared to earlier Epics that used much larger chromoly lugs, Ned's bike (and 1991 production Epics and Epic Ultimates) used as little metal as possible to join the carbon tubes. Duralcan is a team sponsor and is the company that helped develop Specialized's new M2 mountain bike.

Stumpjumper for the last two), and obviously it was the most successful. For 1991 Specialized will make available two different versions of the Epic. One will be just like Ned's with titanium lugs, and the other will

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MOUNTAIN BIKES

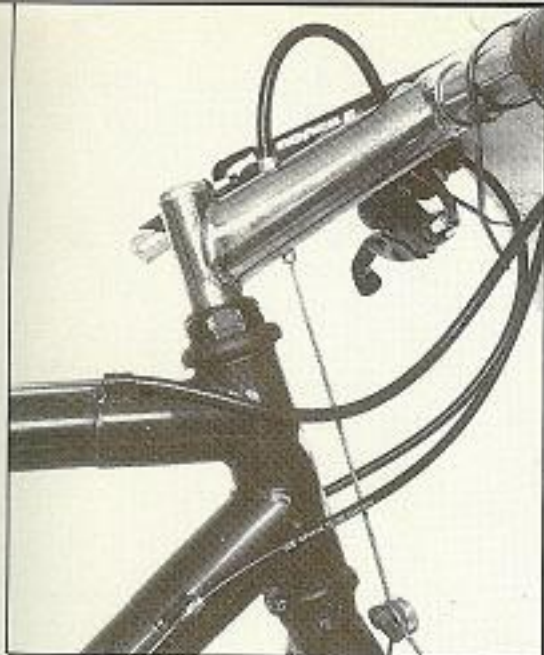
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Not a flaw found: Craftsmanship on Ned's bike is first-rate. Unlike other brands, Specialized downplays the visible aspects of the carbon tubes and titanium lugs to give the bike a very plain-wrap appearance. To soften up the ride when he's not using Rock Shox and to save more weight, Ned uses a titanium stem and handlebar combination, compliments of Litespeed.

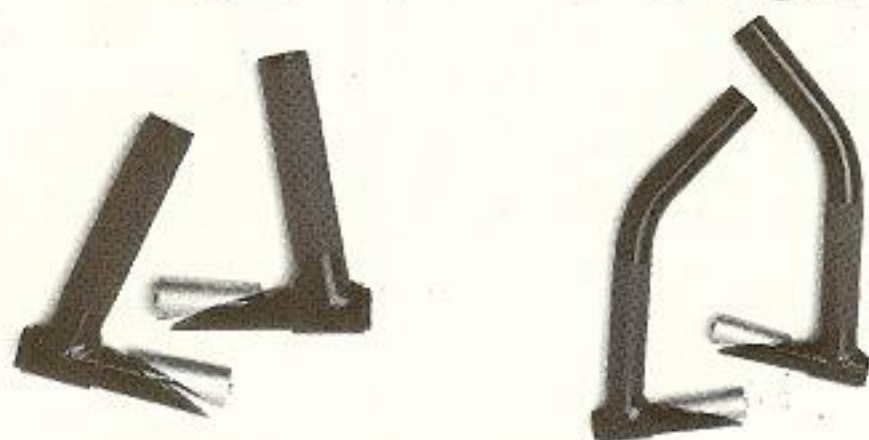
be a less expensive version with chromoly lugs. In no other sport, with the exception of running, does a consumer have the opportunity to purchase and use the same equipment as a world champion. Specialized has the bike—do you have the legs? □

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