

FOUNDER'S DAY BREEZER THUNDER

• You don't have to be around mountain biking for very long before you meet someone who claims to have invented the mountain bike. The world is full of them, but if you chance to run into a fellow named Joe Breeze—listen to him. Joe Breeze is the founding father of the mountain bike business (not the only parent, but in direct line of ascendancy).

From the day that Joe made his first mountain bike he has been on the leading edge of the off-road movement. The \$1300 Breezer Thunder is a perfect example of the care that a father takes in bringing up his children.

Frame: Unlike the higher-priced Breezer Lightning (\$1700), which uses Tange's ultra-thin-walled and lightweight Ritchey Logic Prestige tubing, Joe Breeze selected Ritchey Logic Super tubing for the \$1300 Thunder. Tubing can get confusing, even to riders who specialize in techno-weenie trivia, but the difference between regular Tange Prestige and Tange-built Ritchey Logic Prestige is that the Tom Ritchey-designed tubing uses special short butts to shave grams from each tube. The shorter butts are designed specifically for TIG-welded frames that are joined with the quick and efficient application of heat (requiring less meat to absorb the heat). The short butts and thin tube walls produce a frame that is not only light but lively. Okay, what's the difference between Ritchey Logic Prestige and Ritchey Logic Super tubing? Not much and a lot. Instead of the special heat-treated Prestige tubes the Breezer Thunder uses chromoly tubing that is stouter, but with the same basic configuration as the high-tech tubing.

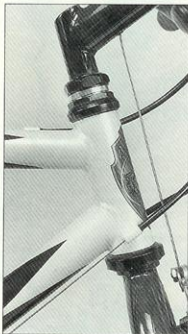
Joe Breeze's goal with the Thunder was to build a bike with greater durability, longevity and versatility than possible with the lighter and more temperamental tubes used in the Lightning—and just so you don't think that the Thunder is a pig, it tips the scales at 26.5 pounds.

A Breezer frame is so simple that it's beautiful—no frills, buzzers or bells, just the proper use of chromoly steel and TIG welding. Exceptionally clean and crisp beads highlight the welds, while Joe's years of experience guide his hand on putting the frame together. The cable guides are brazed on as far forward as possible to lessen cable housing and routing hassles, so far forward that the derailleur cable guides are actually brazed to the head tube. Tange Prestige Bi-Conical seat stays are mated to a



Breeze Thunder: Off-road pioneer Joe Breeze uses a combination of crisp engineering, lightweight components and years of experience to produce a superb-handling bike. The Thunder retails for \$1300.

◀ **Forward march:** Cable guides on the Breezer Thunder are mounted so far forward that they are brazed to the head tube. Shorter cable housings and less heat damage are the benefits.



Added extra: When you buy a Breezer you get a Hite-Rite seat adjuster thrown in with the deal. The Hite-Rite allows you to drop your saddle height for descents and have it return automatically when you hit the flats.

brake bridge that guarantees a minimal amount of brake flex. Breeze even uses the shortest dropouts possible so that the lightweight tubes do more of the work than the heavier dropout tabs. The seat tube is ovalized at the bottom to reduce pedaling flex, while the seat tube is bulge-butted at the top to provide more meat for the seatpost.

The front fork is a Ritchey Logic fork with Force Directional steerer tube and 27mm x 16mm fork blades—a very light and resilient fork.

Drivetrain: Equipping the Breezer Thunder is a complete Shimano Deore XT gruppo with a RapidFire Plus upgrade. Most off-road riders are familiar with RapidFire, the under-the-bar push-push shift system, but RapidFire Plus is a

spinoff from the higher-priced XTR trigger system. The Breezer grabs its gears with a seven-speed version of the XTR trigger and thumb system—superb shift-

◀ **Leader of the pack:** When it came to hard-core trail riding, serious climbing and covering ground at speed, the Breezer Thunder was always at the front of the pack.

WORKHORSES

ing and much better than standard-issue push-push.

Armed with 46/36/24 chainrings, the 175mm cranks turn out a usable spread of power for strong riders with its 12-28 rear cluster. We weren't surprised to find that Joe Breeze routed both derailleur cables under the bottom bracket. It's no secret that most contemporary designers go for top-driven cables (across the top tube), but if the founding father wants to hold onto under-the-BB routing we will let it slide. It's not criminal, just dirtier.

Components: Joe Breeze does things the sane way. The Breezer stem has an internally routed cable (Joe doesn't believe in headset-mounted cable guides like his NorCal compatriots), and Joe slips a spacer into the headset between the races and locknut to allow the buyer of the Thunder to upgrade from the short-stack Ritchey Logic headset to any taller-stack-height aftermarket bearing set. It's a little touch, but one that shows concern for the customer.

The rims are dark-colored Ritchey Vantage Experts (come on, Joe, get rid of the dark-colored rims) mounted with Panaracer 2.2 Smoke tires and Wheel-smith 14-gauge spokes.

Joe went to old buddy Tom Ritchey for any parts that he didn't build himself, and Tom is responsible for the tubset, fork, rims and seatpost. The saddle is an Avocet Racing 1.

The Breezer Thunder comes stock with a Hite-Rite saddle adjuster.

Interesting features: What's most interesting about the Breezer Thunder is that it harkens back to the good old days without losing sight of the advances of modern technology. It blends trigger-style shifting with long 17.25-inch chainstays. The Thunder combines short-butt chromoly tubing with a paint scheme dating back to the 1940s. The brake cables are guided through a bolt-on rear brake hanger reminiscent of the '70s, but the cable is pulling low-profile Shimano Grafton-style cantilevers.

Comments: Of all the bikes the *MBA* test riders rode this issue, the Breezer Thunder was the most incredible. It was accurate, agile, nimble, neutral, responsive and rock-steady. You could ride 15 bikes in a row blindfolded, and then throw your leg over the Breezer and recognize its greatness. It's that good.

Even with the longest chainstays we have seen in years, the Breezer still climbs like a Sherpa. The 71-degree head angle and 73-degree seat work well with the long 23-inch top tube. Racers would prefer a slightly lower stem than the slightly upright model on the Thunder, but for general all-around trail riding the Breezer is about as perfect as you can get in this decade. ●

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