

# HERE'S YOUR CHANCE



## WE RATE FAT CITY'S MOST AFFORDABLE BIKE

**S**weet! Corral Canyon, high above a sparkling Pacific Ocean. Saturday morning. Good buddies. Miles and miles of cliffside singletrack. Sweeping around hairpins and switchbacks, over rocks, over sand and loose gravel.

Sigh. I'd forgotten how nice it was to ride a solid, beautifully made, all-American steel bike. In the past year I'd been on titanium, aluminum, metal matrix, and even one bike made of hardened, formed matzoh meal. All were most lovable. (The one made of matzoh meal even tasted great in

chicken soup.) But the Buck Shaver—the newest and least-expensive (\$795 frameset, \$1,495 as tested) blaster from Somerville, Massachusetts' Fat City Cycles—reminded me of where all us high-brow types come from. And reminded me that steel is still—well, still steel. Light. Reliable. Capable of the highest levels of performance.

I've always had a soft spot in my heart for Fat City bikes. My brother owns a vintage '87 Fat Chance. My first serious bike was an '88 Wicked Fat Chance, the more aggressive version of the standard Fat. After I moved West and wanted an

BY DAN KOEPEL

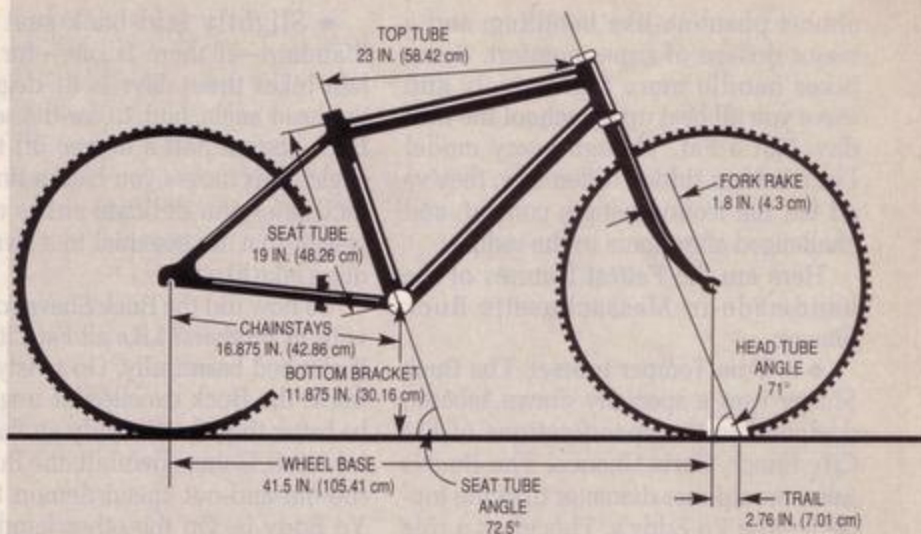


#### HITS:

- Custom ride for not much more than stock
- Incredible attention to detail and finish
- Wide variety of sizes

#### MISSES:

- Possibly too low-key for crazed, abusive riders
- Cheap for Fat City, but still expensive for many
- Weird 29.4-mm seatpost size



#### FAT CITY BUCK SHAVER

Distributed by: Fat City Cycles

Box 218  
Somerville, MA 02143  
617/625-4922

Country of Origin: U.S.

Suggested Retail Price: \$795 frameset, \$1,495 as tested.

Sizes Available: Extra small, small, medium (17-inch tested), large (measured center to center)

Weight: Frame, 4.62 lbs.; fork, 2.04 lbs.; complete bike, 24.60 lbs.

Frame: True Temper double-butted chrome-moly tubing; Tange Struts chrome-moly fork

#### Wheels:

Hubs — Shimano LX Parallax, quick release, 135-mm rear axle spacing

Spokes — 32, 14/15-gauge double-butted Wheelsmith stainless steel, alloy nipples, 3 cross

Rims — Weinmann/Bontrager BCX 2

Tires — Onza Racing Porc's, 26x2.1

#### Drivetrain:

Derailleurs — Shimano LX Advanced Light Action, Shimano LX Rapidfire Plus shifters

Chain — Shimano Hyperglide

Crankset — Shimano Deore LX, Shimano Hyperdrive-C rings (steel inner ring), 175-mm crankarms

Bottom bracket — Shimano cartridge

Freewheel — Shimano 7-speed cassette

#### Components:

Brakes — Shimano LX

Pedals — Shimano SPD clipless

Headset — Dia-Compe AheadSet

Seatpost — Syncros alloy microadjust, 330 mm

Saddle — Avocet Racing

Bar/stem — Answer Hyperlite 23-inch alloy bars, Ringlé 13.5-cm AheadSet-type alloy stem, alloy bar-ends

even more aggressive bike, I bought a Fat Chance Yo Eddy. I raced Big Bear last year on a prototype Fat City titanium rig.

In other words, I like these bikes. They like me. So when the apple-green Buck Shaver arrived at my door—a bike featuring a modified, economical variant on the stock Fat City design—I had two questions: First, is it a great mountain bike? And second: does it ride like a Fat?

#### Mass. Production

How does a Fat Chance ride? I'd distill the qualities into two specific areas: ultra-precise,



The non-tapered chainstays provide key stiffness to the rear triangle, making the Buck Shaver an exceptional bike for climbing.



almost phantom-like handling; and a major dosage of super-comfort. Some bikes handle more aggressively and leave you all beat up for school the next day. Not a Fat. Though every model I've tried has ridden differently, they've all left me feeling happy, content, and challenged after hours in the saddle.

Here are the Fattest features of the handmade-in-Massachusetts Buck Shaver:

- A True Temper tubeset. The Buck Shaver uses a specially drawn tubeset, designed to the specifications of Fat City honch Chris Chance. The Buck's tubes are thinner diameter than the top-of-the-line Yo Eddy's. This gives a ride that is a little more forgiving, a little less stiff—and a lot more comfortable. The tubes are not heat-treated, though, which means they need to be a little heavier to maintain strength.

- Non-tapering chainstays. Though some bike makers swear by tapered chainstays, they certainly aren't as stiff as non-tapered ones. Chris Chance says energy transmission to the rear wheel is better when the rear triangle uses the untapered stuff. This proved true on the trail, and may be the secret to Fat City's legendary climbing capabilities.

- Slightly laid-back seat angle: Standard—if there is one—for mountain bikes these days is 71 degrees for the head angle, and 73 for the seat. The Buck shaves half a degree off the seat angle. This moves you back a tiny bit. It facilitates the delicate shifts of body weight that are essential to a sweet-handling bike like this.

So how did the Buck Shaver compare with its brothers? Like all Fat City bikes, it climbed beautifully. On twisty single-track, the Buck excelled. It might even be better than the Yo Eddy on flat, squirrely stuff. Going downhill, the Buck isn't the out-and-out speed demon that the Yo Eddy is. On the other hand, it is a stable, sure-fire descender. I didn't crash once on the Buck. I crash lots on the Yo, though when I don't, I get where I'm going quicker.

### Same Singer, Different Song

How else is a Buck different than a Yo? Besides the smaller diameter tubing, the Buck uses a monostay (a U-shaped configuration of two stays, welded into a larger section meeting the seat tube). This is an economy measure. It's easier to assemble a bike built this way, and it causes no performance problem that we

could feel.

Other differences: the Buck comes with a choice of three different forks; for \$1,110 you get the frame and a Rock Shox Mag 21 or Manitou 3 suspension fork. If you want to save money, or eschew (gesundheit!) suspension, the \$795 Buck package includes a Japanese-made Tange fork. Though based on the similar-looking handmade Fat City "Big One Inch" fork (\$975 with the Buck), it isn't the same. The Big One Inch weighs 1.5 pounds. The Tange fork weighs 2.0 pounds.

Which, conveniently, brings us to the issue of weight. The Buck Shaver frame weighs 4.6 pounds in the medium (17-inch) size we tested. That's light for a steel bike, but heavier than similarly priced aluminum bikes. But with reinforcing gussets and bullet-proof construction, the Buck is—barring rust and accidents—a lifetime proposition. Aluminum can be less so. And our test bike—with the Tange fork and a very modest Deore LX gruppo and no ultralight trickery—weighed 24.6 pounds. That's real good.

### Sizing It Up

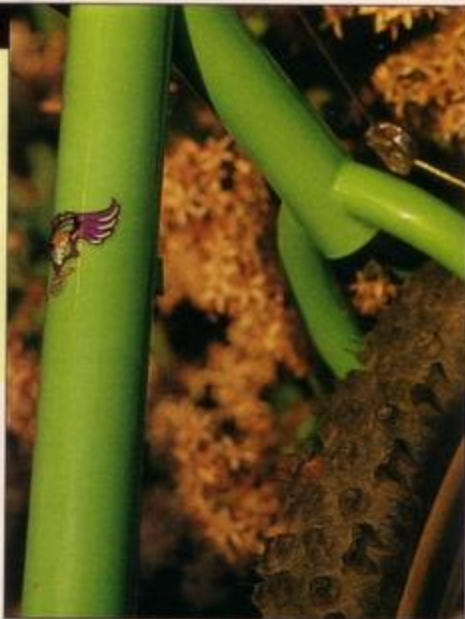
For most people considering the Buck

Life is  
a limited time offer...



Live deliberately.  
Ride frequently.





## WHO WAS BUCK SHAVER?

Though the Buck Shaver sounds like a cool way to say that this bike isn't terribly expensive, that ain't so. Chris Chance explains: "We came up with all kinds of names, but the favorite was Buck Shaver, in honor of our friend and co-worker Pat Egan. Pat was a great guy. He had a lust for life, a good sense of humor, and a complete commitment to quality. He worked hard and played hard. Pat wore a bowling shirt most of the time. It was of the finest polyester with 'Buck Shaver' embroidered on it. That's what we called him. Pat died in an accident over Thanksgiving of 1990. His hat hangs over the alignment table to remind us of his dedicated spirit. The decal on the Buck Shaver is Pat's likeness. Pat Egan was a good friend, and we miss him very much."

—Dan Koepfel

old-style manual labor, which translates into excruciating attention to detail.

Need proof? The bike has rack mounts in both front and rear. The down tube is reinforced with a gusset. Tubes are sealed to prevent water entry, and the seat collar also features a built-in gasket. Top tube cable routing is clean and logical. A "toothpick" anti-chain-suck device is included. The bike is suspension-ready, so adding an aftermarket shock won't affect handling.

Just as important is stuff you might not notice. You get Fat City's well-known spot-on alignment and welding. Taiwan and Japan rarely match this in mass production.

So is it worth it? Our LX-equipped bike probably runs between \$200 and \$300 more than a production bike with the same components. But I look at it this way: a bike like the Buck Shaver has a lot more in common with models that cost more than it does than with bikes that cost less. My choice would be to buy the Buck Shaver frame, use the LX gruppo, and add a Rock Shox Quadra. That configuration would run about \$1,600, weigh about 26 pounds, and rock the house completely.

One more kudo: the Buck is available in frame sizes down to extra small, or about 10 inches. That may make it the best mountain bike anywhere for riders under 5-foot-4. ●

Shaver, the real choices will be against bikes from bigger companies—either less-expensive, high-quality steel bikes or similarly priced models that boast a little exotica in the frame materials department. For instance, for the Buck's price or less, you can get production bikes made of metal matrix materials, or heat-treated steel. Most of these are built by machine, though, while the Buck comes from

Latitude 39° 45' north. Longitude 110° west. Elevation 4,950 feet... Visibility unlimited.



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