



BRODIE EXPRESSO

*Too much is never enough
of the caffeinated Canadian*

■ The Pacific Northwest has never followed the ways of the rest of the North American continent. It's different. Not different as in odd, but different as in unique, quaint . . . you know . . . different! The arts and customs of its local population are alien to the rest of the planet. The area was once a thriving Russian colony. Warmed by the Japanese ocean currents, the area is a subtropical rainforest within sight of the Northern Lights. There is a woodsman, frontiersman, Wild West atmosphere that permeates the air.

It should then come as no surprise that British Columbia is the heart and soul of fat-tire cycling in Canada. It would stand to reason that the folks up there would also have their very own style of mountain bicycles. You know, different kinds of bikes! The Canadian-style of frame design is so recognizable that an MBA test rider could spot a bike on the next ridge, call it Canadian and, until a few years, be correct 100% of the time. Not so today. The Canadian style has begun to migrate south, and some of their ways are affecting the minds of stodgy American frame designers.

If you are not clear on the Canadian concept, MBA can name the prime example—the Brodie Expresso. The Expresso (at \$825 for frame and fork) has all the important Canadian features and most of the little touches, too. Let's start with the frame:

(1) There are only two acceptable materials for a good Canadian frame—steel or titanium. This is really odd because British Columbia is the world's largest aluminum producing region. It is so big that the government diverted a river and built a hydroelectric plant next to its largest ore deposits. So why do the natives shy away from the stuff? Do they know something about aluminum that the rest of us don't?

(2) Any good Canadian frame will have an exaggerated sloping top tube and an extended seat tube with forward-facing seat clamp.

◀ *Falling colors: Brodie's British Columbian design ethos is based on strength and performance. Most of the MBA staff chose to book their flights on the autumn-red Expresso.*



(3) There will be the signature stay that braces the seat tube above the top tube junction.

(4) Bottom bracket height always stands a tall 12 inches.

(5) Chainstays run short (always close to 16.5 inches).

(6) That unmistakable Canadian profile, highlighted by a low seat tube, will include a long top tube and a head tube one inch taller than average.

(7) Frame geometry north of the border hovers around the 74-degree seat-angle and 71-degree head-angle marks.

(8) Component choices lean on locally designed trickery, and very few Canadian builders adhere to the sacred one-brand drivetrain rule. Mixing and matching groups is almost a passion in the great north. SunTour thumbshifters driving a Shimano XTR derailleur? No problem. Sugino chainrings? Dia-Compe levers? You name it, it has a home in Canada.

What you can't predict about a Canadian bike is the paint job. They range from popular hues of moss and lichen to toxic brightness, with very little middle ground between the two.

BRODIE'S BREW

Our Expresso test model came to us with an outstanding custom paint scheme

in bright oranges and yellows—very reminiscent of maple leaves in the fall. A frame tube sticker proclaimed "Brodie heat-treated butted tubing." The well-constructed, TIG-welded, steel frame used tubes very similar to Tange's Concept tubestep. Top tube cable routing was clean with a trick macaroni tube to guide the rear brake cable around the left

Canadian encyclopedia: Brodie's Expresso cuts a profile that encapsulates every representative feature of Canadian fat-tire bicycle design: A straight shot of function, an eclectic mix of component favoritism, a splash of color and a dash of dog-ugliness.

side of the seat tube. Rear-tire clearance was better than it should have been, because it came at the expense of a poor chainline. There was space to move the Expresso's Race Face crankset closer in, and the Syncros Ti bottom bracket was adjustable right to left. A very stout braze-on-mounted, anti-chainscut plate prevented accidental dismemberment of the right chainstay.

Shimano's XTR derailleurs and Rapid-fire combo levers handled transmission duties. The final drive was a 12-32 Hyperdrive cassette hooked up the new Ringlé freehub setup. Ringlé did front hub, twister skewer and seatpost duties as well. In an interesting switch from the Mavic standard, Brodie chose Sun Chino-rim rims outfitted with Ritchey Z-Max tires. For some very un-Canadian reason, the bike was fitted with Schrader valve tubes instead of prestas (probably a slap at Quebec). Guarding against nature's worst is a Rock Shox Mag 21 SLTi fork.

BRODIE

A POTENT & FORMIDABLE MIX

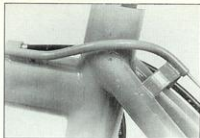
In the flesh, the Brodie Expresso presents a formidable package, kind of a potent mix of beauty and business. On the dirt, the bike begs you to put its unconventional features to the test. The first area of evaluation for all the MBA test riders was the brake and fork flex-orama. The setup was a mixed bag of tricks. Shimano's M-pad brake compound performed in a sub-wonderful fashion for about 15 miles and a few water crossings, then finally began to break in. After the first scrubbing-in, the brake system came together and the bike could be hauled down from orbit with two fingers. Although the dual device stiffens the fork noticeably, the downside of the stout Rockin' Rooster is its cable actuation device. The built-in brake wedge requires the brake pads to be set so close to the rim that a minute amount of lateral flex will drag the rim against them. Perfect runout was required on the front wheel.

The Brodie made friends quickly once it hit the dirt. The stiff chassis held a straight line on the climbs and could be made to work in or out of the saddle. The bike's stiffness made it feel very harsh at slower speeds. A big contributor to trail clatter was the Expresso's wimpy 1.9-inch tires. Bigger meats would mitigate the frame's inherent sturdiness. Even with the Z-maxs, the sleek orange Canadian bike could be ridden very fast on fire roads, but even the most courageous of MBA riders would forgo the tires' weight savings and opt for 2.1-inch rubber. The Brodie Expresso tipped the scales at 24 pounds with Shimano SPD pedals. This is a great weight for a chromoly bike, because it shows an acceptable level of fail-safe built in, but still feathery enough to give a lot of Ti bikes a run for the truck scales.

As expected, the Expresso was an all-around performer in the mountains. Its only flaw was a tendency to wash the front end out through sandy or gravelly turns. This could not be attributed to the bike's setup. Its 23-inch top tube and 130mm-reach, five-degree-rise, titanium stem put the rider's weight in the bike's sweet spot. We figured that the front end might have a bit too much trail. This might also account for the bike's ease at high speed.

HOW CAFFEINATED IS IT?

We give the Brodie Expresso a hearty handclasp. With fatter treads, the bike could do little wrong on the dirt. Like some of the other bikes we have tested with Race Face cranks and Syncros bottom brackets, chainline related derailments were a nagging factor. The cranks are stiff and good-looking enough to make it worth the hassle to dial 'em in.



Pro pesto: Simply marvelous macaroni tube, eh? Cable routing was sensible. Forward-mounted seat post clamp is a British Columbia signature. Keeping the cables high and dry is a major concern in the rain capital of the north.



Hey, Joe: Joe Breeze-style dropouts are a sanitary touch. Strong, too. We bent the derailleur severely without phasing the dropout. The right rear dropout forced the quick-release into the derailleur. The rear wheel was tough to remove as a result.



Tailored titanium: To keep the Expresso's sharply sloping top tube and tallish head tube in check, Brodie outfitted the cockpit with a trick Race Face titanium zero-rise stem.

One aspect that raised more than a few eyebrows was the inclusion of Brodie braces, brake boosters and brake mechanisms on the front and rear cantilever brakes. In front, a dual brace setup they call a Rockin' Rooster encased the Shimano STX brake in an all-out war on flex. The rear brake sported a conventional brake booster.



Steamin' Expresso: Brodie's bomber likes everything hot. Every tester took to the bike immediately. The bike served up a hot plate of handling and stopping power with sour rubber on the side.



Flex prison: Paul Brodie's flex-phobia has driven him to market an interconnected brake booster/fork brace to keep the front of the bike from stepping out of line. The Rockin' Rooster even sports an alternative brake actuator cam.

The bike's design is a proven no-nonsense item at the races and in the Rocky Mountains, so if you are looking for something that's slightly different, but still a proven performer, the Expresso is a good candidate.

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