



SPECIALIZED S-WORKS

An exciting shade of gray

■ Hey, something doesn't jive here! Read all these Specialized bicycle ads and a person would get the idea that Morgan Hill's mad scientists were designing the company's bicycle line into warp-drive symbols of postmodern velcraft. You know? Carbonio, suspenders, composites, matrices and CAD/CAM jazz. The last place on earth the *MBA* rigid reporters penciled onto their map in the search for unsuspended superbikes was the Specialized warehouse (after all, it *is* just a warehouse) in Morgan Hill. Who could imagine a group of hip designer-types with fancy haircuts tuning a blank sheet of paper into something as generic as a diamond-frame, TIG-welded,

fat-tire bicycle sans suspension? *Sans* means without, and we mean without any suspension—front or rear. *Sans* could also stand for a trip back to the '80s, eh?

Surprisingly, our snoops discovered the rather conservative S-Works bicycle while perusing the back pages of the *MBA* Buyer's Guide (in the high-back section). At first, we were sure that the unassuming-looking, rigid bicycle was accidentally placed in the wrong section. Subtlety is easily obscured by smoke and mirrors, however, and it is ironic that one of the jewels of Specialized almost became a wallflower because it was surrounded by the type of polished coolness their own people are so good at creating. Well,

Shades of gray: Don't leave the Specialized S-Works lying around on a foggy day. It just might disappear. As bland as the concept sounds, the silver and gray monochromatic scheme gave the S-Works a businesslike, lightweight look.

some things have to be seen to be appreciated. Such was the case with *MBA's* steel S-Works, Classic Metallica.

FIRST PEEK AT THE S-WORKS

Fifteen years ago, if a custom frame builder could have had the mountain bicycle of his dreams, it would look exactly like the '94 S-Works—a super-light steel frame with a slightly sloping top tube, pre-neon '70ish Saab gray-green paint, custom-gauge butted fork blades

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and alloy components finished in a non-scratch-revealing silver: all in all, a dutiful mountain bike that is all performance and devoid of frivolity. The time warp doesn't work, though, because 15 years ago the S-Works' Tange Prestige frame tubing was in an imaginary state, but the

frame building dreamer would have surely chosen the S-Works' 1.25-inch-diameter downtube and 1.125-inch top and seat tubes (*de rigueur* at that point in time). Other non-'70s parts abound. A light and comfortable saddle (no such luck in '79!). Ultra-light wheels and tires were a fig-

Specialized may not make a flashy-looking bike, but it knows how to dial them in. The S-Works was stiff, light, accurate-handling and well laid-out. About the only things we would change are the Umma Gumma Pro Control tires and we would add some bar ends, both of which would make it climb better.

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Another way to skin a cat: Specialized chose to cast its 6/4 titanium stem rather than TIG-weld it. Reversing the 5°-rise unit made it perfect for shorter riders. The twin-bolt stem cap makes this operation a snap.

ment, also. These are dream components for riders of the previous generation, but, in fact, you could take a classic Stump-jumper and have Mr. Peabody and Sherman zap to today for a complete facelift, and the result might be this exact bike. Retro-ness does not always go hand-in-hand with grouchiness.

COMPONENT COUNTDOWN

Specialized Bicycle Co. was the first bicycle manufacturer to successfully de-

sign and market a wide range of quality components that exclusively carried its own moniker. The S-Works line carries this concept to the last bolt (almost). Take away the bicycle's Shimano Deore XT (C-Drive, eight-speed) drivetrain and nearly every part is a Specialized private-label item. Check off the list as we go if you are in doubt: (1) Gray Ti-rail saddle. (2) 26.8mm alloy seatpost. (3) Butted alloy handlebar. (4) Gray grips. (5) Cool, cast 6/4 S-Works titanium stem. (6) Threadless headset. (7) Direct-Drive Prestige, rigid fork. (8) 32-hole, Z-21 Pro rims. (9) 1.9 Pro-Control Umma Gamma gray tires. (10) 14/15-gauge spokes. (10) Ti quick releases. Yep! Every single one a Specialized part. It must be nice to have the wherewithal to do things your own way if you are not entirely satisfied with what's available.

THE NUMBERS GAME

The S-Works frame is made in Japan from TIG-welded Tange Prestige pipes. Our 18-inch frame had a 22.375-inch top tube, 16.75-inch chainstays, its bottom bracket height was 11.375 inches and its wheelbase worked out to 41.25 inches. Frame angles? The head and seat were 71 and 73.5 degrees, respectively. The investment cast 130mm, five-degree titanium stem had a two-bolt handlebar clamp that allowed it to be reversed for a slight, negative-rise setup. Our S-Works weighed in at a feathery 22.6 pounds.



Someone did it right: For all of the companies that have tried to craft a macaroni tube around the seat cluster, the S-Works designers are the first to pull it off in an eye-pleasing manner. The Specialized's rear brake works perfectly.

Considering the components, the frame should be on the scale at three pounds (nice). The price tag for this subtle beauty is \$1600. Specialized has a customer information number: (408) 779-6229.

FIRST DIRT ON THE S-WORKS

The designers at Specialized were smart enough to leave well enough alone in the geometry department. We have come to enjoy the honest, no-surprise handling quality that bikes from their rac-

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ing stable possess. The S-Works was like a "Whitman's Sampler" chocolate assortment, as if all the race-proven goodies that the S-designers have developed over the last few years were combined into this one silver and gray package. Each test rider felt at home on the S-Bike at the outset. There simply were no idiosyncrasies to overcome: no funky shifters, no weird brakes—just a good bike.

Hammering the S-bike was encouraged by the five-degree stem and stiff, oversized rear stays. Together, these factors spelled "sprint." On a good day, the rest of

the pack would need a long-distance phone service to keep in contact. Out-of-the-saddle climbing was restricted by sub-standard rear traction (1.9-inch Pro-Control) and lack of bar ends, but was the position of choice for major efforts. Seated pedaling was better than most, which should aid in the recovery department for would-be racers. The frame and fork were absorbent, but not to the extent that the suspension-impaired members of the test staff would forsake from sliders for good.

Steering was excellent throughout the speed range, with a slight tendency to overcorrect when in aggressive mode (this caused some testers to chop the apex of corners occasionally). The S-Works



Someone did it wrong: The profile of the Specialized titanium/aluminum quick-release mechanism appears to be form-fitting, but the reverse is true. Sharp edges around the lever make opening the unit a real pain. It looks like a bottle opener.



Dave wins CHAMPIONSHIP on BCX

DAVE WIENS, 1993 NORBA NATIONAL SERIES CHAMPION

Team DBR's Dave Wiens

scorched the field in '93 and his ride to the top was made on Weinmann BCX rims. The NORBA pro circuit poses the toughest test on Earth and only the strongest survive. BCX-1 and BCX-2 are the winning combination, even if you're not Dave. BCX - designed by **Keith Bontrager & championship proven.**



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felt the same in fast or slow curves, as long as you kept some pressure on the outside pedal. As a bonus, the S-bike was a joy to ride in sandy or lousy terrain. It held a line and turned without serious washouts. Downhill the bike was fun until one had to endure prolonged, unnecessary roughness. A rigid bike can be ridden hard, but the time comes quickly when proving a point is no longer of value—you can do whatever the suspension crowd can do, but just not for as long.

Brakes felt strong and S-bike owners will appreciate the replaceable cassette brake pads on the Deore XT stoppers.

EL DOWNSIDE

The few complaints we did have were echoed by all the crew (even the Felix Unger types). We wanted bar ends and more traction. More aggressive tires would benefit cornering up front and climbing in back. Our threadless headset loosened repeatedly and the C-drive setup caused the chain to clank on the chainstay (a padding/protector would help). We all wished that the edges of the Specialized quick releases were rounded off. They are medieval torture devices.

WHAT DO WE REALLY THINK?

Few modernites will be attracted to the S-Work by its stunning looks or technological brilliance. It isn't stunning, nor technologically advanced. It's basic and workmanlike. However, if you are barfing up advertising claims and not quite recovered from the last full-suspension design you read about, test-ride one of these pups. You may end up with a life-long friend. ☐