

Battle Of The Brothers

The Santa Cruz Superlight faces the Santa Cruz Blur



Santa Cruz Bicycles introduced the Superlight in 1997. The dual-suspension cross-country race and trailbike was a study in simplicity. It utilized a monoshock rear suspension, flowed downhill as well as it ascended, and could be configured to accommodate the needs (and budgets) of everyone from beginners to national champions (a Superlight won the 2001 NORBA Cross-Country Championship in the competent hands of Kirk Molday). The Superlight received the ultimate compliment when a mail-order company knocked it off so blatantly that even the Santa Cruz guys had to laugh. Superlight sales continued to grow until 2003, when a new bike took the wind out of the Superlight's sails. That bike was not a rip-off; it was the Santa Cruz Blur.

The Santa Cruz Blur abandons monoshock rear suspension in favor of Virtual Pivot Point (VPP) suspension. The anti-bob function of the VPP rear suspension is invisible. It is caused by two short links that *rock* the swingarm instead of pivoting it. This causes the rear axle to move up and away from the rear of the bike as the suspension compresses. The more pressure you put on the pedals, the more the rear suspension firms up because of the unique axle path. Chain tension tries to pull the

axle forward and down—and thus opposes the rear suspension movement.

Has the Superlight finally met its match? It sure appears so. Santa Cruz reports that in its second year of production, the Blur has eclipsed the Superlight as Santa Cruz's most popular bike (and the margin would have been larger had Santa Cruz been able to keep up with rider demand for the Blur). So long, Superlight, it's been nice to know you? End of story? Not so fast, Superlight lovers. The game isn't over yet.

BROTHERS IN ARMS

Although we tested the Superlight and the Blur sep-

arately (the Superlight was tested in our April 2002 issue, and the Blur debuted in our April 2003 issue), the *MBA* wrecking crew felt it was time to hit the trail with both bikes side by side, strip the new-bike hype away from the Blur and carefully document both bikes' strengths and weaknesses. (Of course, it didn't hurt that we received a large volume of mail asking us for a bar-to-bar comparison).

Our Blur and Superlight bikes were not identically equipped, but this did not prove to be a big problem. We found it was still easy to identify the quirks and attributes of each bike. The biggest discrepancy arose in the fork selection. The Blur sported a Manitou Minute 2:00 SPV fork, while our Superlight ran a RockShox Duke XC. Not exactly a level playing field. Still, we were confident that we could factor in their performance differences when making our final evaluation because we have had so much experience with both forks.

THE RIGHT BROTHERS

Our comparison of the Blur and Superlight (both mediums) took place over a two-month period. We would sometimes swap bikes four or more times during a two-hour ride—even if it meant carrying a pedal wrench to do so. We hit a wide variety of terrain, from smooth fire roads to highly technical singletrack. This is how the two brothers stacked up.

Ergonomics: On paper, the two bikes have plenty of differences, but in the saddle, they feel very similar. The top tube lengths are within two tenths of an inch of each other, and the Blur's half-inch-longer seat tube does not affect the rider's position. The most noticeable ergonomic difference between the two has to be the Superlight's standover height—a full inch lower than the Blur's.

The Blur's swingarm is almost an inch wider at the shock mount than the Superlight's, but we didn't notice it until we measured the bikes. In other words, the Blur's added width never rubbed a crewer's leg, and there were no telltale signs of shoe rubbing on the stays.



Follow the leader: All things being equal, the Superlight (front) is going to come in a half-pound lighter than the Blur. The Superlight rider doesn't need a scale to notice the weight difference. It feels lighter and faster on long or steep climbs.

The Brothers



Popularity contest: *The Santa Cruz Superlight (right) and the Santa Cruz Blur are both immensely popular cross-country bikes (especially with MBA readers). Is it fair to pit them against each other? All is fair in love, war and mountain biking.*

In the tight stuff: The Superlight edges the Blur on tight, singletrack sections by virtue of its shorter wheelbase (1.1 inches shorter than the Blur) and lower bottom-bracket height. The Superlight rails during tight turning and banking through corners. If you have the horsepower, it will blast out of corners—as long as the suspension is set on the firm side of the dial. Softening the suspension takes the edge off the bike's sharp sprinting ability. The Blur is no slouch in these sections because of its light steering and a more centered rider position (the Superlight puts your weight slightly rearward), but the Superlight gets the nod.

In the tight stuff II: Hit the same section of trail, but this time liberally sprinkle roots and rocks on the path. The Blur nudges ahead of the Superlight in this situation, thanks to the VPP suspension design. The Blur's rear end rolls over obstacles without the familiar hesitation you sense when hitting a flat-edged bump on a traditional rear suspension (like the Superlight's monoshock). The Fifth Element shock goes a long way to reduce bobbing on the Superlight, and it makes the travel feel bottomless, but it doesn't take the edge off bumps like the VPP does.



Eat it up: *The Blur has a marked advantage on the descents because the VPP rear suspension isn't affected as much by hard braking as the monoshock design. And as if that weren't enough of an advantage, the Blur gets an extra inch of wheelbase too.*



Roll over, Blur: *The Blur's VPP rear suspension has a unique feel over rocky terrain (okay, maybe the Intense Spider, with its version of the VPP, feels similar). The bike seems to build momentum over the rough.*

In the rough: The Blur is amazing through rock gardens. The VPP never feels like it loses forward momentum, no matter how hard or how squarely you hit a rock, curb or root. The thing flows. The Superlight behaved as expected in the rough. Riders who set the Superlight's suspension on the firm side had to pay far more attention to picking lines than their Blur-mounted buddies (who could pretty much point-and-shoot the Blur through anything).

Climbing: Chain tension causes the Blur's and Superlight's suspension to firm up, and that means they can't react as well, nor grip as firmly, as an active system. Both rides can scratch their way up nasty climbs, but you'll have to move your weight around occasionally to maintain rear tire traction. Still, the Superlight inches ahead of the Blur on the climbs in a two-up race. It feels lighter and more efficient on fire roads, steep walls and smooth singletrack climbs. If outfitted identically, the Superlight is a half pound lighter than the Blur. If the trail is littered with rocks, the Blur has a chance to pull ahead, but the terrain has to be exceptionally rough.



Superlight flight: *The Superlight rails tight turns. Drop the hammer and this bike responds—as long as the rear suspension is set on the firm side of the dial. Softening the suspension takes the edge off the bike's sharp sprinting ability.*

The Brothers

Descending: Santa Cruz bikes come with a downhill pedigree. Good geometry, a solid chassis and excellent suspension all guarantee smiles on the faces of Blur and Superlight riders as they swoosh down a mountain trail. But the Blur edges the Superlight because of its longer wheelbase (making it more stable) and VPP rear suspension (that isn't affected as much by hard braking as the monoshock design).

Maintenance: We didn't need to do any maintenance on either bike over our two month test period (other than lube the chains). The Blur's rear suspension has more moving parts than the Superlight's, though, so when it does come time for a rebuild (maybe a year to 18 months from now), the Blur will take more time and more parts to accomplish the rebuild.

BROTHERLY LOVE

We figured picking a winner would be a tough, gut-wrenching decision, but we came up with an easy solution. You have to pick the winner. Ready?

The Superlight beats the Blur for cross-country racing. It can be built up a half-pound lighter than the Blur. Equipped with a Fifth Element Air, Manitou Swinger or Fox Float shock, there is no need for a suspension lock-out. It feels light, nimble and totally flickable when railing down your favorite singletrack. You don't have to be a racer to enjoy the Superlight either. The bike favors riders who have to contend with long climbs during their rides and those who don't have to contend with overly rutted and rocky trails. It saves you \$300 over the Blur, and the lower standover height should not be overlooked by short riders.

The Blur beats the Superlight as an all-round trailbike. If your trails constantly throw roots and rocks at you, you will be floored by the way the Blur's rear suspension rolls over the stuff. It feels like it builds momentum over the rough! It will give you more confidence on downhill sections because of its longer wheelbase (and the VPP suspension). Even racers have to consider the Blur if their races are held on rough courses.

So there you go. The winner will depend on what you expect of your mountain bike. No matter which one wins in your shootout, you will have a sweet ride that will keep you happy until the guys at Santa Cruz spring something else new on us. □



Close race: The winner of the Santa Cruz shootout is you. Read the ride evaluation carefully, think about what type of riding you do, and then pick your winner.



The new kid: The Santa Cruz Blur borrowed something old (the nearly forgotten Virtual Pivot Point rear suspension), revamped it, updated it and served it up as a fresh dish. It tasted so good that it became Santa Cruz's best selling bike.



The old guard: The Santa Cruz Superlight is eight years old and still going strong. It has been upgraded, refined, copied and raced (to a National Championship, no less). New shock technology has breathed new life into this proven mount.

SUPERLIGHT vs BLUR QUICK REFERENCE CHART

	Superlight	Blur
Price (anodized frame)	\$1199	\$1499
Weight (frame only)	5.1 pounds	5.6 pounds
Top tube	22.5"	22.7"
Head tube	4.2"	4.3"
Seat tube	18"	18.5"
Head angle	71°	71°
Seat tube angle	73°	73°
Wheelbase	41.1"	42.2"
Chainstay	16.7"	17.1"
Bottom bracket height	12.1"	12.6"
Standover height	28.7"	29.8"
Headset	1.125"	1.125"
Seatpost	27.2mm	30.9mm
Rear wheel travel	3.9"	4.5"