



Santa Cruz Superlight D

£1,799 Classic single-pivot ride unhindered by relatively lowly spec

WORKSHOP WISDOM



MBUK'S MECHANIC SAYS...

Keep it simple

Most full suspension bikes use some form of multi-link back end, but the Superlight sticks with the same single-pivot layout that it's had for more than a decade. Suspension performance might not be as transparent as some, but the big benefit of the set-up is its simplicity – with just one pivot and a shock there's very little that can go wrong, and come replacement time, two bearings are considerably cheaper than eight...

Santa Cruz's Superlight has been around for a very long time. The current incarnation is four years old, and before that there's another 10 years of history to wade back through if you fancy it. Over that time much has changed, but the basic layout and profile of the Superlight is essentially the same. So can such a venerable design still cut it in 2011?

The chassis

Next to the current crop of frames, the Superlight looks almost spidery. There's little in the way of weirdly shaped tubes, the twisty bits at the front of the swingarm being the only exception. Most notably, the head tube is a straight pipe with a conventional external headset for a straight 1.125in steerer. Semi-integrated and tapered front ends haven't been around all that long, but they've been extensively adopted, making the Superlight's traditional front end the exception. You don't get to enjoy the undeniable fork and frame stiffness benefits of the contemporary front end, but the traditional design works as well as it ever did, and it's lighter. At the back, the practical benefits of the

single-pivot design are clear. There's very little to go wrong back there, with plenty of tyre clearance and no 'shelves' to collect dirt. At around 5.5lb (2.5kg) for the frame and shock, the Superlight is true to its name, making this a chassis worth hanging on to and upgrading as time goes on.

The detail

Even the most cursory of glances will show that Santa Cruz don't quite have the buying power of some brands. Yes, the Superlight is the second-cheapest bike here, but the spec is some way off the level of the others. Despite that, the overall bike weight is competitive with plenty of scope to go lower over time. Sensibly, Santa Cruz have gone for solid, reliable gear throughout rather than trying to blindside buyers with one or two over-the-top blingy bits.

The obvious set-up for a 100mm travel frame is a 100mm (3.9in) travel fork, and that's certainly an option on the Superlight. It's steep and low in that configuration, meaning that there's scope for going longer – Santa Cruz rate it for 100 to 120mm travel units. The test bike

had a RockShox Recon Silver R up front, which looks rather low-rent next to the array of Foxes elsewhere in the test, but isn't actually at all bad. Chromed silver stanchions add weight, but they're also stiff and the shiny finish helps keep the action smooth.

Elsewhere you're looking at a Deore/SLX transmission mix – just the nine speeds out back, but we don't have a problem with that – and Avid Juicy 3 brakes that are competent if uninspiring. The same is true of the finishing kit, which is from RaceFace's Ride line. It's not the most exciting stuff, but it does the job just fine.

The ride

We've always had a soft spot for Superlights. There aren't many simple single pivots like this around any more, but there's a lot to like about the set-up. Unsubtle rear braking can make things slightly chattery and the pedals kick a bit going up stepped climbs in the granny ring, but other than that it's a surprisingly vice-free arrangement. The long-stroke shock – 50mm for 100mm travel at the wheel – helps a lot in the rough, making the Superlight remarkably composed. »



IT'S A FUN, LIVELY BIKE THAT'LL TAKE ON MORE THAN ITS TRAVEL SUGGESTS

Having that longer fork up front helps too, lending the bike a relaxed stance without blunting the handling too much. The Santa Cruz can start to feel a little on the lazy side if you're that way inclined, but the sensibly proportioned bar and stem encourage you to work the front end and keep things lively. With more travel at the front it makes sense to ride in a slightly hardtail

manner, making the most of the fork and letting the back end follow through. It may be a relatively unsophisticated and slightly portly unit, but the steel-stanchioned Recon is stiff, smooth and competent. The Maxxis Crossmark tyres wouldn't be our first choice for softer or wetter ground, and a little more volume would be useful on hard, rocky trails, but

they roll fast and work fine on dry-to-tacky surfaces. It's testament to the Superlight that its qualities remain largely undimmed by the relatively lowly spec. It's a fun, lively, involving bike that'll take on more than its travel would suggest. It's worth a look at the options list too – there are various builds and upgrades available if you're prepared to stretch the budget. »

✓ SO GOOD

- Bombproof single-pivot set-up
- A true modern classic
- Generous mudroom

✗ NO GOOD

- Pedal feedback in low gears
- Sadly outgunned for component spec
- Not as poised as more modern competition



Steel-stanchioned Recon fork adds heft and lacks tunability, but does the job without fuss



A pivot and a shock – and that's about it for the back end. Simplicity is a virtue



Conventional head tube with a standard 1.125in headset is a rarity these days



Struggles to compete for value on paper, but it's a rare blend of sensible and fun on the trail