



## SANTA CRUZ TALLBOY ALUMINIUM



Price: Frame £1749, £4127 as tested. Bikes from £2399

From: [www.santacruz bikes.co.uk](http://www.santacruz bikes.co.uk)

Weight: 28.7lbs

Persona: Tilda Swinton – 5ft 11in



Tallboy in 'nice-summer-day' blue.



VPP all the way.

As one of the many companies who said 'We'll never make 29ers', Santa Cruz has certainly taken to them in the last couple of years. They now make three models of big wheeler: the Highball carbon hardtail, the Tallboy Carbon (reviewed in Singletrack 57) and, here, the Tallboy Aluminium. And who knows what other stuff they're beavering away on out the back?

### The Details

Would it be a cop-out to say the Tallboy Aluminium is rather like the Tallboy Carbon, only in aluminium? Perhaps, but that's a pretty good place to start. The Tallboy Aluminium shares the same geometry and dimensions as the carbon models; so, a pretty neat frame, VPP2 suspension, a 23in top tube and 71°/73° angles (which are what passes for 'average' angles on 29ers these days). The lines are a little less 'organic' than the carbon frame, but that's to be expected – and it does cost a fair chunk less (£1749 vs. £2399). The weight penalty is only 1.5lbs over the carbon frame (6.6lb vs 5.1lbs). Interestingly, the aluminium frame comes in fewer sizes (M-L-XL) than the carbon frame (M-L-XL-XXL), and equally interestingly, like many of the less crowd-pleasing 29er frame builders, Santa Cruz isn't insisting that

big wheels are for little people. With a bit of stem flipping and spacer displacing, we got 5ft 7in Jenn to fit our medium test bike but she still needed a step ladder to get on and off; we wouldn't recommend it if you're any smaller.

The VPP2 suspension system has appeared many times on these pages, but for those new to the story the one key point you need to know is that the suspension will still work whilst you're pedalling. Some suspension systems stiffen up or even lock out when under forward drive but that doesn't happen with the Tallboy; the upshot is that the bike can be

rocketed forward under hard power without suffering any loss of control or traction, and still feels like a longer-legged beast on the descents.

Components on our test bike included the very popular Fox F29 fork with QR15 thru-axle, some natty black and white DT 340 hubs, Mavic 719 rims (shod with capable Crossmarks again), Elixir CR brakes, Thomson post and Easton low-rise handlebars. Even with the low-profile Cane Creek semi-internal headset, we'd still like to see a fully flat bar to keep the front low. Matt's theory is that this shouldn't just be because it keeps the hands low, but because it keeps the bars



That seat QR will get a workout.

Flared and short; the way of the 29er.

in the same relative position (to your face) as the ones on your 26in bike. Interesting.

The Fox RP23 shock nestles just under the top tube, which makes reaching for the ProPedal lever a breeze. We were surprised not to see a carbon shock link for some reason. That'll be us being spoiled then...

### The Ride

We said of the carbon Tallboy that it was “a FUN bike to ride” and its aluminium brother is predictably similar in character. It's a bike that we can see appealing to 26in crossover riders who want a familiar-feeling introduction to bigger wheels; the ‘big-curious’, we'll call them. Even just messing around in the car park, the Tallboy feels much more like a 26in-wheeled bike than the others on test; a little more manoeuvrable and a little more ‘normal’ to those not used to the ways of the bigger wheel.

There's a great sense of bump-reduction when first riding the Tallboy, and it's a bike where you feel that the suspension is working for you. Small stutter bumps actually seemed quieter, like we'd accidentally put on some super sticky rubber tyres, and it did make

riders open up the gas on a few descents normally reserved for bigger bikes, with pleasing results. In some cases the VPP system seemed a little overwhelmed by super technical climbs as every dip in the trail could be felt as the bike slackened and wagged, but we found that judicious use of the ProPedal lever really helped the bike sit up a little, rather than wallowing in its 4in of travel and falling into the holes. On flat-out-and-peddalling rocky terrain, the bike flew. All thoughts of the bigger and, in theory, more delicate wheels went out of the window as riders that belied its modest travel

(and for this reason, if we were keeping the Tallboy for longer we'd be fitting some tougher tyres sharpish to minimise the pinch flats suffered by the lightweight, but paper-thin, Maxxis sidewalls...).

The instructions say that the Tallboy will take a 120mm fork if you want. That's something we'd be curious to try, given how much we like the handling of the bike just as it is. On second thoughts maybe we'd just buy one of these and then wait to see if/when Santa Cruz came out with a longer travel 29er and get one of those too. But that would be greedy. Wouldn't it?

## CONCLUSION



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If you're a die-hard 26in trail-bike fan and want to see what 29in wheels are all about, then get the Tallboy. With the cheeky attitude of a fun trail bike, it manages to feel more nimble than you're expecting, and all those weight shifts and wheel lifts from your old bike will still work with little need for translation. If you're after a pure 29in trail bike, then this is where you want to look first. While you can use it for racing, you'll just end up getting distracted by taking the wrong lines just for fun.