



# MATT'S 2011 EDITORS' CHOICE

I've had a really good year on the bike. The first few months were filled with lots of classic big days out, like Snowdon Horseshoe, Benji's epic pass storming route and my first ride in the Peaks (I'm still not sure how I missed a huge bit of classic UK riding all of these years).

There've also been some great events: for me the best one was the **Steel City downhill**, even with the most awful weather leading up to the day and really a pretty claggy run. The event reminded me of all of the fun things in mountain biking - there was competition but not so much it got in the way of fun, and just enough organisation without it becoming about the organisation. Grass roots racing but with some pretty big names taking part!

Summer was spent playing on new generation big bikes, testing the Giant Reign, Rocky Mountain Slayer and Trek Scratch. And while the trails were dryer I had fun discovering just how far you can ride these days, on bikes that have more travel than the biggest downhill bikes a decade ago.

The opposite of that was riding quite a few full suspension 29-inch bikes - and falling for a couple of them, as well. It feels like manufacturers stopped worrying about where the wheels are in comparison to 26-inch wheel bikes at some point over the last couple of years and have instead concentrated on just making fun-handling bikes.

Autumn was the usual bike riding fail that is Eurobike and press launches, but this year it was saved by returning to help out at **Trans-Provence** after taking part in the event last year. Returning with a couple of hundred kilometres of dusty Provençal trails under my belt has me ready for the long winter ahead - I can see the next few months being made up of short slithery technical off road rides, with the majority of my mileage made up on a cross bike or road bike.

## BIKES OF THE YEAR:

**Aluminium Santa Cruz Tallboy and Giant Reign X**

If anyone else reading this is surprised by my choice considering my general preference for bigger enduro-style bikes - you're not as surprised as me.

Even with its relatively small amount of travel, the Tallboy proved to be fun and more than capable technically. I added an uppy-downy seatpost, shorter stem and bigger bars to our test bike, then went and rode - well, everything on it. Big rides, pack horse trails, singletrack: full suspension 29ers are meant to be good at all of those things and the Tallboy was too, which shouldn't and didn't really come as a surprise.

What was a surprise was how good it was on big rocky terrain, as well on the 'stall and fall' steep chutes that make up some of my favourite trails in the valley. Don't get me wrong; 29ers currently seem to have definite strengths on certain kinds of terrain and 26-inch wheels seem to be better at the other stuff, but the perceived gap is closing between them. I suspect at some point in the near future it's just going to be a preference of wheel size, rather than any obvious advantage or disadvantage of one or the other.

So as the opposite of the Tallboy I've talked about above, the Giant Reign isn't just an incredibly good enduro/mini downhill bike - it's also a completely useable, 'go out and get lost' mountain bike. With weight in the low 30s, a decent length top tube and its super-efficient suspension design (it's quite odd to feel nothing through the pedals and then look down at the rear shock chomping its way up and down swallowing stuff), it's the only bike this year that I've ridden as it came out of the box without changing a single component on it. The bike's not perfect, as you can't drop the seat all the way into the frame but it was brilliant fun and easily escaped what would seem to be a tightly defined type of usage.

## PRODUCTS OF THE YEAR:

**Montane Dyno jacket.**

I've been wearing this jacket since late autumn last year and it's the outer shell I wear most often. It's soft, comfortable and provides an amazing amount of protection for something that doesn't have a waterproof membrane or permanent coating to keep the rain out. Regular reproofing with Nixwax spray-on proofing (wash-in proofer ruins the breathability) keeps out pretty foul weather and it's a lot more breathable than a traditional waterproof to boot. If you overheat a lot, I highly recommend it; you'll probably be drier in a storm than if you were wearing a waterproof.

**Specialized Clutch and Storm DH tyres**

All I can say is that these tyres are grippy, come in very soft compounds, are very similar to another brand of tyres, but are nearly half the price. The weight is pretty good too (for big tyres). If you love riding hard, slippery stuff and you're not able to spend £50.00 on a single tyre, then try these.

**RockShox Reverb seatpost**

The search for the perfect uppy-downy post continues. The Reverb hasn't been perfect but it's still been the best I've used by far. Initially it needed bleeding rather regularly (this is a simple job though - and if I say that, then it must be...) and it ended up not quite coming back to full height. After being sent off to SRAM for a check over, it came back with a new, upgraded hose and what I suspect is an upgraded seal, too. Since then it's been perfect: no play and no problems with it not coming back to its fully upright position.