

SANTA CRUZ HECKLER £2399 (£899 F/O)



Get the basics right

Three years is a long time in mountain bike development, but that's not such an issue if the frame fundamentals are as right as they are on the Heckler. There's always the Butcher frame with the same travel if you want all the latest fixtures.

Travel options

Our sample bike had a Revelation fork for all-round trail riding. The Heckler will take a 160mm travel fork for a slacker angled, rock and drop-sliding ride. 2.5in tyre and 203mm brake clearances mean you won't have to skimp on rubber or rotors.

Fair shout

Heckler is an apt name for a bike that'll make sure you spend a lot of time on the tail of more technically advanced bikes hassling their riders until they let you past.

AT A GLANCE

▲ **HIGHS** Simple swingarm suspension gives intuitive, rider reactive feedback. Versatile ride character, rock solid reliability, colour choices and custom options make it a tough trail bike basis.

▼ **LOWS** The constant brake and suspension reactive feel won't suit everyone. Old frame lacks tapered head tube and ISCG mount features.

► **BUY IF...** You want a trustworthy, involving and versatile tough trail frame.

The Heckler is an oldie but a goodie

Santa Cruz's Heckler is one of the oldest bikes here, with the latest version introduced back in 2007. But its entertaining and encouraging performance makes it a true trail evergreen.

The facts

There are some downsides to the older frameset. The conventional head tube restricts you to straight fork steerers and there are no remote seat post cable clips or ISCG mounts. If you really want those features Santa Cruz's new Butcher is a fully up to date and an outstandingly stiff frame at £400 more.

The Heckler frame is stiff enough and really nicely put together. The ovalised kinked top tube gives plenty of standover and conveniently reached shock position. Asymmetric high chainstays swing on pivots just above and ahead of the down tube. The squared seatstays loop up from the big open drop-outs then twist as they roll down inwards towards a shared seam above the pivot terminals. There's masses of mudroom and a removable rear derailleur plate that also includes a hook for opening your post-ride beer. It's got a really nice seat post quick release collar and comes in black or

lime green. The frame and Fox fork-only price is a very reasonable £899.

The cheapest Heckler D AM full build with Sektor fork is only £1999 making it surprisingly accessible for a boutique named bike. For an extra £400 you get a Revelation 15mm Maxle fork plus 30-speed XT/SLX transmission and a durable Hope hub upgrade at the centre of the WTB rims. Easton and Truvativ finishing kit is all acceptable gear too, with no obvious shortcuts to get in the way of your ride.

“What marks the Heckler out on the trail is its agility and interactivity”

The feel

The 150mm fork tips the angles back enough to add a bit more stability than your average trail bike, but if you're mostly about murdering the downhills we'd go for a 160mm fork such as RockShox Lyrik or Fox 36 to knock the head angle back another degree. What marks the Heckler out on the trail though is its agility and interactivity.

The Medium size is a very short reach frame, which makes it a bike you'll naturally move about a lot on. This keys into relatively quick steering and a simple swingarm suspension system that stiffens under power and drops the nose under braking to make a very feedback rich and responsive bike that reacts noticeably to almost everything you do on it. The direct power feel means it never seems as heavy as it actually is on the trail either, leaving it perfectly happy on black DH runs or long day rides.

Summary

Pedal bob and the constant interaction won't appeal to riders who like a neutral bike, but if you like to attack the trail dynamically it's one of those bikes that just feels right.

WHAT MOUNTAIN BIKE ★★★★★

“Superb handling balance, interactive suspension and solid reliability make the Heckler a classic trail bike.”