



TESTER SAYS

If there's one thing that riding these top performance options has proved it's that hardtails – especially 29ers – are far from ready to roll over and let full sussers turn them into dinosaurs. Even in this cherry-picked lineup some stand out as favourites: the steel spring valve of the Charge, the bulldog feel of the Identiti, the craftsmanship of the Lynskey and the all-round ability of the Whyte all get them high scores. The super-light but still super-fun Scott and the top value Maxlight really shine too, but it's the vast trail confidence of Santa Cruz's Highball that rolls it into the top spot. *Guy*

Santa Cruz Highball £599

Weight 1890g **Sizes** S, M, L, XL **Angles** 70° head, 71° seat **Seatpost** 30.9mm

Features 2x bottle cage **Contact** www.santacruz bikes.co.uk

➤ Santa Cruz's alloy 29er is an unassuming ride at first, but a proper grower the harder you ride it.

“While it feels good cruising, it's in its element when you get excited”

At nearly 2kg it's no lightweight (the carbon version is 800g less, but £1100 more) but the stout tubeset can take 80-120mm tapered forks. It's versatile: you can run fixed or adjustable singlespeed dropouts, there's room for 2.4in tyres, the 30.9mm seat tube is dropper-ready, the conventional cups can hold a BB-mounted chain device and it's available in white or blue.

But it's the riding that makes the Highball stand out, particularly if you plug in a 120mm fork and inline post. While it feels good but not

amazing cruising, it's in its element when you get excited.

The Highball's ability to hold a line and maintain traction on climbs or through corners is outstanding, even if you're running semi-slicks in slimy conditions. It's among the most assured and confidence-inspiring hardtails we've ridden. Complete builds are also available from £1599, which offset the otherwise high-looking frame price.

ALSO CONSIDER

Yeti Big Top £999

Another sturdy but superb handling alloy 29er all-rounder. It got a massive thumbs up from our über experienced bike tester Steve Worland.

Contact www.silverfish-uk.com



“Initially unassuming, but ride it hard and you find a superbly capable and versatile trail 29er.”