



Even in a basic build the Superlight's class shines through

## SANTA CRUZ SUPERLIGHT R



PRICE £2249 (price effective from June 2010)  
WEIGHT 12.3kg (27.2lb)  
CONTACT [www.santacruz bikes.co.uk](http://www.santacruz bikes.co.uk)

▲ **HIGHS** Lightweight but trail tough XC all-rounder with a playfully predictable ride and better than ever pricing.

▼ **LOWS** The complete bike is a cracking deal considering the frame cost, but it's gagging for gradual upgrading.

► **VERDICT** We fall in love with it again every time we ride it - the Superlight is a genuine classic and it's never been better value.

### TESTER SAYS



"The Santa Cruz Superlight may not be the most mechanically perfect bump-taming design, but its lightweight single-pivot simplicity and hair-trigger responses to pedal input still make it one of the fastest choices for moderate up and down terrain - and that's why I've had one for eight years."

Steve Worland



"Orange and Santa Cruz prove that 'simple' bikes are still a force to be reckoned with"

evening light flies up the valley floor towards us. We scramble up one more time for a maximum length fun run back down to the vans. It's here that the Saracen starts to really make an impression: our Ariel 2 is actually a pre-production sample straight from the show stand, but the way it's ripping down Snowdon couldn't be more sorted. The low, stiff front end is carving hard through the loose corners and hitting every crucial rock slot line we aim at absolutely spot on. The supple rear is sucking up the drops and smoothing out the chatter to keep speed high and the gap growing on all the pursuing bikes.

As if to prove a point, Alex runs the Ariel right round the outside of Guy through one rocky section, leaving him shocked, stalled and swearing astride the Commencal as Alex giggles off in a blur of gravity

## "Today is all about working out our top 10 bike shortlist"

rush. The Ariel's slack head and low bottom bracket really come into their own as the trail widens, loosens and twists down to the station. Only the Lapierre and Trek can keep this hard-charging newcomer in their sights as we scatter scree and bounce rocks off bikes in a mad charge to finish first on the opening day of testing.

### Food for thought

Regrouping at the Rhiw Goch Inn, just a short stagger from the bunkhouse, exchanging bike

opinions comes second to our first hot meal of the day. It turns out we're in very good hands as the portions of curry, steak and lasagne are as epic in size as the local scenery. Post-feast feedback from the other group earmarks some contenders from their test selection too: Specialized's new extended travel Stumpjumper FSR Comp is as smoothly sorted as ever and, with some of the most radical geometry here, it has a real handling edge over most of the Europeans. Our two classic rides - the Santa Cruz Superlight and the Orange Five S - are shining through their cheaper specs whenever the riding hots up too.

Our second day dawns with another splintering frost and a searing blue sky. Against all odds the weather is being kind to us and we're determined to make the most

of it. We split again, with Seb and Matt heading north to shoot more Snowdon footage as Guy and the others hit the stunning Coed y Brenin trails.

### Wheat from the chaff

Today is all about working out our top 10, and we're throwing loops around the visitor centre on as many bikes as possible, as fast as possible. It's the perfect testing circuit too: going under the big suspension fork gateway to start, you've got a couple of seconds to settle into the bike before smooth gravel gives way to the string of big boulders that form the 'Badger' section. The worst bikes are already out of shape before they even get to the decent-sized drop-off at the end, and even a few of the better ones stumble and need dragging

back on line after landing.

Then it's out of the saddle, pushing the pedals and pumping the rocks through more mixed boulder and gravel sections of 'Pinderosa' with some corners that turn out sharp if you hit them at speed. Two big compressions also need some 'weight back, wheelie and float' action to carry speed into the short rock and root climbs. While they're not long you'll certainly be aware of any weight you're carrying before the top.

The contouring and gradually climbing singletrack has just enough random boulder and stump obstacles to really test quick reaction handling: long and steep enough to test lungs, rolling speed and smooth surface climbing stability at the bottom end then looser and scrabblier at the top, this section is where the

The predictable single pivot loves a bit of turn and gurn action



Jenn rocks out as we head up to the snowline again