



SANTA CRUZ BLUR 4X

Price: £1099 painted, £1199 anodised

From: Santa Cruz UK www.santacruz bikes.co.uk

Tested: Two months

Ahh we were excited! Initially, the Blur 4X was going to feature in the miss-matched suspension bike test from a couple of issues ago. This was one bike that some of us really wanted to ride last year. Almost like it was designed for Calderdale, (selfish yes but it's where we live) nice short back end, big forks in the front (up to 160 mm) and enough suspension at the back to keep the speed up with out being too intrusive.

Initial out-of-the-box looks were appealing. Big gusseted top tube, bigger tubes than its other Blur stablemates and a longer wheelbase to boot. (It's half an inch longer than the XC and about a quarter of an inch longer than the LT).

The model we tested had Pike U-Turn forks, so max travel was 140mm which felt a pretty good compromise for the recommended travel range. One thing it has in common with the Chameleon is the short top tube; at 22.3in, the medium we were testing here is actually 0.2in

shorter than the, already short, Chameleon we tested last issue.

Strangely it didn't feel as short when on-board, this may be due to the seat angle being slacker giving the bike a roomier feel. It was surprisingly comfortable on climbs, grippy but not wallowy, and it didn't feel like a big bike either, more like a slightly rotund XC bike. It didn't dance uphill but it could do a reasonable impression of jogging.

On singletrack it was rocking, ploughing a line, its beefier build to the fore here, letting the forks work their way through stuff rather than riding round it. Its short cockpit like a positive rather than a negative, it does all of the great fun, super fast riding that the Chameleon does, but with a much bigger safety margin.

That short top tube though is a handful when it gets steep. the quick handling of the bike encouraging you to push on, but the short top tube making it a real handful. I ended up over the bars a few times, in situations where I hadn't expected to.

It made me wonder whether a bigger fork might be the answer for the bike. Slackening the front end of the bike by running a bigger fork may cure its super-fast steering, but by doing so may take away what's good about the bike. The great thing about the Blur 4X is that it feels like a mini DH bike that pedals really well uphill or down, the bad side of that is that you're bound to get in trouble with it when you forget that it isn't a full-on DH bike and ride it like it was one.

After far too much navel gazing, my conclusion is that the Blur 4X is a great all-round trail bike, tipped towards the sillier end of riding. What it isn't is a pseudo freeride bike or mini downhill bike. It has plenty of great handling to flatter you and it's unlikely to spit traction uphill or downhill on 90% of UK trails that we ride. Its beefier build will tolerate more cack-handedness than its stable mates, and if you can ride a bit you'll probably be able to make a gap on your mate as long as the gradient is even slightly downhill.

Matt