

BIKE
TEST

SANTA CRUZ SUPERLIGHT

Can this revitalised classic compete with true featherweights?

£949 - £2550 approx
Frame Complete bike



The original Heckler Superlight celebrated its tenth birthday last year. But while it looks very similar and still weighs suitably little, the Superlight for the next decade is a whole new beast.

The Facts

Santa Cruz has wisely retained the classic single pivot layout, but it has been reshaped – and they’re also reaping the rewards of the latest tubing technology.

The mainframe still uses good ol’ gusset-reinforced round tubing, with the characteristic upswept kink of the top tube on larger sizes. The back end does get a whole new swingarm though, with a twisted and split forked front piece spiralling out from a big main pivot section. The asymmetric stays are chunky rectangular sections that go straight to big cutout dropouts. Another rectangular section ‘U’ piece joins them together around the front of the seat post to leave the back end totally bridge free. This gives massive mud room compared to most linkage bikes we could mention – let alone the old Superlight.

The Geometry is also totally changed, with over an inch added to the wheelbase, half an inch to the top tube and nearly an inch off the head tube height for a longer, lower and more aggressive character. You still get plenty of powder coat colours to choose from, though (black, white, orange, liquid blue, gangrene) or a tough anodised slate or blue finish for an extra £100. The frame comes in a full range of S-XL sizes, as well as ‘Juliana’ female fit versions and there’s no rider weight limit.

The Feel

Whereas the old Superlight bike felt more like an upright, short wheelbase play bike, the new SL has an unmistakably aggressive character. The long top tube means plenty of room, even with an inline seat post pushing weight forward and down onto the front wheel. This means that while large was an essential for us on old SLs, we’d

Other practical points include two bottle mounts and the main pivot bearings are clamped into the swingarm for easy removal and replacement. Given the massive increase in rear end stiffness, the new Superlight should run smooth for a lot longer, though.

SPEC CHECK

PRICE Frame £949
 Complete bike £2550
SIZES S, M, L
 (tested), XL
WEIGHT 26.1lb
 (11.83kg) without
 pedals
FRAME Custom
 butted 6069 alu
FORK Fox 32 F100
 RLC 100mm travel

SHOCK Fox
 Float RP23
WHEELS DT 4.1D
 rims on DT340 hubs
TYRES Kenda Nevegal
 DTC 26x2.1in
CRANKSET XT
GEARS XT rear,
 front and shifters
BRAKES Avid
 Juicy Seven

HANDLEBAR Race
 Face Deus XC riser
OTHER STUFF WTB
 Rocket V saddle,
 Thomson seat post,
 Race Face Deus
 stem and Cane
 Creek Aheadset
CONTACT Jungle
 01423 780088 www.
 santacruz bikes.co.uk

“The iconic Superlight has always been much more than just a skimpy race bike”



ALSO CONSIDER

→ **Santa Cruz Blur XC** £1399 (frame only)
 Jungle 01423 780088 www.santacruz bikes.co.uk
 Same low slung hunter killer character, but with hard kicking VPP linkage suspension.

probably opt for a new medium and stick on a layback post.

It'd also pull some weight back off the front end. While it's welcome in terms of full commitment cornering and climbing traction, the forward-weighted feel occasionally threatened to tuck under and trip up in slow speed situations. With angles this steep, you could get away with a longer fork without any trouble, though. In fact, when we checked the fork lengths covered by the warranty (it's 125mm) they said that several of their testers and builders were riding around with a longer fork for a more stable, rock-flattening feel up front.

The frame certainly feels ready to tackle trouble with a really noticeable stiffness running full length to nail down tracking and cornering accuracy. It means some sharp kickback occasionally, but combined with the chunky new Fox forks, it's definitely a precision instrument now. The stiffer rear end adds a proper edge to power delivery too, and it stomps up climbs or out of corners, despite being heavier than the other bikes here.

Single pivot suspension still remains totally intuitive, too. Stomp on the power and it pulls down and digs in for a firm pedal feel. Slam on the brakes and it noses down for even more front wheel traction and a back wheel drift tendency that back tyre sliders will love.

The 'kick down under power' characteristic meant it sometimes spat traction on sections that the Giant and Scott linkage systems cleared, but overall the 'lift and accelerate' sensation really helps you storm the climbs. It also jacks up the low bottom bracket slightly and we clattered pedals less than on the linkage bikes. Despite the



Original Superlight owner Steve has already fallen in love with the revamped SL

more aggressive position, it still enjoys tight technical terrain and demanding descents. Things are noticeably smoother if you freewheel or float off stuff rather than trying to pedal 'against' the suspension movement though, and it can bounce across braking bumps.

Kit Notes

Jungle built up this bike for us with parts they had available, but you could choose one of their complete build kit options – give 'em a ring.

The Fox fork is a £237 upgrade on the standard RockShox Reba Team, but it's worth it for the fully tuneable compression damping if you're a fanatical suspension fettler. We never bothered changing the

RP23 shock once we'd found the shock pressure sweet spot though, so you'll be fine with a standard Float R (which saves £80).

It's definitely worth noting that items on the normal 'R' kit would add a bit more weight than the selection here – with the complete bike weight likely to be nearer 26.5lbs. The X.O kit is a proper gram skimming setup though, and 'only' costs an extra £550, which looks reasonable compared to the Giant (p48).

GEOMETRY

SIZES S, M, L (tested), XL
TOP TUBE LENGTH 24in
SEAT TUBE LENGTH 19.5in
HEAD ANGLE 71°
SEAT ANGLE 73.5°
BB HEIGHT 12.3in
CHAINSTAY LENGTH 16.7in

Summary

The iconic Superlight has always been more than just a skimpy race bike. While the new version is definitely a more muscular and aggressive character that powerful speed freaks will love, its more planted and solid stance also bolsters its general trail confidence.

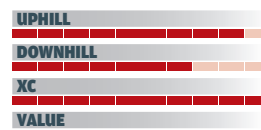
The result is a supremely enjoyable, communicative and versatile lightweight all-rounder, with real 'Superlight' potential matched to practical all-weather simplicity. The frame and complete bike prices are good too, so it looks set to be another damn fine decade.



That organic twisted tube swingarm is what's grabbing the attention

WHAT MOUNTAIN BIKE

VERDICT



Stiffer and faster, but still a classically simple all-rounder

