



perfectly adequate Hayes Stroker Trails for the incredibly sexy Saint units. These four-pot affairs really impressed me back in the winter when I test-rode a prototype Brooklyn Machine Works Shorty 8. Their modulation was very impressive, allowing me to slow the bike down over some very slippery leaf-covered mud sections without ever locking up the back wheel, and their outright power was simply amazing. During extensive testing mostly at Diablo this season they performed amazingly and were never found lacking. No fade issues, none of the squealing I have heard others complain of, just reliable, powerful, modulated braking. I can't see myself ever wanting to use another brake after these, they are that good. For best results, set up the Free Stroke so the lever is engaging pretty close to the bar. This seemed to get the very best performance out of the brake.

The Funn Full-On bars got swapped out for a pair of Azonic World Force bars in 30" width. This was actually for the peculiar issue we had with the Saint levers which, being of a non split-clamp design, couldn't be moved inboard far enough to accommodate one-finger braking right on the end of the lever blade. The extra inch of the Azonics was less about control and more about getting the lever position right, but the extra width was a very welcome addition when it came to some of the more flat-out, gravelly, wide-open sections, as did their ultra-low rise and comfortable sweep. The 25.4 mm diameter bar we used was also the lightest downhill bar I have ever used, but strength was never a concern.

For tires, I alternated between the stock Kenda Excavators and Geax DHEAs, both in 2.5. The Excavators were hugely confidence-inspiring, rolling over everything in their path and hooking up like no other on some of the flat, gravelly, sweeping turns I encountered. I would class these as solely a lift-assisted tire as they are heavy and have a lot of rolling resistance, but when the going is steep, loose and fast, there are few tires out there more up to the job. The Geax DHEAs excelled in different ways. Not as grippy as the Excavators, they rolled like lightning and actually had me coming into some sections way too hot and having to get on the brakes to avoid disaster. In tacky dirt they hooked up excellently, and also in loamy dirt they cut through the topsoil very nicely. In the situations I described for the Excavators, however, they could be a little scary at times after experiencing such a level of grip from the Kendas. For my Diablo runs I quickly switched back to the Kendas but for everything else I was very happy with the DHEAs handling characteristics, light weight and amazing lack of rolling resistance. I actually rode the Mongoose with the DHEAs 100 blocks through Manhattan to get to the Highbridge downhill/freeride trail at the northern end of the island, and I was amazed that it wasn't as torturous as I had imagined. If I had attempted that with the Kendas I would have got about 5 blocks before busting a lung. Their "TNT" idea is something

worth exploring later in the season to make the bike even more pedal-friendly. "Tubes/No Tubes" basically means that they can be run tubeless if you wish, or as we did with tubes. This feature also makes them an absolute bitch to mount so get some soap onto the bead to save yourself some major headache. The Geax has been the hike-a-bike tire of choice this fall, possibly switching to an Excavator up front to save me from myself when the going gets hairy.

The Marzocchi suspension front and rear was a mixed blessing. The Roco on the back provided a very smooth ride, albeit without a lot of adjustability, and complemented the pedaling efficiency of the Boot'r frame by simply getting on with the task of shock absorption without any recourse to a pedal platform. The Boot'r is simply so efficient to pedal that a platform shock would have been a waste, and again whoever spec'ed this bike did so with a keen eye. Its sibling, the 888, was not as classy a performer and never really matched the back end in terms of performance. It was capable in that it tracked well and ate up everything that was thrown at it, but it never achieved the ground-sticking qualities of some other forks on the market, and was prone to harsh and noisy top-outs at times.

Raceface cranks added some major style to the bike while shaving a lot of weight. Raceface cranks have always been a firm favorite of mine from way back in the day, and it's great to see that they have kept the trademark lines while making them strong enough to put up with the rigors of modern downhill. They did their job, were very stiff and looked amazing...job done.

THE RIDE

So far I have been banging on about pedaling efficiency a lot, but how did the Mongoose perform in its true environment? I would characterize it as a lively bike that was a lot more nimble than its weight would suggest. A single pivot is always going to produce a livelier ride and the Boot'r liked to be jumped and flicked around, but it could also be the "plow through" bike when it needed to be, although that is not its true calling. The steep-ish head angle contributed to the feeling of liveliness but in the wide-open stuff I never felt held back by it. On the very fast, rough, steeps of somewhere like Mont Sainte Anne I could see the head angle being a disadvantage, but as far as the worst of the east coast was concerned, it never became an issue. The back end was very stiff and never felt sloppy, and although I sometimes missed the ground-hugging effects of some other designs out there, the fun factor of the Mongoose was hard to ignore, as it begged to be launched off every little rise in the trail. When the lifts closed for the season, leaving me to get to the top by my own power, the bike really came into its own. Normally I would be looking for areas that could be shuttled in the car, but the