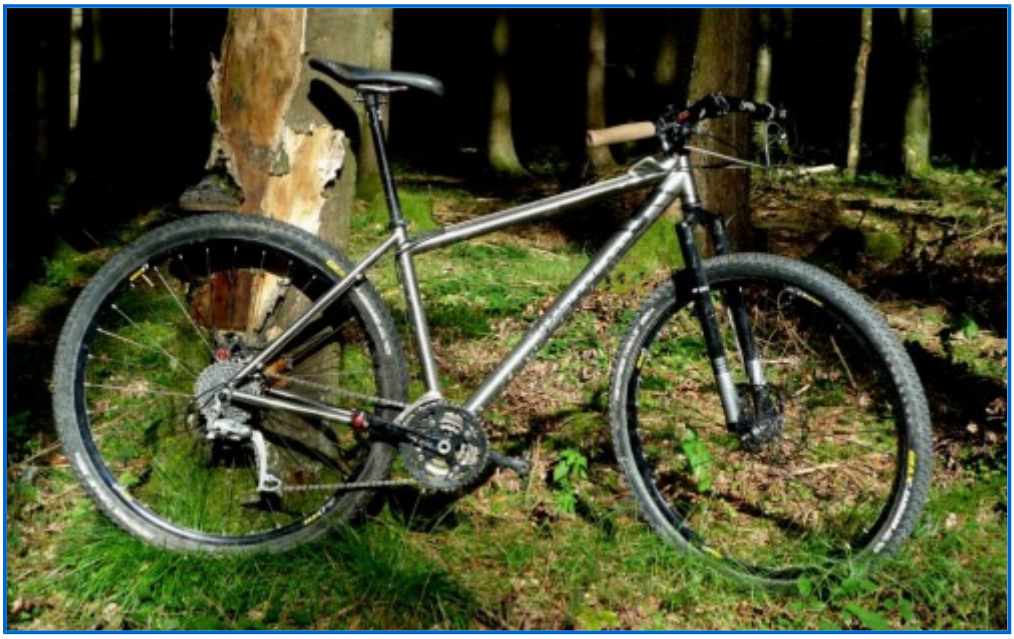
# Geax Saguaro Tubular 29″er Tires: Final Review

December 20th, 2010 by Guitar Ted

*Note: This is "c_g"'s last installment on his long term testing of the Geax saguaro tubular mountain bike tires.*

**GEAX 29″er tubulars – Another Rider´s Ride Impressions & Final Verdict: by "c_g"**

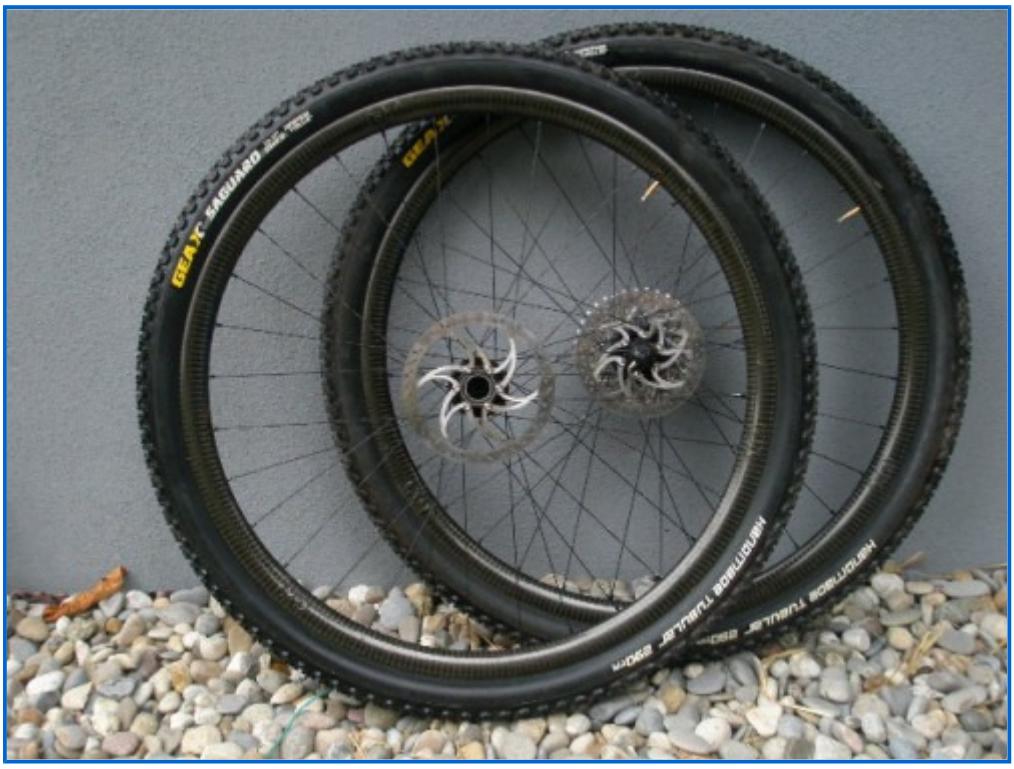
Hello folks, it has been some time since I have given my last update on the **GEAX tubular 29″er tires** – one of the most interesting innovations for 29″er mountain biking in a long time. The roadies and cyclocross riders would call it less innovation, but rather adaptation, because they have known the benefits for ages and have been riding them for a long time.



I openly admit that I have been new to the concept of tubulars for mountain biking, (and even more so to tubular 29″er), and some of my approaches, (especially the way I glued my tires),

might be considered crude. (Some of you have chosen more explicit words, which I won´t cite here ).

In the last months I have put another rider on the GEAX 29″er tubulars – a former road racing professional, who loves to ride mountain bikes and was eager to try them out. This man really knows what he's talking about, having decades of experience with road and cyclocross tubulars as well as all kinds of tubeless tires.




So here comes J. Förster´s impressions of riding the GEAX Saguaro 2.0 tubular 29″er tires – Thank you J. for your time and effort :

*"Twentyniner? The dislike for BIG WHEELS in Germany is still there but slowly we show some motion. I have learned the benefits of 29"ers some time ago and wouldn't want to go back!*

***Tubulars for mountain biking?** – Many people I meet and discuss this topic with are full of skepticism if not antagonistic. Pure mountain bikers know them only from magazines, the least of them have ever seen or really ridden them. Roadies like me, have quite a history with tubulars and (to be open) many of us are happy to have alternatives – the disadvantages (mainly the gluing process and lack of repair options) are simply too big in general riding.*

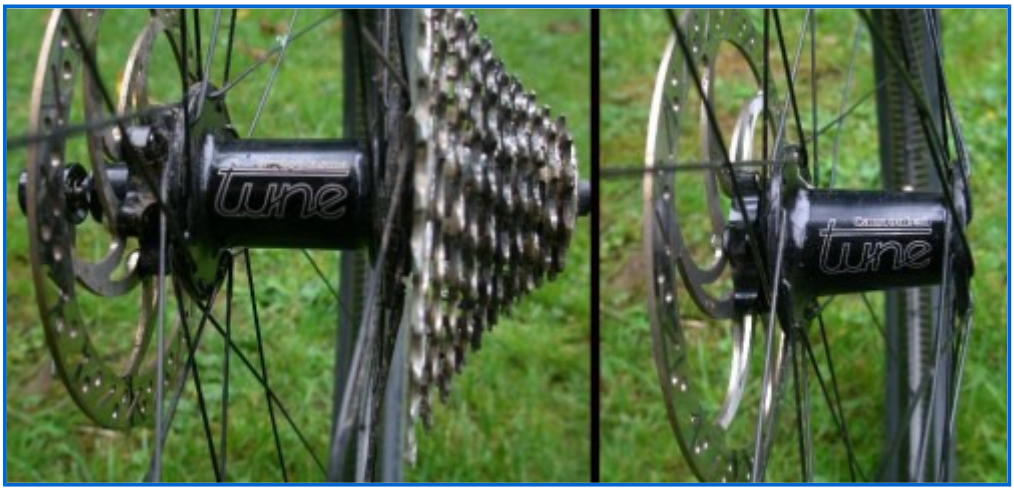
*I have been racing on tubulars for years, where they have clear advantages over anything else. For one they roll so well over rough ground, then they are much less prone to snake bites and punctures. Then there is the possibility to keep going even in case of a flat because they will not dismantle – a huge advantage in competitive situations (and in corners ).*

*Carbon rims, like they have been around in road riding for years, really only make sense from a technical point of view as tubular rims. Rim flanges out of Carbon make the rim's weight go up considerably, besides being the most vulnerable part of the rim under pounding. The disadvantages of tubulars are clearly in the fact that they cannot be serviced or repaired (much less on the trail), which factors in as higher costs and in the time consuming gluing process. I advise to always carry some latex sealant (if not a spare tire) with you.*

*After having been on standard mountain bike tires forever (mostly converted tubeless), I have been given the opportunity to try out tubular mountain bike tires in real life. Like I said before, tubulars do have multiple advantages and these should show in mountain bike riding even more dramatically.*

*I still see the mental image of Thomas Frischknecht, who has been riding tubulars in mountain biking for years now. Because there had been no light weight and high end mountain bike rims available then, he started out on 26" ZIPP Carbon road rims with high strength glue to fix the tire on the too narrow rims. Now we even have high end tubular rims for 29"er mountain bike use* .

*Here is my wheel built for this test:*




***Hubs: TUNE Cannonball** (front hub for Lefty) and **Protoplasma** (´11 rear with an all new ratchet system)*

** both super light and real workhorses*

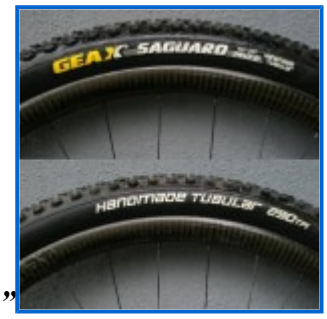
***rims: AX-Lighness 29" tubulars***

** under 270 g per rim and a aesthetic delight*

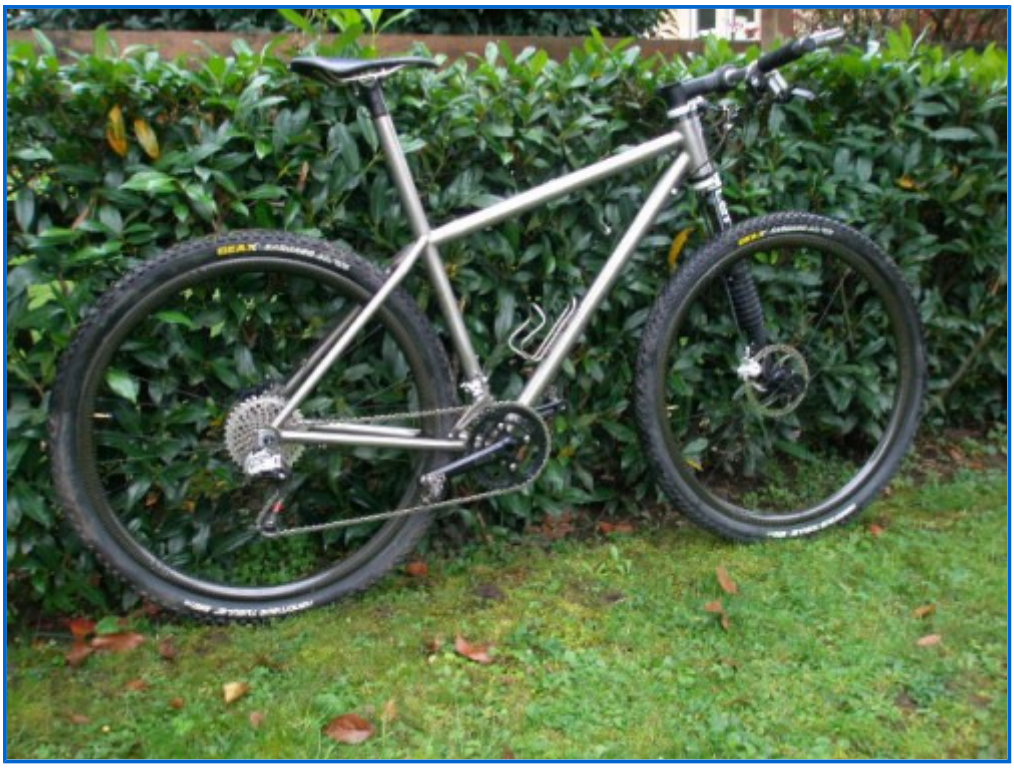
***spokes: SAPIM Super Spoke** (1.8 – 1.4 – 1.8)*

** minimalistic but can handle high tension, had been perfectly fine during the test – no failures or loosing tension*

***tires: GEAX Saguaro 29"er tubulars, 2.0"***




** – excellent workmanship and highest end materials but the only non-lightweight part of the wheels*



***Bike: MAWIS Ti-bike*** *(custom made with Lefty fork and integrated seat mast) with lots of trick and bling components*

*But let´s turn our attention to the tubulars –* ***first comes the mounting:***

*In road riding I had been having good results with using the double sided tape by TUFO. I have read about reports with tires not being held adequately by it but can´t really back them up. The adhesion is very high, I´d say even higher than with some liquid glue. Overall the system is quick, clean and simple and the wheels can be ridden immediately after. When going for tubular glue, which I have done for years, you often end up with glue all over – it takes a lot of experience to get it right without issues.*

(**comment by c_g:** I have tried my luck with the same tape but didn't feel the adhesion was confidence inspiring for really low pressures. I always ended up gluing them, settling with disposing my working clothes afterward )

*The GEAX tubulars were easy to install, little force needed like I had been used to with many road tubulars. One tire ran perfectly true after a little truing, the other one I simply never managed to get 100 % true – something that sometimes happens with handmade tubulars, as they are not restricted by rim flanges but are free to expand to their own shape on the rim. The handmade process of the GEAX tubs ensures top quality but can lead to minor deviations in their dimensions. It was detectable on the work stand but not when riding.*

***Off we go on the trail:*** *I started out with 2,5 bar (rider weight 72 kg). On the first meters on asphalt I already noticed the smooth running of the wheels. Especially when switching back and forth from road bike to mountain bike, I immediately notice the higher rolling resistance of MTB tires, which in this case was noticeably smaller! It felt almost like running a cyclocross bike.*

*On the trail I felt very confident from the beginning on, getting the impression the tires virtually were glued to the ground. Uphill performance was especially improved, which is partly attributed to the light and stiff wheels. Downhill and in corners I always felt like I could push the tubulars a bit more. Before I had always been riding tires converted tubeless but the sensation of suppleness and comfort with the GEAX tubulars was better still.*

*The coming trips and epic rides just confirmed my initial impressions. With a bit of trial and error I ended up finding my sweet spot pressure around 1.8 to 2.0 bar. I needed to check the pressure and inflate a bit before every trip, as is common with latex inner tubes. On one particular ride I felt the pressure slowly dropping for an unknown reason and inserted a bit of latex sealant with good success.*

*I liked the GEAX tubular equally well on dry and on wet surfaces. The occasional direct hits were taken without any defects by either rim or tire. Everything is still running like on day one!*

*During the limited time of the test I did notice neither premature wear nor tears and cuts.*

*Riding impressions certainly are a subjective thing, but I am rather sensitive to differences in rolling resistance and propulsion… I am a roadie after all.*

*One day my positive riding impressions got confirmed by a riding buddy, who going downhill on a single track section in front of me, got annoyed by my free hub's sound while he had been pedaling all along. "This can´t be" he commented shaking his head; I only grinned contently* .

***Verdict:** To me mountain bike tubulars have proven their worth. The benefits clearly outweigh the disadvantages. I cannot imagine to go biking competitively without these wheels anymore.*

*Try them out whenever you get to – though chances are probably scarce – it is worth to experience it for yourself."*

(J. has been riding the GEAX tubulars on AX-Lightness rims and TUNE hubs – a combination that safely can be considered the pinnacle of weight saving, hitting the scale at around 1100 g !!! plus tubulars. Here is some information on them from my EUROBIKE´10 coverage.)

**UPDATE by c_g:** I had been riding my tubular 29er wheels also in between other testing and all the impressions earlier stated in my Mid term report (here) stand firmer than ever.

But there had been one thing missing in my mind: The GEAX Saguaro 29er tubulars have given me absolutely no trouble in the reliability department but maybe I was just lucky. I decided to take reliability to the extreme. You may call it “destructive testing”, for me it was a weekend ride on the GEAX tubulars at 0.8 bar rear and 0.7 bar front. Yes, I did take them out for more than 3 hours hard riding (at first my heart was aching at the abuse but curiosity prevailed) and you can imagine it was quite bumpy. I must have hit the rims over a thousand times during this ride, often really hard – but can you believe it, no snake bit or other defects. Reliability – WOW, fully approved.

(NO mistaking- the ride feel was not optimal, it was rather unstable and not very confidence inspiring in the corners – but it was rideable, a thing I am sure would not be possible on regular or tubeless tires.)

OK I think you have heard all the pros and cons of tubular MTB tires repeated enough times to put into a short conclusive list:

Tubular MTB tires (both 26” and 29”) are:

* elaborate to mount
* require specific tubular rims, which in most cases means a new wheel set
* costly (the GEAX Saguaro tubulars sell at a steep € 179.- / $ 240.- a piece)
* very hard if not impossible to repair (other than injecting some latex sealant)
* are not the lightest tires existing (but keep in mind to calculate incl. tube)
* are available only in very limited variations (exactly two, the GEAX Saguaro 2.0 29er and the DUGAST Rhyno XL in two widths)

But they also allow you:

* To experience the smoothest and liveliest ride you can imagine on most riding conditions (Only in the really rough and very slow technical sections did I find then slightly under damped – see mid term report here)
* To benefit from the best snake bite protection I know of at even the lowest pressures
* To get into the technical support zone safely on the wheels in the unlikely case of a puncture, because the tire will not separate from the rims
* To built wheels with the lightest possible rims (< 240 g), negating the higher weight of the tires
* I tend to believe they have the lowest possible rolling resistance but have no self-tested numbers to back it up (I think J´s report gives a hint of it also)
* (to be the coolest dude in your group because none of your riding buddies will probably have anything comparable )

Verdict: While the ride characteristics and reliability of tubulars are too good to be believed and make them desirable for all types of XC and trail riders, the resulting cost the limited availability of tire options (XC oriented treads and widths) narrow down the audience of tubulars to serious racers and competitive riders looking for the cutting edge in tire technology. Their overall reliability may even make them attractive for endurance racing but the non existent repair options (on the trail) will probably make many such folks shy away from buying them. Leaves them predestined for XC circuit events with technical support.

My wheels show you don´t have to cash out tons of money to benefit from and enjoy tubular mountain bike tires but to fully take advantage of the concept you will want to invest BIG bucks into light yet strong carbon tubular rims.

In my perspective the tubular concept for 29″er is one of the most interesting developments in the past year but like many such new concepts they are still very niche and their acceptance is hindered by the lack of selection, making them less attractive to the general public. The 29″er story all over again, isn´t it, but see where 29″er are now. But who knows: In five years tubular 29″ers may be ruling the (racing) scene … or be memorabilia collector items.

I for one will continue riding my set of GEAX Saguaro 2.0 29er tubulars, whenever the trail conditions are favorable for them (and when I don´t have any other tires or wheels to review in 2011 ).

RIDE ON,

c_g

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