

Soulcraft Option Three

BIKE SEEKING RIDER

SEXY, SLIM BEAUTY spends days dreaming of the right lover. You are willing to open your wallet to make me happy; you are interested in dancing up life's long, hard climbs and adventurous enough to accommodate my quick decision making. ☘

Out Of The Box

When Salsa pulled up stakes and left Northern California for Minnesota last year, former employees Sean Walling and Matt Nyiri were left wondering what to do. Sean had about 10 years experience building frames at Salsa and some spare garage space, so it seemed logical to go into business making fine steel bikes. A defining moment came at Interbike last fall. Sean was walking the halls, frame in hand, when he ran into Bianchi's Sky Yeager. "I'm talking to Sky and she's asking me what I'm doing now, and I hold up a frame and say 'This. I'm building frames.' And she looks at me kind of funny and goes 'Okay, but what are you going to do for money?'"

That was a year ago. So far Soulcraft's guerilla marketing has been a resounding success. Soulcraft is so backed up with orders that the hardtail we tested is the personal bike of Yuri Hauswald, one of Soulcraft's race family.

On The Trail

Running the tape over this bike led to some pretty standard numbers. A 42-inch wheelbase. Head and seat angles of 71/73 degrees. Chainstays that measure 16.75 inches. And a 23.6-inch top tube. These are the sort of numbers that—if one was inclined to judge everything by the rules of tape—you would expect to deliver a plain vanilla ride.

But the Soulcraft is anything but that. Fast, damn fast. That's the only reasonable way to describe this hardtail. This is a textbook race-bike, especially since it arrived with a longish stem and handlebars three inches below the saddle. The Soulcraft lives for climbs. Stand up and



FRAME: Reynolds 853 steel
SUSPENSION: RockShox Sid Race
WHEELS: Sun-Ringle RPM
DRIVETRAIN: Shimano XTR
BRAKES: Shimano XTR
PRICE AS TESTED: \$2,900 (\$1,050 frame only)
 Sizes: 15.5, 17, 18 (tested), 19.5, 21
WEIGHT: 23.8 pounds
CONTACT: 707-775-2453; www.soulcraftbikes.com.

honk the big ring up fire roads. Crouch on the tip of the saddle and pray for granny-ring steeps. And everything in between.

The Reynolds 853 steel frame is laterally stiff, but not brutally so. The Soulcraft levitates with the best, aided in no small part by its featherweight build. It's also quick handling—changing direction with barely a touch on the bars or a nudge of the saddle. This characteristic is something of a mixed bag. On fast fire roads, it's rock stable. On tight and

relatively smooth singletrack, the bike glides. But when the going gets hectic and rocky, the Soulcraft can swap ends real quick. The bike came set-up NORBA old-school style, so a shorter stem or handlebars with some rise could change the scary-fast controls. But then those changes could sacrifice some of its bleeding-eyeball climbing alacrity.

In an age where quality steel hardtails are as rare as an honest politician, it's heartening to see the rise of companies willing to bet the farm on ferrous materials. For proof that steel is as sweet as ever, for a top-notch race bike, for a good time, you know who to call. If you ask real nice, they may throw in a pair of those cutesy handlebar tassels that came with our test bike.

—Mike Ferrentino