

# Bikes To Match Our Mountains

*Fisher MountainBikes' Mt. Tam And Montare  
Master Black Bear Pass • by Glenda Wilhelm*

Where better to test two Fisher MountainBikes than on a mountain pass approached by "one of the most terrifying roads . . . anywhere in the American Rockies"? Half-way up that section of Black Bear Pass, which rises to 12,840 feet behind Telluride, Colorado, we were wondering which was undergoing the greater testing, the Mt. Tam and Montare bikes or the riders.

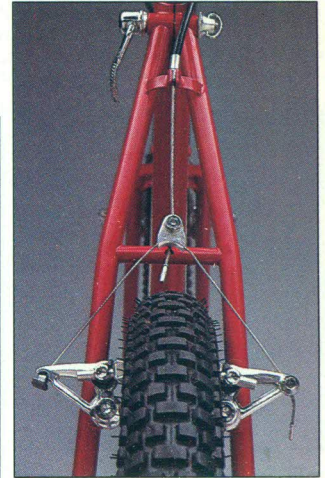
Beside us roared one of the most spectacular waterfalls in Colorado, sending its cascade of snow-melt down to the San Miguel

River more than 2,000 feet below. How little the tourists down there in Telluride knew, peacefully having lunch on a lazy late-summer Saturday. Aloud, we six riders of the tortuous trail gloated over their lack of physical conditioning, their reliance on motorized transport, their refusal to test themselves against the "real" Colorado.

Secretly and silently, I wished to heaven that I was down there looking up, instead of up here, looking so very far down. The only thing keeping me on the inside edge of sanity was the solid, sturdy work-

horse of a bicycle under me.

Tim and I are avid cycle tourers and have been having a love affair with the lightweight touring bicycle for more than 10 years now. We were more than a little skeptical as to how long this "fat-tire" fad would last. But mountain bikes have a way of widening your cycling horizons. Here I was on the up side of a two-day mountain tour that would have been impossible on my touring bike. The one thing I hate more than anything is being told that I can't do something I want to do; as



*The Montare features the excellent, sure-stopping Shimano XT cantilever brakes.*

I planned and dreamed of the Black Bear/Ophir Pass ride, the Fisher MountainBikes in our garage



*studio photography by Steve Broadbus*



## FISHER

“ON GRAVEL AND WASHBOARD BYWAYS, THE BIKES WERE NOT ONLY COMFORTABLE BUT VERY STABLE.”



said, “You can,” not “You can’t!”

The Mt. Tam is no ordinary mountain bike. Its design and custom construction are based on 10 years of the highest technology available in mountain bicycology. We’ve heard it said that if you have seen one mountain bike, you have seen them all. Perhaps that seems so because many of the recent editions are only slight variations of the original Gary Fisher/Tom Ritchey theme. Both the Mt. Tam and the Montare possess high-quality components and have been rigorously tested by Fisher himself, an offroad racer and winner of races. In fact, the Montare, at \$679 is so similar in design to the Mt. Tam, at \$996, that the next question is, “Why a \$350 difference?”

To appreciate that, you must value handbuilt over factory-produced frames. Other differences are in gearing, slightly higher at the upper end on the Montare (96 inches compared with Mt. Tam’s 92 inches), and in fewer deluxe-grade components, although



(Left) The Mt. Tam’s unicrown fork; (above) fording a rocky riverbed with the Montare (f) and Mt. Tam (r).

outdoor photography by Tim Wilhelm

functionally they are very close. The lower gear ranges are identical, and we’re talking *low* as in 21 inches. My touring bike had a low gear of 31 inches, with which I pulled 90 pounds of baby and a Buggy trailer over the Rocky Mountains and on across the United States. That was before we knew better and regared it down to 27 inches. With a 21-inch low gear, we could have pulled *twins* across country.

Not swayed by technical excellence alone, we put both to work on a daily round-trip commute of 10 miles over notoriously bad country dirt roads. The erratic gravel on these roads has thrown one of my best friends and has given me a permanent case of White Knucklitis. I run instead of cycle for daily exercise simply because of the trauma of negotiating 90-degree farm-country turns on domesticated talus. Not satisfied with this trial by Colorado, Tim put the Montare through its paces out in the loose sand and red rock rubble of Canyonlands National Park in Utah. The verdict? Each got an “A” in the country-bike class of ’84.

On gravel and washboard byways, the bikes were not only comfortable but very stable. Once I got over the feeling that I would lose it at every corner, I relaxed and let the bike take the turn for me. As I became convinced of the reliability of the Mt. Tam as a country-road commuter, Tim put a set of Eclipse Commuter Baskets on the rear for me. At times, I loaded up to 20 pounds of gear. Rarely was it possible to balance this load properly, yet the bike remained almost as stable and easy to maneuver as when unloaded. A slight front-wheel squirrelness would have been cured with front panniers.

During off-hours, the bike changed from a serious mother-mover to my son’s prairie dog hole-hopper. The mounds around prairie dog holes on our property make excellent dirt-bike jumps. With a quick release of the saddle clamp to lower the seat, Erik spent happy hours jumping burrows. Since he never returned mangled, we knew that the bike performed well even under soft-dirt circumstances. Tim substantiated this performance with reports that the Montare seemed almost to float through loose sand in Canyonlands, negotiating stretches of the four-

wheel-drive roads impassable to narrow touring tires. Only when the sand reached a depth of three or more inches did he have trouble getting through.

There is more to mountain biking than dirt roads and hole-hopping. On several occasions I rode the Mt. Tam the six highway miles to town, keeping an eye on the time it took compared with the same trip on my touring bike. Although it was easy enough to ride on pavement (with increased tire pressure to help rolling resistance), the trip took longer by five minutes. I noticed a similar sluggishness after we topped Black Bear and came out on the highway at Red Mountain Pass for the 10-mile run down to Silverton where we spent the night.

That rain-slick ride also set me to thinking about the advantages of fenders on mountain bikes, although there is a serious price to pay when you get into mud. Once the buildup begins between those fat tires and their equally fat fenders, the wheels become just as immobile as they do on any other bicycle, and perhaps even worse if you don’t get the mud out before it hardens to just short of concrete. The solution? Avoid mud or enjoy the consequences.

The final test of a good mountain bike is its shifting performance. Being able to get into your lower gears on steep grades with loose surfaces can be critical. I remember well the fury a friend and I felt on a backcountry tour in Utah when our rented mountain bikes kept refusing to shift into the lower gears. As my legs spun the pedals wildly, the bike would grind to a halt halfway up an incline, forcing me afoot or making me turn downhill in order to shift. I might have blamed my shifting tech-



## FISHER

nique had not Bill's identical bike done the same thing time after time. Perhaps it was merely cable-stretching as the bike shop owner suggested, but we have not had such problems with the Shimano derailleurs and shifters on the Mt. Tam or the Montare. Shifting on these bikes is effortless, worry-free and smooth, and a big difference from my more temperamental 10-speed with its delicate derailleurs.

Trouble-free riding seems to be intrinsic to mountain biking, and, in our experience, especially true for the Mt. Tam and Montare. In four months of serious and not-so-serious riding, we have not had to adjust a brake, tighten a cable, or fix a flat on the road. We have carried tools and patch kits mostly out of habit it seems. From what other mountain bike owners tell us, this is generally true of most such bikes. If you don't like the mechanical aspects of bicycle ownership, or if you have children who tend to destroy bikes at about one per year, consider the mountain bike. Fisher is putting out a 16-inch frame on two of his custom bikes. The price may well be worth the durability until your child is big enough for a more standard-size frame. bars. At first, sitting upright on a mountain bike is delightful. But when, after many hours, that is the *only* position you can sit in, I begin to get nostalgic for the choices offered by my touring bike bars. For the person who spends, or wants to spend, most of his or her cycling hours in the back-of-beyond, torquing up impossible gradients and boulder-skimming down dirt roads and trails, the mountain bike is a logical choice.

We can recommend the



The Mt. Tam has either a Sugino AT or Takagi XT triple crankset.

Montare as an excellent buy in its price range (\$500-\$700). If owning a hand-built frame means that much to you, the Mt. Tam will not be a disappointment, even though it is at the lower end of the custom cycles offered by MountainBikes. All of the components withstood our test with flying colors.

What we do *not* recommend is the western approach to Black Bear Pass, no matter how mountain biking has expanded your horizons. There are plenty of mountain passes traversed by challenging roads guaranteed to tax the most enthusiastic and muscular biker. As for Black Bear, even the best riders in our group considered packing it in more than once, or packing the bikes in a backpack next time. As one member of the group put it, "Glenda, this time you bit off almost more than we could chew!"

Back in Telluride at the end of the tour, we looked up in amazement at the route we had taken up the mountains. That is one trip we will never have to exaggerate in the telling. What a great feeling to have tested our limits and perhaps even pushed them back a little. We found out

another thing, too. Not only are the Mt. Tam and Montare good for tackling

the almost impossible ride, they are pretty easy to push, too. **BR**

## MONTARE

### FRAME

Tubing	oversize double-butted chrome-moly; chrome-moly fork; single-bend, tapered chain stays; oval seat tube; reinforced seat cluster; forged dropouts; TIG-welded
Braze-ons	double water bottle; slotted cable stops and guides; cantilever brake bosses; rear rack mounts; double eyelets
Finish	metallic red, metallic green
Frame sizes	16, 19, 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 22-inch

### WHEELS

Hubs	Shimano XT
Rims	Ukai 26 × 1.75
Tires	Panaracer 26 × 2.125 knobby

### DRIVETRAIN

Crankset	Shimano 600 EX triple
Pedals	MKS black
Freewheel	Shimano six-speed (13, 15, 17, 21, 25, 30)
Chain	DID Lanner
Derailleurs	Shimano XT, front and rear
Shift levers	Shimano XT

### COMPONENTS

Brakes	Shimano XT
SEAT and Post	Avocet Touring; SR LaPrade 250 mm, with SunTour QR-170
Bars and Stem	"BULLMOOSE" <sup>TM</sup> TIG-welded
Weight	29 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds
Price	Suggested retail: \$679

## MT. TAM

### FRAME

Tubing	oversize double-butted chrome-moly; Unicrown <sup>TM</sup> TIG-welded chrome-moly tubular fork; single-bend, tapered chain stays; oval seat tube; reinforced seat cluster; forged dropouts; bronze-brazed lugless
Braze-ons	water bottle; oversize cable stops and guides; cantilever brake bosses
Finish	slate grey metallic, medium jade metallic, light blue metallic
Frame sizes	16, 18, 19, 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 22, 23-inch

### WHEELS

Hubs	Shimano Deore XT
Rims	Ukai 26 × 1.75
Tires	Panaracer 26 × 2.125 knobby

### DRIVETRAIN

Crankset	Sugino AT or Takagi XT triple
Pedals	Shimano SX
Freewheel	Shimano Uniglide six-speed (13, 15, 17, 21, 25, 30)
Chain	DID Lanner
Derailleurs	Shimano Deore XT
Shift levers	Shimano Deore XT

### COMPONENTS

Brakes	Shimano Deore XT with Magura Shorty levers
Seat and Post	Avocet Touring I, men's or women's; SR LaPrade
Bars and Stem	"BULLMOOSE" <sup>TM</sup> TIG-welded
Weight	28 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds
Price	Suggested Retail: \$995