

# Fat Chance Kicker

## A Lucky Bike

**T**he Fat Chance "Kicker" is made in—get this—Massachusetts.

A mountain bike from Massachusetts? Is that like a sailboat from the Sahara? A snowmobile from the Sudan? Is this a fake mountain bike? Is some East Coast city slicker with an Italian suit and an idle factory trying to jump on a craze?

The short answer is no. To understand

the full story you have to wrap your mind around a conundrum or two. Like that the Marin County of legend, the place where most of the prestige mountain bikes come from, is not a wilderness full of grizzly bears. It's a suburb full of BMWs. Like that the other mountain bikes we know of in the Kicker's price range, including those with Marin County labels on them, aren't made in the U.S. of A. at all. They're made in Japan and Taiwan.

Which, believe it or not, is just fine. It's experience and state of mind that count in designing a mountain bike, not geography. Chris Chance, John Troja and the boys at Fat City Cycles have the experience; there are actual mountains to ride in Massachusetts.

And yes, they also have that full-throttle attitude, that renegade state of mind, of the gonzo mountain biker. You see it in the cartoony Fat City Cycles logo and in the bright, look-at-me paint jobs that Chance likes. More important, you feel it in the bikes like the Kicker.

The Kicker is a short, light, compact bike that begs to go fast. The handlebar is two inches narrower than usual and closer to the saddle, and the wheelbase is short—less than 43 inches. The bottom

bracket is high—over 12 inches. All that makes for a nimble bike, one that can dodge rocks and run highly technical trails quickly. It seems as eager as a young colt.

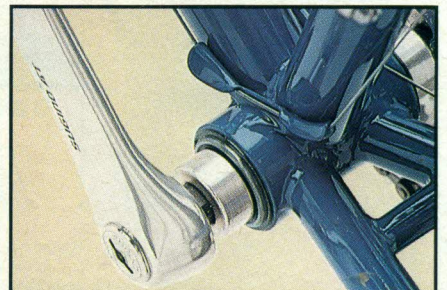
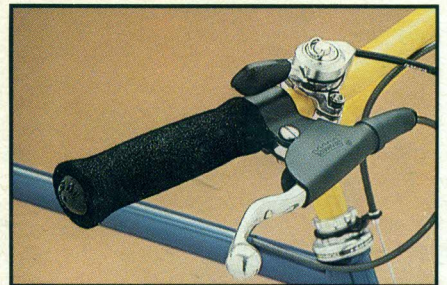
Short, stiff chainstays make the Kicker an efficient climber. The close handlebar feels a bit cramped when climbing in the saddle; it may restrict your breathing a bit. Out of the saddle, though, the bar position feels natural. In either case, the front wheel stays on the ground, probably because you don't pull up on the bar as much as you might on a bike whose bar is further away from you. Going downhill, the close handlebar makes it easy to move back behind the saddle without having to lower it. That makes the standard-equipment Hite Rite, nice as it is, almost superfluous.

Short bikes are sometimes a handful on steep, rough descents, as though with the

**Unusual features include genuine Magura motorcycle levers with brush hoods, Cook Bros. sealed bottom bracket and Shimano BMX pedals with good grip, integral reflectors, toe-clip capability.**



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wheels so close together the bike forgets which one should go first. But the Kicker is pretty stable and tries to go where you point it. One reason, no doubt, is the relaxed head tube angle, and another is the almost mistake-proof full-width knobbies. Still, things happen fast on short bikes; the Kicker goes where you point it *right now*, so beginners beware.

Componentry is functional, not fancy. While many bikes in the Kicker's price range are using part or all of SunTour's flashy new XC group (see "Your Machine," page 76), the Kicker uses Shimano's Deore XT derailleurs and brakes, together with a Sugino AT crankset. Trick features in the SunTour

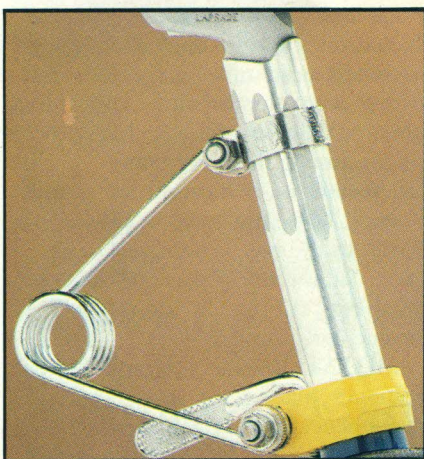
group have made the Deore and Sugino components seem a bit stodgy, but all of them are tried and true.

The drive train is particularly good. Mountain bikes need reliable downshifts at low speeds and high pedal pressure, and both derailleurs deliver. This is especially a lot to ask of the conventional, "bottom normal" front derailleur, which relies on spring pressure to achieve the downshift, but the Deore is the best of its type we've seen yet.

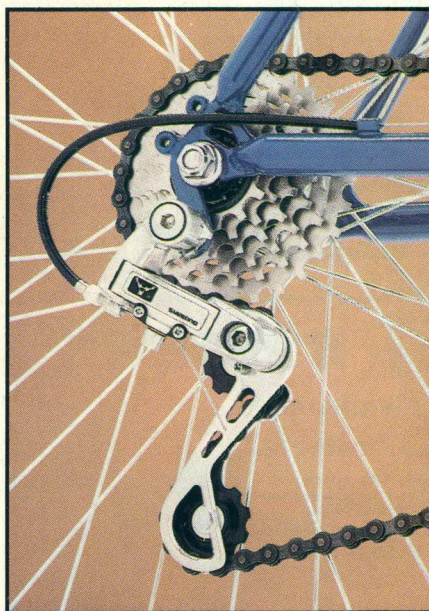
The sealed-bearing bottom bracket is from Cook Brothers. Its cartridge bearings are easily serviced by the home mechanic.

It is when you hit the brakes that you

may regret not having SunTour's XC equipment. John Barnett, our Technical Editor, maintains that properly adjusted cantilevers are just as effective as the XC "Power Cam" brakes, and in the perfect world that emanates from his work bench, that is no doubt true. But in our world, where brakes and other things aren't maintained as often or as well as they should be, cantilevers require more lever pressure for the same braking effect. That means tired forearms and less delicate control. Still, the Deore cantilevers are very good cantilevers, and will lock up the rear or (God help you) the front wheel if you ask them to. They are also a known quantity, while the XC



The standard-equipment Hite-Rite allows seat adjustment on the fly. The alloy seatpost binder is replaceable. Shimano Deore derailleurs and cantilever brakes are not new, but still among the best.



## SPECIFICATIONS

**Model:** Kicker

**Manufacturer:** Fat City Cycles, 331 Somerville Ave., Somerville, Massachusetts 02143

**Price (suggested retail):** \$795

**Frame tubing:** Tange double-butted chrome moly

**Finish:** Red or black powder epoxy standard; variety of Imron colors and camouflage optional for \$50-150, including "Powerful Pink," "Forest Green," "Royal Blue," "Light Lime" and "International Orange." Yellow and blue team colors shown.

### Dimensions:

Wheelbase: 107.5 cm (42.3")  
Fork Rake: 5.5 cm (2.2")  
Head tube angle: 68.5°  
Seat tube angle 71°  
Top tube: 57 cm (22.4")  
Chain stays: 43.5 cm (17.1")  
Bottom bracket height: 31 cm (12.2")  
Weight: 30.0 lbs.

**Available Sizes:** 16.5", 18", 19.5", 21"; 15" and 23" available at extra charge

**Size Tested:** 19.5"

### Drive Train:

Crankset: Sugino AT, 175 mm arms  
Bottom bracket: Cook Brothers, sealed  
Freewheel: Shimano 600EX  
Chain: Shimano Uniglide  
Front Derailleur: Shimano Deore XT  
Rear Derailleur: Shimano Deore XT  
Shifters: Shimano Deore XT

### Gear Pattern:

	26	36	46
13	—	72.0	92.0
15	45.1	62.4	79.7
18	37.6	52.0	66.4
21	32.2	44.6	57.0
24	28.2	39.0	49.8
28	24.1	33.4	—

**Components:** Brakes: Shimano Deore XT, Weinmann Ultra  
Glide cables

Brake levers: Magura, w/ brush covers

Pedals: Shimano PD-GX10

Saddle: Avocet Racing I

Seatpost: SR Laprade, 26.4 x 151 mm (see note), Suntour seatpost clamp, Hite Rite adjuster

Stem/handlebar: "Bullmoose" type

Headset: Shimano 600 EX

**Wheels:** Rims: Ukai 26 x 1.5

Spokes: Desbro, chrome plated

Hubs: Suntour XC

Tires: IRC Racer X-1, 26 x 2.125

Note: Dimensions are for bike tested. Weight is actual. Tube lengths are measured to intersections of centerlines, except seat tube, which is measured to top of tube. Seat post is measured from top of machined surface to "Max" line.



# Fat Chance

brakes, being new, may develop problems in time.

The wheels are a mixed bag. The IRC "Racer X-1" tires have big, widely spaced knobs and are fairly light for 2.125-inch tires, but the Ukai rims are unnecessarily heavy and the spokes are chrome-plated, not stainless steel. The hubs, from SunTour, are sealed and very good.

But compromises like the spokes and maybe the brakes are part of the price you pay for a frame that is essentially hand-made-in-the-U.S. (and therefore expensive) instead of one that is essentially mass-produced-in-the-Orient (and therefore cheaper). Chance is one of the few frame builders to use plasma welding, which he says gives cleaner and faster welds than TIG welding. All frames are aligned on a granite alignment table. A machined head tube, a specially reinforced seat cluster and cable stops mounted off-center for a straighter cable run are among the other unusual details not found on catalog-item frames. Chance says the separate seatpost clamp, by the way, is light, less susceptible to fatigue than brazed-on ears, and cheaper. Tubing is double-buttet chrome-moly throughout.

Still, the truth is that you can find other mountain bikes with about the same component specs as the Kicker for about half the price. Or, for about the price of the Kicker, you can find other bikes with better rims and spokes and the full SunTour XC group, including the brakes.

So why buy the Kicker? The reason is that you are buying a complete bike, not a collection of parts. There are thousands of decisions that go into making a bicycle, and each has a bearing on the next. Sometimes they work against each other, as when a car is driven with the brakes on. Sometimes, when the designer is skillful and lucky, his decisions support each other, and if enough of them do the whole bike is more than the sum of its parts.

The Kicker seems to be one of those lucky bikes, and maybe that's reason enough to spend \$795 for it. You may not win parking lot comparisons with it; the other guy will check the components against the price and think you are a chump. But if you value quiet virtue more than conspicuous consumption, if you're actually going to ride the thing, you'll know who's the chump.

— *John Francis*