

Specialized Rockhopper

Baby Stumpjumper?

The Rockhopper, son of Stumpjumper, is Specialized's least-expensive mountain bike. At \$400, it competes in the entry level or first-timer's category. And like other bikes in that price range, the Rockhopper is designed for moderate trail activity, not for dust-thrashing boonie-crashing.

The major difference between Specialized and other manufacturers is that Specialized has its own line of components to put on the frame. This means that because Specialized makes the rims, hubs, tires, cranks and handlebars itself, it saves money while providing better-than-average parts. You end up getting more for your money because of it.

The TIG-welded frame is built in Taiwan with chrome-moly tubing and upright geometry. But to keep down costs, the Rockhopper uses straight-gauge tubing. The benefits are lower price and greater strength and rigidity; the drawback is more weight, which was noticeable on the hills. The "uni-crown" fork design is becoming popular with the mountain bike crowd because it is lighter than the standard type and just as strong. The upright geometry and rigid tubing helped to make the Rockhopper a better climber, but overall handling wasn't noticeably quick.

The wheels are one of the bike's major strong points. They are built with Specialized's top-quality sealed-bearing hubs which have a "double labyrinth" seal to keep out dust, mud and water. The rims are Specialized's X28's laced with 14 gauge spokes, making for a set of strong, dependable wheels like those found on bikes costing much more. Ours took a beating and kept on ticking.

For tires, the Rockhopper uses Specialized's dual-purpose Crossroads (26 x 1.5-inch), which have a raised center ridge and knobs on the sides. On the street, the tires worked great, rolling right along with minimal resistance (the narrow size helped). On loose soil, however, they didn't grip as well as real knobbies. But that's a typical compromise of most "dual-purpose" stuff. Wider tires would have helped in the dirt but would have been heavier and slower on the street; the Crossroads tires seem best suited for moderate trail use only.

The same can be said of the derailleurs. But if you're just getting into this off-road business, then you're probably not that concerned about tough rear changers—in which case the Rockhopper's SunTour Mountech should satisfy your needs. It shifted fine under light or moderate pressure and easily handled the wide range of mountain gearing, but didn't shift as well under demanding conditions (under heavy load or gummed up with mud).

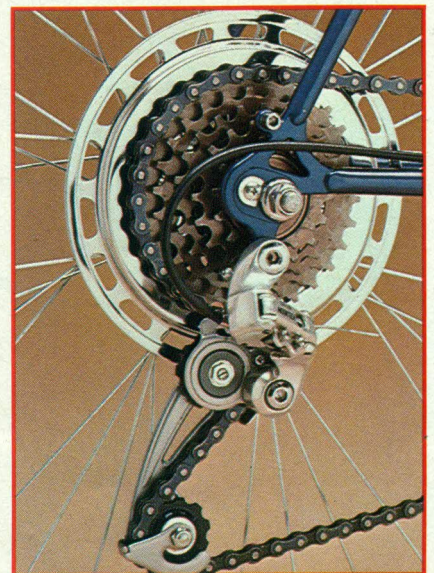
The same can be said for the SunTour AG front derailleur, which did a fine job under the less-severe riding of city and moderate off-road use.

The Rockhopper uses Shimano BR cantilever brakes, which like the derailleurs, seemed designed for the less-demanding rider. On fast, tricky descents they felt too mushy, and hard braking caused them to flex quite noticeably. Even on the street there are times when you need good brakes; off-road, even more so. Beefier cantilever bolts and levers would keep flex to a minimum, but probably at the sacrifice of a higher price tag. Still, the Shimano BRs fit in with the rest of the package: suitable for street and moderate trail use, not for tearing down trails in a cloud of dust.

The pedals, although inexpensive, worked fine, as did the chain. The saddle was comfortable and the chrome-moly bars were tough and functional. The Specialized cranks felt stiff and looked strong. They also looked pretty with their satin finish.

There is one thing that Specialized did that we'd like to see more often. It provided not only double eyelets for mounting fenders and racks, but also nicely finished allen bolts to go in them. Most bikes just come with the empty mounts, making it necessary for you to go out scrounging up the correct-size bolts.

It should be obvious by now that for \$400 you don't get race-ready quality.



SPECIFICATIONS

Model: Rockhopper

Manufacturer: Specialized, Dept. C, 15130 Concord Circle, Morgan Hill, CA 95037.

Price (suggested retail): \$399

Frame tubing: Tange Special Series Touring Straight Gauge Chrome-Moly, TIG Welded

Finish: Dark Metallic Blue

Dimensions:

Wheel base: 109.8 cm (43.25")
 Fork offset: 5.9 cm (2.3")
 Head tube angle 70°
 Seat tube angle 73°
 Top tube: 58 cm (22.9")
 Chain stays: 45.7 cm (18")
 Bottom bracket height: 29.8 cm (11.75")
 Weight: 30.0 lbs

Available Sizes: 17 1/2, 19 1/2, 21 1/2 inches

Size Tested: 21 1/2

Drive Train:

Crankset: Specialized ST 2 Touring, 170 mm arms
 Bottom bracket: Specialized with O-ring seal
 Freewheel: SunTour Perfect VIA
 Chain: TYC
 Front Derailleur: SunTour AG Tech
 Rear Derailleur: SunTour Mountech
 Shifters: SunTour Mountech

Gear Pattern:

	26	36	46
14	—	67	85
18	38	52	66
22	31	43	54
26	26	36	46
30	23	31	—

Components:

Brakes: Shimano BR Cantilevers
 Pedals: Shimano SX
 Saddle: Avocet Touring 1
 Seatpost: SR Laprade 26.4x123mm (see note)
 Stem: Specialized Stumpjumper Tri-Angle Chrome-Moly
 Handlebar: One Piece with Stem
 Headset: Specialized Steel

Wheels:

Rims: Specialized Saturae X28, 26x1.75, alloy
 Spokes: Galvanized 14g, 36 cross 4
 Hubs: Specialized Sealed, solid axle
 Tires: Specialized Crossroads 26x1.5

Picks:

Bolts provided for eyelets, fender and rack mounts
 Unicrown Fork
 Nice wheels

Nits:

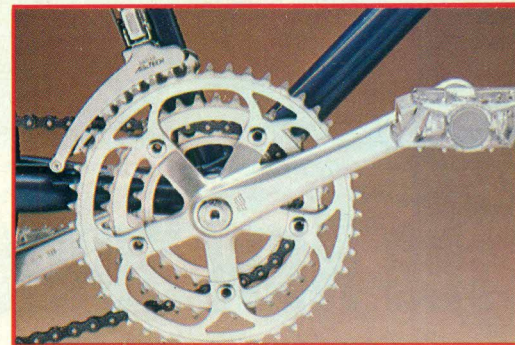
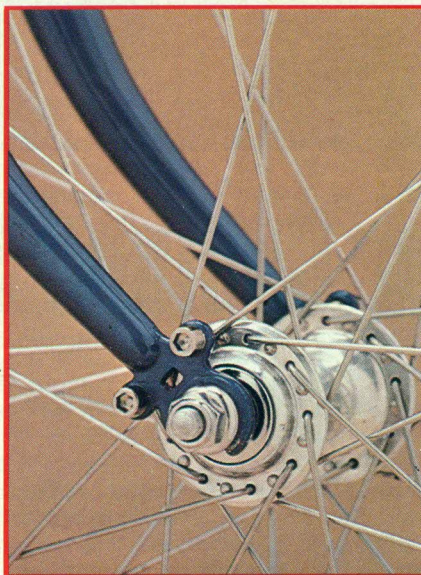
Flexy brakes
 No pump peg

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.



You do get a reliable, smooth-riding bike for someone that doesn't demand thrash performance, someone who aims to ride as much or more on the street as in the sticks. For that, the Rockhopper is a good value when you compare it to many of the other major-brand bikes in its price range.

In fact, the Rockhopper looks as good as or better than some bikes costing considerably more. Good wheels and a decent frame make it a safe bike for upgrading. And for the rider who takes things nice and easy but enjoys (or wants to try) trail riding, the Rockhopper is one of the best values on the market. —Mike Fuller



Mountech derailleurs are no longer state-of-the-art, but adequate; Shimano BR brakes are a little soft, but unicrown-style fork is a fashionable plus; Specialized hubs and cranks are excellent.