



MASTERS OF THE MOUNTAIN

WE TEST THE LIMITS OF THIS YEAR'S BEST MOUNTAIN BIKES ON SEDONA'S TOUGHEST TRAILS

To help you choose the perfect mountain bike, we ventured off to the beautiful singletrack around Sedona, Arizona, and sequestered ourselves with the best trail-worthy bikes available. After a week of pushing them on slickrock descents, jagged climbs, and rugged washes, we compiled this definitive guide to the year's best models. Whether you're contemplating your first mountain bike or are pulling the trigger on an upgrade, we've got you covered.

by THE BICYCLING MAGAZINE TEST STAFF ■ photographed by MICHAEL DARTER

Trail: 26-Inch Wheels

THESE ALL-AROUNDERS ARE AS FAST ON THE CLIMBS AS THEY ARE ON THE DESCENTS

While all the bikes in this category offered a satisfying blend of climbing and descending prowess, **Pivot's Mach 5.7** stole the show when the trails turned skyward. It scooted up hills so smoothly, and in every gear combination, that we never needed to turn on the shock's ProPedal damping system. This allowed the rear wheel to dig into Sedona's rockiest trails, providing ample traction. One rider reported making it up a tight, loose switchback that he couldn't clean while riding any of the other bikes in this category. But trail bikes also need to descend well, and the 5.7 flew downhill, easily soaking up substantial drops. The bike even wowed us on flat terrain, displaying a delicate balance between responsive steering and stability. It ripped along rolling singletrack, accelerating quickly when asked, and never wallowed in its travel.

The redesigned **Cannondale Jekyll 3** also performed well on rolling terrain. Its proprietary Fox DYAD shock reduced travel from 150mm to 90mm with the flick of a switch, giving the bike racier geometry. In the shorter-travel setting, the bike felt like an XC racer while climbing, the steep geometry making technical climbs easier to negotiate. In full-travel mode, the bike descended like an all-mountain machine. That versatility comes at a cost, though: The Jekyll was the heaviest bike in this category and the suspension felt less refined than some others.

Santa Cruz's trail offering, the **Blur LT**, was perhaps the most aggressive bike in this group. Its stiff frame, short cockpit, and seemingly bottomless suspension allowed it to tear down rutted, rocky, and loose descents. It climbed crisply, too, though the rear wheel was less active than some others under pedaling forces. When we pushed the bike into corners or floated over debris, the VPP suspension sucked up bumps without diving into its travel.

The lightweight **Trek Remedy 9** was a well-balanced bike with excellent front and rear suspension aided by a custom-valved Fox



PIVOT'S
VERSATILE MACH
5.7 BLAZED ACROSS
SEDONA'S CRIMSON
SINGLETRACK.

fork to match the proprietary DRCV shock. The bike handled smoothly and predictably on flat terrain, despite some frame flex. The stock tires felt too hard and narrow for Sedona's hard-packed trails, but the Remedy still managed to behave predictably through stretches of twisting singletrack.

.....
PIVOT MACH 5.7 XT \$4,400; 26.9 lb. (M) *Info:* pivotcycles.com ■
CANNONDALE JEKYLL 3 \$4,050; 30.3 lb. (M) *Info:* cannondale.com ■ **SANTA
CRUZ BLUR LT SPX AM** \$4,000; 28.3 lb. (M) *Info:* santacruzcycles.com ■
TREK REMEDY 9 \$4,410; 27.6 lb. (17.5 in.) *Info:* trekbikes.com

Value

WINNER



SALSA EL MARIACHI
\$1,850; 26.1 lb. (M) *Info:* salsacycles.com ■ The El Mariachi's steel frame balances stiffness and comfort very well, soaking

up bumps while still holding its line on technical trails. The versatile bike was nimble on singletrack and bombed through rock gardens and descents. The slider-style

dropouts let you run the bike geared or as a singlespeed. Quality parts, including an excellent RockShox Reba fork, make this bike a great choice for any rider on a limited budget.

FUJI TAHOE 29ER 2.0
\$1,750; 28.0 lb. (M) *Info:* fujibikes.com ■ The well-mannered Tahoe 29er has plenty of upscale touches, including a tapered head tube and a lightweight aluminum frame, features not often found on bikes at this price. The handling and

precise steering were great. But we thought some of the parts were inadequate, especially the low-end Tektro brakes.

JAMIS EXILE 3
\$1,650; 28.0 lb. (17.5 in.) *Info:* jamisbikes.com ■ Aimed at recreational riders and budding racers, the fast-looking Exile excelled on technical terrain. Its racy geometry had us sprinting up climbs and easily hopping over obstacles. Part of the bike's appeal was its high-quality parts package,

including grippy Geax tires, a SRAM 2x10 drivetrain, and Avid Elixir brakes.

MARIN PINE MOUNTAIN
\$1,550; 29.0 lb. (17 in.) *Info:* marinbikes.com ■ One of the best-looking bikes of the bunch, Marin's Pine Mountain mixes retro styling with modern touches. The steel 29er frame was built with quality components that will last for years. A riser bar added stability as speeds increased, making maneuvering over or around obstacles a breeze.