

GROUP TEST

# DIFFERENT STROKES

Singlespeed 29ers are fun, capable and affordable; we test four entirely different variations on the theme

Words: Warren Rossiter Photography: Joe Branston

**FAIRDALE**  
**COASTER UK-SPEC**  
{£399.99}



**Frame** Hi-Ten steel / **Fork** Hi-Ten steel / **Wheels** 30mm deep rims on unbranded hubs / **Transmission** BMX-style 3pcr cranks, 36x13t singlespeed / **Brake** Unbranded dual pivot [www.fairdalebikes.com](http://www.fairdalebikes.com)



**BEST DETAIL**  
Continental Contact tyres are a spec highlight on a bike at this price. They combine excellent puncture protection with fast rolling and good comfort levels

**T**he Fairdale's aesthetics are part Polo bike, part Cycle Speedway machine. The long back end is mated to a fairly short front, though the offset between hub centre and steering is plenty wide thanks to a stubby stem and way-backswept bars. That gives the Coaster an upright riding position that gives you a great view of the road.

The backswept bar is fitted with BMX style two-finger brake levers that combine with the unbranded, road-style dual-pivot brakes well. Braking performance is consistent and easy to use progressively.

The simple singlespeed drivetrain combines a BMX style three-piece chainset and small 36-tooth chainring with a small 13-tooth cog out back. It's a combo that's easy to spin up to speed and competent on shorts hills. Ideally we'd have

liked chain tensioners on the rear horizontal dropouts rather than relying solely on 15mm hex nuts to keep the wheel in place. That said we haven't had any issues in testing and thanks to the seriously tough, double puncture protected Continental Contact tyres we haven't had to remove the wheel to fix a puncture either.

The relaxed steering geometry perfectly suits the cruising nature of the Fairdale. It's nothing like the Vee or Big Ripper in respect of hooligan antics, yet the combination of the 36/13 gear combo and rapid and tough 28c Continental Contact tyres means you can make progress at a decent pace and the Fairdale is a bike you can sweep through corners smoothly and with perfect stability.

The downside of achieving this handling in a high-tensile steel frame is that the stiff structure transmits vibrations straight into your hands. The comfortable saddle saves it at the back but the overall ride quality can be jarring on bad roads. It's the only time that the cheap material really tells.

We like that the frame is so well appointed, with bosses for a rear rack and two mudguards. There is even a tab for fitting a coaster brake - in the US the Coaster comes with a rear coaster only. An optional front brake makes it legal in the UK but experience of the UK market (ie coaster brakes don't sell) led Fairdale to produce this version.

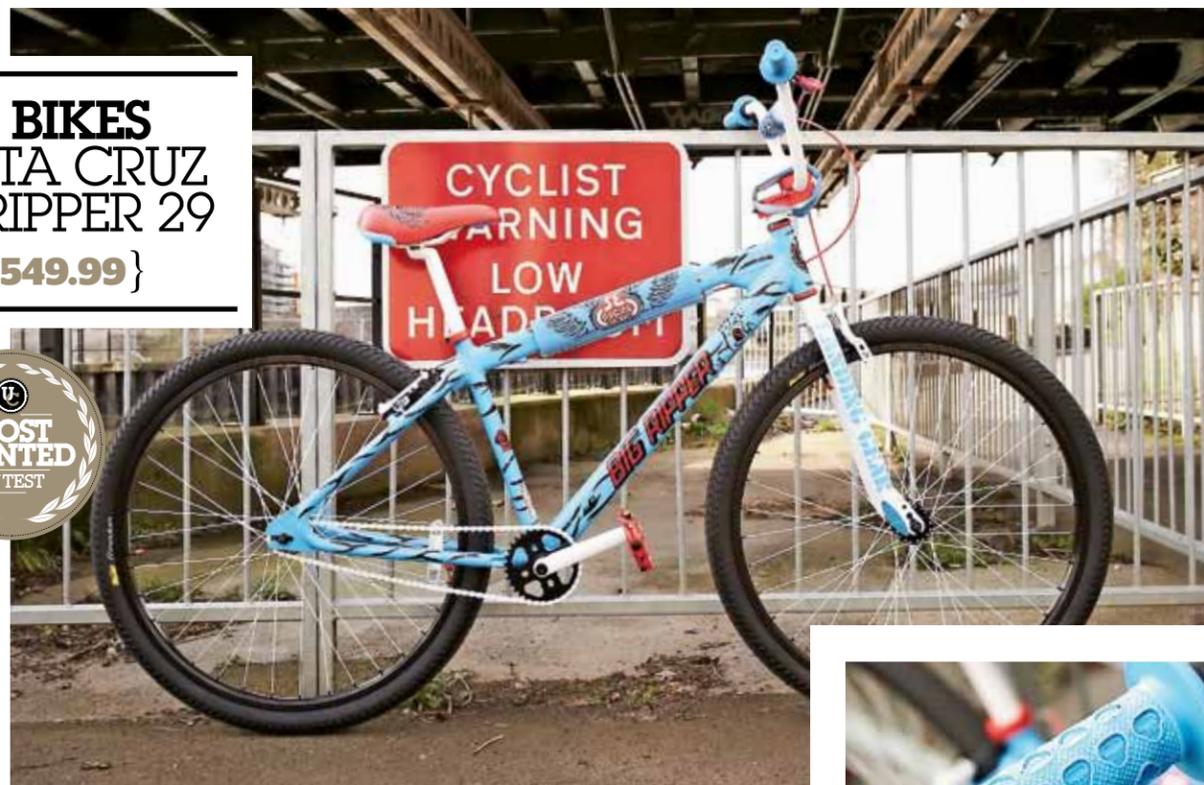
*The relaxed steering geometry perfectly suits the cruising nature of the Fairdale. It's nothing like the Big Ripper*

{7} **Good looking and packed with value but a bit harsh on poor surfaces**

Frame 6061 Alu floval tubing / Fork SE Landing Gear, chromo / Wheels Sealed bearing hubs on double-wall rims / Transmission SE 3pce cranks, 33x15t / Brakes rear Tekro BX-310 V-brake, front U-brake [www.sebikes.com](http://www.sebikes.com)



**SE BIKES**  
**SANTA CRUZ**  
**BIG RIPPER 29**  
{ £549.99 }



**T**he Big Ripper takes the shape from the classic PK Ripper BMX frame - including such iconic touches as the one-piece seatstay and chainstay 'Looptail' design and Floval (flat ovalised) tube shapes - and then upsizes that shape to take 29" mountain bike wheels. Basically, it's a BMX for big lads and a massive blast of fun around town.

This special edition is in celebration of Santa Cruz Skateboards celebrating their 40th year with the bike decorated with the signature 'Screaming Hand' logo of Jim Phillips, a skateboard graphic design legend. Phillips is the genius behind the famous board graphics of some of the biggest names; we are talking Jason Jesse, Rob Roskopp, and Christian Hosoi amongst many. Many more.

The Big Ripper's bold, brash colour palette can't help but put a smile on your face. Get on board and it's much the same. It feels just like it looks - a massive BMX. The fat, heavily siped yet smooth profile treads of the Freedom tyres allow for big lean angles through corners. While the 33/15 gearing is light, it feels right. It's a bike that you ride in bursts: flat out pedalling efforts then cruise along holding your speed.

We pumped in and out of dips to keep the Ripper rolling, bunnyhopped manhole covers, scoped out curb ramps to pitch out of and steps to ride down. It's a bike that screams out

**BEST DETAIL**  
SE's Flyer saddle is a nice place to sit but it's the special cover to commemorate the 40th birthday of Santa Cruz Skateboards that we really like

fun and flat out bad behaviour. Hidden under the garish paint is actually a decent heart: 'floval' alloy tubing, decent three-piece welded steel BMX cranks, a big plush saddle, good tyres and grippy platform pedals. It's at least as effective a means for getting about as the retro Crème.

The white painted chain doesn't stay white for long and while the rear V-Brake is powerful and controllable the front single-bolt BMX calliper offers very little bite at all: we could keep riding almost normally with the short brake lever pulled right back. Endos aren't really possible; wheelies aren't much easier as the Big Ripper weighs 13kg.

The bike comes with a special limited edition Screaming Hand skateboard deck. So, if like us you skated and rode BMX back in the 80s this is just the thing to relive bar spins, look backs, ollies... and of course plenty of road rash.

{ 8 } **Not without shortcomings but it's fun and surprisingly useful. We can't help but love it**

*The bold, brash colour palette can't help but put a smile on your face. Get on board and it's much the same. It feels just like it looks - a massive BMX*





**Frame** Aluminium / **Fork** Hi-Ten steel / **Wheels** HJC DA-22 rims on Joytech hubs /  
**Transmission** FSA Vero crankset, 39x18 / **Brakes** Unbranded V-Style brakes [www.chainreactioncycles.com](http://www.chainreactioncycles.com)

**VITUS**  
**VEE 29**  
{**£324.99**}



*It's tough and cheap enough for the daily grind. And, best of all, you don't even have to compromise on a fun ride*



**BEST DETAIL**  
The Kenda Small Block Eight tyres are a spec indulgence on a bike as cheap as the Vee 29. They're grippy, tough, not too buzzy and ready for anything you hurl at them

**T**he Vitus Vee's flat black colour and all-black components with neon pink 'space invader' highlight graphics make for a really good looking bike. Next to the Big Ripper, you could even call it understated. Although compared to that bike, other things that appear understated include Lamborghinis, Elton John and Las Vegas.

As you'd expect on such a low priced machine there isn't much in the way of top brand parts. Even so, the quality lock-on grips, great shaped saddle and classic Kenda Small Block Eight tyres mean that the contact points are absolutely spot-on. The solid FSA Vero chainset is also a superior choice to the usual unbranded alloy units you find on £300 bikes.

The frame's rear triangle incorporates adjustable tensioners that stop the wheel slipping on the horizontal dropouts. Up front, there's a BMX-style unicrown fork which looks weedy in comparison to the Ripper's burly Landing Gear fork. It's more than adequate but can twang a bit if you drop it down a set of steps.

The Vee's handling is absolutely spot-on. It's agile thanks to a fairly steep (for a 29er) head angle and straight fork and it feels short and flickable underneath you. The gearing is ideal for around town and light enough to manage moderate hills. Of all the bikes on test its closest in the way it rides to the Big Ripper, though the



lower bar set-up makes the Vee easier to handle and the front end less remote.

The tyres are a highlight, with great tarmac grip and the ability to handle a bit of dirt, too. The brakes are simple unbranded V-style units and there isn't much outright stopping power. A bit of adjustment improved them but they only ever felt average. Vitus also offer a disc-braked version of this bike, called the Dee 29 (can you see what they did there?), and at the time of writing it's on sale at £305. The upgrade would be money well spent.

The very low price tag (Chain Reaction have it on offer now for only £262!) makes the Vee 29 a very compelling choice. It's tough and cheap enough to be an ideal stand-in to save your best bike from the daily grind. And, best of all, you don't even have to compromise on a fun ride.

**{7}** **Big wheeled fun without the big price tag, but the disc-brake version is the one to go for**



Frame Hi-ten steel / Fork Hi-ten steel / Wheels Remerx rims, Velosteel/Joytech hubs / Transmission 44x22 / Brakes Velosteel Torpedo coaster rear, Promax calliper front [www.cremecycles.com](http://www.cremecycles.com), [www.hotlines-uk.com](http://www.hotlines-uk.com)



**CRÈME  
GLIDER 1**  
{ £419.99 }



**W**e don't think that there is a bike on sale right now with a more apt name than the Glider. The super relaxed upright riding position, big looped back bars, light gearing and classic coaster brake all add up to a bike that glides up to (a sedate) speed and eases to a halt. It makes the casual Fairdale feel like athletic and the Big Ripper and Vee positively hyperactive.

The Glider really is the most relaxing way to transport yourself on two wheels. The imitation suede saddle is well padded and comfortable, the padded leather grips are soft to the touch and the massive CST Classic Zeppelin 2-inch white balloon tyres means this Crème simply floats along.

The bolt upright riding position helps you take notice of your surroundings, whether it's to drink in the sights or anticipate the flow of traffic. The Velotech coaster brake engages with around a quarter turn backwards pedal - the harder you push back the harder the braking. Yes, you can get the wheel to lock and skid, faux fixie style, but why would you on a bike made for cruising?

The frame's arched toptube harks back to classic Dutch bikes with a hint of beach cruiser mixed in. The frame has fittings for mudguards at

each end and a rear rack. The traditional crowned fork is fixed via a classic 1" headset meaning the quill stem securing the bars can be adjusted to alter the bar height easily.

The drivetrain combination of a 44-tooth chainring and big 22-tooth sprocket (a 57" gear) is easy to turn and cruise along at a sedate pace. If you want to speed along you're looking at the wrong bike but because the riding position makes standing pedalling awkward, you'll appreciate the easy ratio on every incline.

Speedy really isn't the point of the Glider; this isn't a bike for rushing across town or traffic light sprints. The Crème is for lazy Sunday trundles to pick up the paper and stop for a coffee. Of course you could commute on it if you wanted to but leave plenty of time to enjoy the ride as the Glider slows down the pace of modern life leaving you to arrive with a smile on your face.

**{ 8 }** *Take life at a more relaxed pace by gliding around on this stylish and sedate Crème*



**BEST DETAIL**  
The Glider owes a lot to its tyres. It wouldn't look half as good on ordinary black rubber nor ride anywhere near as smoothly without these huge air chambers



*The Crème is for lazy Sunday trundles to get a paper. You could commute on it but leave plenty of time to enjoy the ride*



**W**e gathered what are fundamentally four very similar machines. All are based around the mountain bike 29" wheel size and none will break the bank. But these bikes couldn't be more different. The Big Ripper is a huge chunk of nostalgic fun. SE Racing have combined their legendary BMX heritage with a celebration of skateboarding's most over-the-top era. The Big Ripper is a whole heap of fun to ride but definitely one for the more extrovert rider.

The Vitus Vee has similar dynamics and fun handling to the Ripper but its looks couldn't be further from the SE's. It's understated, slick looking and a bargain price. Thanks to the way this and the Big Ripper encourage some play time, these are bikes that will make you late for work because you're having too much fun. The Fairdale is brisk, stable and definitely the most practical here for daily town use, while every ride on the Crème is like a spa day, totally relaxed, perfectly comfortable and never to be rushed.

*The Vitus and the SE are bikes that will make you late for work because you're having too much fun*



**ALSO  
CONSIDER**



**ROSSINI**  
MARATHON  
£650

Part 50s 'bobber', part hip urban fixed, part mountain bike, this mixed bag of influences could have been a mess - but it's a revelation! It's efficient, light, fun, and nimble. The forged alloy components are great, too.  
[www.grupettoitalia.co.uk](http://www.grupettoitalia.co.uk)



**PASHLEY**  
GUV'NOR  
£825

The Guv'nor is based on the Path Racer of the 1930s, itself inspired by the bikes raced in the first Tour de France. It's entirely authentic, beautifully detailed and wholly joyous. It's available as a single- or three-speed.  
[www.pashley.co.uk](http://www.pashley.co.uk)



**MANGO**  
£295

The high-tensile steel frame is basic but no corners have been cut on the kit. The brakes are decent, the gearing is ideal, the tyres are tough and a bullhorn bar is optional. It made us smile. With 191 million colourschemes, you're sure to find one you love.  
[www.mangobikes.co.uk](http://www.mangobikes.co.uk)



**COOPER**  
REVIVAL  
£1,000

Tasteful understatement is the Revival's style. Paint which looks black from a distance is actually dark green; the lugs are unfussy. It's made from Reynolds 631 steel and rides smoothly, helped by the 28mm tyres.  
[www.cooperbikes.com](http://www.cooperbikes.com)