



TONI PINTO

Exclusive line of bikes roll out at Costco

Wheel value

By T. Foster Jones

IN THE CYCLING world, snobbery reigns. One measures oneself against others not only by bike prowess, but also by the brand of the bike as well as the cache of components and the array of accessories.

Purchasing an unbranded bicycle from a big-box store is anathema to a bike snob. It's like offering a K-car to Mario Andretti.

Not that this prejudice hasn't been warranted. Bikes sold in these environments, wedged between pallets of laundry detergent and baby diapers, have historically been cheaply constructed with inferior-quality parts and bottom-of-the-barrel components, and slapped together on-site by somebody who can't tell a kickstand from a handlebar.

So, when I, a self-professed bike snob, was asked to look at a new line of bikes that were being built exclusively for Costco, I was prepared to be skeptical, to say the least.

What did I find? Here's a look.

The bikes

The private-label line of bikes being built for Costco is rolling out under the Northrock Bicycles (www.northrockbikes.com) brand. Who makes Northrock bicycles? I was impressed to discover that the manufacturer is a highly reputable U.S. company with years of experience and a well-deserved reputation for excellence in bike design and construction.

The bike line includes six styles: OC men's and women's single-speed beach cruisers, CTM and CTL men's and women's "comfort" road bikes, the XC6 mountain bike and the SCR1 road bike. (Not all bikes are available at all Costco locations.)

Frame

The frame, or chassis, of the bike is typically where a manufacturer shines or dies. Components—what goes on the frame—can come from a variety of sources, but the manufacturer is almost always directly involved in

the engineering, design and construction of the frame.

Each one of Northrock's models is well constructed with lightweight 6061 aluminum, for frames that are strong, stiff and light and can weather the elements without rusting. The frames feature a clear-coat paint finish that further protects them from weather elements.

Components

I was happy to see that the Northrock technical team uses brand-name components from well-respected manufacturers such as Shimano, Suntour, WTB, Velo and SRAM. By using higher-end, widely recognizable components, riders can be sure their bicycle is compatible when repairing or replacing parts, reliable and performance based. (It also makes it a lot easier to compare prices.)

Assembly

To reduce assembly error, bikes are shipped from Northrock to Costco nearly assembled. Costco employees responsible for finalizing assembly are given detailed instructions. Hangtags on the bike provide information to Costco members so that it's easier to identify what the components are, what they do and what they should look like.

Styles

Each frame style is designed with a geometry that complements the rider style, performance and intended use of the bike.

The CTM and CTL are intended for cross-terrain riding (pavement to gravel), and use a 26-inch wheel, which gives a lower center of gravity. The cross-terrain tires provide grip on gravelly surfaces and are smooth enough not to cause too much resistance on paved surfaces. A feature I like on both the CTM and the CTL is the adjustable quill handlebar stem, which allows you to really dial in the most comfortable riding position. Front

fork suspension smoothes out terrain. This is a bike that would easily cost between \$400 and \$500 elsewhere. Costco's price is \$299.

Built rugged to perform on mountain trails, the XC6 is equipped with a 24-speed Shimano Acera drive train. Noteworthy are the adjustable Suntour front fork and a dual disc brake system, items usually found on higher-end bikes. I would expect this bike to cost between \$500 and \$600. At Costco, it is priced at \$299.

Equipped with Shimano Tiagra and Sora (front and rear) derailleurs and Shimano Sora STI shifters, the SCR1 is designed for speed, performance and reliability. The carbon fork is a high-end addition that not only lowers the weight of the bicycle but also absorbs road vibration for greater comfort over long distances. The combination of frame and brand-name componentry would cost close to \$1,000 at retail. At Costco the bike is available for \$599.

The single-speed OCs are all about comfort and ease, with lightweight alloy rims, upright handlebars and a Velo comfort saddle. Something you don't often see are the dual fenders, which are both stylish and functional and add to the overall classic cruiser look. I had forgotten how much fun it is to ride a single-speed. These bikes are priced at \$249.

Built to be better

My impression overall is that this bike line is resetting the bar for bicycle quality in a retail arena where one doesn't necessarily expect to find a high level of bike quality. These are "real" bike-shop bikes, with solid workmanship and components. They will appeal to bikers at all levels—from the entry-level rider to someone with enough miles under his or her belt (in other words, a bike snob) to recognize what a value each one of these represents.

Northrock's motto is "Built to be better." I would say they have achieved this. ☐