



APPLEMAN BICYCLES:

CUSTOM, MADE-IN-USA CARBON



If you've been keeping up with our Considering Custom Series, you know that Issue 21 saw us receiving our frames from Appleman Bicycles and Rock Lobster Cycles, just as 21 was heading off to the printer. Now, we've had a chance to get out and ride the custom carbon Appleman CX bike from Matt Appleman in Minneapolis and the singlespeed aluminum and scandium Rock Lobster machine built by Paul Sadoff.

The Appleman is the only all-carbon frame we've seen so far. With my input, Matt Appleman designed and built a made-to-measure all-carbon race-specific dream machine designed to be lightweight with fast handling and a balance of stiffness for acceleration and comfort for control. Did Appleman manage to fulfill all of my requests?

My experience with Appleman from conception up through delivery was flawless, with excellent communication about every minute detail. I even sprang the "Oh, by the way..." on Matt as the project was nearing delivery and he handled it with aplomb.

THE FRAME

The "Appleman Style" is a rough-hewn unfinished carbon look, revealing the natural sheen of the medium diameter carbon tubes that are mated together by carbon wrapping. The joints have a hand-finished appearance—slightly bulging,

slightly rough—but smooth to the touch. Slight imperfections are seen in the taped surface, much like wood grain. Though Appleman has had some of his frames clear coated when requested by his customers, it is this unfinished industrial chic that he prefers to deliver, showcasing his work, allowing the tubes to frame the real art—the joints. Appleman described the joining process: "The joints of my bikes contains hundreds of carefully cut carbon fiber pieces. These pieces are placed at very particular angles and stacked around the joint."

I wanted fast handling and minimal toe overlap. That meant extending the front center to allow a steeper head tube, but also keeping the front wheel forward enough. The frame has a 57cm top tube, a full centimeter longer than any of my other bikes, combined with a centimeter shorter stem and a 0.5 degree steeper head tube angle of 72.5 degrees to accomplish this perfectly. The result was a 102.3cm wheelbase. Other parameters included a low 6.8mm bottom bracket drop, a medium 145mm head tube and an 8-degree sloping top tube.

The 42.5cm long chainstays are a wishbone design with a "mud shelf" behind the bottom bracket, a potential problem with this design, but with ample clearance for a 35mm tire. The stay arrangement is a bladder-molded piece that Appleman sources from a U.S. producer. "The 'cross chainstays that I use are a perfect blend of mud and

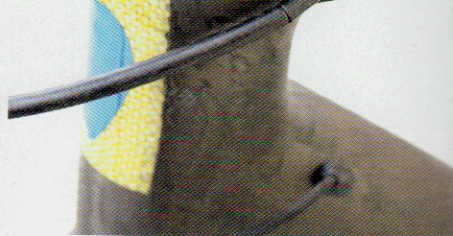
tire clearance, ride quality, strength and durability," says Appleman. He attaches the stays at the bottom of the large diameter PressFit 30 bottom bracket shell, which puts the stays lower, reducing the chain-slap.

Appleman includes internal cable routing, plumbed for a full-length cable run. Since we elected to use Di2, all wires were run internally, but he left internal routing tunnels should we choose to run a mechanical system in the future.

THE BUILD

This bike is over-the-top: Reinforced by seeing what the pros were riding in Louisville, I wanted an electronic shifting, disc brake-equipped machine. We elected to use Shimano's new 11-speed Dura-Ace Di2 9070 with a CX70 crankset. Though not officially endorsed as compatible by Shimano, even they admitted it was usable with that very configuration. Keeping with the made-in-Minnesota all-carbon theme, HED offered up their Stinger 3 CX carbon tubular wheelset with an 11-speed Shimano compatible 135mm disc hub. Stopping power is taken care of by TRP's new Spyre SLC dual piston cable-actuated mechanical disc calipers.

For the controls, Appleman included his signature "AppleStem," a combined stem and bar combination. He used ENVE carbon components and carbon-wrapped them. We had confirmed the



stem length and discussed the handlebar angle before construction, so that the flat parts of the drops and tops were designed to my preference.

THE RIDE

I'd previously had a bike fit as a race bike that seemed perfect to me and we aimed to match that position on the Appleman, separate from the geometry changes for ride and handling. The fit of the Appleman was spot on.

There was instantly something about the handling that was so appealing. The slightly steeper head tube combined with the shorter stem produced a feeling of fast steering. The low bottom bracket lent the feeling of stability and easier remounts. The lack of toe overlap gave confidence on those uphill switchbacks, while the consistency and power of disc brakes gave me more confidence stopping. The magic that Appleman was able to build into the frame combining comfort with stiffness while staying lightweight should draw anyone to a ride like this one.

A potential consequence of pushing the front center out is the reduced weight on the front wheel,

adversely affecting handling while diving into turns, especially on dirt where traction is less consistent, and while climbing steep hills where front wheel lift can already be a problem. I could feel subtle, but conscious, changes in riding style that needed to be made to counter this: For example, you have to sit more forward on the steep climb and stay in the drops when diving into a turn.

Halfway through testing, it became clear that TRP Spyre SLC disc brakes were—for me at least—a bit lackluster for a disc brake, so I upgraded to TRP HyRd that were sent for review and that allowed much more confidence with late braking.

THE VERDICT

The Appleman has already served not only to take me on summer adventures, but also as a test sled for disc wheelsets and other disc brakes. Though I could set up other CXM bikes for these duties, I find excuses to use the Appleman CX. The ultimate question, then, is: Did Matt Appleman meet my expectations and deliver the dream race machine? The answer is a resounding yes! Finally, it's my dream bike come true.

THE MUD SHELF isn't the perfect design for a super muddy race, but there is plenty of clearance.

HANDWRAPPED CARBON wrapped around the ENVE components to create the "Appleman Stem".

INTERNAL WIRE AND CABLE ROUTING makes this bike as modern and minimalist as possible.

Vital Specs:

MSRP: \$4,300 frame with headset and ENVE Cross Disc fork; \$11,300 as tested

Frame: custom U.S. manufactured carbon tubes, hand mitered tube to tube construction, custom molded carbon dropouts, PF30 BB

Fork: ENVE Cross Disc

Components: Shimano DuraAce 9070 Di2

Brakes: TRP Spyre Carbon dual piston disc calipers

Wheels: HED Stinger 3 disc tubular, 38mm carbon rim

Weight: 16.4 pounds w/o pedals, 10.5 pounds w/o wheels

More Info: ApplemanBicycles.com