

How Tony Built His Personal Ride

The Ellsworth Evolve 29er

R. Cunningham

Ellsworth entered the big wheel bicycle race with the Evolve. The dual-suspension trailbike is based upon the four-bar rocker link design of its best-selling Truth and has four inches of rear wheel travel. As a late-comer in the 29er movement, designer/founder Tony Ellsworth had the opportunity to incorporate many subtle improvements in the frame geometry that are intended to spruce up the naturally slower steering and more stable handling qualities of the larger wheel format. Tony announced that Ellsworth arrived at a handling package that mimics his conventional, 26-inch-wheel Epiphany's long-travel, big-hit performance—and to demonstrate the similarities, he sent us his personal Evolve to test.

ELLSWORTH'S PERSONAL RIDE

Twenty-niners are notoriously tall in the front end, and the Evolve squeezes some standover height with a radically sloping top tube and a very short head tube. Tony prefers a climbing setup over a technical descender. The Evolve uses a flat handlebar and Shimano's latest tubeless 29er wheels with 2.1-inch Hutchinson Python tubeless ready tires. The small-sized frame uses made-in-USA butted-aluminum tubing in modest cross-country diameters (larger frames use custom-sized tubing), which gives the conservative frame design a racy look. With a flat handlebar, a steep cross-coun-

try head angle and bottom bracket height, the Evolve suggests that technical descending may not be its forte, but 29er riders know that the bigger wheel format gives a rough terrain advantage to an otherwise conventional chassis. A Manitou Minute 29 air-sprung fork. Tony confirmed that his personal ride was outfitted as a technical climber and the evidence supports it.

PINK?

Hardly a manly color, but Tony proudly chose a pink-anodized finish to advertise Ellsworth's cancer research program that donates 50 dollars from the purchase of each custom-order pink frame to a pair of female cancer research organizations. Survivors who order the pink bikes get their names laser-etched for free.

MADE IN USA

Originally, Ellsworth was a design-and-farm firm that contracted with various U.S. frame makers to build the frames, and they assembled and shipped from their Southern California warehouse. Three years ago, however, they established a frame-making factory in Vancouver,



Conventional design:

Ellsworth said that although the Evolve's suspension looks similar to the 26-inch-wheel Truth, its linkage geometry had to be completely reconfigured because of the larger-diameter wheels and bottom bracket placement.

The bike reflects the builder: You can learn a lot about the rider by throwing a leg over his bike. Tony Ellsworth's 29er is outfitted to climb technical singletrack, but tempered just enough to make descending enjoyable.




Ellsworth

more than one click at a time. Once it gets up to speed, it is easy to maintain a smooth cadence over rough ground. Its steering is slower than its 71-degree head angle indicates. For comparison, the Ellsworth's front end feels like a 26-inch trailbike with a 69-degree head angle. To get around a sharp bend at low speeds, a considerable twist on the handlebar is required, but the resulting stability is a boost when descending at speed.

Climbing when aboard the Evolve is smooth and effective, as long as the terrain allows a minimum of forward momentum. Spinning up prepared singletrack trails and any dirt road gives the impression that there is an electric motor hidden inside the bottom bracket. When ascending tight switchbacks, or climbing through technical sections that require poking upwards in the granny gear, the Evolve feels more subdued at the crankset. In these situations, consistent pressure on the pedals and a smooth spin will eliminate the sense that the bike is being re-accelerated with each push on the pedals. That said, when the grade does become technically steep, the Ellsworth's not-long-for-29ers 18.2-inch chainstays help the Evolve find traction almost anywhere.

THE ELLSWORTH LEGACY

Tony's Evolve reflects the Ellsworth legacy—top-notch cross-country ergonomics, mated to a lightweight-as-practical chassis, with handling that takes the worry from any technical problem that a trail rider would expect to encounter on a forest singletrack. Those in the market for a smooth-rolling, made-in-USA 29er with a cross-country edge should talk to Ellsworth. □



Descending, 29er style: The Evolve gets down to business on the downhill. Stable steering and a centered feel in the cockpit help to keep the rubber side down.

Washington—just over the Columbia River from Portland, Oregon. The expansion moved Ellsworth towards better control of their destiny.

A RIDE AROUND THE PARK

The fact that Tony Ellsworth can ride a size small frame is good news for 29er hopefuls, because the shorter the rider, the more compromises must be made in the frame's optimal geometry to fit large wheels to the confines of the chainrings and bottom bracket, to keep the saddle from contacting the rear tire at full suspension compression position, and to the front-center of the cockpit in order to prevent the rider's feet from contacting the front tire.

The Ellsworth passes most of these hurdles while maintaining a crisp feel at the handlebar and under power. The one aspect of the Evolve's frame geometry that potential customers should be wary of is that, at 23.5 inches, its top tube is long for a small-sized frame, which is typical of 29ers world wide. The reason is to push the front tire forward to prevent toe overlap.

Despite the fact that Tony's Evolve uses lightweight wheels and tires, it can't escape the fact that accelerating a 29-inch ring of rubber and aluminum requires a bit more push than does its 26-inch counterpart. You'll feel the first three pedal strokes each time the 29er jumps up the cogset

TONY ELLSWORTH'S EVOLVE 29ER

Price	\$5900 (\$2395 frame and shock)
Country of origin	USA
Weight	26.5
Hotline	(760) 788-7500
Frame tested	16" (small)
Bottom bracket Height	13.5"
Chainstay length	18"
Top tube length	23.5"
Head angle	71°
Seat tube angle	73.5°
Standover height	29.25"
Wheelbase	45"
Suspension travel (front)	3.9"
Suspension travel (rear)	4"
Frame material	Aluminum
Fork	Manitou Minute 29er
Shock	Fox Float RP23
Rims	Shimano 29
Tires	Hutchinson Python (2.1")
Hub	Shimano XT
Brakes	Shimano XTR disc
Brake levers	Shimano XTR
Crankset	Shimano XTR
Shifters	Shimano XTR
Front derailleur	Shimano XTR
Rear derailleur	Shimano XTR
Chainrings	Shimano XTR (44/32/22)
Cassette	Shimano XTR (11-34)
Pedals	None (tested with Shimano XTR)