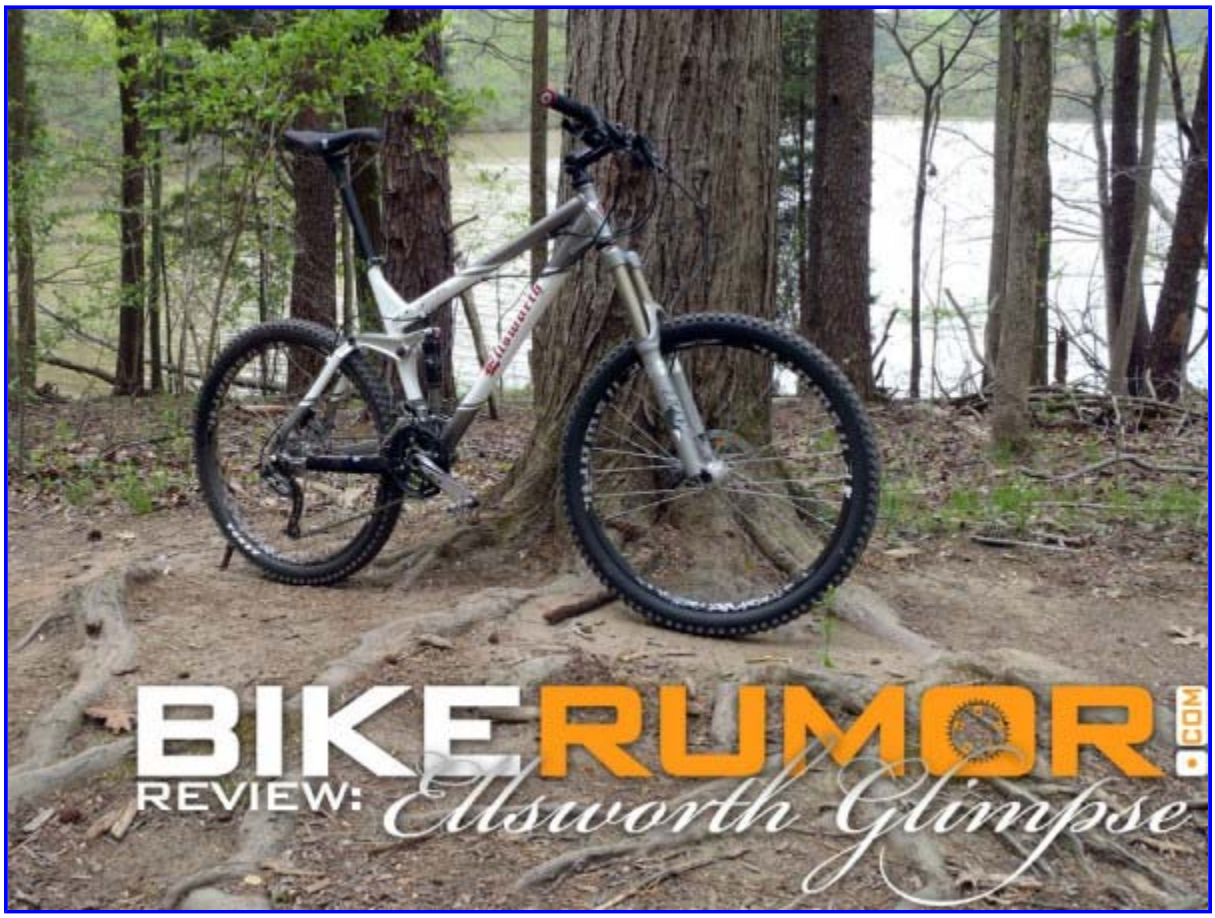
Review: Ellsworth Glimpse Mountain Bike

posted by Tyler (Editor) - November 9, 2010 - 11am UTC



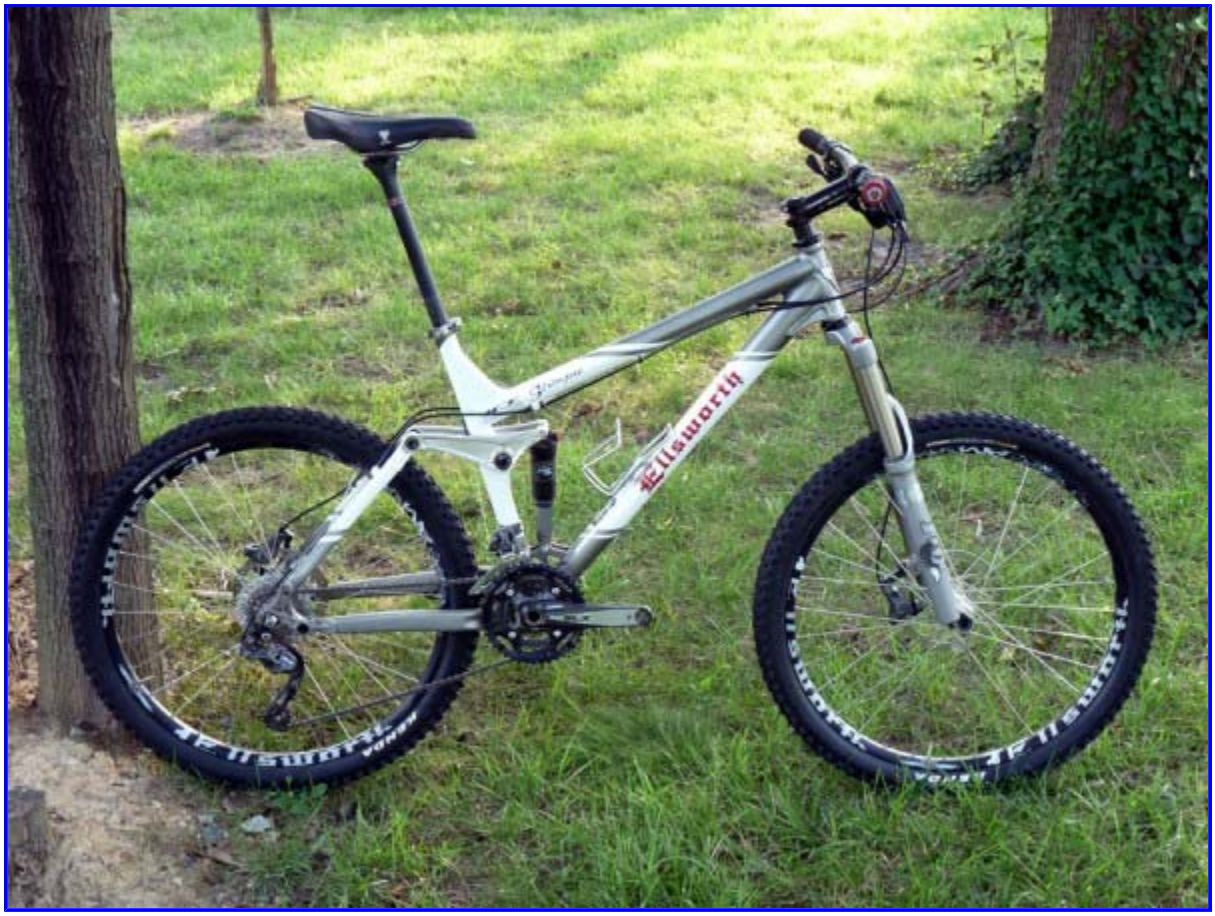
Ellsworth prides itself on being made in America and using the greenest manufacturing practices as are practical. The result is a collection of beautiful bikes that are often priced just beyond the beginner and casual enthusiast rider.

The solution, as much as it may hurt to say it, was to introduce the first mass-produced, outsourced Ellsworth bike in the company's history: The Glimpse.

In typical Ellsworth style, though, the Glimpse isn't just a schematic signed off on by Tony Ellsworth then emailed to a non-descript factory in China. Rather, it's machined parts are first milled out in their Oregon factory and the U.S. drawn aluminum tubes get their SST (Swaged, Shaped and Tapered) treatment, then they're shipped to a factory in Taiwan where the frame is assembled and parts installed. From there, it's boxed and shipped to the destination (U.S. or otherwise) for final assembly by the bike shop.

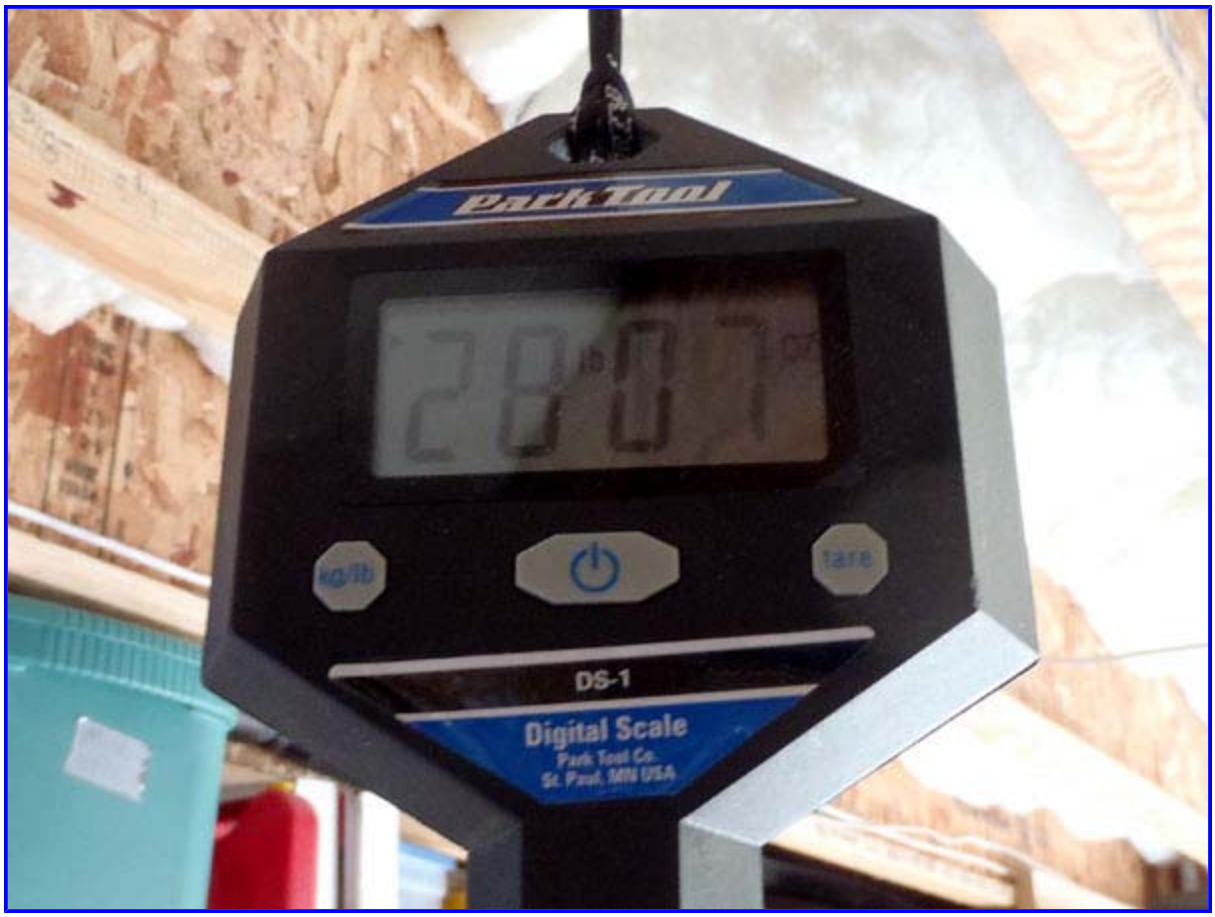
It still has Ellsworth's internationally patented ICT suspension design, and it's spec'd quite well. So, does this bike provide a true "glimpse" of Ellsworth's signature ride? Read on and see…

THE GOOD: FRAME AND FEATURES

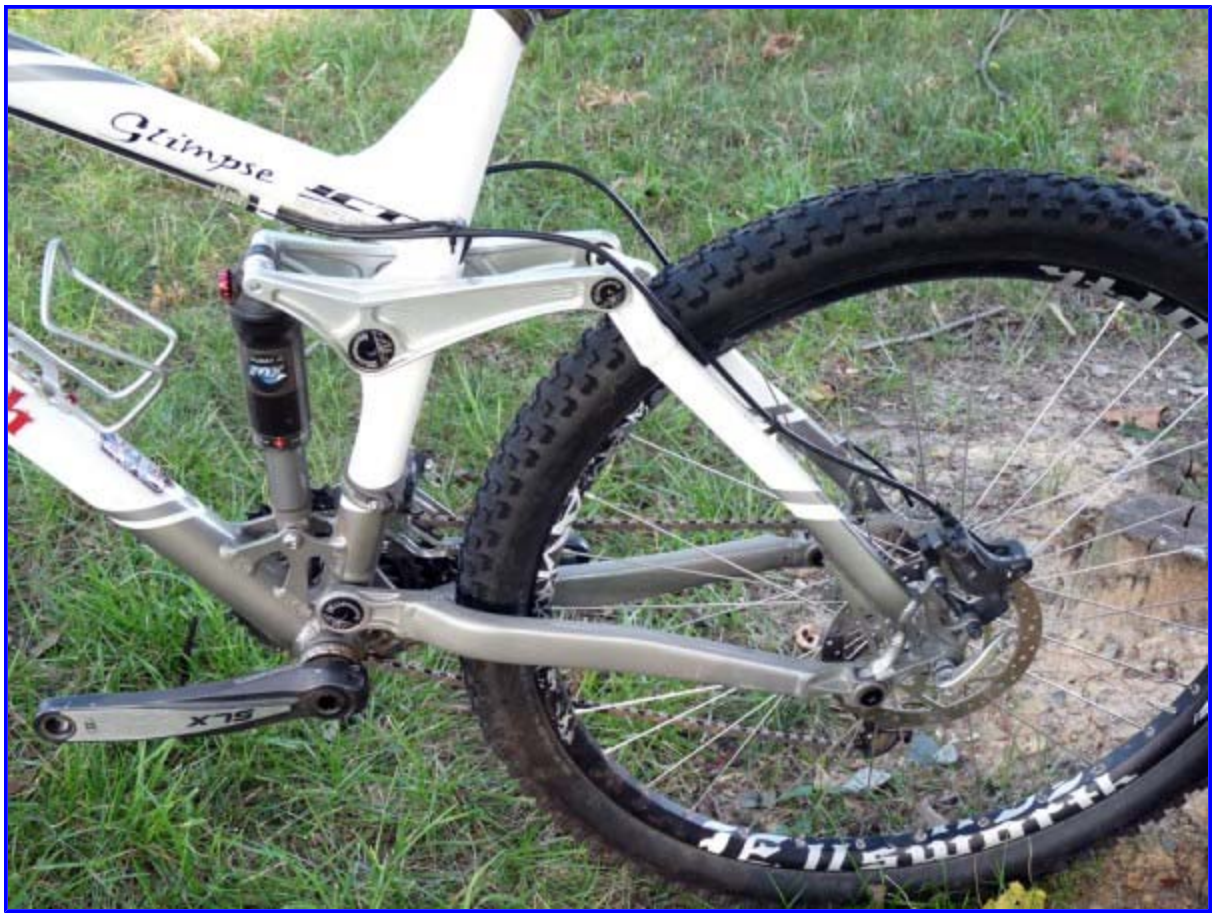


The Glimpse comes in one spec package only, but it's pretty good for the price. $3,295 gets you an aluminum frame decked out with:

- Full Shimano SLX drivetrain and brakes
- Ellsworth AM wheelset w/ 15mm thru axle front
- Kenda Nevegal tires
- Easton EA70 alloy stem and carbon seatpost, MonkeyLite XC carbon handlebar
- Ellsworth branded WTB saddle
- Fox Float R shock and 140mm fork
- Small (15″), Medium (17″) and Large (19″, tested) frame sizes available



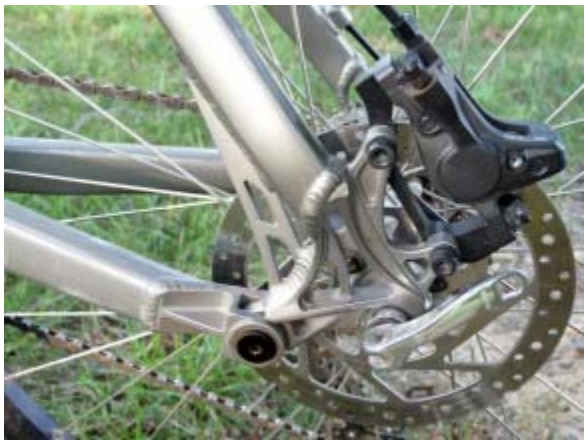
The size Large bike we tested came in at 28lbs 7oz. Not too bad for a 130mm travel bike at this price point, and there's a lot of things you can do to lighten the load. For example, we almost immediately swapped out the Nevegals for the more XC oriented Continental Race Kings, which dropped rotational weight and made the bike a good bit faster on our local trails…the Nevegals were just overkill for most of our riding, especially in the summer months.



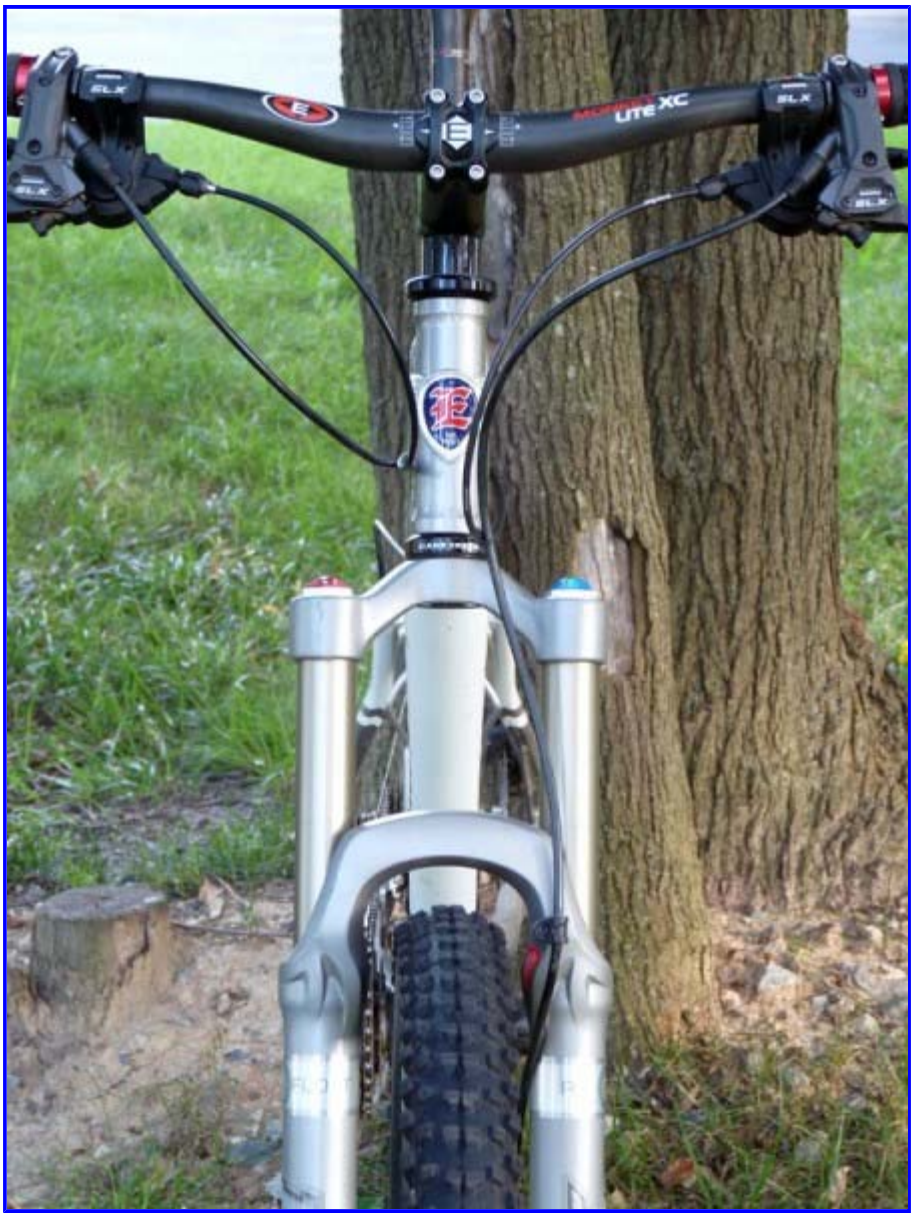
The heart and soul of any Ellsworth full suspension mountain bike is the ICT (Instant Center Tracking) suspension design. In a nutshell, it's a four-bar linkage that claims to provide zero energy loss and be completely immune to the effects of pedaling by aligning the instant center of the chain torque line throughout the range of travel. There are several videos of how it works on their website.

Worth mentioning: The Glimpse was actually their first bike to get the new one-piece, hydroformed seat tube with integrated rocker pivot, which is now on all of their full suspension bikes. Check out Ellsworth post from Interbike to see all the new models.

All of the machined pieces, including the chainstay yoke/pivots above, the dropouts below and the rocker arm are all machined in the U.S. before being shipped off with the tubes for final assembly. The Glimpse still uses an asymmetrical chainstay, but doesn't get the full monocoque design of the higher end bikes.



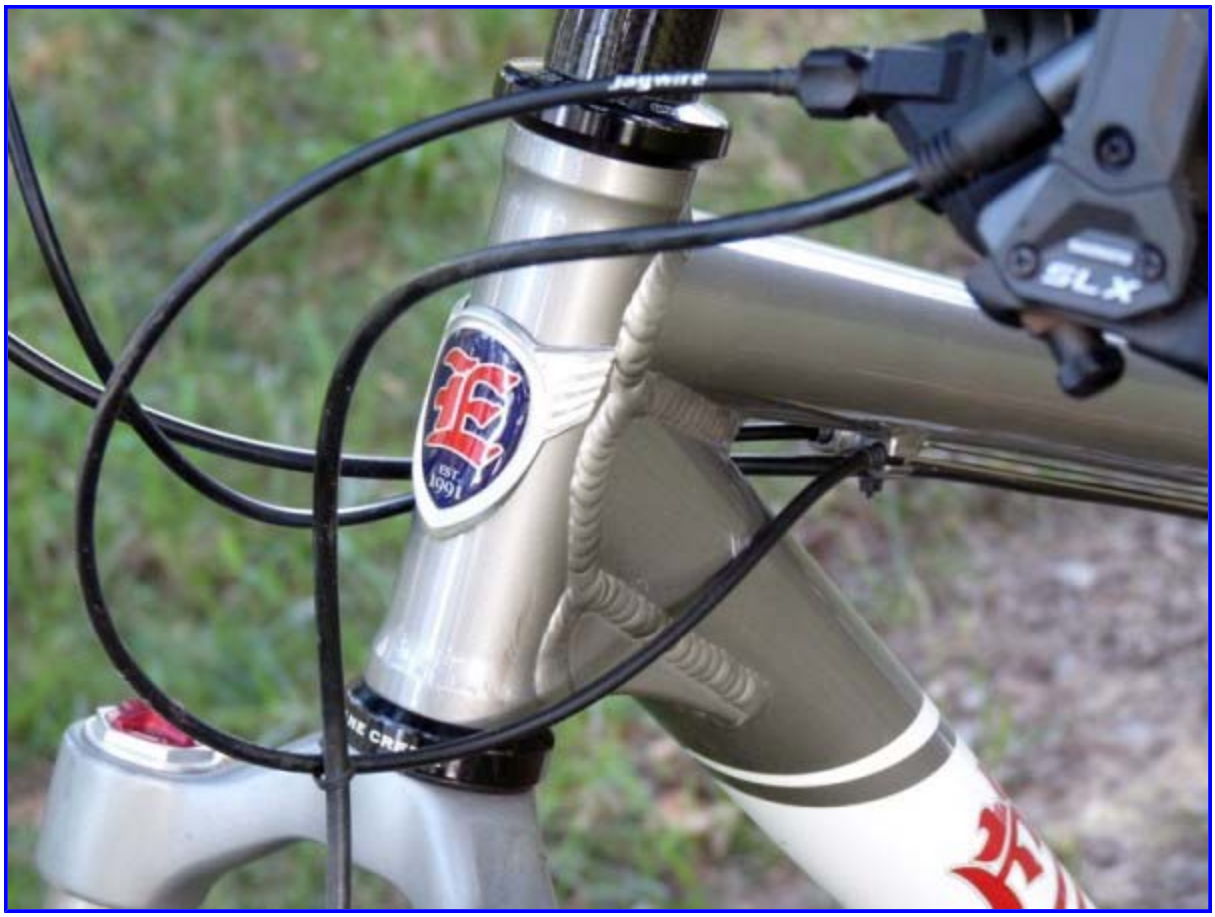
Note the additional reinforcement on the non-driveside dropout section. Braking was solid and we never had any brake squeal or chatter during the six months of testing.



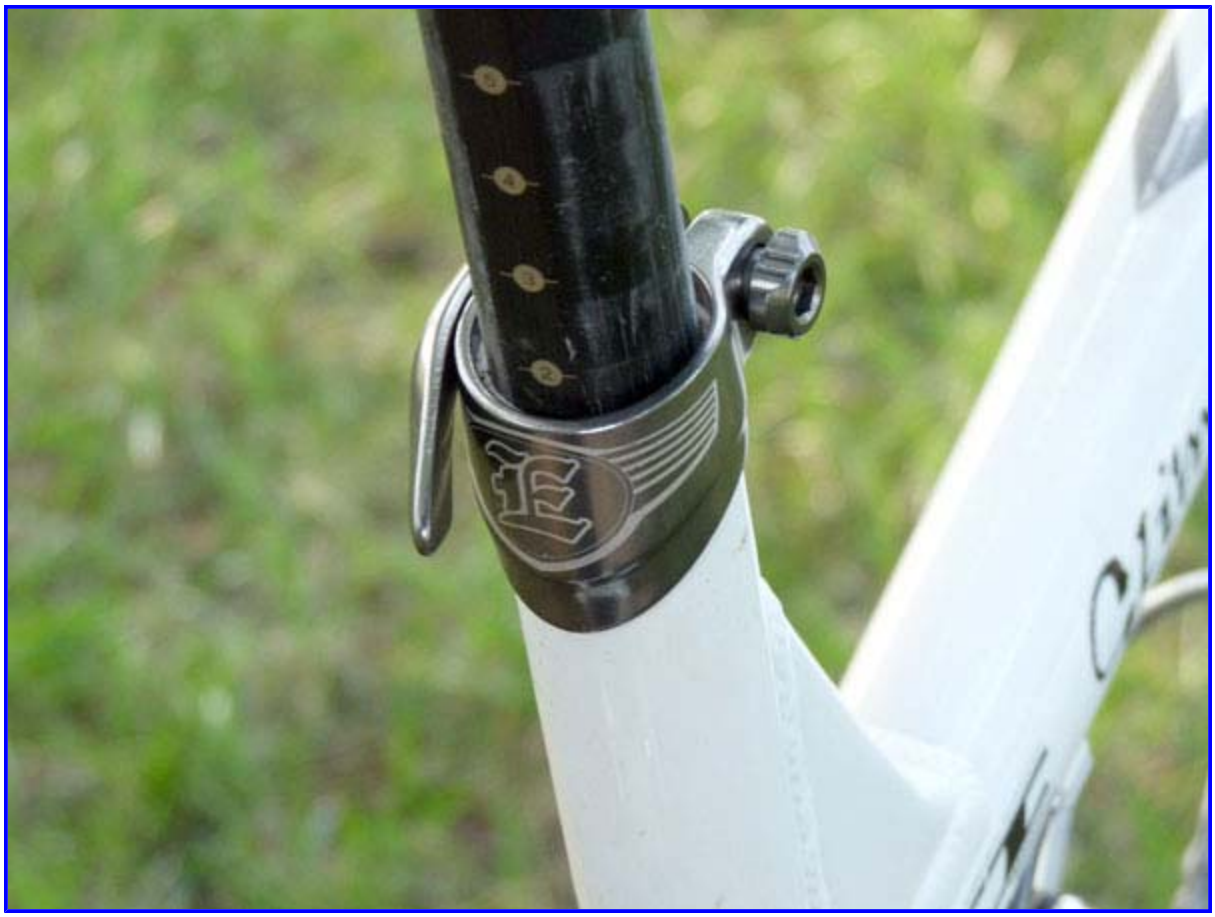
Up front, the Glimpse uses a standard 1-1/8″ headtube and base level Fox Float R fork with 140mm travel. This puts the geometry at:

- 70º head angle (69º Large)
- 73.5º seat angle
- 13.7″ BB height
- 16.9″ chainstay

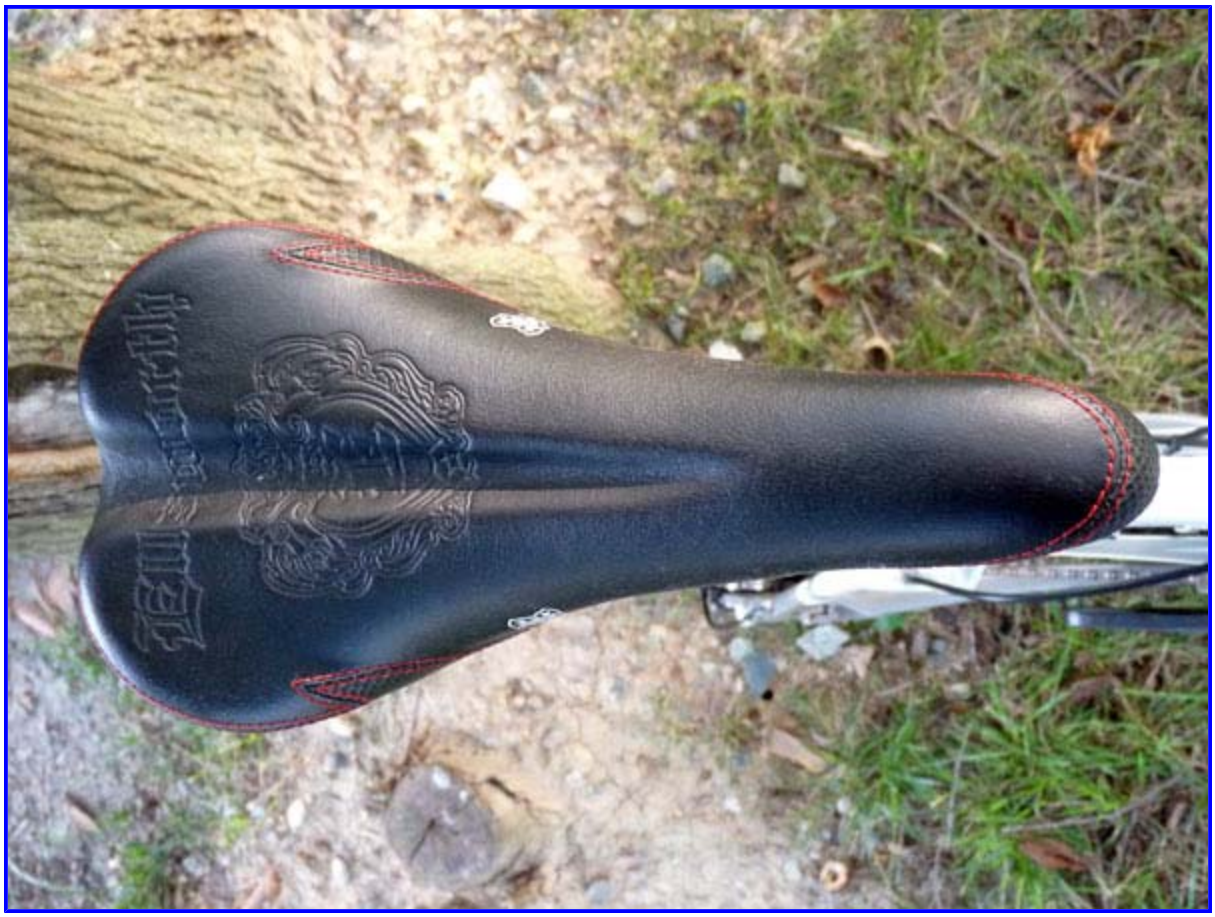
A 5″ (120mm) travel fork is recommended on their website, but our bike came equipped with a 140mm (5.5″) setup, likely to better match the 130mm rear travel design.



A small gusset at the head tube/downtube junction helps reinforce the front end. The bike seemed to steer just fine even with standard sized headtube.



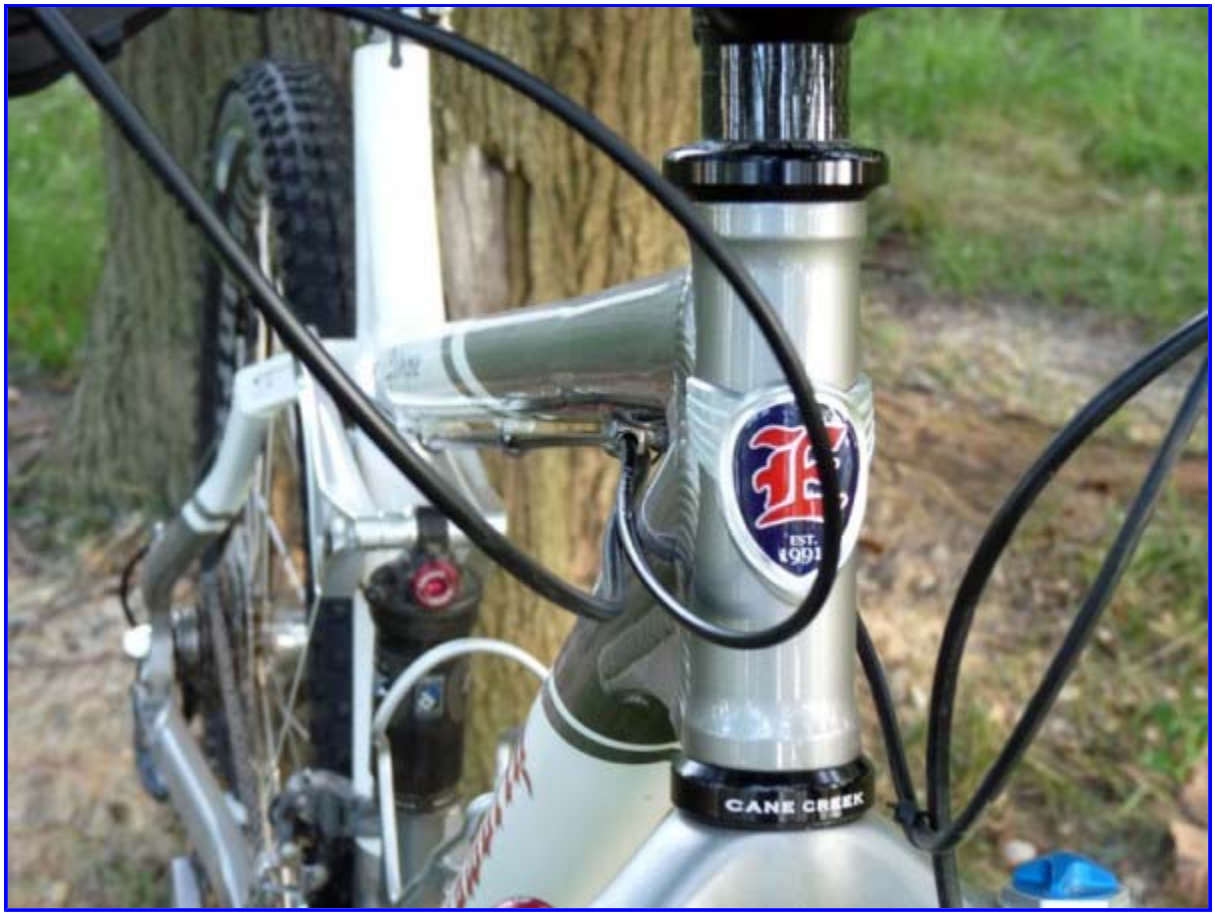
Little details like the seat clamp are bonus. You can run it facing forward or backward based on your preference.



The WTB saddle has a real leather cover with Ellsworth's logo embossed on it. It looks nice, but it's a bit heavy and over padded for our more XC oriented tastes.

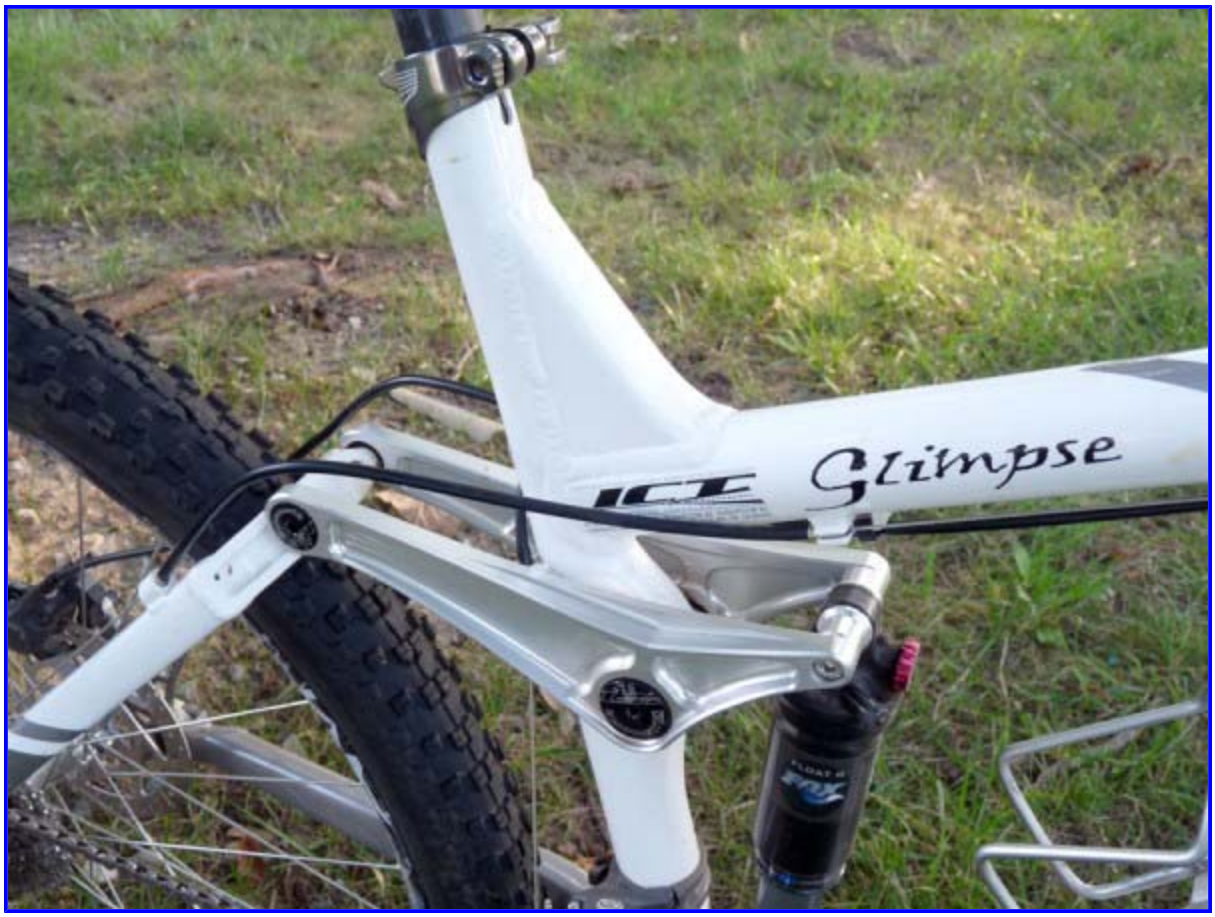
The Glimpse uses a standard outboard bearing bottom bracket set up. Most riders, and particularly those in the market for a bike at this level, will find the Glimpse to be plenty stiff under power whether seated or climbing.

THE BAD & THE UGLY: CABLE ROUTING

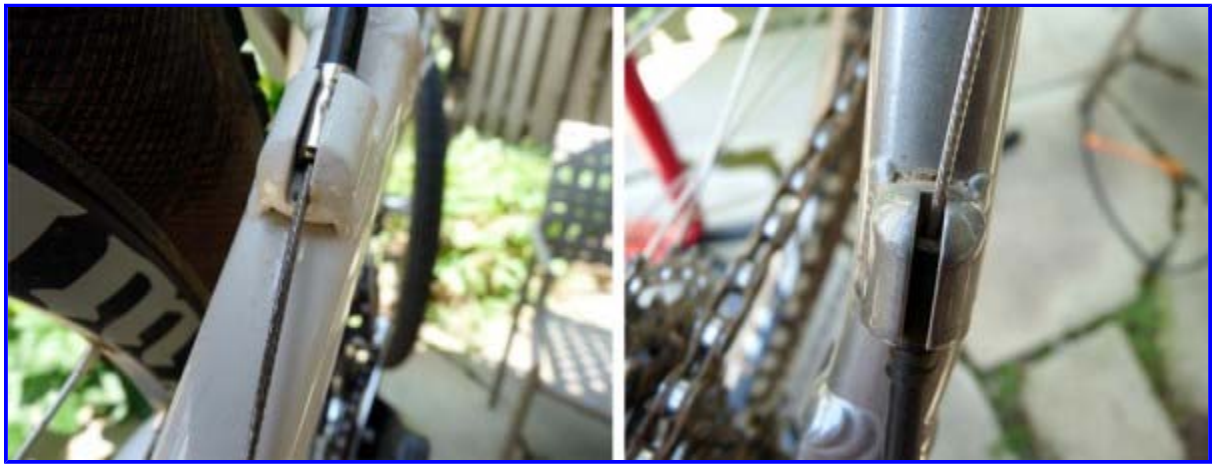


First up, let's make it very clear you should keep reading, because the *ONLY* thing we didn't like about this bike was the cable routing…and even Tony himself admitted it could be done a little better (which means he's likely tinkering with it as you read this). We had some really, really bad rear shifting (if it shifted at all) until we trimmed the housing length and cleaned up the cable runs a bit, and we could have done more…

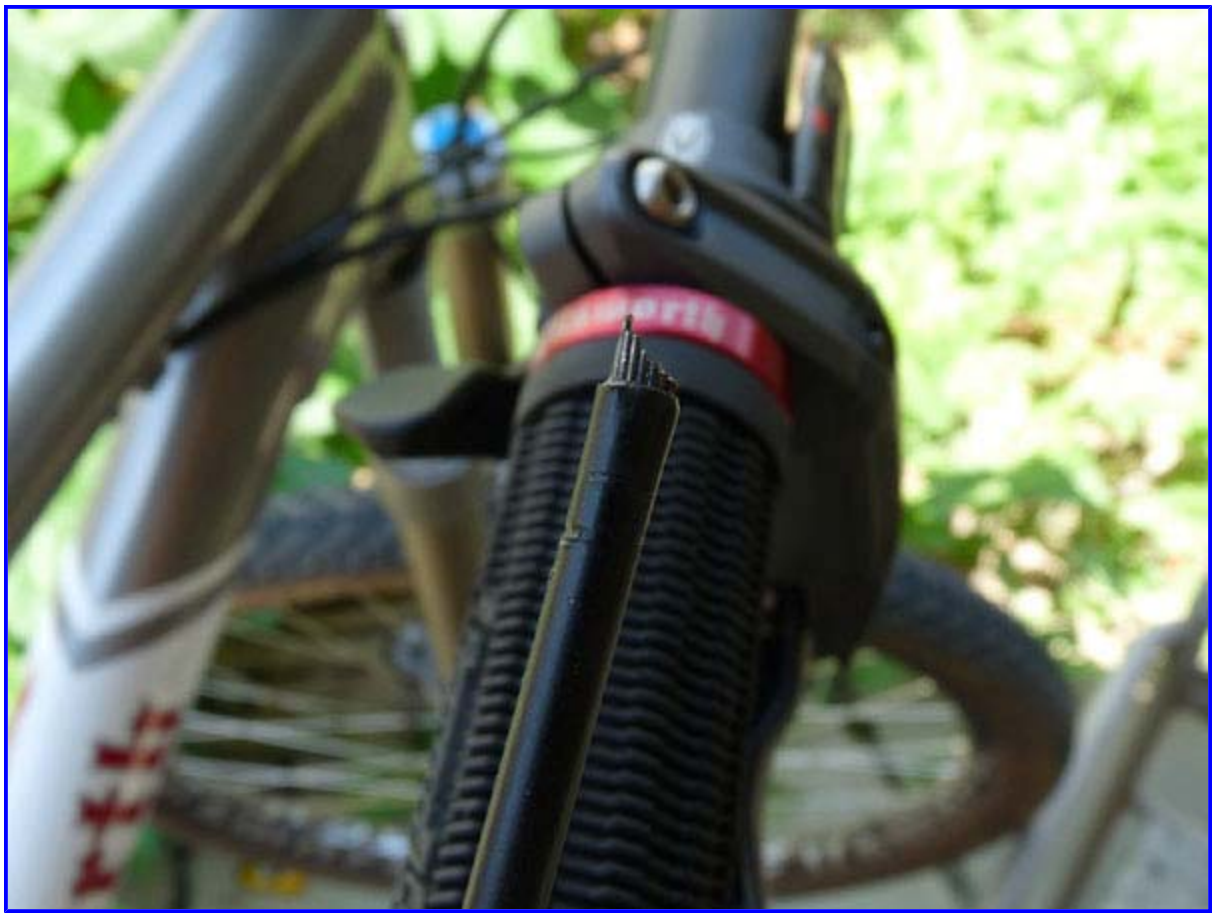
At the front, the cable guides are a bit too close to the headtube, which forces the housing to bend a bit more than we like to see. Also, from the factory, the right side cables are run into the right side of the frame and vice versa. We'd like to see the rear derailleur cable run around the headtube to the left side. Here's why:



Running the rear derailleur cable on the left would allow you to crisscross the rear brake and derailleur cable/hoses above the rocker arm, or just run them both along the left side and cross the derailleur cable over. That's how Ellsworth sponsored racer Pua Sawicki runs it on her Truth, so we're not the only one that thinks this would be a better method. Why?



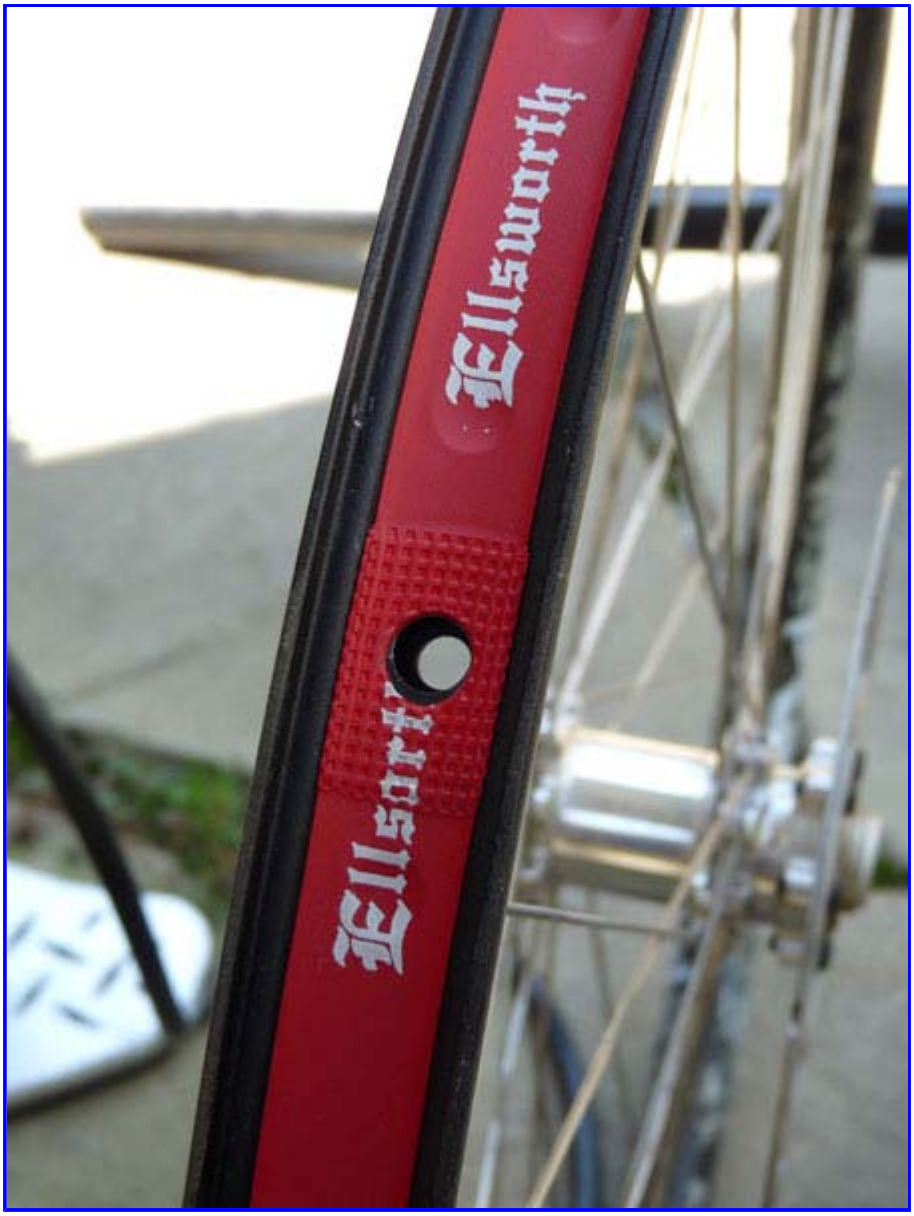
First, it would allow a smoother cable entry angle at the front of the bike. Second, it *might* help with the cable rub on the housing stop at the top of the right chainstay. Unfortunately, I don't think it would do anything for the cable rubbing the stop at the bottom…and we think this is where you're losing some of the attention to detail by outsourcing frame production and/or assembly. In fairness, our biggest issue with the shifting was from this:



Once we pulled the original housing off, we found this sticking into the shifter. Combined with the excessive length of housing used and the other factors mentioned here, it was enough to make the rear derailleur stick when trying to shift to a harder gear…to the point where we had to physically reach down and tug on the cable under the top tube to get it to go slack. Once we trimmed it up (and actually replaced the front section of housing), shifting was fine. We didn't crisscross the cables like we're suggesting, but after seeing Pua's bike and talking to Tony about the issue, we're confident that trimming the housing (and using something like the Gore Ride-On cables we've reviewed) and redoing the cable runs after you get the bike would solve the shifting woes. The cable stops certainly need addressing on the manufacturing side, but they're not enough on their own to ruin the bike's performance.

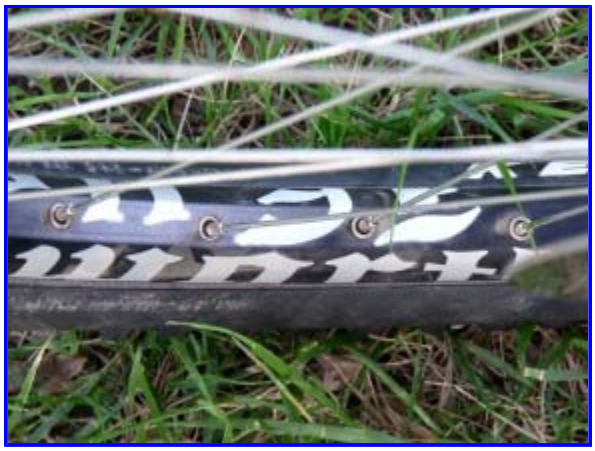
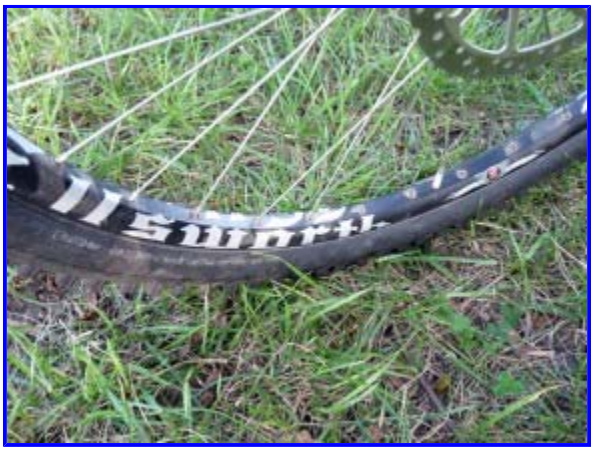
Oddly, the gallery on Ellsworth's website shows the rear shifter cable running around to the right side at the front, so they may have already reworked their assembly instructions for the Taiwanese factory. If not, it's an easy enough fix.

MORE OF THE GOOD: ELLSWORTH'S WHEELS



We're working on a review of Ellsworth's XC wheels separately, so we'll get into the details of these another time. Included with the Glimpse are their AM (All-Mountain) wheels, which have a lightweight but very wide 29mm rim combined with quad-butted spokes and some gorgeous hubs. You can upgrade just about everything else on the bike, but these wheels you're gonna want to keep. They're light (1,695g), stiff and roll smooth…and they're available with caps to swap between 9mm QR and 15mm and 20mm thru axles, so you can upgrade to pretty much any fork you want without having to buy new hoops.



RIDING IMPRESSIONS:

DANIEL (6'0" – 165lbs)

Tales of Adventure
Reviewing the Glimpse was more of a privilege than an obligation. The Glimpse is an amazing bike that embodies both capability and affordability. It offers an instant feeling of comfort and control. Within 90 seconds of being on the bike I jumped over a parking barrier the I would never have felt comfortable trying on the mountain bike I have ridden for years (a hardtail cross country bike). The first ride on the Glimpse lasted a couple hours. At first I noticed some unwanted movement in front and rear of the bike which was easily resolved with proper adjustments to front and rear shock. With the pressures set correctly, the bike smoothed out tremendously.

The first race on the Glimpse was in Ducktown, TN. It was a mountainous climber's race with an additional section this year for anyone who didn't get enough climbing last year. The Glimpse was by far the largest travel bike there. Unfortunately, I was not able to keep up with the hardtail 29ers as we climbed the single track. However, with any climber's race, there's also a descender's race. And, as the largest travel bike there, I had a distinct advantage as the rain moved in and visibility and stability moved out. I didn't have to worry about much as the Glimpse chewed through the descents. The last leg of each lap was a long flat sprint along the river. Proudly, the Glimpse (and I) over took more than one person in a flat, flat out sprint.

The next big adventure on the Glimpse was the BURN 24 Hour Challenge N. Wilkesboro, NC. The Glimpse had proven itself in all around capability and comfort. My concern was how fast could I push

the bike before the extra effort of pushing a 5″ travel bike really began to take its toll. Two modifications were made prior to the race: Narrower tires (Continental Race King Supersonics) and a lighter seat (WTB Silverado w/ Ti rails). The glimpse looked a little funny at first with 5″ of travel and super skinny tires, but let me tell you: there is almost nothing more fun for an endurance race than fast rolling tank of a bike. Hour after hour the Glimpse stayed fast, smooth, and fun. When others had saddle sores and sore joints, I had smiles and smooth riding. Although the Bikerumor team did experience several mechanical issues including a blown fork, broken wheel and a broken rear derailleur on other bikes, the Ellsworth had zero mechanical problems; ZERO. I can only imagine how fast we would have been had our whole team been on Ellsworths.

Tales of Torture

It took no time to begin enjoying the freedom of a well designed 5″ travel bike. Once fully acclimated to the extra suspension, I celebrated the opportunities to punish my friends on their hardtail and short travel XC race bikes. Instead of absorbing the vertical trajectory of whoops and jumps on the trail, I would lean back and float for days. Instead of carefully navigating specific lines around obstacles, I could ignore the path of least resistance and flow like a tidal wave down the trail. I found that with little effort I was able to inspire (aka: goad) other riders to push beyond their comfort zones. On one ride at Bent Creek in Asheville, NC, I joined a group with several 29″ hardtail riders. I ascended with determination and never left their side. As we prepared to come back down I jockeyed to the front in order to lead the descent. I began down the hill as determined as I had risen. I let off the brakes, closed one eye, showed my teeth, and made a straight line out of everything. Whoops were launched, rock gardens ignored, log-overs hucked and brakes generally disregarded. Before the gap between myself and the riders behind me grew beyond earshot, I heard a desperate exclamation from a seasoned rider: “Oh god, don’t follow his lines”. Which I believe translates to “Well done, good Sir. Your cycling prowess has bested my trained eye and skilled hand. I concede to your glory.”

Tales of Intrigue

I hear that Tony Ellsworth is almost obsessed with efficiency and improving the design of his full suspension bikes. The four bar linkage used on the Glimpse looks good and feels great, but I needed quantifiable data. So I set out to measure the play (travel) in the rear shock as I pedaled with varying degrees of intensity in my laboratory (aka the velodrome down the street from my house). Using a caliper measuring tool (aka a clear blue plastic safety compass you give 3rd graders) I intended to measure how far the rubber ring slid down the shock. The method: Carefully mount, ride with consistent effort, dismount, check the rubber ring, reset after each lap, and repeat (this is an excellent way to get strange looks from the track riders). Just my static weight moved the ring 4/8″ down the shock. The first 2 laps were at minimal effort, just smooth easy peddling. The result was zero movement in the rubber ring travel. The next few laps were slightly faster and still resulted in zero movement. The next few runs were even faster and only resulted in 1/16″ movement of the ring. The next few laps were at a brisk pace that let the track stars know things were getting serious. The result, only one more 1/16″ in movement for a total of 5/8″. The last few laps were all out sprints (on the saddle). Nothing makes a track star push the pace like a 5″ travel mountain bike, T-shirt and baggy shorts right on his wheel. The results were just shy of 6/8″ (let’s say 11/16″) of movement in the rubber ring. Pleased with myself for diligently completing the experiment, and fitting in a workout, I rode back to the car contemplating the data. The data seemed far less significant than I had anticipated. So what that an all out sustained sprint only moved the rubber ring 11/16″? I realized that a critical piece of data was missing: the available travel of the rubber ring. So I decided to do what the bike was built for; I jumped off of something. Brilliant! The drop from the picnic area to the parking lot was about 2.5′ feet and resulted in 1 7/8″ [one full inch and seven eighths inches, or 30/16"] in movement in the rubber ring. A huge difference from 11/16″. I don’t know the actual distance the rear wheel traveled, compounding the shock compression and rear linkage, but who cares? 11/16″ of shock movement from a full sprint is far less than 1 7/8″ of movement from taking a little bump.

TYLER (6'2″ – 180lbs)

While Daniel put in the bulk of the miles on the Glimpse, I stole it for a few rides and the photos, which is why the seatpost is totally jacked in the pics above.

From a ride perspective, there's nothing to complain about and lots to love. I echo everyone of Daniel's comments about efficiency under power. Whether you're seated or standing, the bike simply crushes the climbs and makes short work of bumpy, rocky, rooty ascents thanks to the lack of pedal force interference with the suspension's movement. There's a lot of hype out there, but in our experience on this and other bikes from Ellsworth, their design just plain works.

The extremely low standover height made possible by the extended seat tube and gusset makes it super easy to whip the bike around underneath you and really let it float around over obstacles while you remain fairly steady. It's a confidence inspiring ride.

As with any bike we review, I like to imagine what could be done to take it to the next level. Swap out the drivetrain for a higher end component group, put some lightweight tires and saddle on there and you easily have a 26lb bike. Heck, we got this down to about 27.5lbs with Eggbeater pedals and a bottle cage just by swapping tires and saddle. What does this mean? It means you're getting Ellsworth performance on a frame that's very much worth keeping around and upgrading as budget allows or necessity dictates.

BIKERUMOR RATING

We give the Glimpse 4.5 out of 5 thumbs up. It is well designed, well built, well equipped and reasonably priced. The four bar linkage is incredibly efficient, the SLX groupo is bullet proof, and the Ellsworth wheels are great. With the tire and seat modifications, water bottle cage and egg beater pedals, the bike weighs in at about 27.5lbs. There are people we know riding 5″ travel bikes that weigh nearly 40 lbs. And the ones whose bikes dance around the 30lbs mark have invested far more than the $3,295 required to own a Glimpse. Mr Ellsworth, well done good sir.