VOODOO NAKISI

Versatile model makes for a good light tourer
by Patrick O’Grady

Back in the day when I was still racing bicycles, I favored odd-ball events and machinery to match. There was New Mexico’s Watermelon Mountain Classic road race, which started on pavement in Bernalillo and climbed into the Sandias along a stretch of unimproved dirt Forest Service road before returning to asphalt for the descent through Cedar Crest into Albuquerque. An hour east, we had the Mount Taylor Winter Quadrathlon, in which participants cycle, run, ski, and snowshoe to the summit of the race’s name-sake, then repeat it all in reverse order to the finish in downtown Grants.

Up north in Boulder, Colorado, it was the Boulder-Roubaix, a road race that was half dirt road, half paved.

And, of course, there was cyclo-cross, a deviant form of duathlon for busy folks who are in too much of a rush to change shoes for the running portion.

An off-the-rack bike just wouldn’t do for most of these contests, given the variable terrain and weather. So I’d mix and match, trying cyclo-cross tires and gearing on a road bike, road rubber and gearing on a ’cross bike, or ’cross tires on a mountain bike.

In the mid 1990s, when my wife and I moved to the Wet Mountains in south-central Colorado, equipment selection became even more complex. The riding possibilities included chip-seal state highway, indifferently maintained gravel county roads, federal two-track, private single-track, horse trail, and deer paths. Mostly I rode a ’cross bike, but this was a case of making do. What I needed was an expedition bike, something that would be more or less at home no matter where I took it.

It was not the first time I came to regret selling my Steelman CC ’cross bike to a teammate. Framebuilder Brent Steelman pitched this steel frameset as “a 700C mountain bike,” giving it a slightly sloping top tube, clearance for 700C x 40 tires, and the option of running a triple-ring crankset. It was a 29er before anyone had coined the term.

Then one day VooDoo Cycles came out with the Loa, a titanium ’cross bike with a one-off Marzocchi suspension fork, mountain-bike gearing, and clearance for burly rubber. I went for it like a shot, adding a U.S.E. suspension post for extra cushion.

I’ve had a soft spot for VooDoo ever since, plus a general fondness for bikes that can serve more than one purpose. So, late last year, when I saw a photo of VooDoo’s Nakisi on a friend’s website, and it looked like a smarter, cheaper version of my long-gone Loa, I drew my Visa card the way a gunfighter draws his Colt.

The Nakisi is a steel 29er designed for “dirt drop bars,” and thus doesn’t look like a 29er at all. It has neither a radically sloping top tube nor a suspension fork, but will accept 29” x 2.3” tires — no, that’s not a typo — and your choice of disc or cantilever brakes. When built up for off-road use it looks something like a ’cross bike wearing Dunlop D952 motorcycle rubber.

“ ’We kept the top tube flat and head tube short to offer a traditional look with lots of standover clearance,” said John Benson of VooDoo North America. “That has met a fair amount of resistance, especially when the high-rise Nakisi stem is put on. It does look goofy but, man, it is great riding that setup.”

Benson rides a Nakisi outfitted with WTB Mountain Road drop bars and a Shimano XT drivetrain, whereas designer Joe Murray set his up with VooDoo Scorcher bars and 1 x 9 drive for use as a townie.

I had mine built as a sort of old-school ’cross bike on growth hormone, mostly using parts already on hand in the garage — Hugi hubs from a long unused set
of mountain-bike wheels, cantilever brakes, nine-speed bar-end shifters, a 12-26 cassette, Ultegra rear derailleur and XT front, and an old M737 Deore XT triple crankset with 42/32/22 rings. Old Town Bike Shop in Colorado Springs, Colorado, handled the assembly, which included the lacing of Mavic Open Pro rims to those hubs with DT Revolution spokes and the addition of 700C x 45 Panaracer Fire Cross tires, the cyclo-cross version of the rubber on my ‘cross bikes.

The first thing I noticed was what a bear those tires were to push on the road. The second was how nicely they rolled over the rocky sections of single-track that serve as roadblocks to the 700C x 30/32 Michelin Jets on my ’cross bikes.

With a high-rise stem to bring the bars nearly level with the saddle, the Nakisi handles the ups and downs of trail riding impeccably, so much so that I found myself spending more time on the hoods or in the drops than on the tops, white-knuckling my auxiliary brake levers (yeah, I’m a sissy; my wife likes a man to have a reasonably intact epidermis and all of his original teeth).

Frankly, it’s nice to spend more time riding rather than carrying, especially since the Nakisi’s cables are routed underneath the top tube. There’s a guide under there for a hydraulic brake cable, too, if you’re among the disc-brake fanatics who think that cantilevers can’t cut it.

Finally, with drop bars permitting more hand positions than flat bars, shaped seat stays that eat up the bumps, and no suspension fork to wrestle, the Nakisi is a comfy bike for the long haul.

But it’s more than a mountain bike with drop bars. The Nakisi is an all-rounder, a Swiss Army bike with braze-ons for racks and fenders that can tackle just about any type of riding, short of a fully-loaded tour.

Swap the portly Panaracers for something a little more svelte — I had a pair of wire-bead 700C x 38 WTB All Terrainasauruses lying around — and continued on page 62.

Specifications: VooDoo Nakisi

**Price:** $350 for frame and fork, $89.95 for high-rise stem.

**Sizes available:** X-small (46cm), small (50cm), medium (54cm), large (58cm), X-large (62cm).

**Size tested:** Medium

**Weight:** 24.2 pounds with pedals

---

**TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS**

- **Seat tube:** 21 ¼ inches (54cm), center to top
- **Top tube:** 22 7/16 inches effective
- **Head tube angle:** 71.5°
- **Seat tube angle:** 74°
- **Horizontal chainstays:** 16.8-17.7 inches (17 1/8 as tested)
- **Seat height above ground:** 40 3/8 inches
- **Crank spindle height above ground:** 11 3/8 inches
- **Fork rake:** 1 31/32 inches (60mm)
- **Wheelbase:** 41.5 inches
- **Standover height:** 30 ¾ inches
- **Frame and fork:** VooDoo Black Magic chromoly steel with butted main tubes. Threaded bosses for two water bottles.

---

**Baize-ons front and rear for fenders and racks. Cable stops for front and rear derailleurs. Disc tabs and cantilever brake bosses. Origin-8 threadless headset. Steel fork. Horizontal rear dropouts**

**Rims:** Mavic Open Pro, 32-hole rear, 28-hole front

**Spokes:** DT Revolution, cross three rear, cross two front

**Hubs:** Hugy Compact

**Tires:** WTB All Terrainasauruses, 700x38

**Crank:** Shimano M737 Deore XT, 175mm arms, 42/32/22 chainrings

**Front derailleur:** Shimano XT

**Rear derailleur:** Shimano Ultegra

**Shift levers:** Shimano Dura-Ace BS77 bar-cons

**Brake levers:** Shimano 600

**Cog cassette:** SRAM PG970 12-13-14-15-17-19-21-23-26 9-speed

**Chain:** SRAM PC-971

**Gearing in inches:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>22</th>
<th>32</th>
<th>42</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>74.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>63.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Saddle:** Selle San Marco Ponza Island.

**Seat post:** Thomson Elite.

**Brakes:** Cane Creek SCX-5 cantilevers with Shimano 600 aero levers plus top-mounted Cane Creek Crossstop levers.

**Pedals:** Crank Brothers Candy.

**Bars & stem:** Salsa Pro Road 46cm bars with an unidentified high-rise stem from the parts box.

**Contact:** info@voodoocycles.net. VooDoo USA distributes through Bicycle Technologies International, 1216 Mercantile Road, Santa Fe, NM 87507. For a store locator see https://www.bti-usa.com/store_locator.asp
and contemplative. Cycling, especially touring, satisfied that need for me."

The CEO of Memjet, a color printing company, McGlynn believes that, in addition to touring, regular cycling is an important part of his daily life.

“It really keeps me centered,” McGlynn said. “I cycle to work 30 miles roundtrip as often as I can. I use that time to clear my head. I need that in my life the same way people need yoga. It’s my meditation.”

Aside from mental health, cycling has been greatly beneficial for the couple’s physical well being. McGlynn said his wife’s mother had heart problems for years, which he thought his wife probably had inherited.

“Since we started doing these rides, her heart is in much better condition and I’m sure it has extended her life. That’s true for both of us, but especially for her,” he said.

Since their first tour, McGlynn and England, 52, have progressed as bicycle travelers. They no longer scout their rides by car ahead of time anymore. Additionally, their pacing has improved. McGlynn said his wife rode behind him on their first ride and he would loop back to pick her up. Now England rides ahead of him most of the time.

McGlynn said he looks forward to future cycling adventures, which he schedules at least annually (and now require far less planning time than their first trip). In 2011, McGlynn and England were registered to participate in Ride Idaho, a seven-day supported trip through the Gem State in August. Every year, the couple do a trip to celebrate their wedding anniversary. More than once, the occasion led the couple back to Montana, where they completed their first bicycle tour.

“When we drive along the Lochsa River on Highway 12, all the memories of our first ride come back,” McGlynn said. “I had driven the Lochsa hundreds of times and had never seen Shoestring Falls! You can’t go slow enough in a car to even see it! We feel very fortunate to share these special memories, and Adventure Cycling has been helping make it happen.”

Dan Schwartzman is a Bikram Yoga teacher and freelance journalist living in Missoula, Montana. After writing for newspapers on both coasts, he founded Café Abroad InPRINT, www.cafeabroadinprint.com, a nationally-distributed international education magazine.

The Nakisi becomes a slightly lighter, faster-rolling cyclo-cross bike. With some 700C x 28 Continental Ultra Gatorskins and a messenger bag, you have a speedy commuter. Add racks and fenders and it’s an all-weather grocery-getter.

And if you’re into warm-weather bike-packing on gentle trails, or perhaps you’re a credit-card tourist who favors the dirt road less traveled, you could outfit the Nakisi with some friendlier gearing and beefier wheels, add minimalist bags, then hit the road, the trail, the whatever.

A load of 20 to 25 pounds should be doable, says Benson, with the following caveat: “This is not a tested or researched area for this bike, however, so riders need to take into consideration that it uses smaller-diameter tubing in frame and fork and should not be overloaded.” He recommends soft bags from Revelate Designs or Carousel Design Works “or perhaps the new Salsa Minimalist racks with ultralight dry bags.”

I didn’t have any of those things. But I did have front and rear Cold Springs racks from Old Man Mountain, plus Economy Panniers from Jandd and B-40s from Arkel, so I promptly overloaded the bike with 30 pounds’ worth of warm-weather cycling and camping gear and went for a spin.

No worries. I didn’t tackle any single-track with this configuration, but on asphalt streets and gravel paths the Nakisi accelerated, cornered, and stopped smoothly. I only noticed the load when standing to climb a steepish hill.

So there you have it. The VooDoo Nakisi joins a parade of multipurpose machines from outfits like Surly and Soma Fabrications — inexpensive, versatile, steel, suitable for exercise, transportation, or following that bear over the mountain to see what you can see.

I like to call these innovative devices bicycles. —

Patrick O’Grady has written and cartooned about cycling since 1989 for VeloNews, Bicycle Retailer and Industry News, and a variety of other publications. The number of bikes in his Colorado garage is an exact match for the number of voices in his head.