



# VOLAGI VIAJE APEX

BY JOSH TACK

→ GRAVEL bikes got quite a bit of buzz last year, and you're going to hear a lot more about them during the 2014 riding season. If you're unsure of what I mean by a "gravel bike," it's a bike that fills the void between touring and cyclocross bikes, yet it's not quite a randonneur bike. In this case, the void is pretty small, but it's an area the bicycle industry sees an opportunity to expand in.

When I first set eyes on the Volagi Viaje, my intuition was to add it into the gravel-bike column. It has clearance for wide tires, shorter chainstays than you'd find on traditional touring bikes, yet a tall head tube for comfort, and a system to absorb vibration in the back. This bike will absolutely handle gravel rides if that's what you're into, but I love that Volagi keeps your cycling plans open-ended by referring to this simply as an "adventure bike."

Looking at the frame there's a lot to take in. Although it does sport a steel construction with eyelets for a rear rack and full-coverage fenders, any traditional frame concepts end there. The bowed top tube and seatstays catch the eye in a hurry, which is a design aesthetic that is becoming more and more prevalent on road bikes. In this case, the design serves a unique purpose. Normally your seatstays would be welded to your seat tube near the seatpost clamp. Instead,

## SPECIFICATIONS VOLAGI VIAJE APEX

**Price:** \$2,620

**Sizes Available:** 50, 53, 55, 57, 60, and 63cm

**Size Tested:** 55cm

**Weight:** 21 lbs. (without pedals)

## TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS

1. Seat tube: 52.5cm (center to top of seat collar)
2. Effective Top tube: 54.4cm
3. Head tube angle: 72°
4. Seat tube angle: 73.5°
5. Chainstays: 41.5cm
6. Bottom Bracket drop: 7cm
7. Crank spindle height above ground: 27.2cm
8. Fork offset: 5cm
9. Wheelbase: 99.8cm
10. Standover height: 80cm
11. Frame: Double Butted 4130 Chromoly steel, Long Bow Flex Stays
12. Fork: Full carbon, 1 1/8" - 1 1/2" tapered steerer
13. Rims: Volagi E7 Ignite XL 32 hole
14. Hubs: Volagi cartridge sealed bearing
15. Spokes: Sandvik T302 double-butted with brass nipples
16. Tires: Jack Brown 700 x 33.3
17. Bottom bracket: FSA 386EVO w/SR adapter



- 18. Crankset: SRAM Apex 50/34
- 19. Cassette: SRAM PG1050 11-36
- 20. Shift/brake levers: SRAM Apex 10 speed Double Tap
- 21. Brakes: TRP Spyre (160mm front rotor, 140mm rear rotor)
- 22. Pedals: None
- 23. Bottle cage: None
- 24. Seat post: FSA Energy 27.2mm setback
- 25. Stem: FSA OS150
- 26. Handlebar: FSA Compact Pro
- 27. Headset: Stainless Integrated 1-1/8" top and 1-1/2" bottom
- 28. Saddle: Volagi E7 Ignite

**GEARING IN INCHES**

|    | 50    | 34   |
|----|-------|------|
| 11 | 122.7 | 83.5 |
| 12 | 112.5 | 76.5 |
| 14 | 96.4  | 65.6 |
| 16 | 84.4  | 57.4 |
| 18 | 75.0  | 51.0 |
| 21 | 64.3  | 43.7 |
| 24 | 56.3  | 38.3 |
| 28 | 48.2  | 32.8 |
| 32 | 42.2  | 28.7 |
| 36 | 37.5  | 25.5 |

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these seat stays flow right on past either side of the seat tube and are welded to the top tube a few inches forward of the seat collar. Volagi refers to this as LongBow Flex™ Stay Suspension, and it allows the bike to absorb more vibration over rough surfaces through the elongated stays.

Some other standout features found on the frame include a tapered head tube and a BB386EVO bottom bracket. The tapered head tube you're probably familiar with. By tapering the head tube down from a 1.125 inches to 1.5 inches, Volagi increases stiffness and control for better front-end handling. Not a big deal when you're cruising on a flat road, but you will appreciate it while descending twisty roads or steering through rough surfaces. The frameset includes a headset and a tapered carbon fork that is painted to match the frame.

As for the BB386EVO bottom bracket shell, this is a relatively new feature that offers a couple of key benefits for this frame. The BB386EVO shell is wider than most traditional bottom brackets, which is great when you want to have widely spaced chainstays for large tire clearance like you have on this bike. It's a press fit-style shell, but it is also versatile in the sense that there are a lot of adapters out there that will let you use a BB30 or English threaded bottom bracket if you have a specific crankset you are hoping to run.

Getting into some familiar frame specs, you've got great tire clearance that will allow up to 700C x 42 tires, or 700C x 32 tires with full-coverage fenders. As far as brake-mount options go, this is a disc-brake-only bike, however, it's set up to allow either mechanical or hydraulic disc brakes, depending on your preference.

Now that we're getting the frame figured out, you're probably wondering what kind of build options are available. Dialing in your component package is where Volagi absolutely nails

it. Because they don't have a huge distribution network like most major brands, they are in a unique position to work with the buyer on a very personal level, almost to the point of what you would expect from a custom builder. You select your frame size and choose between a cream, red, or blue color. Next, you pick your drivetrain package, and you have all sorts of options from Campagnolo, Shimano, and SRAM. You then get to pick your wheelset, which consists of three levels of complete wheels from Volagi. Beyond that, you get to pick which disc brakes and handlebars you would like. If you're placing your order online, you make your selections and hit checkout.

You may think you're all set and your bike will be arriving in the mail shortly, but you're wrong. At this point, you've given Volagi a base point of reference, allowing them to pull down your frame and begin to get some components ready. You can expect a follow-up call from them in which they will dial in even more specifics, such as cassette range, stem length, handlebar width, crankarm length, and style of tires. As they collect this information from you, they will hand-assemble your bike at their factory, ensuring the best fit a non-custom bike can give you out of the box.

Because more options can sometimes be intimidating, an authorized Volagi dealer can help you through this component selection process. If you don't live near a Volagi dealer, the company will ask if you have a preferred shop and check to see if they will work with you during the process. If your local shop is willing to help, Volagi will support them and pass on a portion of the sale. If neither of those options are available to you, Volagi can also work with you one-on-one and ship the bike straight to your door.

As you can see from the spec chart, I opted for a SRAM Apex/X9 drivetrain, coupled with Volagi's Ignite XL workhorse wheelset. I've really started to become a fan of the 2 x 10 drivetrain and the 11-36 cassette combined with a 50/34 crankset which offers a wide range of gears. This is perfect for the wide range of riding conditions found

in Montana, which can vary between long flat river valleys one day and mountain passes the next.

Most of my time spent on this bike was on Forest Service dirt roads, and I was excited to see how the LongBow Flex™ Stay Suspension worked out over these rugged surfaces. When I first made the transition from pavement to dirt, I honestly didn't notice the



suspension effect at all. Taking it through some large potholes, I could still feel plenty of jolt, but it was slightly muted to keep the bike more stable and send less vibration through my back and shoulders. There wasn't a huge difference in the moment, but enough to make me aware of it. The suspension system really shines when you reach that point in your ride where you normally feel a good amount of fatigue from being pounded by rough road surfaces. Generally, after about four hours of Forest Service roads, my legs and back are ready to hit the couch. Although I wouldn't go so far as to say that the Volagi Viaje left me feeling fresh after my favorite four-hour Forest Service loop, but I was noticeably less fatigued and felt as though I had a few more miles left in my legs.

Taking the bike over to smooth pavement, I was happy to see that it still felt fairly stiff, especially when

standing on climbs. I was initially worried that it would feel too soft or sluggish with the suspension design. No matter where I rode the bike, I was consistently happy with its handling. The geometry provided a very stable ride, and steering was very predictable in all conditions. I even had a good time handling the bike on some moderate mountain bike trails near town.

Anyone who loves long miles will appreciate this bike. If you're into century rides, gran fondos, or simply want to head out on the bike and spend countless hours finding yourself, this bike is worth a serious look. Beyond long day rides, it's also fully capable of handling a variety of touring styles.

Earlier I mentioned that the bike is fitted with rear-rack eyelets. The carbon front fork does not have eyelets for racks, but there's nothing stopping you from retrofitting the bike with a fork that does. That said, I would consider this bike more of a light-duty touring bike where racks are concerned. The reason for this is that the chainstays are pretty short. I didn't have any clearance issues with my heel striking my rear panniers, but I did have them set far back on the rack and the available clearance was tight.

If touring with a bicycle trailer is more your cup of tea, you'll want to be aware that the bike has Breezer-style dropouts, which have a lip that surrounds a portion of the rear dropout. Most trailers that mount to the skewer, such as BOB trailers, won't have any issues. However, you can run into trouble with trailers that use a hitch, such as the Burley Nomad. In this case, the hitch component won't fit under the lip around the dropout.

Don't want to deal with all the hardware involved with racks and trailers? Strap on some frame packs and hit the road, trail, or whatever surface you fancy. This Volagi Viaje is ready for adventure if you are. **AG**

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