



SALSA VAYA

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

→ IN HIS 1982 BOOK *Blue Highways: A Journey Into America*, William Least Heat-Moon recounted his tour of the lesser American thoroughfares once so colored on maps.

His vehicle was the furthest thing possible from a luxury RV — a half-ton 1975 Ford Econoline van that he dubbed Ghost Dancing, a “clangy tin box” that served him as bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, and parlor.

Wrote Least Heat-Moon: “It came equipped with power nothing and drove like what it was: a truck. Your basic plumber’s model.”

Three decades later, were he the sort to reach for a handlebar instead of a car key, Least Heat-Moon might find the Salsa Vaya 2 catching his eye; a blue bike for the blue roads. Like Ghost Dancing, with a few aftermarket enhancements the Vaya can provide at least some of the comforts of home away from home. And while it’s not exactly an Airstream Interstate EXT, neither is the Vaya 2 a clangy tin box, with worn rear tires “and an ominous knocking in the water pump.”

But if his travels included a lot of climbing, or he traveled heavily laden (or both), Least Heat-Moon might find himself longing for a bit of power something when the road rose upward, because the Vaya 2’s lack of a true granny gear can make the bike feel at times as though its panniers

SPECIFICATIONS

SALSA VAYA 2

Price: \$1,950

Sizes available: 50cm, 52cm, 54cm, 55cm, 56cm, 57cm, 58cm, 60cm

Size tested: 57cm

Weight: 27.9 lbs. (without pedals)

TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS

1. Seat tube: 54cm (center to top)

2. Top tube: 57cm (virtual); 55cm (actual)

3. Head tube angle: 71.5°

4. Seat tube angle: 72.5°

5. Chainstays: 450mm

6. Bottom bracket drop: 75mm

7. Crank spindle height above ground: 280.2mm

8. Fork offset: 50mm

9. Wheelbase: 1053.5mm

10. Standover height: 800mm

11. Frame: Salsa Classico double-butted chromoly. Rack and fender mounts; disc-brake mounts; pump peg; shift- and brake-cable routing points; replaceable derailleur hanger; three water-bottle bosses.

12. Fork: Vaya chromoly, 1 1/8-inch steerer, forward-facing, stainless-steel, double-eyelet dropouts; through-fork low-rider mounts; fender mount at fork crown; disc-brake mounts

13. Rims: Sun Ringle Inferno 23, 32-hole

14. Spokes: DT Swiss Competition

15. Hubs: Salsa 2 by Formula, 32-hole (135mm rear)

16. Tires: Schwalbe Marathon Plus Tour, 700x40c

17. Crankset: Shimano R563, 175mm, 50/39/30 chainrings



18. Cassette: Shimano 105
10-speed, 11-12-13-14-15-17-19-
24-28

19. Chain: KMC 10-speed

20. Shift/brake levers: Shimano
105, 10-speed

21. Front derailleur: Shimano 105
triple

22. Rear derailleur: Shimano 105
SGS

23. Brakes: Avid BB7 Road S
mechanical discs, 160mm rotors

24. Pedals: n/a

25. Seat post: Truvativ Stylo T-20,
two-bolt clamp, 27.2mm

26. Stem: Salsa Guide, 100mm, 7°
rise, 31.8mm clamp

27. Handlebar: Salsa Cowbell 2,
44cm at levers, 12-degree flare at
drops), 31.8mm four-bolt clamp

28. Bar tape: Salsa gel

29. Headset: Cane Creek Ten

30. Saddle: WTB Pure V

GEARING IN INCHES:

| | 50 | 39 | 30 |
|----|-------|------|------|
| 11 | 124.2 | 96.9 | 74.5 |
| 12 | 113.8 | 88.8 | 68.3 |
| 13 | 105.1 | 82.0 | 63.0 |
| 14 | 97.6 | 76.1 | 58.5 |
| 15 | 91.1 | 71.0 | 54.6 |
| 17 | 80.4 | 62.7 | 48.2 |
| 19 | 71.9 | 56.1 | 43.1 |
| 21 | 65.0 | 50.7 | 39.0 |
| 24 | 56.9 | 44.4 | 34.2 |
| 28 | 48.8 | 38.1 | 29.3 |

Contact: Salsa Cycles, 6400 W.
10th St., Bloomington, MN 55348;
1-877-668-6223; salsacycles.com;
support@salsacycles.com.



are packed with plumbing supplies.

The Vaya 2 is the middle child in a family of three, all billed as touring and road adventure bikes. The \$3,950 Vaya Travel is a stainless-steel beauty with S&S couplers, a 10-speed Shimano Ultegra drivetrain, and some nifty bits from L.H. Thomson. The \$1,499 chromoly Vaya 3 rolls in kelly green via a Shimano Sora setup.

The \$1,950 Vaya 2 features a 10-speed Shimano 105 drivetrain, with STI brake-shift levers, a Shimano R563 triple crank (52/42/30) and an 11-28 105 cassette. This setup proved as reliable as sunrise, a trait most bicycle travelers appreciate when far from their friendly neighborhood bike shop. But that 30 x 28 low end — 29.3 gear inches — is a big ask on a long climb with full bags.

The downshifting stops there for a reason, according to Salsa product manager Tim Krueger, himself a passionate and veteran tourist. It seems modern road and mountain components don't make nice together the way their venerable ancestors did, and after one factors in the buyers' desire for integrated brake-shift levers and triple cranks, what comes to market is a compromise intended to satisfy the largest possible number of customers.

"This is the best low gear we can get on the market today with integrated drop-bar shifters, in a method that is approved by the company producing the parts," said Krueger.

"Being a moderately sized company, we are held to certain standards that involve not spec'ing drivetrains that are B fits, or not recommended by the manufacturer. I agree with you, this gearing is not necessarily the best for pure loaded touring, but it does work for a lot of the other ways our customers use these bikes."

And indeed it does. The Vaya 2 starts at 27.9 pounds, which is not unreasonable for a steel all-rounder

that handles both good roads and bad. Screw in a pair of pedals and find out where that country lane goes after it turns to dirt. Ride it to work, to the grocery, to the next town over, the one with the clothing-optional hot springs (no off-the-bike duds required, which lessens your load).

The Vaya 2 has bosses for three bottle cages, so you need not go thirsty, and the heavy-duty 700 x 40c Schwalbe Marathon Plus tires seem unlikely to fail on any surface short of a minefield, even at low pressures (for comfort I ran mine around 45 PSI, 5 under the recommended minimum). They're not light, at 940 grams apiece, but they roll nicely on pavement and hardpack.

You'll find comfort in the Vaya 2's baby-blue double-butted chromoly frame, too. I rode a 57 cm (71.5-degree head tube, 72.5-degree seat tube, 50 mm fork offset and 1053.5 mm wheelbase) and it rolled with the endless punches thrown by the roads in a financially strapped town that recently took \$2 million from its reserve fund to patch potholes. The cushy WTB Pure V saddle provides an additional layer of protection against the cold, hard ground.

Up front, the Salsa Cowbell 2 bars wrapped with Salsa gel tape are likewise easy on the hands, with a 76 mm reach, 126 mm drop and 12-degree flare at the drops. Brakes are Avid BB7 Road S mechanical discs with 160 mm rotors, downtube cable routing and inline adjusters accessible from the cockpit. The Tubus racks and SKS fenders I installed fit neatly around

the calipers, with only a single 5 mm spacer needed to nudge the left front fender strut slightly outboard.

You'll notice I've been adding items and thus weight to the bike as we've chatted so amiably. Kitted out for all-weather adventures, with fenders, racks, computer, and bell, the Vaya weighed in at (ring a ding ding) 33.1 pounds. So it was no surprise that on rolling Colorado terrain, with just 10 additional pounds of payload, I spent quite a bit of time on the wide side of the cassette.

With three times that weight — 13 pounds in the front pannier, 1.5 in a handlebar bag, 10 in rear panniers, plus tent (2.7 pounds), sleeping bag (1.7 pounds) and saddlebag (1.3 pounds) — I occasionally felt like a tortoise wearing too much shell.

On long, gradual ascents I was able to stay in the middle ring. But on steep pitches, especially when pedaling into the wind, I skipped the river and woods and went straight to granny's house. I was set afoot just once, on an absurdly steep, washed-out gravel hill, but I was riding only a couple hours at a stretch on familiar paths, not spending long days on the saddle or climbing toward Cedar Breaks in a blizzard. ("A rule of the blue road: Be careful going in search of adventure — it's ridiculously easy to find," wrote Least Heat-Moon.) Plus, the freelancer's life doesn't leave a lot of free time for building strength and endurance, so your wattage may vary.

Heck, your idea of what constitutes bicycle touring may vary. My default question about a bike these days is

how well it's suited to loaded travel, yet I just told you that my fitness is best suited to the sort of last-minute, lightweight getaway I made a while back — a three-day, 150-mile outing on rolling terrain with about 30 pounds of stuff, much of it journalism gear. I camped in motels, ate in restaurants, and had a high old time.

Who cares if you spend a lot of saddle time in the little ring, anyway? That's what it's there for, right? If you're not fetching along your own toilet, tub and sink — the porcelain variety, anyway — you may never even need those sought-after, increasingly elusive, itty-bitty gears.

But if a low end of 24 x 36 is a must-have item, well, Salsa has you covered there, too. They'll sell you a Vaya frame and fork for \$750, and you can spec' it out yourself. Play our Product Manager game at home. It'll take a little more time, and a lot more money, but you'll be able to assemble the component package that best suits your style of riding while product managers like Krueger keep urging suppliers to deliver wide-range touring groups.

And then all the blue highways can be yours, even the ones that wind steeply skyward. **AC**

Patrick O'Grady has written and cartooned about cycling since 1989 for VeloNews, Bicycle Retailer and Industry News, and a variety of other publications. To read more from Patrick, visit maddogmedia.wordpress.com.



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