THE APPROACHABLE, affordable do-it-all bike. It’s the cycling world’s yeti. Whenever I hear someone mention budget-minded versatility, my ears perk up, but I’m often left disappointed by the bicycle equivalent of a grainy, Photoshopped image of a paunchy middle-aged man in a gorilla suit. One person’s idea of affordability can leave another snorting with disbelief. To some versatility means that a given bicycle will work for road and criterium racing.

Although many look to the large bicycle manufacturers for jack-of-all-trades bikes, those in the know seek out the smaller brands. Norco is one brand that has embraced its ability to produce niche bicycles. The Cabot I tested over the course of several months may be a true jack-of-all-trades bike.

Versatility rules

The Cabot is categorized as a touring bike, and its geometry, full complement of braze-ons, and triple chainring drivetrain certainly fit that bill, but it’s also a great commuter, road bike, and gravel-exploring machine.

I was unable to take the Cabot on an extended tour, but as a grocery-getter and commuter, it excelled. With a rear rack and panniers, a frame pump (thanks for the pump peg!), bottle cages, and blinky lights installed, I
rode the Norco all over town, dodging potholes, cars, and ear-budded runners. I’ll admit that commuting isn’t a perfect touring substitute, but the Cabot did carry the largest loads I packed on it with aplomb. On a return run from the hardware store, I was able to see how capably the Norco handled a load. With a gallon of degreaser, a few new tools, some hardware and various other miscellaneous items in the panniers, the Cabot tracked true.

You would never mistake the Norco for a race bike, thanks to its long and low geometry, but the Cabot is lovely to ride on bumpy or dirt roads and is a very stable descender. If you were inclined, fitting a pair of cyclocross tires would make this bike a very capable gravel road-exploring machine that would even bring smiles on mild singletrack.

Whether you’re riding on tarmac, bike paths, or mixed dirt-gravel roads, the Cabot is made for the long haul. Its geometry, fittings, and running gear all contribute to offer a great bike for all types of riding.

The heart of the beast
Norco’s approach to a touring bike frameset is somewhat unique. The Cabot is sold with cantilever rim brakes, rim brake-compatible rims, and the associated frame fittings. But look to the hubs and dropouts of the frame and fork and you’ll notice that they are all disc brake compatible. If a Cabot owner wanted, he could easily purchase a pair of mechanical disc calipers (I recommend Avid BB7s), a pair of rotors, and run new brake cables. Stopping power would increase tremendously.

This approach is something akin to sticking your toe in the pool to judge the water temperature. But I’m not slagging on Norco for doing so. Fortune may favor the bold, but sometimes giving consumers options pays off too.

Sweating the details
As mentioned the Cabot frame is a

---

**17. Crankset:** Shimano FC-R563, 50/39/30
**18. Cassette:** Shimano Tiagra 12-30T 10spd
**19. Brake/Shift levers:** Shimano 105 ST-5703 silver
**20. Front derailer:** Shimano 105
**21. Rear derailer:** Shimano 105
**22. Brakes:** Tektro CR710 Cantilevers, silver
**23. Pedals:** Alloy body/Alloy cage, silver
**24. Seat post:** Alloy, silver
**25. Stem:** Norco High Rise 35 degree, silver
**26. Handlebar:** Ritchey BioMax, 44cm
**27. Headset:** FSA Orbit DL, silver
**28. Saddle:** Norco Gel Vacuum w/Chromo rails

---

**GEARING IN INCHES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>21</th>
<th>24</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>112.5</td>
<td>103.8</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contact:** Norco Bicycles, Eastern Head Office, 105 Queens Plate Dr. #1 Etobicoke, ON M9W 7K4, norco.com.
bit of a transformer, capable of running either cantilevers or disc brakes. It also comes with a bounty of rack and fender mounts, a pump peg, and three water-bottle cage mounts. And all those mounts will work whether you’re using rim or disc brakes, which shows good forethought on Norco’s part.

With one possible exception, the parts hung on the Cabot are fantastic. Norco starts with Shimano’s reliable 105 triple drivetrain and shifters. Tektro supplies its excellent CR710 cantilevers, possibly the most effective, easy-to-set-up cantilever brakes I’ve ever used.

The 36-hole Wheel Master WTB Freedom Ryder 23 rims seem robust but will probably work better for disc-brake applications as they have a noticeable seam on the machined braking surface. The rear wheel also required some truing after the first couple of rides, but it seemed to bed in after that, staying true for the remainder of the test period.

Those rims are laced to Shimano cup-and-cone hubs that, with maintenance, should run well for thousands of miles. Sapim stainless steel spokes and brass nipples are used to connect hubs to rims.

 Mounted on those wheels are Continental CityRide 32mm tires with reflective sidewalls. They offer good puncture resistance and wear like iron, although supple is not a word I’d use to describe them.

The FSA Orbit DL headset has retained ball bearings, not sealed bearings. You’ll definitely want to keep it greased up and check it before long outings or wet commuting. Replacing it with a sealed unit from FSA or another reputable headset maker might be a good upgrade.

The nice, wide Ritchey BioMax handlebar offered great all-day comfort. I particularly liked the swept-back tops that eased wrist tension. The bar tape included with the bike offered great grip — if little padding. But that’s all a matter of personal preference.

As sold, the Cabot’s stock stem creates an extremely upright position. This is great for those with limited flexibility or riders who prefer to be bolt upright. I found it a bit too much and swapped out the stem to suit my preferences, an easy fix. Likewise the Norco Gel Vacuum saddle didn’t do it for me. With a Brooks B17 mounted, I was happy.

As a true touring bike, though, the Cabot is lacking in gearing. The Norco’s 30-tooth granny ring and 30-tooth largest cog are low enough for challenging riding or commuting with a load, but for extended loaded touring the combo is likely too tall. The addition of a mountain bike rear derailleur and an 11-36 cassette would remedy the situation for most cyclists. But that also adds to the cost of the bike as a true long haul-touring machine.

Affordability

Whether you have the coin in hand to buy one or not, at $1,215 the Norco’s price is incredibly competitive for such a well-equipped bicycle. In comparison, Surly’s Long Haul Trucker, another affordable favorite, retails for $1,350 but doesn’t have the ability to upgrade to disc brakes. Surly’s disc brake touring bike sits at $1,550. If you’re looking for something less ubiquitous than Surly’s excellent bikes, the low-key, black-only Norco may fit the bill.

Living up to its name

In summing up the Norco, the Cabot’s namesake is worth mentioning. Giovanni Caboto, or John Cabot as his English benefactors called him, was a 15th-century explorer commonly believed to be the first European to set foot on the North American mainland since the Vikings in the eleventh century. He was also the first European to search for the Northwest Passage — no slouch of an adventurer.

In 1497, he landed, according to the Canadian and British governments, on Newfoundland, which makes the name of this Canadian bicycle all the more apropos.

Ultimately, whether Norco’s Cabot lives up to its namesake as a traveler is up to the rider. It is a capable, reliable machine for exploring, whether you’re riding around town, down a dirt road, or across a continent. 

Nick Legan lives in Boulder, Colorado, but firmly believes that adventure is a state of mind and has little to do with geography. As a former pro cycling team mechanic, he’s seen parking lots the world over and a few great roads along the way.