

The SPECIALIZED SEQUOIA

Light touring in the 21st century is supremely elegant.

by John Schubert

A year or two ago, *Bicycling Magazine* asked several industry luminaries what they thought the best bike ever built was. Grant Petersen, founder of Rivendell Bicycles, nominated the 1983 Specialized Sequoia. I own a 1983 Sequoia. It is indeed my favorite bike. I've ridden lighter bikes, stiffer bikes, touring bikes with wider tires, bikes with more sprockets and braze-ons, but the Sequoia is a terrific day-to-day bike that I have used many times for motel touring and sag-supported touring.

Specialized stopped making the Sequoia shortly after they made mine. For about 15 years, they showed no interest in touring bikes, light or otherwise.

But some good things do return, and for the 2003 model year, Specialized introduced a 21st-century rendition of the Sequoia. They have done a masterful job of meeting the old bike's mission profile with new technology. It's still a light touring bike with three chainrings and medium-width tires, optimized for the same mix of uses as the old one. It is sleeker, more refined and more comfortable.

The lugged-steel frame of my old bike has made way for a beautifully made welded aluminum frame (not painted, but clear-coated, the better to show off the extraordinary welds). The classic fork of the old bike has given way to a carbon-fiber fork with a shock-absorbing elastomer insert. And there is a long list of design modernizations.

Take shock absorption, for example. In no fewer than four places, this bike has comfort-enhancing technology that didn't exist 20 years ago. It has a shock-absorbing, telescoping seat post and a Specialized Body Geometry saddle, with innovative shape and padding. The handlebar tape has a thin layer of gel padding and the fork has the aforementioned shock-absorbing insert.

Skeptics will find themselves pleasantly surprised by this stuff. It really works, without being obtrusive. The Body Geometry saddle and suspension seatpost don't have the waterbed-like feel of other gel saddles I've known; the padding on the handlebar tape is thin enough to be



The new 2003 Sequoia. Below, the author's 1983 model.



inconspicuous, and the fork insert doesn't detract from the bike's alert road handling. The overall effect deserves high praise: at the end of a long ride, you'll feel more comfortable than you would on those other bikes. But most of the time, you won't even notice that you're riding a bike stuffed with "comfort" features.

The Body Geometry handlebars are their own conversation piece. The stem rotates, so as you raise the bars they come closer to you. This has become a common feature on bikes with Aheadset headsets, and in my opinion it's an excellent trade-off for the old-fashioned telescoping stems that came with the inferior headsets we used for more than a century.

Once you get past the handlebar stem, you notice that the bars have a shape you've not seen before, adding a few curves to the classic maes handlebar shape. Even skeptics should like these

Specs: Specialized Sequoia

Sizes available: 38.5, 44, 47.5, 49.5, 51.5 cm. Bikes have a rising top tube so pick a size smaller than your classic size (i.e., a 47.5 cm Sequoia fits a rider who would take a 54 cm classic bike). **Size tested:** 47.5 cm

Frame dimensions: **Seat tube:** 47.5 cm or 18.5 inches (center to top) **Top tube:** 21 1/4" (54 cm) (horizontal distance, 21 1/2") **Head angle:** 72° **Seat angle:** 74° **Chainstays:** 17 (43 cm) **BB height:** 10 1/2" **Front center:** 23 3/8" **Fork rake:** 1 1/2" (44 mm) **Trail:** 2 3/4" **Wheelbase:** 39 5/8" (1007 mm)

Standover height: 30 5/8"

Frame & fork: Welded over-size aluminum, clear-coated. Butted aluminum frame with threaded bosses for three water bottles and rear rack. Slotted brake cable stops. Aheadset headset. Carbon-fiber fork with elastomer insert. Vertical rear dropouts.

Rims: Alexrims AT400 black anodized; measured width, 18.1 mm **Front spokes:** 28, 14 gauge, radial **Rear spokes:** 32, 14 gauge, cross-three **Hubs:** Black anodized, with Specialized quick-release

skewers. **Tires:** Specialized Turbo long-wear high grip compound 700x26C.

Measured width, 26.7 mm (1.05 inch) **Crank:** Specialized 175 mm forged with 32/42/52 chainrings. **Front Derailleur:** Shimano Sora triple **Rear derailleur:** Shimano Tiagra **Shift levers:** Shimano STI Sora Flight Deck integrated shift/brake levers **Cog cassette:** Shimano Hyperglide CS-HG50 12-13-15-17-19-21-23-25 **Chain:** CN-HG50 Narrow

Saddle: Specialized Body Geometry Milano. **Seatpost:** Specialized shock absorbing; two-bolt microadjust saddle clamp; 340 mm long, 27.2 mm diameter **Brakes:** side-pull.

Pedals: Road style with nylon toe clips and straps.

Gearing in inches:

	32	42	52
12	72	95	117
13	66	87	108
15	58	76	94
17	51	67	83
19	45	60	74
21	41	54	67
23	38	49	61
25	35	45	56

Price: \$880. May vary.

Manufacturer: Specialized, 15130 Concord Circle, Morgan Hill, CA 95037. 408.779.6229 www.specialized.com.

bars. They offer many viable hand positions and feel quite natural.

But the biggest handlebar news is the return of the brake assist lever, now known as the "interceptor lever" or "top mounted brake lever." The assist levers of old were mechanically crude. These aren't. They are precision machined, and they work, very well, by being neatly spliced into the brake-cable path. Curmudgeons who detest any and all assist levers better run for cover, because these new assist levers are getting rave reviews from many sources. On the Sequoia, they dovetail

with the Body Geometry handlebars to provide a great hand position with braking control from the tops. That hand position feels like riding a city bike with upright bars, not like riding a dropped-bar bike with afterthought extension levers.

The Sequoia comes in three trim levels. We picked the cheapest level, the \$880 Sequoia Sport, for this road test. All three have the same frame and fork, but the fancier models have high-zoot wheels with paired-spoke arrangements. The Sport has traditional spoked wheels (if you call 28 radial spokes in the front wheel traditional)

and is therefore the best of the three models for someone packing a rack trunk or small set of motel-dweller's panniers.

Why 28 radial spokes? Because manufacturers now know how to build a 28-spoke wheel that stays in true in normal use. Radial spokes work fine in the front wheel (but not in the rear wheel, where drivetrain forces demand tangential spacing to transmit your pedaling energy from hub to rim), and radial spokes are slightly shorter than tangential spokes. The shorter spokes save a tiny amount of weight and make the wheel slightly stiffer in response

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to side loads. The wheels are shod with tread-deprived Specialized 700 x 26C tires. There is ample clearance in the frame and fork for tires a size or two larger.

The more expensive Sequoia models retail for \$1,200 (the Expert) and \$1,630 (the Elite). For the additional money, you



get fancier drivetrain components and wheels that us shade-tree mechanics find much more difficult to true.

Much as we like the Sequoia, it's not all things to all people. Even as we stipulate

that it's not a touring bike, but rather a motel touring bike, we lament that it can't mount a front fender or a handlebar bag. And while a front rack arguably doesn't go with the Sequoia's mission profile, it absolutely, positively doesn't go with the Sequoia's carbon-fiber fork. The gearing is Shimano's typical sport tour gearing—high gear too high, low gear also too high. This is what we get when bicycles are designed in California, where you never have a six-month winter to get out of shape or a rainstorm during the riding season.

Still, though, the Sequoia is a breakthrough. Specialized has made a deliberate decision to flirt with the touring market. Rack mounts, fairly wide tire clearance, and a bevy of superbly designed comfort features set the Sequoia apart from the plethora of racing-bikes-with-three-chainwheels on the market today.



I'm not the only one who likes this bike. The bike's sales exceeded Specialized's projections by a stunning margin and, therefore, Specialized plans to follow through with other designs along a similar vein. So, we say with enthusiasm, watch this space for future developments. **AC**

Modernize the thinking of Technical Editor John Schubert with your edifying comments, directed to schubley@aol.com.