

JAMIS AURORA ELITE

A bike for all reasons

by Patrick O'Grady

Reviewing the occasional bicycle for a magazine is like browsing at a well-stocked shop owned by an old friend, or maybe a relative, one to whom you don't owe money and never tormented as a child. There's no sales pitch, and sometimes you get to experiment with unfamiliar technology. The bicycle is delivered to you rather than the other way around, and you can take some time getting to know it, because that short "test drive" in

the shop parking lot or around the block really doesn't unearth the hidden flaws in an era when, frankly, it's tough to find a crappy bike, as long as it's not being sold in some cavernous warehouse alongside pallets of iPods, diapers, and jumbo cans of creamed corn.

And I'm happy to report that the 2011 Jamis Aurora Elite isn't crappy.

If that sounds like a back-handed compliment, it's not intended as such. I made the \$1,700 Aurora Elite my daily rider for a few weeks, and it quickly joined the club of multipurpose steel bikes I've come to appreciate so much, capable of changing personalities at the twist of an Allen key and box-end wrench.

The 28.5-pound Aurora Elite can handle a recreational ride with friends or family, get you to and from work, fetch stuff home from the store, and take you away from all that without turning a key and gulping dinosaur wine at over four dollars per gallon.

It's not a needy bike — hop aboard and it's content to roll right along with minimal instruction, leaving you free to pay attention to your surroundings, which is the one of the advantages of cycling over driving, right? And mind you, I rode it during a La Niña April in



Colorado, which means wind with a side of wind in wind sauce. It stayed rooted to the road as firmly as Odin's eight-legged horse.

The frame set is an attractive antique bronze with inconspicuous decals, an extended head tube with reinforced collars, and a pump peg. Its Reynolds 631 main tubes, with chromoly stays and lugged, semi-sloping fork, soak up all the feedback a crumbling Colorado road can throw at a rider. The matching rear rack with included three-cord bungee is a thoughtful touch and comes stamped with a weight limit (25kg/55.1 pounds) for impatient types who chuck the owner's manual before loading the panniers.

The easily adjustable NVO Components F-2 stem makes finding your comfort zone simplicity itself, and the unbranded handlebars are plenty wide

enough to support a handlebar bag, a cyclometer, a bell and a pair of top-mounted auxiliary brake levers if you like that sort of aftermarket upgrade for bumpy roads and hairy descents (I do).

The wheels are sensible without being overbearing — 32-hole Mavic A119 double-wall rims laced to Formula alloy hubs with 14-gauge stainless DT Champion spokes and topped off with 700C x 32 folding Vittoria Randonneur Pro tires. I loved Vittoria sewups when I was

racing cyclo-cross, and I'm equally happy with the company's touring clinchers; I have them on three bikes here in goat-head country and have yet to suffer a puncture, something I couldn't say about their tubular ancestors.

Less familiar to me were the SRAM Apex drivetrain, Avid BB-7 disc brakes and flat anodized alloy fenders. I have a SRAM Rival group on a 2008 Jamis Supernova cyclo-cross bike, but this was my first introduction to Avid discs. And those fenders — well, more about them later.

Billed on the SRAM website as boasting "a wider gear range than the most popular triple combinations," the Apex group uses a rear derailleur that can handle an 11-32 cassette. Pairing that with the 50/34-tooth FSA Gossamer Compact

crankset yields a low end of 34 x 32 (28.7 gear inches), which in hilly Colorado is fine for riding unencumbered or with light commuter/credit-card loads, both of which I did.

Greg Webber, vice president of product development for Jamis, conceded that this setup is “not necessarily billed as the adventure cyclist grupp.”

But given that the 50/34 x 11-32 system would be nearly as accommodating as the occasionally fiddly STI road shifter/MTB derailleur triple setups commonly seen on other bikes, he added, “We were liking the weight reduction and shifting simplicity of the double-chainring drivetrain.”

I appreciate the uncluttered look of the SRAM setup — no free-ranging cables snaking this way and that — and found Apex's shifting crisp and efficient, though a bit stiff and something of a long throw when shifting from the little ring to the big one, unlike the Rival shifter on my Supernova. I have small hands, and crashes have severely dislocated the birdie and thumb on the left one, so I notice things like this — but other, less damaged riders I know have noticed it too.

No matter. When I loaded the bike with about 35 pounds of gear — panniers front and rear, plus a handlebar bag — I wasn't spending a lot of time in the big ring. I deliberately sought out some of our steeper climbs and quickly found myself bottomed out, with no bailout cog — and I love me some bailout cog, especially at the end of a long day in the saddle when food and drink are only to be had atop some hellish ascent.

Should room and board sit at the bottom of your final hill, you'll appreciate the stopping power of the Avid BB-7 brakes. As a longtime cantilever user and card-carrying Luddite, I'm not yet sold on discs, mostly because I have little experience with their care and feeding. A front-rear combo of Paul's Neo-Retro and Touring cantis, on the other hand, I understand well enough to handle simple field repairs.

I've heard and appreciate the many sensible arguments for discs over rim brakes, but I was a late and reluctant convert to linear-pulls on the mountain bike, too, so you might take that into consideration. And for more intelligent

advice, see Jan Heine's brake-choice breakdown in the April 2011 issue.

Something else to think about when buying a disc-equipped bike is what sort of front rack you'll need. My old Jandd low-rider wouldn't clear the disc hardware; an Old Man Mountain Cold Springs rack fit fine, but perched the front load a bit high for confident steering. Jamis's Webber suggested a Tubus Tara, but after a visit with Wayne Boroughs of The Touring Store (www.touringstore.com) I went with the Tubus Ergo, which has more adjustability built

in than a subprime mortgage.

Other nits worth picking:

- I encountered quite a bit of toe-tire overlap on the Aurora Elite, as I did with the '08 Supernova, but this may have more to do with me than with the designers, though Jamis sees fit to discuss the issue in the FAQ section of its website. I'm tough to fit at six feet tall with a longish torso and legs that are less so. And once I became aware of the overlap I promptly forgot about it. Just don't try track-standing at a stoplight or clean-

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Specifications: Jamis Aurora Elite

Price: \$1,700

Sizes available: 47cm, 50cm, 53cm, 55cm, 57cm, 59cm, 62cm.

Size tested: 57cm

Weight: 28.5 pounds without pedals

TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS

Seat tube: 22 inches, center to top

Top tube: 22 inches effective

Head tube: 6.5 inches

Head tube angle: 72°

Seat tube angle: 72°

Chainstays: 17 3/8 inches

Seat height above ground: 39 3/4 inches

Crank spindle height above ground: 11 inches

Fork rake: 1 31/32 inches (50mm)

Wheelbase: 40 1/4 inches

Standover height: 32 5/8 inches

Frame and fork: Reynolds 631 seamless air-hardened chromoly main tubes. Double-tapered heat-treated chromoly stays, extended head tube with reinforced collars, custom laser-cut road-disc dropouts with double eyelets. Lugged semi-sloping chromoly fork with low-rider braze-ons, disc-brake tab, forged dropouts with single eyelet. Threaded bosses for two water bottles.

Headset: Ritchey Logic V2, Aheadset, 1 1/8 inch

Rims: Mavic A119 double-wall black, 32-hole

Spokes: DT Champion 14g stainless, cross three

Hubs: Formula alloy disc hubs

Tires: Vittoria Randonneur Pro, folding, 700C x 32

Crank: FSA Gossamer compact. 175mm arms, 50/34 chainrings

Front derailleur: SRAM Apex

Rear derailleur: SRAM Apex



Shift/brake levers: SRAM Apex DoubleTap

Brakes: Avid BB-7 mechanical discs with 160mm rotors

Pedals: None

Stem: NVO Components F-2 easy height adjust, 6° x 120mm

Saddle: Jamis Touring Sport with hollow chromoly rails

Seat post: Unbranded, one-piece fully forged

Handlebar: Unbranded, butted, 125mm drop, 44cm (center to center)

Accessories: Blade Runner flat alloy anodized fenders, alloy rear rack.

Cog cassette: SRAM PG-1050, 11-12-13-15-17-19-22-25-28-32 10-speed

Chain: KMC DX10SC

Gearing in inches:

	50	34
11	122.7	83.5
12	112.5	76.5
13	103.8	70.6
15	90.0	61.2
17	79.4	54.0
19	71.1	48.3
22	61.4	41.7
25	54.0	36.7
28	48.2	32.8
32	42.2	28.7

Contact: jamisbikes.com, 800-222-0570.

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ing any single-track switchbacks.

• The flat anodized alloy fenders are pretty, but I wondered how dry they'd keep me on a rainy day. I thought I'd never get a chance to find out, as we were enduring our driest winter and spring in years. But in early April, we finally got a nice rain that left some puddles on the deck and I rode through all of them. You're going to get wet. I did, anyway.

"We've always been a form-follows-function kind of company, but in this one instance we lost our bearings a bit,"

said Webber. "We saw these in wood and thought they'd be really cool in flat aluminum, and they are. But they're probably not as absolutely practical as they could be."

Probably not. But then bicycle touring isn't exactly practical, either. If you want to stay comfy and dry and climb hills without effort, drive a car.

Or, if you'd prefer to stick to two wheels, and all it would take to make you content is a few more creature comforts than the 2011 Aurora Elite provides, the 2012 version will sport a different

set of fenders, cupped for full coverage with adjustable stays and mudflaps, and return to the traditional Shimano 105 triple (50/39/30) — but with a 12-30 cassette and Dura-Ace bar-end shifters.

You'll have to wait until October 2011, though. And by then you may be thinking more about hut trips than road trips.

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. The number of bikes in his Colorado garage is an exact match for the number of voices in his head.