



NOVARA MAZAMA

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

→ MOUNT MAZAMA was once a volcano, and as volcanoes sometimes do, it blew up.

Its collapsed caldera came to enclose Crater Lake, and its name came from an 1896 journey there by The Mazamas, a Portland mountaineering club whose founders had previously scaled etymological heights by extending the Nahuatl word for deer, *mazatl*, to include the Rocky Mountain goat.

A mountain goat, no matter what you call it, can go pretty much anywhere it pleases. And so can the Novara Mazama from REI.

The Mazama is REI's 10-speed entry in the adventure-bike sweepstakes. It's not a fat bike — that's a whole other species of mountain goat — but it's stout enough to take you to a lot of the same places the big boys can go, and it'll be a whole lot easier to carry up the stairs once you get home. Plus it's light on the wallet at \$1,099 and more fun to ride than a *mazatl*. Deer. Whatever.

A sticker on the downtube assigns the Mazama a 1+ rating, meaning REI deems it "suitable for road riding and smooth trails." But once you get tired of that sort of thing, it's easily coaxed around moderately mountain-bikey terrain — twisty singletrack, small rock gardens, bumpy ups and downs.

Cyndi Mundhenk, product line manager for Novara, says the Mazama

SPECIFICATIONS

NOVARA MAZAMA

Price: \$1,099

Sizes available: Small, medium, large, extra large

Size tested: Large (for riders 5-9 to 6-0)

Weight: 26.9 lb. (without pedals)

TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS

1. Seat tube: 53.5cm (center to top)

2. Top tube: 54.5cm (actual)

3. Head tube angle: 71°

4. Seat tube angle: 73°

5. Chainstays: 44.5cm

6. Bottom bracket drop: 70mm

7. Crank spindle height above ground: 280mm

8. Fork offset: 50mm

9. Wheelbase: 1060mm

10. Standover height: 82.5cm

11. Frame: 4130 chromoly. Three bottle bosses; top-tube shift-cable routing with inline adjusters; downtube brake-cable guides; rack and fender mounts; replaceable derailleur hanger; pump peg

12. Fork: Chromoly. Rack and fender mounts at dropouts, crown and mid-fork; low-rider mounts at mid-fork; dynamo-cable guides on right fork blade; brake-cable guides on left fork blade

13. Rims: Alex ATD 470, 32-hole

14. Spokes: DT Swiss Competition

15. Hubs: Formula, 32-hole

16. Tires: Clement X-Plor MSO, 700c x 40mm

17. Crankset: Shimano Deore FC-T611, 175mm, 48/36/26 chainrings



- 18. Cassette:** Shimano 10-speed, 11,13,15,17,19,21,24,28,32,36
- 19. Chain:** KMC Z99 10-speed
- 20. Shift levers:** MicroShift BS-M10 bar-cons, 10-speed
- 21. Brake levers:** TRP RRL-A
- 22. Front derailleur:** Shimano Deore
- 23. Rear derailleur:** Shimano Deore
- 24. Brakes:** TRP Spyre mechanical discs
- 25. Rotors:** Shimano Center-Lock SM-RT64, 160mm
- 26. Pedals:** n/a
- 27. Seat post:** Novara, two-bolt clamp, 27.2mm
- 28. Stem:** Novara, 110mm, 7° rise, 31.8mm four-bolt clamp
- 29. Handlebar:** Novara All-Terrain 6061 aluminum, 31.8mm
- 30. Bar tape:** Velo
- 31. Headset:** FSA with Head Block turn limiter
- 32. Saddle:** WTB Pure V

GEARING IN INCHES

	48	36	26
11	119.2	89.4	64.6
13	100.9	75.7	54.6
15	87.4	65.6	47.4
17	77.1	57.9	41.8
19	69.0	51.8	37.4
21	62.4	46.8	33.8
24	54.6	41.0	29.6
28	46.8	35.1	25.4
32	41.0	30.7	22.2
36	36.4	27.3	19.7

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is a perfect fit for REI’s “free-range adventure” customer, who may ride the road to work Monday through Friday and then get dirty on the weekend.

“It’s a gravel grinder for the person who doesn’t race but is more interested in a comfortable way to ride the same places with options for camping,” she said.

Toward that end, the Mazama comes with quad-friendly gearing — a Shimano Deore triple crankset (48/36/26), Deore derailleurs, and an 11-36 cassette. You also get three sets of bottle bosses, rack and fender mounts, guides on the right fork blade for a cable should you decide to add dynamo lighting, and a pump peg.

Though the fork has the usual double eyelets at the dropouts, REI’s designers even thought to include a set of fender bosses on the inside of both fork blades, which lets you avoid sharing the low-rider mounts with a rack, the unsightly bending of fender stays around the front brake caliper, or hose-clamping the stays to the rack.

“It makes routing the fender stays cleaner and easier than having to custom-bend them around the disc caliper,” said lead designer Greg Golding. “Also, most stock fender stays are not long enough to make this bend and provide the necessary clearance for a large tire.”

And the stock tires are indeed large — Clement X-Plor MSO foldable knobbies in 700x40mm. You can go larger if you like, all the way to 45mm, though you may be pushing the envelope fender-wise. And anyway, all the cool kids will stick with the stock tires, if only because the “MSO” is a nod to the airport code for Missoula, Montana, home to (wait for it) the Adventure Cycling Association.

Given its big rubber and steel frameset I didn’t expect the Mazama to bound away from a dead stop like a startled deer, and it doesn’t. But once I got it moving, the bike ambled along just fine in Albuquerque, my home

since last fall. It rolled placidly on pavement of all varieties and sailed serenely around the local singletrack.

The mixed-condition MSOs, with a center ridge of closely spaced knobs for pavement and shoulder lugs for dirt, are rated for 55-90 PSI. But at 70, they gave me some harsh feedback on roads surfaced with heavy chip-seal, and on sandy trails 60 was too stiff for confident cornering; I rarely ran more than 60 on road or 40 off-road. The MSO is durable, too — I came home once with cactus spines in both tires but didn't notice them until the next day. Both tires were still plump.

The double-buttressed 4130 chromoly frame is a flat cayenne red, a fine match for the Sandias at sunset, with blue accents on the lower fork blades and seat stays and badging that borders on the invisible. I liked it; it seemed a fine workmanlike hue that wouldn't be offended by contact with a trailside rock or a downtown bike rack. It looks a little like some Portland hipster went after the frame with a rattle-can of Krylon.

The wildly flared Novara All-Terrain handlebar is intended to improve handling while descending on rough terrain, but I spent most of my time on the hoods of the TRP RRL-A brake levers rather than in the drops, though they were shallow and easily reached by an old saddle tramp. That flare — to 60cm at the MicroShift BS-M10 bar-cons — was a little too generous in certain situations, such as negotiating narrow fence gates at trailheads or running the occasional gantlet of cholla.

Those third-party shifters are how REI got to that nifty gearing, in case you were wondering. Shimano's road and mountain

components quit making nice with each other with the advent of 10-speed groups, and the only way to command a 10-speed Deore drivetrain was to look elsewhere for the shifters, according to Golding (see pp. 13-15 for more).

"Shimano bar-cons are not compatible with their mountain rear derailleurs — only road," he said. "This puts a limit on the gear range that we found undesirable. The MicroShift bar-cons with a Shimano rear derailleur allow us to get to the gear range (specifically the low gear) that is essential on this style of bike."

Also useful is a strong set of stoppers, and the TRP Spyre mechanical discs are certainly that. The double-piston design provided smooth, predictable braking from both hoods and hooks, and without a single squeal, too.

Golding said that two-piston punch elevates the Spyre above other brakes.

"The lever feel is better," he said. "Power and modulation are better than most mechanicals and it is much easier to get the rotor centered between the pads. It's really the first advancement in mechanical disc brakes in years."

I found the front brake caliper's actuation arm a bit too close to the spokes for comfort, though. While climbing out of the saddle and under heavy braking I could hear the arm brushing against at least one pair where they crossed.

After I raised the issue with Mundhenk in late January, she told me that REI's design and tech-services people had double-checked a sample bike and thought its front-wheel setup was within reason.

"They believe there is adequate clearance with our sample under normal

riding conditions, but recognize that the possibility of spoke contact is a concern under load and are in the process of investigating a larger test sample," she said. "We haven't had the bikes long enough to get any customer feedback, and the techs in our stores are usually very quick to point out issues."

Being a rim-brake kind of guy, I examined four other disc-equipped bikes — one with Spyres, one with Avid BB5 Roads, and two with BB7-S Roads — and found their caliper/spokes clearance all over the map. One of the BB7s was nearly as snug a fit up front as the Mazama's Spyre.

Then I consulted two mechanics whose chops far exceed mine. Both suggested replacing the Mazama's 160mm rotor with a 180. Instead, I decided to take the cheap and easy way out, loosening the front wheel's spokes a quarter turn on the rotor side, tightening the others by the same amount, and finally realigning the caliper. This gave me about a business card's worth of clearance between actuation arm and spokes, and that disturbing "tink tink tink" sound went away.

And so did I, right back to the roads and trails, and without incident, too. My most recent outing on the Mazama was in a light snow, on some moderate singletrack. I didn't crater, and the bike didn't blow up. Together we pranced around the whitening cacti like a mazatl. Goat. Whatever. **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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