



TUMBLEWEED PROSPECTOR

BY NICK LEGAN

→ WHAT'S IN A NAME? Well, if we're talking about a Toyota Camry, perhaps not much. The connotations of the word Camry are vague at best, which is probably intentional. But the mental imagery conjured by the Tumbleweed Prospector is much richer and more evocative. A dusty track heading off toward distant hills comes to mind. As does a worn, wide-brim leather hat atop the head of a grizzled man carrying a pickax up a narrow, mountain path.

Such images embody arduous work and remote areas, much like backcountry bike touring. And because of that, the name of Tumbleweed's Prospector couldn't be more apropos. Getting to the quiet places in the world can take some doing, but this versatile bike is up to the task, thanks to careful design and quality execution.

Daniel Molloy, a former Rivendell employee, is the man behind the Prospector. His experience, both professional and recreational, informed many of the decisions he made when designing the Tumbleweed. He focused his attention on maximizing versatility and reliability.

Versatility

The chromoly Prospector frameset is capable of using all sorts of wheels and tires. You can choose your level of flotation, traction, and weight based on where you plan to take the Tumbleweed. If you expect snow or long sections of

TUMBLEWEED PROSPECTOR

Price: \$4,300 as tested

Sizes available: S, M, L, XL

Size tested: M

Weight: 31.5 lbs. (without pedals)

TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS

- Stack: 621.9mm
- Reach: 413.9mm
- Head tube length: 120mm
- Head tube angle: 69.5°
- Seat tube length: 432mm (center to top)
- Seat tube angle: 72.5°
- Top tube length: 610mm (effective)
- Chainstays: 458.5mm
- Bottom bracket drop: 63.5mm
- Fork offset: 53mm
- Fork trail: 83mm
- Wheelbase: 1133mm
- Standover: 808mm
- Crank spindle height above ground: 293mm



SPECIFICATIONS

- **Frame:** Tumbleweed Prospector, double-butted, heat-treated chromoly, investment cast BB yoke, 73mm Tumbleweed exclusive Phil Wood eccentric BB
- **Fork:** Tumbleweed Prospector unicrown, 135mm symmetrical
- **Headset:** Cane Creek 40
- **Rims:** WTB Scraper
- **Hubs:** Rohloff Speedhub rear, Surly New singlespeed front, 32h, 135mm QR
- **Tires:** WTB Ranger 27.5 x 3.0in
- **Crankset:** Surly OD crank, 175mm, 30T
- **Bottom bracket:** Surly threaded
- **Cog:** Rohloff, 16T
- **Brake levers:** Shimano XT M8020
- **Shift levers:** Rohloff twist shifter

- **Brakes:** Shimano XT M8020 hydraulic disc
- **Stem:** Dimension, 90mm
- **Handlebar:** Thomson Trail, 750mm wide x 12mm rise
- **Seatpost:** Thomson Elite, 31.6mm
- **Saddle:** WTB Silverado
- **Gear Inches:** 76, 66.9, 58.8, 51.8, 45.6, 40.1, 35.3, 31.1, 27.4, 24.0, 21.2, 18.7, 16.4, 14.5

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sand, a set of 26 x 4.0in. fat bike tires can be installed (but only with either a singlespeed drivetrain or an internal gear hub). If you want to maximize rollover in technical terrain, a set of 29+ wheels can do the job. And if you want to save a bit of weight, throw on a pair of 27.5+ wheels and tires.

Many fat bikes can also handle all the wheel sizes mentioned above, but the Tumbleweed is set apart in its ability to maintain a normal mountain bike Q Factor. That is to say that unlike a fat bike with a wider pedal stance (or tread), you can run a regular mountain bike crank. This is made possible by a clever cast bottom bracket yoke that maximizes clearance for both the tire and crank. On our test bike, a set of Surly cranks cleared the chainstays with millimeters to spare, but the bike is stiff enough that this wasn't a concern.

That clever steel casting also incorporates a 73mm eccentric home for the threaded bottom bracket that is produced exclusively for Tumbleweed by Phil Wood. This allows the tensioning of a singlespeed drivetrain or the use of a Rohloff or other internal gear hub. It also allows users to adjust bottom bracket height when swapping between wheel sizes.

Anna Schwinn (an engineer whose last name is exactly what you think it is) designed the dropouts and the bottom bracket yoke on the Prospector, and the bike arrives with a replaceable derailleur hanger and the slot needed to use a Rohloff hub. If a Rohloff isn't your preferred means of changing gears, the Prospector can also run front and rear derailleurs. (There are, however, some limitations on chainring sizes and crank dimensions when using exceptionally large tires.) The frame and fork also feature all the rack, fender, and cage mounts you could ever dream of. You could move house using the Tumbleweed if you needed to.

At the front end of the Prospector is an oversized head tube that is compatible with 100–120mm travel 29er suspension forks or Rockshox's Bluto fat bike fork. The Bluto is particularly attractive because it can clear any of the wheel and tire combinations mentioned above.

While designed as an off-road touring bike on which most builds will use a flat

bar, the Prospector can also be built as a dropbar bike. It acts as a blank canvas upon which intrepid adventurers can paint their preferred bike configurations.

Reliability

Finding yourself in a wide-open expanse, dust covering your skin and a hot sun setting, there are few things that will sink your spirits faster than a broken derailleur or a slipping hub. Here the Tumbleweed shines some welcome light.

Quick-release front and rear dropouts mean that you can source a wheel virtually anywhere to keep you rolling in the event of a wheel failure. But perhaps even more ingenious is the fact that they use the same 135mm spacing front and rear. This means you can lace a “spare” rear hub in your front wheel to make sure you can keep rolling no matter what misfortune may befall your bike. Use a singlespeed hub on the front and a Rohloff for the rear. Use hubs with a freehub both front and rear and you can swap your cassette over if the rear fails. While Rohloffs and other quality hubs

are fantastically reliable, this will give you an extra dose of peace of mind.

Geometry

The Tumbleweed doesn't blindly follow the modern mountain bike geometry idea that a super-slack head tube angle and an extremely low bottom bracket is the way to go (all in the name of high-speed, downhill stability through technical terrain). And as a touring bike, this is good news. You don't ride a rigid or hardtail loaded touring bike the way you do an unloaded full-suspension trail bike.

Molloy explained further: “For the geometry of the Prospector, I wanted to find a balance that would work well for loaded bikepacking as well as unladen trail riding. For loaded touring and general around-town riding, I didn't want a super-slack head tube, and I also wanted the bike to steer nicely at low speed with fat tires, which is why I gave the fork a little bit more offset than a typical rigid or suspension fork, without doing anything too crazy. With a 120mm suspension fork, the head tube slackens out a bit more and

the bike can really stretch its legs.”

In my time on the Prospector, I came to view it as a predictable bike perfect for transporting a load, especially over rough terrain. When unladen, it isn't particularly spirited. In fact, it felt a bit harsh. But that overbuilt frame and fork shine when a combination of bikepacking bags and/or racks and panniers are attached.

The \$1,450 frameset is currently available via the Tumbleweed website. Complete bikes with a Rohloff will start around \$4,000 and are configured for each customer. Two color options are available, a bright New Mexico turquoise and a milder desert sandglow.

Molloy spent over a year and a half developing his prototypes for the Prospector, and his work has paid off. The Tumbleweed Prospector is a bike that can get you to those lonely, beautiful spots. Perhaps more important, it's also designed to get you back home again. **AG**

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