



# SALSA MARRAKESH

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

→ MARRAKESH, MOROCCO, enjoys a hot, semi-arid climate, so naturally I took my first ride on its namesake from Salsa Cycles during what New Mexicans feared would be the snowstorm of the century, which is about how often Marrakesh gets one.

Oh, Oukaïmeden, a smallish resort high in the Atlas Mountains some 45 miles south of the North African city, is said to get a bit of snow from time to time. I should have relocated there after a wintry, post-Christmas blast whitened trails and iced roads in Albuquerque, as the forecast for Oukaïmeden predicted a stretch of sunny weather with temperatures in the 50s.

But let's look at the sunny side of the street, shall we? At least I got a chance to road-test my Shimano XM7 wet-weather shoes and Showers Pass Storm Jacket (two slightly blue and quivering thumbs up); see how well mechanical discs work on fast, winding descents in slush (stopped with the rubber side down, thanks for asking); and form an initial seat-of-the-snowpants opinion of the \$1,599 Salsa Marrakesh.

I liked it. I bet I'd like it even more if I rode it in shorts, under sun, and over sand.

With its flared drops, fat tires, and beefy chromoly frameset ready for an arsenal of attachments, the new-for-2016 Marrakesh shares some style with global adventurers like the Cinelli Bootleg Hobo (see the April 2014

## SPECIFICATIONS SALSA MARRAKESH

**Price:** \$1,599

**Sizes available:** 50cm, 52cm, 54cm, 55cm, 57cm, 60cm

**Size tested:** 55cm

**Weight:** 32 lb. (without pedals, but with Alternator 135 Low Deck Rack)

## TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS

- 1. **Seat tube:** 560mm (center to top)
- 2. **Top tube:** 550mm (effective)
- 3. **Head tube angle:** 70.75°
- 4. **Seat tube angle:** 73°
- 5. **Chainstays:** 455-472mm
- 6. **Bottom bracket drop:** 77mm
- 7. **Crank spindle height above ground:** 279.4mm
- 8. **Fork offset:** 55mm
- 9. **Wheelbase:** 1054.9-1071.9mm
- 10. **Frame:** Cobra Kai butted 4130 chromoly. Three sets of bottle bosses; rack and fender

mounts; disc brake mounts; down tube/top tube guides and stops for shift/brake cables; spare spokes holder; kickstand plate; Alternator dropouts

- 11. **Fork:** Steel Marrakesh unicrown. 1 1/8-inch steerer, stainless double-eyelet dropouts, low-rider bosses, Three-Pack bosses
- 12. **Handlebar:** Salsa Cowchipper, 420 mm (center to center), 96mm reach, 116mm drop, 31.8mm clamp area
- 13. **Tape:** Salsa Gel, brown
- 14. **Stem:** Salsa Guide, 80mm, 31.8mm four-bolt clamp, +/- 15°
- 15. **Shift levers:** Microshift barcons, 9-speed
- 16. **Brake levers:** Tektro RL340
- 17. **Brakes:** Avid BB7 Road mechanical discs with inline cable adjusters and Avid G2CS rotors, 160mm front and rear
- 18. **Front derailleur:** Shimano Deore, 9-speed



- 19. **Rear derail:** Shimano Deore M592 Shadow, 9-speed SGS
- 20. **Crankset:** Shimano Deore 590, 172.5mm, 48/36/26T
- 21. **Cassette:** Shimano CS-HG300 9-speed, 11-34T
- 22. **Bottom bracket:** Shimano Deore SM-BB52
- 23. **Seat post:** Zoom SP-218, 27.2x400mm, two-bolt clamp
- 24. **Saddle:** Brooks B-17 Narrow
- 25. **Headset:** Cane Creek 1.0 ZS44/28.6 | 40.EC44/30
- 26. **Chain:** KMC X9
- 27. **Hubs:** Deore M475, 36h, 135mm rear
- 28. **Rims:** WTB SX-19
- 29. **Spokes:** Pillar, straight, black
- 30. **Tires:** Schwalbe Marathon Plus SmartGuard, 700c x 38mm
- 31. **Rack:** Salsa Alternator 135 Low Deck Rack (stock on the Marrakesh; also available aftermarket in summer 2016)

**GEARING IN INCHES**

	26	36	48
11	64.6	89.4	119.2
13	54.6	75.7	100.9
15	47.4	65.6	87.4
17	41.8	57.9	77.1
20	35.5	49.2	65.6
23	30.9	42.8	57.0
26	27.3	37.8	50.4
30	23.7	32.8	43.7
34	20.9	28.9	38.6

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edition of *Adventure Cyclist*), and the Novara Mazama (reviewed exactly a year later).

I reviewed a cousin, Salsa’s Vaya 2, in the August/September 2014 *Adventure Cyclist* and groused about its lack of a proper granny gear. The 2016 Vaya now has one, down around 25 gear inches. And so, too, does the Marrakesh — 26x34, or about 21 gear inches (see page 13 for more about gear inches) — which gives you a fighting chance of beating anyone riding a donkey to the Oukaïmeden chairlift.

And you’ll need it, too, because the Marrakesh is a real tank, something Bernard Montgomery might have used against Erwin Rommel in North Africa had the second Battle of El Alamein been fought on bicycles.

My 55cm Marrakesh arrived at Two Wheel Drive bike shop in Albuquerque weighing 32 pounds without pedals (but with a rear Alternator 135 Low Deck Rack). After I fitted it with Shimano M540 pedals, SKS fenders, a Tubus Ergo low-rider rack, two Blackburn stainless bottle cages, Cateye Velo 7 computer, Mirrycle Omnibell, Princeton Tec headlight, 4D Toplight taillight and Jandd Mini Mountain Wedge saddlebag with spare tubes, mini-tool, and tire irons, it clocked in at a strapping 37 pounds. Achtung, baby.

This is not by accident or oversight. The Salsa website describes the Marrakesh as “our world-touring bike, designed for fully loaded, rugged exploration. Stable and predictable when heavily loaded, and durable enough to be strapped down to the roof of a bus jostling over a remote pass.”

“We wanted a full-on, world-touring-capable bike in our line,” added Salsa Marketing Manager Mike Riemer. “To us, that meant heavy-duty tubing that might be considered overly robust unloaded, but with an appropriate ride quality when fully loaded. We have other bikes in our line that can take racks and panniers, but the Marrakesh



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is the bike in our line truly developed to take a heavier load."

Toward that end the Marrakesh is available in your choice of cockpits (flat bar or dropbar); can wear 700c x 40mm tires with fenders and 29 x 2.0in. without; and is robust enough to carry all the essentials for a no-nonsense expedition to the back of beyond — racks, panniers, frame bags, trunks, spare spokes, and enough water for an army thanks to the usual three sets of bottle bosses plus Three-Pack mounts on the fork blades. There's even a kickstand plate in case you can't keep the beast upright without help.

And you'll want to, because the Marrakesh is a sharp-looking steed. My dropbar review model was a glossy black with gold decals, chocolate-colored Salsa gel bar tape, and a deep brown Brooks B-17 Champion Narrow saddle. Some bamboo fenders would have accessorized nicely, but all I had was silver plastic. You go to tour with the fenders you have, not the fenders you wish you had. Just ask Rommel.

Shift cables run from the Microshift bar-cons along the downtube to the nine-speed Deore derailleurs, while the rear brake cable snakes under the top tube, with housing all the way from the Tektro RL340 lever to the Avid BB-7 Road caliper. Inline brake-cable adjusters are easily reached from the cockpit, as are shift-cable adjusters in their usual spots on the down tube.

Shifting was clean and precise, nine-speed Deore being the bike-travel equivalent of the Swiss watch, delivering what Salsa Product Manager Joe Meiser ticked off as "simplicity, durability, reliability," plus the added benefit of reasonable up-front and repair costs.

Braking was likewise solid with Avid calipers grabbing Avid 160mm rotors via Tektro Ergo levers. Again, the goal was dependability and serviceability, especially on the road, according to Meiser.

The rims are sensible, durable 36-holers, WTB SX19s, with Deore hubs and trusty Schwalbe Marathon Plus SmartGuard tires in 700c x 38mm.

Thus the muscular Marrakesh didn't even blink at Ortlieb panniers and a light load (7.5lb. up front, 8.25lb. in

back). If anything its ride smoothed out a bit. Whether I reached up to adjust a wool cap or down for a bottle of tea, the bike tracked straight and true, even at low speed on long climbs.

And when outfitted with Salsa's Alternator 135 Low Deck and Down Under racks, the Marrakesh will bear up nicely under a whole lot more weight than that — up to 59.5 pounds in the back and 33 pounds up front — if you plan to carry a lot of winter clothing and hot beverages.

Want to fine-tune your ride? The Marrakesh's interchangeable Alternator dropouts let you choose whether to use a traditional geared setup, ride singlespeed, or go full Rohloff.

The Alternator gives you the choice of quick-release or thru-axle, too, and the whole shebang can be shifted fore and aft depending upon whether you seek frisky handling or no-worries stability.

I didn't alter the Alternator, and I kept the weight light because, it being the holiday season, I was already spending a lot of our rides on the wide side of the 11-34T cassette, especially when the ground tilted upward.

But as we chewed on the wintry scenery together, the Marrakesh had me thinking of faraway places, climes where a fella could ride himself out of his old snow white and into a toasty Brooks brown.

Starry-eyed? Maybe. Blame the subtle silver celestial motifs in the Marrakesh's golden decals, though I can't tell the Big Dipper from the Big Bopper.

"We chose that graphic scheme because of the age-old practice of navigating by the stars," said Riemer. "You have to look closely to see some of them depending on the paint job.

"I guess we hope this bike really does inspire people to take some time off, load up their bike, and set out to see new places." **AG**

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*Patrick O'Grady has written and cartooned about cycling since 1989 for VeloNews, Bicycle Retailer & Industry News, and a variety of other publications. To read more from Patrick, visit [maddogmedia.wordpress.com](http://maddogmedia.wordpress.com).*